This newsletter provides information about the B-Learning project activities and outcomes developed during the project “B-Learning: Curriculum Design for Blended Learning” (2015-1-LV01-KA201-0013406) implementation, that was supported by Erasmus+ program. Blended learning is a hybrid form of learning that involves a combination of face-to-face and online instruction. B-Learning project aims to provide resources (Toolkit) and training for school teams on how to transform traditional schooling by combining on-line and face-to-face teaching – learning experiences. The first part of the project was related to needs analysis and development of the toolkit (see the 1st Newsletter), the second – to piloting of the professional development program and toolkit materials. The 2nd Newsletter introduces school leaders and teachers with the piloting results and considerations about the program implementation for practicing blended learning in schools.

The project team meets in London to finalize the Blended Learning Toolkit

B-LEARNING TOOLKIT AND WHO IS IT FOR?

The toolkit consists of 1) professional development program (PDP); 2) guidelines for trainers; 3) course materials for PDP; 4) guidelines for school teams; 5) self-evaluation tool for school teams. The B-Learning project is implemented by 6 project partners from Latvia, Cyprus, Austria, and UK. All materials for school teams are available in 4 languages – English, German, Greek and Latvian.

The toolkit aims to support school teams in introducing blended learning in schools (rationale behind BL can be found here). Professional development program is designed for school teams involving representatives from the leadership and teaching staff interested in using technology and digital tools.

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Professional development program (PDP):

1 – Introduction: Introduces school to concept/benefits of BL. School makes an initial diagnostic and formulates a first draft of a vision for blended learning in their context.

2 – Models of Blended Learning: Models of blended learning are shared and discussed, allowing the school to make an assessment on what types of blended learning models are possible in school.

3 – Designing Blended Learning: The unit provides a guide to planning a unit of work using blended learning.

4 – Management of Blended Learning: Schools revisit the vision based on deeper understanding of blended learning and plan the (change) management strategy.

5 – Setting up Blended Learning: School chooses and sets up technological infrastructure; and develops the curriculum with blended learning.

6 – Delivering Blended Learning: The unit focuses on supporting school teams support the implementation of the toolkit.

7 – Monitoring Blended Learning: Key indicators are identified and tools created to measure them.

Self-diagnostic tool (SDT) for school teams

SDT is developed in 3 dimensions - systems, processes and people, and 10 categories - School vision and goals; Culture of innovation; Technical capacity; Community support; 21-st century learning skills in curriculum; Existing approaches and particular practices; Designing 21st century learning; ICT skills for teaching and learning; Motivation for blended learning; Professional development routines.

School teams can use SDT to:

- assess the readiness of school to deliver blended learning using the self-diagnostic (systems, processes, people)
- use data from SDT to create the draft version of school vision related to blended learning

Course materials for PDP

Unit 1

- Successful case studies / best practice
- SWOT analysis for Blended learning
- Definitions and description of blended learning
- Rationale for blended learning (to help inspire)

Unit 2

- Description, images of blended models
- Comparison of blended learning models
Unit 3
- List and description of instructional strategies
- List and description types of technological tools (e.g. blogs, forums, videos etc...)
- Templates for creating blended learning lesson plans and activities – Examples of blended learning lesson plans – different lessons

Unit 4
- A guide for how to engage teachers/students e.g.
- Theory of change and change management including theory of change example
- Management strategies
- Project management tools
- Process mapping
- Guides for creating the following communication and interaction processes online and/or in person
- Action and communication plan templates

Unit 5
- List of criteria for assessing the different technology tools
- Guide for ICT tools’ evaluation
- List of LCMS’s and LMS’s

Unit 6
- Tool for reflection on progress

Unit 7
- Examples of self-monitoring tools (rubrics, survey, checklists, learning diaries, etc...)
- Information on using the PDMR (plan-do-monitor-review) cycle
- Suggested methodologies to share learning (e.g. posters, workshop in school, webinar)

These materials can be used in full or just partly. We recommend contacting the developers of this toolkit for the best results each school can get.

Guidelines for school teams
Guidelines for school teams provide an overview of how schools can use project materials (Toolkit) – both by themselves or/and supported by trainers.

Guidelines for trainers
Guidelines for trainers compile the results that come out of the piloting process of the toolkit and provide recommendations for implementation of the professional development program.
PILOTING PROCESS AND RESULTS

PDP “Curriculum Design for Blended Learning” has been successfully piloted, demonstrating good results in all aspects of the delivery. Leadership teams form 21 school in 4 countries (6 schools from Cyprus, 5 schools from Austria, 5 schools from UK, and 5 schools from Latvia) were involved in piloting professional development program.

The responses to the materials prepared were overwhelmingly positive. Schools found the materials comprehensive and the approach to change clear. A typical summary was: ‘The content and activities are directly relevant for school managers and change agents. They provide excellent definitions and practical examples of content.’

Although, one school (UK), remained unconvinced of the usefulness of blended learning, suggested areas of change were comparatively minor. These consisted of suggestions for additional notes or an additional power point. The overall majority of our schools were positive about the program and its potential to change school cultures.

The words of BEST’s facilitator presented below gives us a testimonial of the main conclusions of this process in Austria: “As school leader and teacher, you need to understand the challenges and opportunities of blended learning as well as its relevance for schools. You need a willingness to use that modern approach and to rethink your strategies and methods about teaching. While today, many more schools think they understand the “why” of the relevance of blended learning, long-term, relevant and sustainable implementation of blended learning, most still grapple with the “how”. Therefore, this curriculum can help you and your school in implementing blended learning. It helps you to imagine what blended learning is and how it should be implemented. It also requires you to reimagine your role as teacher and raise the awareness of blended learning in Austrian schools.”
Schools in Latvia are very motivated to introduce blended learning: “We are looking for introducing B-Learning to improve quality of teaching and learning. Results of national exams demonstrate gaps, which have to be overcome, and new, technology enriched, approaches are necessary for meeting needs of students with different aims, intentions and abilities.” (Rujienas Secondary School); “We hope that blended learning not only will help to better acquire knowledge, but also will widen their horizon and understanding real life.” (Liepaja Rainis Secondary School No. 6); “B-learning provides the opportunity of personalized learning for students, according their abilities, interests and learning needs.” (Riga English Grammar School).

**DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES**

During the program piloting a few introductory seminars are organized both for local and international educationalists. One of the most important events - Association for Teacher Education (ATEE) Spring Conference in Riga (12-13th May 2017) – where many researchers and education leaders from Europe worked together under the conference theme “Innovations, technologies and research in education”, provided an opportunity to introduce the participants of the conference with the Toolkit and the results of the project piloting by poster presentation that caused a lot of interest from practitioners.

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Curriculum Design for Blended Learning

Why BLearning?
At school, however, a new way to keep up with the traditions of social and cultural learning. For many decades, there have been efforts to achieve this goal, and they have had a significant impact on the way that we think about and teach the subject. However, in recent years, there is a lack of understanding both on the part of teachers and those who are responsible for the education of children and young people. This is why teachers are encouraged to try new teaching methods and technologies to support their work. Teachers need to be aware of the latest developments in this field and be able to adapt to the changing needs of their students. By combining the best of both worlds, they can create a learning environment that is both engaging and effective.

Definitions
Blended Learning is a combination of face-to-face and online learning in a way that suit the need of the students. It is becoming more popular and is supported by the European Commission. This project was funded with support from the European Commission.

Models
A blended learning model describes a planned and delivered educational outcome that integrates traditional classroom-based learning activities with online learning or distance learning. This model is implemented at the face-to-face level, either as a stand-alone course or as part of a larger program. The model provides a framework for the delivery of online and offline learning experiences, allowing students to learn at their own pace and in a way that suits their individual needs.

Benefits
Blended learning has been shown to improve student engagement and performance, as well as to increase flexibility and accessibility. It also allows for the integration of diverse learning styles and approaches, which can be beneficial for students who have different learning needs. Furthermore, the use of technology in blended learning can help to improve the quality of instruction and to facilitate collaboration among students. This project is part of the Erasmus+ program and is aimed at improving the quality of education and training in Europe. The project's objective is to develop a blended learning environment that is designed to support the learning needs of students from different backgrounds.