

Chapter 6

Improving the Key Competences in K12 by Collaborating in an Active Learning Environment Online

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research is to transform the quality of teaching decisions and actions by adopting an active learning approach. The implementation was carried out as an eTwinning project for eight months in the 2021-2022 educational year with the first and second-grade 28 students in primary schools, aged six to nine, in Germany, Greece, and Turkey. Action research data collection techniques were used such as experiencing (by observing), enquiring (by asking), and examining (by using records of the poll questions answered by the pupils) and the results were reported with descriptive analysis. Learning was enriched with an emphasis on collaborative teaching and learning, active participation, and decision-making of learners. Learning methodologies such as inquiry-based, project-based, blended, and game-based learning increased learning motivation and engagement. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) helped foster the development of a range of competencies. Digital technologies contributed to capturing the multiple dimensions of learner progression.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout some parts of teaching careers, pedagogy was generally done by standing at the top of the class and ‘talking at’ the children. That was what we thought teaching was all about. When thinking about how to reshape our teaching practices, has brought us the notion of replacing ourselves from being a sage on the stage to being a guide on the side (King, 1993). As is stated in the famous quote of Trenfor, “The best teachers are those who show you where to look but don’t tell you what to see.” That is why teachers want to improve their teaching practice and subsequently student learning. The chalkboard, pencil, and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7015-2.ch006

paper tasks and direct instruction do not make any interest to the students anymore in the digital era we live in. Teachers need to reshape their school practice for themselves with a lot of student engagement. Therefore, it is believed that the way to change student learning is to change instructional practice, and the researchers in this paper plan to use collaborative scenarios to make students attend the lesson and learn effectively as international teams. Through school projects that can be carried out online, it is possible to work in pairs not only with the ones sitting next to them but also with pairs living abroad.

Two researchers of this paper with the same ambitions and intentions met online on the eTwinning platform and designed an international school project. One more teacher from another country joined as well and they started a digital learning and collaboration journey together which is explained soon in detail. The main purpose of this project is to transform the quality of teaching decisions and actions to enhance student engagement and learning by adapting an active learning approach.

Every year eTwinning platform announces a theme for teachers to work together. Teachers and students are invited by eTwinning to reinvent their schools and consider the components that make their learning environment attractive and sustainable in 2022. “Our future beautiful, sustainable, together: Schools and the New European Bauhaus” is the campaign’s recurring theme for the year (European School Education Platform, 2022). To achieve it, the researchers decided to design collaborative scenarios on the themes of sustainability, first aid, and children’s rights along with tech integration in the project they have created. Discussions, problem-solving, case studies, role plays, and other methods are used actively to engage students with course material in an active learning environment.

The way to change student learning is to change instructional practice. Instead of giving children language skills tasks such as reading aloud assignments or filling the blanks according to what you hear type listening activities, the objective was to link the main courses with other disciplines and assess the effect of the designed activities on key competences for lifelong learning. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How can we reshape our school practice with a lot of student engagement?
- 2) What is the impact of setting up collaborative scenarios via eTwinning on our students’ learning in class? Does technology help to achieve it?
- 3) What is the effect of collaboration on the key competences for lifelong learning?

BACKGROUND

What is eTwinning?

Initiated in 2005 as the primary intervention of the eLearning Program of the European Commission, eTwinning has been co-funded since 2014 by the European Education, Training, Youth and Sports Program Erasmus+. European Schoolnet, an international partnership of 34 European Ministries of Education, operates as its Central Support Service to develop learning for schools, educators, and students throughout Europe. 38 National Support Services further support eTwinning at the domestic level (Etwinning.net, 2019).

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