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in society 5.0

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ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR THE DIGITAL SOCIETY.  
EXPERTISE, BEST PRACTICES AND TEACHING  
IN THE DIGITAL ERA

*edited by*

Stefania Capogna, Manuela Minozzi, and Danila Scarozza



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## 4. COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE EDU-HUB: THE TRAINING PATH

by Fulvio Benussi\* and Manuela Minozzi\*\*

### *Introduction*

A lot of research in recent years has shown that the introduction of digital technologies in schools is not sufficient to renew teaching processes and, as dramatic experience determined by the Covid 19 has also shown, there is a generalized delay in schools in consciously integrating these resources into teaching/learning processes (Capogna, 2017; 2020; 2021).

EDU HUB is a Community of Practice that was established in 2021 by secondary school teachers. The aim of the community is to compare peer-to-peer methodology on the practices implemented and co-design innovative teaching modules. The digitalisation of educational practices refers to the use of digital technologies to support teaching and learning activities. From a theoretical perspective, digitalisation offers several advantages. It enables more personalized and flexible learning experiences that can be tailored to the needs of individual students. Digital tools can also facilitate collaborative learning, allowing students to work together on projects and assignments regardless of their physical location.

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\* Direttore Responsabile *Quaderni di Comunità. Persone, Educazione, Welfare nella Società 5.0*: fulvio.benussi@gmail.com.

\*\* Ricercatrice, Link Campus University: m.minozzi@unilink.it.

Digitalisation can increase access to education for individuals who may face barriers to traditional learning, such as geographical distance, physical disabilities, or time constraints (Frolova *et al.*, 2020). From a practical perspective, digitalisation of educational practices can provide numerous benefits to both teachers and students. Digitalisation can support the creation and sharing of educational resources, making it easier for teachers to access and incorporate new materials into their teaching. For students, digital tools can increase engagement and motivation, as well as providing new opportunities for interaction and collaboration with their peers.

Overall, the digitalisation of educational practices has the potential to transform traditional models of education, within this transformation process, we consider the community of practice to be a necessary tool: «the success of organizations depends on their ability to design themselves as social learning systems and also to participate in broader learning systems such as an industry, a region, or a consortium» (Wenger, 2000). EDU HUB was the natural continuation of the training course carried out by Hellenic Open University, the Greek partner of the Re-Educo project, which is an international training program on the new frontiers of teaching in the digital age. Unfortunately, despite the great interest shown by teachers, attendance has been highly variable. Starting from a community of 39 teachers from all over Italy, predominantly central-southern, we have had meetings with as few as 4 people attending, due to the many overlapping commitments of teachers. An online learning space was set up to guarantee everyone access to the materials at any time and support the participants in not losing the contents discussed during the peer learning sessions. During the first year of activity, teachers exhibited the practices carried out in their classes, which were then subject to peer-to-peer reflection. The first year also saw theoretical studies carried

out by the trainers. This year, the community has begun the co-planning phase, with a particular focus on activities planned with the support of the trainers.

### *1. First year of activity*

During the first year of activity (2021-2022), we carried out a national review of the UU.DD. (Teaching units) that were implemented during the training course held by the Hellenic Open University. Monthly meetings were organized, exclusively online, to allow teachers to present their “teaching practices.” These presentations were carried out in a logic of “peer learning” among the teachers of the group, while some insights were presented by the trainers. The online seminars, lasting about two hours, were held in the late afternoon. The aim for the teachers involved was to examine themselves as “reflective professionals” with regards to their professional action, Figure 1 shows the workshop proposal.

During the meetings, each teacher in the community presented the outcome of the educational activities, supported by digital tools, which they had prepared and implemented in their respective classes. The questions posed during the presentation, and the subsequent socialized reflection, allowed the teachers to deepen their understanding of the experience and underline its critical points, as well as its successful elements. The basic questions asked by the trainers regarding the community were: Have any of you faced a similar situation? What indications are emerging for a possible replication of the activity at school? From the experiences made, each with its own peculiarities, useful indications have emerged for those wishing to replicate the experience in their own teaching course, even with possible modifications and additions. The first shared experience

introduced in the meetings concerned a broad and well-articulated path to exploit the potential of virtual reality for training purposes. This path was developed over the years by a teacher and then tested in numerous classes. The construction of this path was made possible through the use of a platform and the help provided for the development of the platform, “edMondo, il mondo virtuale di Indire”<sup>1</sup>. The second shared practice was a technology training course on lathes, which aimed to illustrate the characteristics of parallel lathes to students, using an iterative method of questions, tests, and tools to build curiosity and problem-solving skills in students. The third presentation focused on the activities within the DIG4LIFE - Digital Literacy for Future Education project<sup>2</sup>, in which a teacher had taken part.

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<sup>1</sup> edMondo, il mondo virtuale di Indire: <https://edmondo.indire.it/>.

<sup>2</sup> Digital for Literacy and Future Education, ERASMUS + (Project code: 2020-1-IT02-KA201-079420) is an action research project that aims to create the best conditions of exchange best practices in teaching digital skills by the innovation and dissemination of innovative tools, such as simulator and teaching editor for digital gamification environment: <http://dig4life.eu/>.



Figure 1: workshop program

<p><b>The contract</b> Sharing of expectations Guidelines for designing subsequent seminars.</p>	<p>The possible learning outcomes by sharing the experiments carried out at school, thanks to the contribution of colleagues, in building professional knowledge and skills.</p>
<p><b>Presentation of “practices” tested in schools</b> Presentation of teaching practices by the “experimenters” Reflection and guidance from “critical friends” Socialized reflection and identification of possible avenues to make the practice multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary Possible formation of new multidisciplinary teams for the redesign of the “practice”.</p>	
<p><b>Carrying out exercises</b> Deepening of digital tools Exercise activities that can be proposed again in schools (not just digital)  Example: From curriculum vitae to personal promotion on LinkedIn.</p>	
<p><b>Theories and models: tools to know and to do</b> Student-centered learning Effective strategies to promote critical thinking in active learning classrooms Peer-assisted learning strategies Technology-supported assessment tools Technology-enhanced learning tools Transactional analysis in relationships Conflict and mediation Communication. ...</p>	

## 2. *Second year of activity*

In the second year of activity, the proposal regarding the activities to be carried out during, before, and after the meetings was slightly modified.

### *a. Working hypothesis n. 1*

The trainers proposed implementing an assisted plan of new learning paths supported by digital tools, see Figure 2, based on the experiences shared in the first year, while maintaining the approach based on reflection and thorough thinking on the practical activities carried out by the teachers. To support the teachers along the way, the trainers made themselves available to accompany them in designing the training proposals to be implemented in their schools by integrating the use of digital tools and services. We proposed enhancing the activities with technical support regarding the skills needed in relation to the software and internet services to be used, methodological support aiming at promoting continuity about the educational paths and the harmonization of the analogical and digital tools in teaching activities. In the community of practice, planning and thinking over the practices have the purpose of:

- Overcoming the rigidity of the teaching curricula, which does not help the planning and development of innovative and interdisciplinary paths.
- Achieving a development that, through technologies, goes beyond the transmissive educational model to develop pedagogical models, based on the use of ICT in teaching, which make it possible to achieve an effective interactive and engaging training, educational experience.

Co-designed activities, after implementation in classrooms, are to be co-analysed in the community of practice through the

presentation of what was planned and implemented by the teacher(s) involved in planning the training course. Therefore, as usual, socialized reflection is useful to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of what has been planned and implemented. Particular attention was paid to bringing out the elements that could facilitate the replicability in other contexts of what was been achieved. We hypothesized as questions to the group: with the project we have reached this point, can we get a more fruitful result?

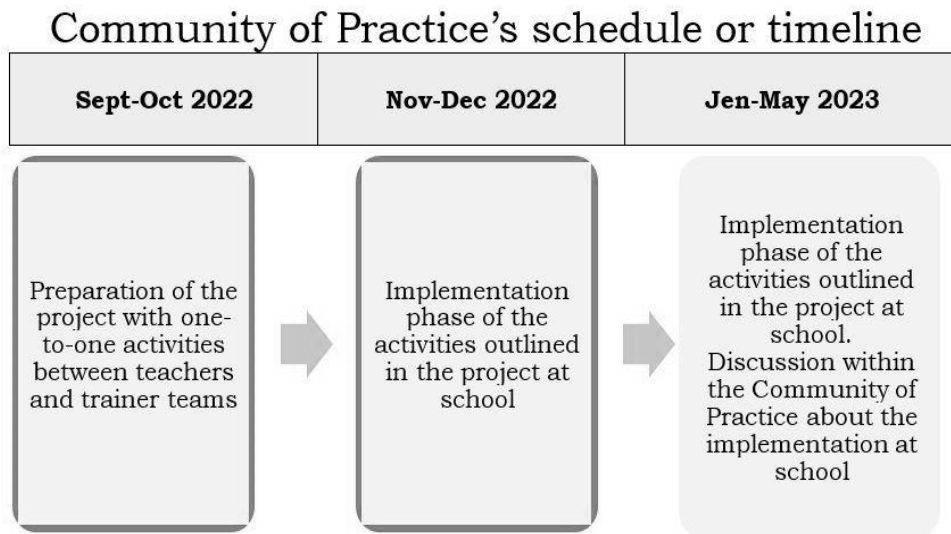
Are we able to extend the collaboration to other members of the community of practice to obtain a more effective result?

Another planned development for these activities was to document projects and experiences. Working hypothesis number one of the co-design proposals did not receive the hoped-for support. We hypothesized various reasons to explain it, but above all, we tried to identify possible ways to solve the impasse. The reasons for the lack of participation in co-planning and the implementation of digitally supported educational paths with the aid of trainers may be due to:

- A timing problem: The planning period coincides with the start of the academic year and would be time-consuming for teachers due to the necessary bureaucratic documentation (PDP, programming, etc.).
- The unwillingness of some secondary school teachers to discuss and work in teams, particularly with tools they do not fully understand.

Several teaching requests were made to institutes, also based on the PNRR plan.

Figure 2: assisted plan of new learning paths



*b. Working hypothesis n. 2 (ongoing)*

Since the proposal illustrated in the previous paragraph did not receive the hoped-for support, the aim was to involve teachers in a co-planning teaching strategy about a particular topic proposed by the trainers that the teachers can freely join. We proposed to create a digital civic education course that was transversal to different thematic areas and necessary for each subject. The course path, which was already sketched out, was introduced to the teachers to be subsequently revised in a co-planning process to encourage teacher involvement that required a minor effort and was therefore consistent with their didactic commitments. The teachers worked side-by-side with the trainer to integrate the planning and collaborate in the implementation and experimentation of the training activity in the classroom. The proposed path included linking Internet service content to the professional experience of the trainer. Possible Internet services

include certified email, electronic protocol of public administrations, digital signature, digital identity, web reputation, paper curriculum, and LinkedIn profile. The storytelling of the “professional history” was linked to the digital tools and services that make it possible to carry it out. In particular, the story was related to the development of a journalistic investigation based on the possibility of accessing information held by public administrations through the F.O.I.A. The training course was based on a remote presentation as a contribution from the trainer and a presentation in-person with the contribution of the teacher, followed by a test and a questionnaire anonymously carried out by the students in the laboratory. The questionnaire was also proposed as useful training support, as its results (the graphs generated based on the answers received) displayed on the Multimedia Interactive Whiteboard and discussed with the class. The purpose was to create an operational framework. By utilizing the skills and knowledge acquired, we structured a didactic module for civic education that was cross-curricular, integrated, and innovative. A single topic should be analysed and studied from various perspectives in an integrated and interactive manner, preferably focusing on the student’s experience. Building a cross-curricular program is not easy in the Italian school system, which is organized by subject and area, so providing a tool that can be enhanced by each teacher for their respective subject area, in synergy with the others, could be a case study to follow for cross-curricular teaching.

### 3. Conclusions

The community of practice has shown an interest in continuing a virtuous path in which teachers get involved. However, it also demonstrated the difficulty of working constantly, due to school commitments and difficulties in introducing different teaching methods. For this reason, the need to connect the development of easy-to-use tools to the community of practice is highlighted, which can facilitate the work of teachers, even when they are busy at school or have difficulty adopting new teaching methods. In addition, to using online platforms for sharing materials and ideas, where teachers can interact asynchronously and access resources when they deem it appropriate; it could be useful to develop self-assessment tools that teachers can use to evaluate their own work and identify any areas for improvement, but above all, involve them in well-defined projects. Involving teachers in the design and development of these tools can make them more responsive to their needs and facilitate their appropriation. This approach makes teachers protagonists of the training path, motivating them to actively participate in the community of practice. As Wenger argues (Wenger, 2000), these communities are essential for fostering innovation and creativity and can provide a supportive environment for individuals to develop their identity and sense of belonging.

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