THE ROLE OF THE KEY COMPETENCIES IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO FINISH THEIR STUDIES

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Abstract

The article focuses on findings developed by the School&Work project (Programme: Erasmus+ KA2 – Strategic Partnership) within a partnership involving six countries: Italy, Belgium, France, Lithuania, Romania and Spain. The main objectives of the project aim at improving the job orientation services and experiences offered by schools and at establishing a more concrete and effective cooperation between schools and the world of work. The article highlights the role that key competencies can play in enhancing students' learning experience and in motivating them to learn and complete their studies. Besides learning about a range of subjects students need to learn how to learn, how to communicate with others, how to think independently and be motivated to learn throughout their lives. All this is requested by the job market and valued by companies when recruiting staff. Based on thorough research on existing data and findings of similar European projects the project provides school teachers, advisors and counsellors with the necessary skills and tools to enable students to identify their interests and aptitudes and match them with a possible future career. The article states that an appropriate correlation between students' personal aptitudes and interests and the skills that are requested by the job market may motivate students at risk of early school leaving to continue their studies.

Key words: key competencies, school, work, motivation

The Council of Europe has repeatedly stated that it is "committed to building a Europe with and for all young people". In this respect, the Council of Europe aims at "ensuring young people's access to quality education and training, to decent work and living conditions, as well as developing the conditions to enable them to contribute to the development of society" (www.coe.int). However, Europe registers a high rate of students who drop out of school before completing their compulsory education (Colibaba A. et al, 2015). School dropout creates the premises for failure to achieve social integration and can impact a country's entire society and economy (Neamtu C., 2003). Early school leaving is linked to unemployment, social exclusion, and poverty. "Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda" identifies the connection between early school leaving and unemployment and states that "52% of early school leavers in the EU were unemployed or outside the labor market (ec.europa.eu).

European Union has financed projects in order to prevent the phenomenon through appropriate measures. The School&Work project aims at capitalising on the existing results of previous European projects that have addressed early school leaving issues (Colibaba A. et al, 2015).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The project activities rely on an effective cooperation between schools and the world of work in order to motivate students to learn and complete their studies. The aim of the project is to highlight and promote the importance of specific professional and sectoral skills and competences that companies and the job market consider when recruiting their staff. The project also states that the qualification and transversal knowledge needed to obtain the desired job can only be achieved by successfully completing the educational process. The specific objectives of the School@Work project are:

- provide school teachers and advisors/ mentors/ counsellors with the necessary skills and tools for better understanding pupils' individual attitudes, interests and potential skills they need in their future career (schoolandwork.pixel-online.org).

- provide school teachers and advisors/ mentors/ counsellors with the information related to the transversal skills that companies and recruiting services look for when selecting staff (schoolandwork.pixel-online.org).

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- establish a direct cooperation between the world of work and schools in order to promote the importance of completing the school studies. In this process students are informed about the role of the transversal skills, which are relevant to a wide range of jobs and occupations. (schoolandwork.pixel-online.org).

Transversal skills and competences are the building blocks for the development of the "hard" skills and competences required to succeed in today's economy and modern society but also in personal life. They are defined at EU level and comprise the following (Marek T. et al, 2014):

1). the ability to communicate in the mother tongue; expressing ideas in different ways, expressing opinions, feelings, needs, understanding and communicating with others.

2). the ability to speak foreign languages, using different language(s) in different life contexts.

3). mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology: calculating, budgeting, controlling and planning expenses, solving problems, logic and critical thinking, looking for data, being sensitive toward the environment.

4). IT skills, use of IT as a mean of communication; producing, storing, analysing, sharing information.

5). social and civic competences: being able to participate in social, civic and working life; being able to deal with people coming from different social and cultural backgrounds; being able to cope with conflicts; participating in civic life.

6). the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship: ability to turn ideas into actions, being creative and innovative, taking risks, planning and managing projects, being aware of different working contexts and being able to optimally use given opportunities for personal development; being aware of ethical values.

7). the capacity to learn to learn: being able to organize one's own learning; setting personal aims and objectives; being able to apply achieved competences and experiences in personal, professional and social life; knowing how to increase one's own motivation.

8) cultural awareness and expression: being creative in expressing ideas through art; being appreciative for expression of ideas through art; being aware of one's own cultural context and cultural context of the others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research has revealed the most required jobs in each country. Each country has selected 10 most popular jobs (Marek T. et al, 2014).

Belgium: accountant, cook, electrician, plumber, industrial engineer, mechanical technician, nurse, roofer, secondary school teacher, web designer.

Romania: carer, carpenter, computer analyst, kindergarten teacher, logistic coordinator, nurse, project manager, sales representative, surgeon, systems administrator.

France: chef, cleaner, computer programmer, farm worker, retail salesperson, sales representative, social worker, waiter, welder, youth worker.

Italy: accountant, analyst, chef, truck driver, electrician, secretary, mechanic, carer, retail salesperson, waiter.

Lithuania: pilot, biomedical engineer, credit analyst, IT consultant, economist, logistics and distribution manager, primary school teacher, secretary, software engineer, special educational needs teacher.

Spain: computer applications developer, customer service representative, export manager, marketing technician, mechanic, pharmacist, physiotherapist, plumber, sales manager,welder.

The most popular jobs in Europe according to the project research seem to be the following: carer, sales representative, accountant, computer analyst, chef and mechanic.

The project site provides the profile of each selected job by describing its main tasks, identifying required qualifications, workload, knowledge, skills, competences, experience as well as personal aptitudes needed (*tables 1, 2, 3, 4*).

The required key competences have been identified and their rate of occurrence in the job descriptions have been analysed. The key competences that prevail in the job profiles are social and civic competences, which are present in 55 job descriptions, learning to learn (in 44 job descriptions) and mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology (40) followed by communication in the mother tongue (38), digital competence (24), sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (15) and cultural awareness and expression (11).

In Italy the most required competences are mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology and learning to learn; in France, Lithuania and Belgium - social and civic competences; in Romania -communication and social and civic competences; in Spain mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology and social and civic competences.

The project has created a Tool-kit for counsellors and teachers, which can be used by school counsellors and teachers to help their students with their career orientation. The kit provides teachers and counsellors with a wide variety of tests which enable them to analyse and highlight students' aptitudes, interests and skills. Complex questionnaires and tests provide valuable information on skills, abilities, knowledge, work activities, and interests associated with jobs. By helping students identify their most appropriate

professional career the kit becomes a useful tool in motivating them to complete school. Once students' personal aptitudes are identified they are matched with what is requested on the job market. The kit raises students' awareness about their potential, social requirements as well as the necessary steps they have to make in order to have the job which matches their aptitudes, interests and skills.

Tabel 1

Job profile- Carer- Knowledge

Name of the Job Profile: Carer Description of the Job Profile		
KNOWLEDGE	DESCRIPTION	LEVEL
Health and Medicine	Medicine	Level 6
Health and Medicine	Nutrition	Level 5
Sciences and Mathematics	Chemistry	Level 7
Sciences and Mathematics	Botany	Level 4
Sciences and Mathematics	Biology	Level 4

Tabel 2

Job profile- Carer- Skills

Name of the Job Profile: Carer Description of the Job Profile		
KNOWLEDGE	DESCRIPTION	LEVEL
Analytical thinking	Intuitive thinking	Level 4
Analytical thinking	Logical reasoning	Level 6
Communication skills	Active Listening	Level 6
Communication skills	Persuasion	Level 7
Customer care	Social Perceptiveness	Level 6
Customer care	Service Orientation	Level 7
Computer Skills	IT	Level 4
Manual dexterity	Manual dexterity Handling instruments etc	Level 5
Using of technical tools	Elaboration of mixtures and medicines	Level 7

Tabel 3

Job profile- Carer- Competences

Name of the Job Profile: Carer Description of the Job Profile		
KNOWLEDGE	DESCRIPTION	LEVEL
Ability to work under pressure	Dealing with emotionally charged situations	Level 7
Communication competences	Good communication and observation	Level 6
Customer care	Ability to answer questions and offer advice	Level 6
Customer care	Customer focus	Level 7
Organisational competences	Organization	Level 7
Organisational competences	Tidiness	Level 6
Personal/behavioural competences	Discretion	Level 6
Personal/behavioural competences	Commitment	Level 7
Teamworking	Team work	Level 7

Tabel 4

Job profile- Carer- Experince and personal attitude

Name of the Job Profile: Carer Description of the Job Profile	
Previous experience	Experience is important
Personal attitude	Sociable and interested in helping others and taking care of other people's health and well-being

CONCLUSIONS

The project raises students' and teachers' awareness about the key competencies that are fundamental prerequisites for living one's life fully and decently, according to one's potential, as individuals and as members of communities. They are the life skills that young people need to negotiate their path to full adulthood in order to participate effectively in the world of work. It also equips teachers and counsellors with necessary tools to help students identify their potential, aptitudes and interests. The materials created help teachers and counsellers to put things in proper perspective and provide students with well-informed career counseling. Well-informed career counseling will help students identify their interests, choose the appropriate subjects, and finally, the right career. It will also help students set goals and identify the steps needed to reach these goals in their career paths.

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