

Portugal

Escola Móvel

A distance learning initiative aimed initially at circus and fairground adolescents (aged 10-17) who were otherwise excluded. (The learner focus has widened to other 'at-risk' groups, including teenage mothers and older learners who have failed in mainstream provision.) It aims to give permanent access to a virtual, national-curriculum-oriented learning environment. The content is both through subjects and cross-curricular areas, personalized through an individual tutor. There are four face-to-face weeks a year for each learner while logging on for the on-line sessions must be from a school or library in whichever destination the travelling learner has reached. Engagement and attainment indications are positive.

Main Focus of Innovation: LEARNERS, TEACHERS, RESOURCES,
ORGANISATION

Other Keywords: blended/non-formal, equity, technology-rich

General Information

Name of the ILE: Escola Móvel

Location/Address: Ministério da Educação - Direcção Geral de Inovação e Desenvolvimento Curricular (DGIDC)

Website: <http://escolamovel.dgipc.min-edu.pt>

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Escola Móvel is a distance learning project which gives children and adolescents (aged 10-17, from grades 5 to 12) permanent access to a virtual, national curriculum-oriented learning environment. This project has been designed and developed by the Portuguese Ministry of Education, and initially it seek to respond to the needs of students from families of showmen and circus artists and workers, who would otherwise have to change schools throughout the year - about 30 schools a year - as a result of their families' professional activities, showing high dropout and failure rates.

In fact, inclusion has always been a major aim of Escola Móvel, since most students belonging to these families would drop out before concluding the 6th grade as soon as they reached the age of 15 (age limit for compulsory education), with no school certificate or professional qualification .

In the course of 4 years this project has been broadened and currently involves not only students belonging to travelling families, but also teenage mothers and students over 15 who have repeatedly failed to complete compulsory education.

Mainly directed towards the conclusion of compulsory education, this project comprises the subjects of the Portuguese national curriculum, with the introduction of innovative approaches: (a) the constitution of interdisciplinary subject areas; (b) the creation of compulsory tutoring periods. Curriculum design, instruction and assessment are adjusted to the students' specific interests and learning needs, in order to provide opportunities for success and prevent early dropout.

Escola Móvel seeks to prepare students for the challenges of the digital age by combining the use of technology with the development of different literacy's - basic (language and numeracy), scientific, visual, artistic, multicultural - through the subject areas. The development of metacognitive and interpersonal skills occurs both within virtual interactions (online chats and forums in subjects/subject areas, tutoring and cross-curricular areas) and face-to-face interactions (four attendance weeks a year and individual tutoring).

Evidence

Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?

There are yearly indicators of success based on the students' results in each subject, including term assessments (3 times a year), the results of national exams, as well as non-existent dropout rates.

In school year 2007-2008, 95 students attended Escola Móvel, from which 82 concluded the school year with a success rate of 91,5%, including the results in Portuguese and Mathematics national exams. The remaining 13 students redirected their options to professional courses and training.

Four of the students who concluded compulsory education in Escola Móvel proceeded to upper secondary education, and in 2008-2009 are attending a professional course in management.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

The core aims are the following:

- a) To ensure equity in the access to education, aiming at the inclusion of children and adolescents who, for family and personal reasons, are not able to attend actual classes on a regular basis;
- b) To adjust curriculum design, instruction and assessment to the students' needs within a virtual learning environment, seen as a valid alternative to ensure the conclusion of compulsory education and provide access to upper secondary education, thus preventing exclusion and improving qualification levels;
- c) To guarantee a stable, regular and effective learning process using distance learning;
- d) To develop subject-based core competencies, as well as cross-curricular and interpersonal skills, using the technology to learn, to communicate ideas, to access and process information from a variety of sources.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

Having started with around 10 students attending the Portuguese 3rd cycle (lower secondary education), three years later this project involves about 100 students attending the 2nd cycle (5th and 6th grades), the 3rd cycle - lower secondary education (7th to 9th grade) and upper secondary education (10th to 12th grade), with ages ranging from 10 to 17 years old.

The target students have also been broadened, as Escola Móvel includes, since last year, students over 15 (age limit in compulsory education) who have been identified as having repeatedly failed to conclude compulsory education in regular schools, and teenage mothers whose new responsibilities pose serious difficulties in the attendance of regular schools. The inclusion of these two groups of students has been organised through partnerships with public schools and a welfare institution.

Escola Móvel is open to the inclusion of other types of students within the perspective of creating opportunities for success and conclusion of compulsory education. Upper secondary level is attended by students who have finished compulsory education in this e-/b-learning environment and belong to travelling families.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

There are 24 teachers of different subjects, organised in teams of 3/4 teachers per subject area. Subject areas are coordinated by senior teachers who constitute the board where pedagogical and organisational decisions are made. All the teachers have come from public schools and have had training in b-/e-learning methodology and innovative approaches to teaching. They are responsible for preparing multimedia virtual resources and teaching classes online by moderating chats and forums in subjects/subject areas, according to timetables defined at the beginning of each school year. Each teacher is also responsible for the tutoring of 3-5 students and for establishing a close relationship with the students themselves and their families. This tutoring allows students to organise and update individual portfolios; helps identify cognitive, social and/or interpersonal difficulties and find ways to overcome them.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

The students' timetables include the subjects of the national curriculum, cross-curricular areas and tutoring periods. The students have to be online according to that timetable organised by year/class, interacting synchronously with their teachers and other students through chats and forums for analysis and discussion. The pedagogy followed is student-centred, aiming at personalised learning based on continuous feedback.

Most resources are elaborated by the teachers, addressing subject-based and cross-curricular competencies, including interactive activities which foster autonomy and self-assessment. The Internet access to real-world contexts is also greatly valued as it helps students understand and interact in response to real-life situations and challenges. Students and teachers also interact face-to-face during four attendance weeks a year and in tutoring sessions according to specific and individual needs. This face-to-face tutoring sessions involve some travelling either by the students or the teachers.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

Learning takes place online, during synchronous classes. The students access each subject, where the learning objectives and the sequence of tasks are presented for each lesson. In order to avoid isolation and promote interpersonal competencies, itinerant students must take their laptops to the nearest school's resource centre or library - where their families are working at that moment - and access Escola Móvel from there. The two most recent groups work from their schools (students over 15) and their institution (teenage mothers). Apart from face-to-face periods, which occur in state facilities, the learning environment is virtual - currently a Moodle Platform.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

As already included in the rationale, this project emerged as a response of the Portuguese Ministry of Education to the needs of itinerant students, and their difficulty in having access to a continuous, sequential learning process, due to constant changes from school to school (about 30 schools a year). This situation led to early dropout and high failure rates. Escola Móvel provides these students with permanent access to the same teachers and learning environment, hence creating conditions for structured learning provided by their own teachers and their own school. In fact, Escola Móvel has become an educational community, supported by a teaching and learning network.

Escola Móvel started with a small group of about 10 students (2005-2006), evolving to about 40 students (2006-2007), then 80 students (2007-2008) and currently there are about 100 students involved, 64% belonging to itinerant families. Other students have also been included starting last year (see item 5 "Learners").

The gradual enlargement in the number and type of students, the creation of a multimedia virtual resource bank that can be made available in different learning contexts and situations, and the setting up of a network of partnerships has allowed Escola Móvel to progressively become a sustainable organisation.

Funding of the ILE*How is it funded?*

Escola Móvel is a project developed by the Ministry of Education, and most expenses are supported by this ministry. However, some partnerships have been established as a way to ensure technological support, such as internet access, accommodation during presential classes (four weeks a year) and the access to experimental science activities. There are no tuition fees.

Learning Outcomes*What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?*

Student learning is assessed through continuous task development and feedback, through tests (face-to-face and online), involvement in activities and presentation of projects, as well as in national exams for students who are completing compulsory education.

Escola Móvel has contributed to eliminate dropout rates and promote school success, as 91,5% of the students got passing marks last year, including positive results in national exams, which shows the attainment of learning goals.

According to external evaluation, which has been conducted since 2006 by an expert on e-/b-learning, there has been a close relationship between regular access to the learning environment and students' success and development of teaming, collaboration and interpersonal skills. Data referring to 2007-2008 is included to compare the results of students in the first and last years of compulsory education in Escola Móvel:

5th grade (entry year in "Escola Móvel")

- Mark 2 (failing mark): corresponds, on average, to 853 platform registrations and 8 forum participations
- Mark 3 (passing mark): corresponds to 1320 platform registrations and 34 forum participations
- Mark 4 (passing mark): corresponds to 1612 platform registrations and 56 forum participations
- Mark 5 (top passing mark): corresponds to 2202 platform registrations and 45 forum participations

9th grade (conclusion of compulsory education)

- Mark 2 (failing mark): corresponds, on average, to 1171 platform registrations and 11 forum participations
- Mark 3 (passing mark): corresponds to 1290 platform registrations and 29 forum participations
- Mark 4 (passing mark): corresponds to 1888 platform registrations and 61 forum participations
- Mark 5 (top passing mark): corresponds to 2452 platform registrations and 76 forum participations

As far as learning outcomes are concerned, the final report concluded that assessment patterns in Escola Móvel and in public, non-virtual schools are similar.

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

The website of Escola Móvel is under construction. General information can be accessed on http://www.dgidec.min-edu.pt/escola_movel/index.html. A password is required to enter the virtual learning environment.