European Education Area Strategic Framework

Working Group on Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment: 4th Peer Learning Activity (PLA), 19-21 March 2024, The Hague, Netherlands

Input paper: Preparing teachers and school leaders for a digital world & AI in education

1. Peer Learning Activity (PLA) Overview

PLAs within the DELTA WG are typically organised to provide a cooperative learning space for policy makers and social partners on a particular theme relevant to the overall agenda of the meeting. While this is officially our second face-to-face PLA, our first PLA in Madrid also doubled as a plenary meeting due to the lack of meetings during Covid-19. We are now keen to organise our forthcoming PLA in line with the approach taken during a typical PLA event. This short note will outline the approach we plan to take and will also identify the areas we would like participants to research in advance of their arrival in the Netherlands in March. We are also aware that some members are new to the notion of a PLA and thus we are keen to share some of the key principles of such events, and how they differ from plenary meetings.

The PLA will focus on two thematic areas: teachers' professional learning in digital education[1] and AI in Education. The goal is to bring participants together who are particularly interested in these two thematic areas so they can participate in a peer learning event, where they learn with and from each other.

PLAs are typically designed to:

- strengthen mutual learning and deepen the exchange of good practice between countries sharing similar concerns, to develop a common understanding of success factors for the improvement of policymaking and the implementation of reform. The peer-learning process should serve as a source of inspiration for the development of national education and training policies in the participating countries and contribute towards the implementation of reforms.
- contribute to the further development of the European Education Area through enhanced practical cooperation, and by encouraging policy makers in participating countries, to take full account of existing instruments in the development of national education and training policies and systems.[2]

In advance of the PLA, we are asking participants to gather some relevant data on teacher professional learning approaches and on the current use of AI in their Member State or in their network. We also want members to identify any issues or key questions that they would like to explore with their peers during the PLA event.

The PLA event will consist of several elements, principally:

- Inputs from national perspectives
- Inputs from thematic experts (i.e. AI and teacher professional learning)
- Visits to educational institutions
- Group work and discussions

We are designing the forthcoming PLA so that participants will have sufficient time to engage in group work and discussions with peers, thematic experts and those we meet during our school visits. We have developed several key questions to guide our

[1] We are particularly interested in the approaches Member States, and other Organisations, are designing and implementing to meet the needs of teachers working in education, thus in-career professional development/learning. While recognising the importance of Initial Teacher Education, we are keen to focus more on in-career approaches during the PLA.

[2] For an example of the outputs from a past PLA see: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4875-att1-1-EAC_B5_general_brochure_280909_web_en-electronic_version.pdf

discussions and we would urge participants to take an active role during these sessions by sharing their experiences, their concerns/issues and where possible we would like participants to propose solutions or approaches to these issues.

We have outlined the specific areas that we would like to explore and we would ask you to gather perspectives on these issues before the PLA takes place, so that you are able to actively contribute to the discussion at the meeting.

1. Preparing teachers and school leaders for a digital world

Our first focus in this meeting is on preparing teachers and school leaders for a digital world. We wish to consider, the in-service professional development of teachers and school leaders, rather than pre-service training.

We are first asking WG members to report on:

- the approaches to the professional development of educators that are being deployed in their MS or Organisations, in order to identify success elements and challenges of those approaches,
- how the approaches were developed, any feedback from teachers and the observed impacts of these approaches on practice in schools.

In thinking about approaches to in-service professional development it is important to keep in mind the goal – that is to say, it is a means to support the development of digital education in schools. Some professional development approaches are principally concerned with the development of individual teachers' skills (for example MOOCs and self-training materials). The intention here may be either a) to support the teacher in developing their digital pedagogic skills or b) to prepare teachers who will be pioneers and perhaps leaders for other teachers in developing digital education. These are both possible (though quite different) goals, and they leave it to the individual teacher's own initiative in integrating what they have learned within their working context. Some approaches, seek to address teachers' professional development within their own school context, sometimes involving multiple stakeholders from the school in such a way as to allow for addressing several key factors in implementing digital education in that school in parallel with professional development.

2. 1.1 Common approaches

We list below some common approaches to the professional development of teachers in digital education. These are not exclusive and often a combination of approaches will be used.

- **Training courses**

Structured teaching course often based around explicit learning objectives and consisting of presentation of use cases and discussion.

- **MOOCs**

Training courses delivered online as MOOCs

- **Courses organised around teachers as researchers/designers**

Often organised as a form of action research, in which the trainee designs, implements and evaluates novel teaching practices with the support of the trainer.

- **Self-training material**

Provision of books, other written materials, videos, web sites etc.

- **Communities of practice**

Teachers sharing their practice in using technology. These will vary in the extent to which they are managed or led by experienced facilitators.

- **Mentoring**

Teachers with greater experience of digital education provide support on an ad hoc and on demand basis to less experienced teachers.

- **Innovation projects**

Schools or consortia of schools are given resources and support to develop innovative projects which act as forms of professional development for those who take part and as a model for others – example see SEF[3]

- **Whole school (or consortium of schools) development projects**

This might include some, or all, of the following elements:

- Involvement of senior leadership, teachers, teaching assistants (or similar, if part of the local education system), pupils, parents
- Designated leadership for digital education and pedagogy in the school(s)
- Costed across several years – costs including expenditure on hardware/software/technical support, but also possible savings – for example in reduced use of non-digital materials such as textbooks.
- Resources (hardware and software) allocation and support
- Agreed approaches to digital pedagogy, including planned progression across school years
- Agreement to proposed forms of technology use by leadership/teachers/pupils/parents (e.g. in case of school provided computers parents may need to agree to certain conditions over care of the machines whilst at home)
- Teacher professional development related to the specific pedagogic plan and resource allocation as defined by the school plan.
  An example of this approach is the work at the LEO Academy[4]

3. 1.2 Possible parameters

Any particular case of teacher professional development (PD) will adopt one or more of these general approaches to professional development within a particular context, for specific purposes and with a specific focus. The following questions indicate a number of these parameters that could be defined in the description of a specific example of teacher professional development.

[3] https://www.oidetechnologyineducation.ie/projects-initiatives/digital-clusters/

[4] https://www.leoacademytrust.co.uk/2801/pedtech-impact-report

Whether PD is regulated:

- Is the professional development required (mandatory) or optional?
- Are there any incentives or rewards for teachers to participate?

Location/format of PD:

- Is the professional development online or in person (or a blend). If in person then onsite or offsite?
- Do teachers have to travel to another on-site location?

Possible PD provider:

- University
- National or local government support agencies
- Commercial company
- Teacher association
- Expert teachers within the school (who may have had outside training to take on this role)
- Combination of a number of providers

Focus of the PD:

- General (e.g. General digital competences for all teachers)
- Critical digital literacies
- A specific 'level' of schooling (junior/lower secondary/upper secondary: ISCED 1, 2, 3, 4 etc)
- A specific curriculum area (language, maths, STEM, music etc).
- A specific technology (GenAI, OER, Virtual Reality etc.)

Whether the professional development promote specific pedagogic perspectives: If so, which?

4. 1.3 Survey

To kick start the discussion in the PLA we are asking you to first respond to a survey on the methods of in-service professional development used in your MS or Organisation. Please consider the preceding discussion in this paper about general approaches to professional development and the possible parameters of specific courses before responding to the survey. The survey can be accessed via this link:

https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/64aac8a1-fa55-894e-1408-25e310082aac.

(Deadline for replies is the **8th March**)

5. Discussion in PLA

During the PLA, we will build on the results of this survey, reporting back on which approaches are most commonly adopted across MS, in order to initiate a more in-depth discussion, which will address the following questions:

- What is actually happening in your MS or organisation in relation to digital professional learning?
  - Why are these approaches being taken?

- What would count as success in terms of these approaches?
- How are teachers trained to reflect critically on the use of digital technologies in order to evaluate the opportunities and risks in applying these technologies?

- What role, if any, are schools playing in supporting teachers' professional. learning?
  - What do schools need to put in place to enable locally supported professional learning experiences to be effective

We ask you to come prepared to address these wider issues – but note that these wider questions to be addressed in the discussion, we are not asking you to address these in the survey.

2. AI in education- Conclusions of previous DELTA WG discussions

2.1. We have held a couple of meetings on AI in education already, in this meeting we hope to build on these discussions, and not repeat them. We recall some of those messages below.

2.1.1. Joint online event on the use of Generative AI systems in education (May 2023):

Multiple speakers and contributors noted that schools have a key role to play in ensuring that young people are familiar with AI and on how it can be used for good in their lives. It was noted that we are at the beginning of a journey and that we have much to learn from each other, particularly from those involved in the DELTA WG by engaging in focused conversations around specific AI issues. AI has the potential to transform many existing aspects of our education and training systems, yet there was a call to critically consider what we might transform and why, and for greater collaboration among WG members on these issues.

- AI is here to stay and we need to ensure we educate our teachers and our students about what it is and how it can be used ethically and legally in society, and specifically how it might be used to enhance administrative, teaching, learning and assessment practices. **The provision of appropriate education and training experiences will be key for educators to ensure they are confident and competent in using and developing AI literacy in schools.** It was suggested that schools should provide a safe space where teachers can experience AI, using approaches such as Project Based Learning, to develop their competences and those of their students in this area. While there was broad agreement on this issue, **it raises questions around what kinds of supports, member states and other organisations, are providing to schools so that educators are equipped with the confidence and competence to use AI effectively** (i.e. this includes pedagogical, ethical and legal approaches) in their work. Furthermore, it raises questions around how best to capture and share this information between DELTA members.

- There appears to be a need to explore and identify practices/areas where AI can work well in education and specifically where it can support school leaders, teachers and students carry out their activities. In addition, there also seems to be a need to outline practices/areas where AI applications should not be used in schools.

The capturing and sharing of such practices could again be facilitated through European collaboration.

2.1.2. DELTA WG PLA in Madrid 30 May-1 June 2023

Key Policy messages in relation to this theme during this PLA identified the need for the following:

- Greater transparency and openness in relation to emerging technologies, such as AI tools.
- Prioritise the design and implementation of a range of **teacher training supports** (ITE and CPD) for teachers in emerging areas such as AI. Teachers should be confident and competent to use AI technologies legally, ethically and pedagogically. In order to ensure a basis from which teachers could develop advanced digital competences, ITE and CPD should ensure that all teachers hold at least basic digital competences.
- Additional research on the impact of emerging technologies on education and training and creation of safe spaces to conduct it.
- Specifically in areas such as AI, there is a need for Ministries to take a more flexible approach to policy formulation and implementation. Monitoring these approaches and sharing lessons learned across Europe, with other Member States is of high importance in this area. This can be done through a range of channels, such as; the DELTA WG, Erasmus+ projects, the Digital Education Hub etc.

The issues we wish to look at in this PLA is to move on from what was discussed earlier, in order to consider where we are now, almost one year on from the PLA in Madrid. In doing so, we are addressing the clear request made by members, in both the above meetings, for continuing our DELTA WG exchanges on this topic.

2.2. Work in groups: Key Questions:

- Are schools/teachers/students currently using AI, in their practices? If yes how and if not why?
- What are schools looking for in relation to helping them to use AI effectively?
- Based on your experience from your national context, what are the issues that schools/school management groups are concerned with?
  - What are the key issues MS are encountering in relation to the use of AI in schools and how are they addressing, or considering to address them?
  - How could national policies/initiatives assist schools to introduce AI in a responsible and ethical way?

Since this is an area that is changing quickly, we would like to offer you the opportunity to propose an additional key question for consideration – to be sent to us before the meeting for consideration for inclusion in the discussion.