CREATIVITY AND TRANSVERSAL SKILLS TO RAISE FAIR EUROPEAN STUDENTS IN A DIGITAL ERA

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Internet and the telecommunication technologies are precious tools in the field of Education. They allow students benefiting and sharing from thousands of source of information in real time and almost freely. Unfortunately, students have not a critic approach towards content or author; the rank in the search engines is often considered a synonymous for accuracy and reliability. GENIUS project aimed at fighting against the phenomenon of Plagiarism providing distance learning pathways focused on supporting creativity and students' transversal skills. Over 357 teachers and 381 students gained understanding of different types of plagiarism, copyright, methodologies to enhance creativity, and a new phenomenon, the cyber- bullism.

Introduction

Thanks to the fast and overwhelming Innovation Progress in particular concerning the telecommunication technologies and the widespread use of Internet and World Wide Web sources of information, the didactics, as well as the learning process and dynamics in class have been widely changed. The powerful mobile phones, the reduction of costs of Internet services have allowed the students to easily have plenty of information freely available on the WEB. The lack of information about copyrights and different licences as well as the high expectations of the teacher or parents associated with the lack of time, the low self-esteem and, in some cases, laziness and carelessness, have caused the raise of Plagiarism Phenomenon in class. Education environments such as schools are not separated and distinguished from the "world of adults" such as the labour market, the economic environments and social dynamics. The young minds are the present and the future that is the key actors for a fair progress. *GENIUS plagiarism or creativity: teaching innovation versus stealing*[1] is a two year project funded by the European Commission, started in October 2011, aimed to foster the transversal skills of students undermined by

1: GENIUS plagiarism or creativity: teaching innovation versus stealing website, www.genius-project.eu

the unstoppable quick diffusion of digital devices, Internet large use, online sources, social software and Social Networks.

GENIUS project thus meets the priorities of European Commission concerning Education enhancing digital and language skills, developing sense of initiative, entrepreneurship, intercultural dialogue, ethic behaviour, creativity and innovation.

GENIUS main goal is to fight against consolidated habits reflected on "Copy and Paste" from the Web and decided to spread a message, support the settlement of key transversal skills to students and all Education stakeholders.

Almost come at an end, it is proud to have provided interesting results processed during the Research and Analysis Phase and the unexpected success demonstrated by Teachers and Students during the Experimentation Phase.

What we know about plagiarism?

Most of the desk research encompasses papers and articles retrieved on internet and newspapers. European, in particular Italian Scientific literature is quite poor about plagiarism phenomenon in secondary schools, so that the Research Phase carried on by GENIUS partners has represented an indisputable added value.

A Documentary and a Field Work Researches have been carried out in each country in order to make an evidence of teachers and students' behaviours, learning needs, schools dynamics and actual backgrounds.

The field research has been carried out Italian secondary schools through two different questionnaires for teachers and students. The questionnaire for students tried to explore the plagiarism phenomenon, its occurrence, the awareness about sanctions and legal aspects and how to hinder it through creativity and reinforcement of transversal skills. The questionnaire for teachers has explored their perception on plagiarism phenomenon connected to their experiences and their approaches to fight the phenomenon.

GENIUS Research[2] has finally involved over 170 Teachers and 334 Students. Research has represented the basis to develop didactic material tailored on learning needs. The results coming up from the Research, in fact, stressed the most urgent lacks and needs. The Italian Field Work Research carried out by Italian GENIUS

2. GENIUS partnership (2012), GENIUS Comparative Report, Avaliable at www. genius-project.eu

partners has highlighted the relevance of plagiarism among teachers and students and the awareness about its illegality. Plagiarism is not easy to detect and sanctions linked to cheating are not well defined, often it's only a warning. Internet and Information Technology (IT) devices foster plagiarism since information is always easily accessible. Several innovative approaches or prizes contribute to stimulate the involvement of teachers and students, improving their creativity and their entrepreneurial spirit. The Research has analysed the strategies to reduce plagiarism in schools, underlining the importance of teachers' ICT competences. As concern school behaviours and dynamics, the results have pointed out that plagiarism is a common action among students and they often do that without any feelings or emotions. Cheating could be a relevant element that reduces creativity and innovation, especially at high levels of secondary schools. Teachers, on the other side, often tolerate plagiarism and they are not able to prevent cheating phenomena or to educate their pupils on a fair use on internet sources.

We will introduce in depth the most interesting answers of the Italian Field Work Research's results[3] taking into account the teachers and the students' perspectives.

Asked to give a definition of plagiarism, all teachers mentioned the students' lack of self-confidence and expressed their concern about the "diffused illegality" that this practice entails.

Teachers completely share the argument that student plagiarizes because:

- A lot of material is easily accessible through the internet and can be copied and pasted (90%)
- Students do not see plagiarism as a matter of concern (100%);
- (Too) Easy access to technologies that provide material that can be plagiarized e.g. mobiles, computers (95%)
- Students are lazy and not able to manage time properly and are not interested in the subjects to study (both 95%)
- Students are not confident in their own opinions and arguments (95%)

In order to comply with the objective of preventing plagiarism, teachers believe that much can be done by the student and the family, in particular if:

3. Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi (2012), Italian Desk Research, Avaliable at www.genius-project.eu

- The pressure to get good grades would be reduced (42% agree + 58% completely agree)
- The students would be more confident of their opinions and impressions (33% agree + 66% completely agree)
- The students would be able to manage time more properly and effectively (72%completely agree + 28 % agree)

As concerns the *Students'* point of view, they stated to plagiarize especially because:

- They know they won't be discovered (53% agree, 42% totally agree)
- They feel pressure to obtain better marks (57% agree, 31% totally gree)
- Material easily accessible through the internet and can be copied and pasted (42% agree, 48% totally agree)
- They are lazy or not able to manage time properly (42% totally agree, 51% totally agree)
- They do not see plagiarism as a concern (77% totally agree, 15% totally agree)
- They do not feel confident of their own opinions (53% agree, 31% totally agree)
- Heavy workloads assigned (33% agree, 48% completely agree)

In particular, when they comes to gather information to do home/coursework, 62% of students affirm to copy rarely big amount major amounts from book or Internet, but a relevant 46% admit to sometimes copy work from another student. In the same stage, they declare to never (24%) or rarely (44%) download an essay from a site or essay bank on the Internet but to sometimes (64%) work together with another student on work that is meant to be individual.

A remarkable 93% of students thinks that plagiarism go often undetected, a relevant percentage that work is sometimes copied and pasted from internet (95%) or from a book (75%), while 95% of students says that they have never been caught copying an homework.

It stands to reason that Plagiarism is strictly connected either to the progress related to digital era, the high pressure or expectations or to the vulnerability such as lack of self-esteem of young students.

The art of coping is a learning and socialisation process that starts at primary schools, develops during the overall school path and it get to the top at the last year of secondary school. It doesn't involve only techniques, but emotions and feelings are strictly linked to the phenomenon.

In order to have a comprehensive overview, an Italian Documentary Research has been carried out. Italian report mainly focuses on the study conducted by Prof. Marcello Dei, a sociologist at Università di Urbino (Dei, 2011), who recently published an interesting book about cheating in classrooms.

Plagiarism in Italian secondary schools is a widespread phenomenon and often ignored by school authorities, by pedagogues, sociologists, due to the fact that copying is not considered a problem more significant than Bullying and violence among students.

The attention of media usually focuses on the latters, making cheating at school a minor problem, not strictly linked with abnormal behaviours (deviant) whose consequences produce more visible effects.

Besides, intellectuals, public opinion and policy-makers are realising that copying is a structural weakness of the Italian school system together with the low level of learning and integration and socialization processes.

Challenging plagiarism phenomenon could contribute to help young people to improve their citizenship, the respect of rules in the society, to be responsible.

According to research results obtained by the sociologist Prof. Marcello Dei of Università di Urbino, copying in classroom is a behaviour encompassing the following features:

- It is a common behaviour: 2 out of 3 students admit to copy often or sometimes
- 85% of students thinks that copying is not or not very condemnable
- copying is a routine act, done without feelings

Plagiarism phenomenon is very relevant in University as well. According to the survey conducted at University of Pisa by COMPILATIO[4], an Italian company for the detection of plagiarism on internet, half of the graduation thesis contains the15% of web-contents, and only 20% has less than 5%. Copy-and-paste is a

4 Sorveglianza e rilevamento del Plagio su Internet, 2013, Available at http://www.compilatio.net/it/

common behaviour among University students, but also among professors and their assistants.

During the drafting of the thesis, students are instructed by their professors on the importance of proper use of sources, the meaning of citing, on the difference between quoting and paraphrasing, the importance of notes as a tool for recognition of their intellectual debts.

Most of the universities are focusing on the importance of making students aware about plagiarism and a fair use of intellectual property. It must be clear that cheating in exams and plagiarizing damage themselves because don't allow them to have an adequate preparation to the goals they want to achieve. On the other side, universities have a social commitment towards society's expectations to receive people prepared to contribute the cultural, economic and political life of the country.

Several universities in Italy provide students relevant information about plagiarism and its sanctions. Discovering plagiarism is becoming easier for professors due to several search engines or software that allow to compare students' production with books' contents and web materials. Other universities put some private companies in charge of discovering plagiarism in graduate thesis. In case of plagiarism, sanction could be a suspension of many months from the academic activities.

Aware of all lessons learnt from GENIUS research, a specific learning path, focused on increasing awareness on which is a web fair use and which are the methodologies to increase and foster students' self-esteem, sense of initiative, communication have been the main goals achieved by GENIUS learning process.

GENIUS at the mirror

GENIUS plagiarism or creativity: teaching innovation versus stealing (www. genius-project.eu) is a two year European project, started in October 2011 and funded by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). It belongs to Comenius sub-programme since the activities and strategies are addressed to the Secondary Schools. The project aims at strengthening the transversal skills of students undermined by the unstoppable quick diffusion of digital devices, Internet large use, online sources, social software and Social Networks.

Fig.1. GENIUS project website
www.genius-project.eu
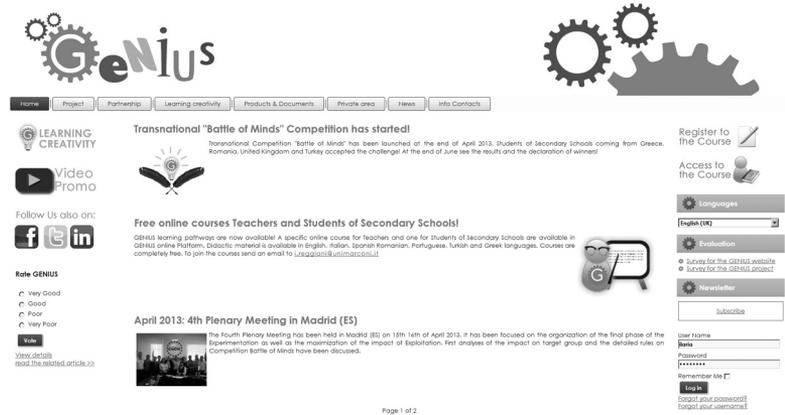
Aware to students and teachers' requirements coming up from the Research, the transnational Consortium has developed an online course for Teachers of Secondary Schools and an online course for Students available in English, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian and Turkish increasing the quality of communication, enlarging the Target Group base as well as project's impact.

Teachers and Students of Secondary Schools, as core beneficiaries, have benefit from a personalised Multilingual online course about Copyrights, Plagiarism, WEB Fair use, Open Source concept, Pedagogical Methodologies to support creativity and Creative writing tailored on their specific learning needs.

As a second stage of the learning process, a transnational students' competition, the "Battle of Minds" has been launched in the online Platform.

All students coming from different partner organisations have been divided into different teams in order to detect Plagiarism of the rival. Students have thus improved learning skills, social and civic competences, sense of initiative, cultural awareness and expression, English and Digital skills. Online course and Transnational Battle of Minds Competition have been carried on GENIUS online Platform based on Chamilo open source model.
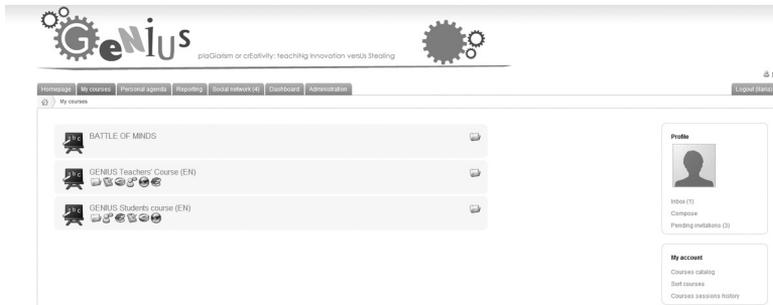
Moreover, in order to increase the attractiveness of the GENIUS learning pathways additional outcomes have been developed in order to support teachers and students towards creativity against plagiarism, personal and professional growth up:

- "My Myths" collection, a database of the most popular biographies of people who work hard to think up genius innovations
- "Code to be Genius" an ethic code addressed and shared by partners and beneficiaries, a sort of reference model behaviour for fair European citizens
- "Open Educational Resources Database", a repository with free educational resources available in the web at local and at international level

Merit particular attention the "My Myth" Best Practice Database, which is a summary of the most famous and popular people who have used or still using their mind, their study and hard work to think up a great inventions. The Collection was aimed at encouraging Students in understanding the value of ownership, the hard work behind the best ideas, importance of citing without fear, the added value of recognizing, citing and re-phrasing. A truly cross cultural selection of examples for young people will be able to inspire students to be creative and innovative.

Core strength of the project is represented by the Partnership, an extraordinary synergy of 7 partner institutions coming from Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, Romania and Turkey.

GENIUS European project has in fact benefited from:

- Deep experience in Secondary Education, students behaviours, learning methodologies ensuring a direct impact on target group through 3 Schools: EPAL AXIOUPOLIS, Norwich City College and Technical College "Mihai Bacescu";
- Academic expertise, dissemination in Scientific Publications and Academic environments through Università degli Studi "Guglielmo Marconi" and Faculdade de Filosofia da Universidade Católica Portuguesa;
- Powerful networks with high mainstreaming and multiplication effects in project impact and exploitation of results through Confederación Española de Centros de Enseñanza and Istanbul Milli Egitim Mudurlugu, a Local Turkish Public Authority.

Different kind of organisations through their differences in expertise, experience, networks and daily activities have deeply increased the quality of first project outcomes and the efficiency of management.

Conclusions

Creativity, Self Esteem, Sense of Entrepreneurship as well as a web fair use will help students to build up a great future full up of opportunities and to become fair European citizens.

Students have to remember that building on others' ideas is good! Students could be able to develop future Innovations by understanding and building on the works created by breaking through thinkers of the past. As Bernard of Chartres perfectly explain in a metaphor in XII century "we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size" (John of Salisbury, 1159, p. 167).

GENIUS project wants to support students to believe in their minds and talents and use the past to create something unique and personal but always acknowledging the value of giants.

In order to effectively guide students, GENIUS asked the help of teachers of Schools involving them in a specific learning pathway, tailored to share with them core aims of the project, its mission and the key competencies regarding Plagiarism, copyrights, Web

fair use and didactic methodologies to support creativity in class. Over 357 teachers and 381 students of secondary schools are attending the distance learning pathways increasing awareness of plagiarism, copyright, innovative methodologies to enhance creativity in class, and new phenomenon such as cyber- bullism. Through GENIUS learning path, teachers are increasing their awareness on Plagiarism Phenomenon, its typologies and feature as well as tools and methods how to detect it. Most of all teachers will thus be able to confront with "digital natives" students. Despite of the generation gaps, they will be able to look beyond the belief - Plagiarism is an always existed phenomenon, accepted as habit and part of the human being nature. It is truth that this habit is always existed but the society, economic scenarios, dynamics, the entire world is deeply changed and the reasons beneath the phenomenon could be definitely linked to the digital era.

References

Dei Marcello (2011), *Ragazzi, si copia*, Bologna, Il Mulino

John of Salisbury (1159), *Metalogicon*, University of California Press., p. 167