

# EXPERTS

EXPERTS IN EDUCATION REFLECT BY TELLING STORIES

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## Progress Report

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### Public Part

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**Experts in Education Reflect by Telling Stories**

Progress Report

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## Project information

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## Executive Summary

Society is going through profound changes, and the process of transformation is bringing new challenges for the educational sector. One of the major current problems is an increasing number of children with adjustment disorders and undesirable development. To meet the demands of early childhood education on the level of continuous teacher training is one of the most challenging questions for education professionals.

At the same time pedagogical and psychological research have shown impressively that early childhood education is the most important time in a person's lifespan to initiate a healthy development and prevent development problems in an efficient way.

Against this background, the role of kindergarten teachers and day mothers is a most crucial one, as they have to master the most responsible and challenging task of raising healthy, socially competent and capable young people.

Moreover the ever-growing complexity of today's society leads to more insecurity about the right and suitable educational behaviour. Furthermore the link to experienced education and present demands is not always apparent.

In this sense it is unacceptable that these professionals belong to the ones with the lowest opportunities for professional development and continuous education and training in Europe.

EXPERTS develops a continuous training environment for early childhood education professionals. The approach of the proposed project is based on a storytelling methodology. Kindergarten teachers and day mothers are invited to tell stories about their experiences as a child, how they were brought up on the one hand as well as stories from their own professional routine on the other hand. Writing down their stories and experiences will make them explicitly and implicitly aware of patterns and difficulties staying in correlation with the own childhood experiences. Furthermore these stories can serve as a basis for exchange and discussion on educational issues with other kindergarten teachers and what they can learn from their peers' experiences. A comment function and forums tutored by educational experts are supporting the exchange and discussion among early childhood educators across Europe.

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# 1. Project Objectives

Although research has proven impressively that early childhood is the most important time to initiate a healthy development and to prevent development problems in an efficient way, kindergarten teachers are not able to easily access relevant and structured training opportunities across Europe at present. EXPERTS is answering to the specific objectives of Leonardo, particularly to support participants in training and further training and future training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market.

EXPERTS develops a continuous training environment for early childhood education professionals. The approach of the project is based on a storytelling methodology. Kindergarten teachers and day mothers are invited to tell stories about their experiences as a child and how they were brought up on the one hand, and stories from their own professional routine on the other hand. Writing down or telling their experiences will make them explicitly and implicitly aware of patterns and difficulties staying in correlation with the own childhood experiences. Furthermore the stories can serve as a basis for exchange and discussion on educational issues with other kindergarten teachers and day mothers, and a peer learning process is launched.

EXPERTS wants to set up a learning and communication platform for early childhood educators, offering

- All necessary information about the project itself and the consortium,
- A “resources” area, comprising relevant information on early childhood education, topical literature and links of respective institutions, organisations, associations and similar projects for five European countries (Germany, Italy, Spain, Slovenia and Finland),
- A multilingual weblog area, offering the opportunity to tell own stories, read and comment the stories of others, in the five project languages,
- Forums in the five languages, providing the opportunity to discuss professional experiences in the field of early childhood education; the forums are supervised and tutored by educational experts,
- A user questionnaire for the evaluation of the EXPERTS platform.

As a short-time objective EXPERTS aims at recruiting at least 20 active “storytellers” per country, thus a total of 100 professionals are supposed to use the service within the project lifespan. Additionally, a substantial (500-1000) number of “story readers” will benefit from the experiences of the storytellers.

As a medium-termed objective it is foreseen that at least 1000 professionals will use the service within 10 years. This will be supported by linking the service to the websites of associations of professionals and integrating it into their learning offers. As an indirect effect, it is also expected that at least regional authorities will be sensitised to make efforts towards structured training offers for the target group via existing institutions (VET institutions, other continuous training agencies).

As a long-term objective EXPERTS wants to contribute to the development of continuous training for early childhood education professionals and therefore enhance early childhood education across Europe. Through its multiple dissemination activities the project also aims at contributing to the policy debate on early childhood education and the need to increase efforts in this part of the educational sector. For the research community the project aims at delivering concrete results on the use of digital storytelling as an efficient methodology for education and training.

## 2. Project Approach

The organisation of the work took the needs of the target group into account from the very beginning. The overall objective of the project is to develop a continuous training environment for early childhood education professionals, and all the tools that were developed to this aim were built on a scientific user needs analysis. For that reason, scientific work taking stock of present theories and practices was carried out within WP2, and was the starting point for the technical development which took place within the framework of WP3. Therefore a weblog platform was designed taking into account a) the user needs; b) the available open source resources; c) the existing practices and trends in using them. Technical development was planned so as to meet design and development recommendations coming both from theories and practices, and from the users who pilot the service (WP4). A broad dissemination action was undertaken at all levels from the beginning, in order to sensitize policy makers, education and training communities, but also to inform associations of professionals and individuals about this learning opportunity and to encourage their joining. The exploitation of results will then start as early as year 2 of the project, given the presence of OPEKO and WEACE who represent this task and who have strong networking capabilities with other associations and professionals in Europe. By means of appropriate milestones and indicators, evaluation and quality-related activities (WP7) ensure an effective monitoring and corrective actions (if needed) to ensure the achievement of results in time and on budget.

The coordinator is in charge of monitoring the achievement of milestones, supported by the WP7 leader, and the formal responsible for the project action: however, the planning is planned by using a participative approach in order to ensure commitment and responsibility of each member of the consortium.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

During the two years of the project's lifetime, the following outputs and results will be (and partly already have been) produced:

A **Management and Communication Plan** describes the procedures of the project management and communication including actions and milestones.

A **Methodology Report** summarises the theoretical approach of storytelling, presents the results of the **user needs analysis** and gives recommendations for the development of the weblog area.

A **Web Portal**, including a **weblog area** and **forums**, was developed according to the recommendations of the user needs analysis.

The web portal includes a **user guide**, **self registration facilities**, **categories**, a **story archive** and **tags** in 6 languages.

A **project website** informing about the project in general and linked to the weblog and to the forums was set up.

An **agreement for storytellers** regulating the copyright issues has been developed.

A **Piloting Plan** describes the procedures of recruiting and piloting with all procedures, timing and milestones.

A **Piloting Report** summarises the results of the piloting and the feedback of the piloting users. Recommendations for the further adaptation of the weblog and forums can be derived.

After the first project year the **Service Running** will offer a permanent service for kindergarten teachers and day mothers. Beside the storytelling, reading and commenting opportunities a translation service for the stories and comments will be established.

A **Content Report** will give a qualitative overview of the themes, focuses, points of view and experiences of the target group and provide analysis and categorisation of the content.

An **Evaluation and Quality Plan** describes tools and procedures for formative and summative evaluation with the aim of quality assurance in the project.

Two **Evaluation Reports** (month 1-12 and month 13-24) will present the results of the evaluation and quality assurance measures.

A **Dissemination Plan** sets out the overall dissemination strategy of the project with all tools, activities and a timetable.

**Project leaflets** as well as **press articles** and **papers** have been/will be produced in order to provide printed dissemination material.

A **contact list** comprising all the dissemination contacts has been set up and will be completed during the further course of the project.

A **Dissemination Report** will summarise all dissemination activities and results.

An **Exploitation Plan** demonstrates the measures for transferring the intermediate and final results and outcomes to decision makers as well as to potential end users.

An **Exploitation Report** will summarise all measures and activities carried out in order to exploit the project results.

## 4. Partnerships

The consortium includes experienced centres of research and associations of professionals. The planned tasks require knowledge and skills that are well represented by the consortium members:

1. Research and methodology development skills. ILI has been a recognised centre for innovation in learning since 1976. Scierter ES have research as their core activity and have been working in the field of education and training development for many years.
2. Technical development skills. FIM has been developing network-based learning systems since 1993. It has a powerful learning technology development centre that develops learning portals, databases, open source learning environments and authoring systems, adapts communication and cooperation systems to learners' needs. IPAK has been working in the field of development of web applications for many years, gaining experience in developing methodological frameworks for web applications, user analyses and software requirement definitions, XML, XSLT, scripting languages and databases..
3. Piloting, recruiting, management of groups, animation. All partners are skilled in managing transnational groups, dealing with different target groups and working contexts. Amitié in particular has wide experience in European collaboration within the framework of education and training, and in coordinating transnational working groups.
4. Services running. All partners are experienced in running services for professionals and other target groups. EDUCODE and WEACE have close relations with the identified target group.
5. Evaluation and management skills. FIM has successfully coordinated several European and national projects. Scierter ES offer evaluation services to their own clients..
6. Dissemination skills. All partners have the ability and expertise to successfully implement dissemination and exploitation strategies. Amitié is leading this WP as they are recognised as being the most experienced partner in terms of disseminating and valorising projects.

The different partners have common European skills *as well as* abilities specifically for their own countries . For that reason they are supplementing and complementing each other and build a complex and efficient consortium to fulfil the projects aims.

## 5. Plans for the Future

### **Running service:**

After the piloting and the adaptation of the learning environment to the user needs the running service will start. During this period a collection of as many stories as possible of kindergarten teachers and day mothers from different European countries will be undertaken. The spectrum of stories comprise tales from their childhood experiences on the one hand as well as stories from their daily routine in their jobs as early childhood educators on the other hand. Expected are gained implicit and explicit knowledge by the linking of retrospections on past experiences and the experiences in the job routine. This leads to an increased awareness about the own educational background and is supposed to help understanding current problems in the job as educator.

The kindergarten teachers of reference (recruited during the piloting phase) as well as the organisations of early childhood educators contacted and the outcomes of the dissemination activities guarantee that the web based learning environment will be perceived by many European kindergarten teachers.

The running service comprises the telling of stories by means of oral and recorded telling, writing or video records, as well as the participation to discussions in the EXPERTS forums and to get advice and support from professional tutors. Furthermore the reading and commenting of the stories of others is implicated. Another relevant activity in the framework of this work package is the proceeding process of translating the existing stories to the several languages of the partner countries. The partners are in charge to check the content of the stories – in order to avoid unacceptable content – and to animate the telling of new stories.

### **Story categorisation and analysis :**

During the last six months of the project's lifetime the collected material has to be sorted, categorised and analysed by the project partners in order to give a qualitative overview of the themes, focuses, points of view and experiences told in the individual tales. The story analysis will summarise all relevant aspects of the learning processes achieved within the web based learning environment and will be published as a Content Report on the project website.

### **Evaluation and Dissemination :**

Evaluation and dissemination activities will be continued according to the action plans and timetables set out in the Evaluation Plan and the Dissemination Plan.

### **Exploitation :**

The exploitation process of the project will start after the first 12 months of the project's lifetime. The exploitation activities will take place in close cooperation with the dissemination activities in order to use synergies between networking, dissemination, valorisation and exploitation measures. The project exploitation plan describes measures transferring intermediate and final results and outcomes of the project to appropriate decision makers on local, regional, national and European level and to convince individual end users (kindergarten teachers and day mothers, but also other groups of the society, e.g. parents' associations) to use the service developed.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

The kindergarten phase is a critical time in the lives of young children. It is a transition time from home and early childhood education programmes to formal school programmes. This importance is recognized in Europe: "The importance of early childhood education for further success or failure at school and beyond in personal and professional life is also widely recognized at national level" (PROGRESS TOWARDS THE LISBON OBJECTIVES IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING - Indicators and benchmarks -2007). The project offers learning opportunities to a target group (kindergarten teachers and day mothers) that is differently educated across Europe, and differently trained. Having little representation across institutions at European level, they are left with the local level. As individuals, they can participate in Associations of Professionals at local and regional level, asking for training and advice. However, they lack a broader vision of their professionalism, they miss a reflection on their own role as educators and on how they are expected to act during their day-to-day job activities. This action could only be exploited at European level: link professionals that are facing the same situations in different contexts as also the local context is becoming more and more intercultural and international.

## 7. Extra Heading/Section

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