

Dschola - regional collaborative network of Piedmont schools (IT)

Timing of case

As part of a Regional ICT Development Action Plan, a three-year project (2000-2003) has been set up by the Italian Education Ministry and Regional Public Administration.

Geographic setting (case location or geographic spread)

In an industrial region like Piedmont, the sectors of scientific research and education play a fundamental role in the creation and development of human and structural resources. Although the Italian education system is traditionally poorly linked to the industrial world, in recent years, Piedmont has been creating academic and scientific centres with a special focus on enterprises' demands and innovative Information Technologies.

Type and use of ICT

Low-cost connectivity with the Piedmont Government Network for all schools. This system supplies all schools in Piedmont with safe and certified network communications, mail boxes (one for each school operator), high-speed Internet access for management, administrative and educational purposes, information systems and hosting for school web-sites (free of charge for maintenance and connectivity), community resources, long-distance support and training activities.

Main contributors

- Regional Government, Regional Dpt. of the Education Ministry and CRT (Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Torino), an Italian Bank Foundation, made the project possible, largely financing it.
- Teachers with ICT, technical and administrative skills.
- Schools with a good technical background and infrastructure interested in improving their competencies and skills.

Main beneficiaries

The project involves 18 schools widespread on the regional territory, 2.828 educational structures, 50.000 teachers, 430.000 students and 840 administrative structures.

Background

A public- partnership project (2000-2003) was set up by the Ministero dell'Istruzione (the Italian Education Ministry) and Regional Public Administration directed towards the creation of a Regional Collaborative Network of Piedmont Schools. The network runs three activities:

- Co-financing of ICT-based projects (2 calls for proposals in 2001 and 2002)
- Low-cost connectivity within the Piedmont government network (universal access for high speed Internet, security, mail, hosting, community resources...)
- Dschola Project: Creation of service, animation and experimentation centres

Overall aims:

Transform some isolated school's best practices into a widespread collaborative system
Create local facilities to "lifelong learning"
Organize a valuable co-operation between school, students and families

Objectives

The project provides to schools a framework to promote and enhance bottom-up initiatives, idea, expertise. In fact, Dschola wants not only to stimulate and accelerate the use of ICT amongst the educational community, but also to increase flexible learning and distance working and cooperation activities. On the other hand, and for the most, Dschola aims to:

- Create and stimulate a virtual community of schools through the official website <http://www.dschola.it>
- Improve the excellence of the Centres of Service, Animation and Experimentation
- Disseminate the didactical excellence of the Centres of Animation through workshops, seminars, conferences

- Stimulate, sustain and improve the training between teachers
- Stimulate, sustain and improve the cooperation between the Centres of Service, Animation and Experimentation and their territorial schools, as suggested by the slogan of the project: "Schools for schools"
- Stimulate and enhance schools' business skills and capacities in order to co-fund their projects
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Resources (apart from ICT)

Regional Government, Regional Dpt. of the Education Ministry and Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Torino: 23 m. €

Co-funding to projects which aim to speed up ICT innovation with up, to enhance teachers' skill in planning and management, and to sustain schools self-government.

2000: 131 projects funded with 5,1 m €

2002: Funded with 4,25 m €

Participation of nearly all schools in the region

Activities

Centres of Service, Animation and Experimentation are schools with proven experience in ICT with particular reference to the Internet. Starting from their potential, they have set up the required technical and organizational structures in order to become technological reference points in their area.

Animation Centres are 4 primary schools and 1 secondary school, with proven experience in didactics and educational methodologies. They are in charge of organizing and fostering workshops, seminars and conferences, in order to disseminate their own competencies.

Outputs and results

Services provided by the Centres:

1/ Training activities provided for school managers. Each Centre provides both direct and indirect training, consultation and support for schools within their own territory. In particular, they consist of courses for school managers and assistants concerning:

-Surfing the Internet

-Electronic Mail

-Piedmont Government Network

The first training initiative started in September 2001 and involved more than 1600 individuals: all the school managers of public and schools of the Piedmont Regions and an assistant chosen by the school managers.

The courses were managed by the Centres, which are equipped with the necessary workplaces and connections. School managers are asked to fill some questionnaires in the different moment of the training, using a specific application for reporting via web.

2/ Support activities for territorial schools. Centres are committed to providing general support for projects which apply for funding from CRT Foundation. This support will be qualified and detailed following the approval of the presented projects and based on the technical aspects of each project.

3/ Support and demonstration activities. The Centres, in conjunction with the activities of schools in any given territory, are dedicated to providing the tools to enable:

- Video conferencing services
- Activity and event distribution services in real time

Animation activities promoted by the Centres:

Training, meetings and conferences concerning the main aspects of the introduction and use of ICT.

1/Technological themes:

- Designing and running a website
- Running and maintaining the school's equipment
- Designing and running security solutions
- Designing and developing multimedia services.

2/ Didactical themes:

- Disability and didactics
- Language and languages
- Microrobotics and microworlds
- Didactics and network technologies
- Hypermedia

Each Centre receives a financial contribution based on its required commitment.

Experimentation activities promoted by the Centres:

Setting up of testing activities as innovative services is planned in each Centre (based on past experience, commitment and projects). These include organizational procedures and services made possible by ICT technology. For example:

- Production of multimedia educational material
- Multimedia educational material for disadvantaged students
- Video-conference training
- Web-based applications for administrative and educational management

Lessons and conclusions

The project, through three main action lines (co-financing ICT-based projects, making possible a low-cost connectivity within the piedmont government network, and creating services, animation and experimentation cen-tres), aims to transform some isolated school's best practices into a widespread collaborative system, to create local facilities to lifelong learning, and to organize a valuable co-operation between schools, students and families.

One of the main difficulties was to make teachers working together. But now they are aware that a common work allows much larger projects. And the most skilled teachers have had to create their own new training programs.

The project has followed an innovative operational model that merges a top-down with a bottom-up approach. The top-down approach sets up a very general objective: overcoming digital divide in schools and in the educational field as a whole and promoting a conscious use of ICT.

The bottom-down approach provides to schools a framework to promote and enhance bottom-up initiatives, idea, expertise. Dschola wants not only to stimulate and accelerate the use of ICT amongst the educational community, but also to increase flexible learning and distance working and cooperation activities.