THE DSCHOLA PROJECT

Erica Lavagno, Eleonora Pantò. CSP - Italy

Dschola is a regional project (set up in Piedmont, in the North West of Italy) started in January, 2001. It is aimed at stimulating greater attention to ICT, by involving students, teachers and families in partnership with schools.

The Dschola network consists of a selected group of primary and secondary schools, with proven technical and didactical excellence at regional level. Those schools disseminate their experiences and expertise towards all the schools in the region.

It is part of an experimentation directed towards the creation of the *Regional Network of Piedmont School*. It was set up by the Italian Education Ministry, Local Public Administrations and Universities. It involves 2.828 educational structures and about 50.000 teachers.

This three-year project (2000-2003) is financed by a Bank foundation that invested 21 millions of Euro.

The experimentation for the *Regional Network of Piedmont Schools* is articulated on three main action lines, that are coordinated with each other, in order to stimulate school and citizens to take part and understand the changes caused by the development of the Information Society.

CO-FINANCING OF ICT-BASED PROJECTS (a "*Call for proposal*" was published in 2001 and a second call is coming).

LOW-COST CONNECTIVITY WITHIN THE PIEDMONT GOVERNMENT NETWORK (the so-called "*Universal Service*"). Services are provided for every public and private school in Piedmont and include: safe and certified network communications, mail boxes, 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.

CREATION OF SERVICE, ANIMATION AND EXPERIMENTATION CENTRES (Dschola project) Starting from their proven experience in ICT, a group of 18 secondary schools set up the required technical and organizational structures in order to become technological reference points in their local area. They are working hand-in-hand with the new school organization and process of gradual school-autonomy. Besides of these, 5 primary schools, with proven experience in didactics and educational methodologies, are in charge of organizing and fostering workshops, seminaries and conferences, in order to disseminate their own competencies.

More specifically, Dschola will support the gradual autonomy process within schools. It is geared to improve educational and organizational flexibility, to increase the responsibility of those who live and work in the school environment, and finally, to assure compatibility and integration between all didactic choices and initiatives.

The project is in continuous evolution and the number of involved schools could increase in time.

1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND OPERATIONAL MODEL

The Dschola project is developed through a collaborative work structure among different players, all working at distance in a shared, cooperative and interactive use of ICT and multimedia, and sharing the aim of improving educational, training and experimental services through ICT. The Dschola project key actors are:

- teachers with ICT, technical and administrative skills
- schools with a good technical background and infrastructure interested in improving and enhancing their competencies and skills towards ICT use in educational field and in new economy.

Dschola policy concern is directed towards building and expanding opportunities for skill acquisition, and applying technological innovation towards didactics or organizational management. Such strategies include:

- The creation of closer synergies between ICT and education
- The creation of closer synergies between schools, and between schools and their environment
- The wider distribution of educational opportunities over the Internet
- The transferability and reproducibility of the model in other regions

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.
Nevertheless, 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 Web site http://www.dschola.it
- Improve the excellence of the Centres of Service, Animation and Experimentation
- 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.

The different topics (namely Learning and training, Innovation and technology transfer policies, Regional aspects and ICT) and actors (namely, Technical and administration secondary school teachers, Educational establishments, local Centres of expertise, Public bodies) involved in the project propose a model for the implementation of the ICT use in the educational field, funded on highlighting best practice experiences, customizing the use of ICT knowledge and technical innovation, providing a training model in which teachers’ skills and competencies are used and improved, considering these three features of professional practice:

- an already present of good quality technical infrastructure
- human and technical resources that are available for generating new knowledge
- the context in which skills are deployed

2. KEY-ACTORS AND KEY-ACTIONS

The Dschola school network consists in:

- 18 excellence technical secondary schools, having proven experience within the ICT area.

- 5 primary excellence schools, with proven experience in didactics and educational methodologies.

Furthermore, those schools are reference points for the analysis and production of innovation in education and schooling and can contribute to the development of innovative methods, systems and content.

Schools are connected with a broadband network allowing high level multimedia, cooperative activities and good quality videoconferences.

2.1. SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CENTRES

a. Training activities provided for principals

Each Service, Animation and Experimentation Centre provides both direct and indirect training, consultation and support for schools within their own territory. In particular, they consist of courses for principals and assistants concerning:

- Surfing the Internet
- Electronic mail
- Piedmont Government Network

b. Support activities for projects co-financed by CRT Foundation

Service, Animation and Experimentation Centres are committed to providing general support for these projects. This support will be qualified and detailed following the approval of the presented projects and based on the technical aspects of each project.

c. Support and demonstration activities

The Service, Animation and Experimentation Centres, in conjunction with the activities of the schools in any given territory, are dedicated to providing the tools to enable:

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

2.1.1. ANIMATION ACTIVITIES PROMOTED BY THE CENTRES

Service, Animation and Experimentation Centres arrange the planning and setting up of meetings and conferences concerning the main aspects of the introduction and use of ICT. These training meetings will supply a comprehensive reference framework for both organization and technology. For example, the sessions will include conferences and meetings based on the following themes:

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

Animation Centres arrange the planning and setting up of meetings and conferences concerning the best practices developed by each Centre. The sessions will include conferences and meetings based on the following themes:

- Disability
- Language
- Microrobotics

- Didactics and network technologies
- Hypermedia

2.1.2. EXPERIMENTATION ACTIVITIES PROVIDED BY THE CENTRES

The 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, the testing provided consists of the following:

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

3. WEB SITE OF THE PROJECT

www.dschola.it is the official Web site of the Centres of Service, Animation and Experimentation community. The Web site is the virtual meeting point of the Dschola community, interested in the topics regarding the relation between school and ICT. In particular, the Web site intends to

- disseminate and promote the community activities (Animation, Service and Experimentation) and initiatives
- to exchange within the community material, experiences, acquaintance, information.

The Web site is in fact organized in thematic sections, not only focused on the Dschola Project, the Centres of Service, Animation and Experimentation and their activities, but also in order to provide information on school and ICT and community services. The Italian version of Dschola is managed by all the members of the community. They can enrich the Web site publishing news, comments, events, upload of material.

Actually, the site in based upon an open source platform (PHP Nuke) that allows direct contribution by the readers and the community members.

The site is developed according to the rules of the accessibility and has passed the Bobby and the 508 validation.

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