

Gunilla Jedeskog

09 11 22

“ELFE 2 – European eLearning forum for Education 2”

Introduction to the project – purpose of this report

The ELFE 2 project has been conducted by ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee for Education) and funded with the support of the Lifelong Learning programme of the European Union.

The aim of this evaluation report is to assess whether the objectives of the ELFE 2 project, expressed in the project proposal, have been achieved through the means proposed. To provide a context for reporting the evaluation findings, an introduction on the background, project objectives and approach and the constitution of the Steering Committee is presented.

Background

The proposed project is a follow-up of the European eLearning Forum for Education (ELFE 1) project, carried out by the ETUCE from January 2004 to December 2005 in the frame of the European Commission’s eLearning Initiative. The ELFE 1 project revealed that a number of factors influenced the good practices in the exemplary schools studied within the project activities, such as a clear vision on what schools want to accomplish when they implement ICT supported teaching and learning, school leadership that is supportive and monitors the processes of change, an infrastructure that fits the changes pursued (not only hardware and software, but also the school building), adequate technical and pedagogical support and training for teachers, ICT becoming part of the school’s culture, a policy on staff development, and support from national, regional or local authorities who have developed policies on using ICT in education and provide schools (some) financial means (ELFE Steering Committee, 2006).

The new two-year project, ELFE 2, has built on various studies and projects, mainly on its predecessor ELFE 1, and on the conclusion that the use of ICT in education brings particular benefits for learning and teaching. Concerning learning processes and learners, benefits are indicated particularly on motivation, skills, independence and teamwork. Regarding teaching processes and teachers, increased enthusiasm, efficiency and best collaboration have been pointed out as skills enhanced when using ICT. However, barriers still exist, preventing these simple benefits from evolving into a solid added value for teaching and learning models. ELFE 2 has dealt particularly with identifying the methodologies used to optimise these benefits. The project has also tried to transpose its findings into clear recommendations on how to implement ICT in schools and teacher education institutions in a coordinated way.

The previous ELFE 1 project (based on 15 exemplary school visits in the participating countries: Denmark, the United-Kingdom, Portugal, Germany and Norway) identified that the structured use of ICT in schools (ICT being a part of the school development strategy) can optimise the added value of using ICT in teaching and learning models. Consequently the ELFE 2 project has built upon three intentions, directed to: teacher education, institutional management and strategic use of available funds, in order to further develop the ELFE 1 project findings.

To prepare teachers for teaching in an information society *Teacher Education* needs to offer the variations of relevant pedagogical approaches utilising ICT. The ELFE 1 project distinguished three meaningful foci: Single-Subject focus, Thematic Curricular focus and School-wide Curricular focus. Schools may apply various patterns of ICT application when implementing innovative pedagogical use of ICT, such as employing tools, student collaborative research, information management, teacher collaboration, (external) communication, product creation and tutorial use of ICT. ELFE 2 has drawn up recommendations for ICT components in schools and teacher education curricula that have taken these curricular foci and patterns of ICT use as starting points.

Successful implementation of pedagogical use of ICT in education depends on a number of factors that have to be applied in coherence in a school such as vision development, teachers' knowledge and skills, (digital) content and software, and ICT infrastructure. A culture of collaboration and support is necessary to make this happen. Leadership and *Institutional Management* are needed to realise these processes in a school. The ELFE 2 project has identified elements that institutional management should deal with in order to manage a successful development in the use of ICT in education.

The ELFE 1 project revealed a variation of problems that schools may encounter when they want to integrate ICT in teaching and learning processes, such as out-dated equipment, need to adapt the school building, not enough digital content, lack of technical and pedagogical support, and insufficient facilities for teachers' development. It has been seen as important that schools have guidelines to address these issues. Where the second intention focuses on determining key decision areas for institutional management to make things happen and to monitor policies and processes (including addressing potential problems), this third intention aims to generate guidelines for *Strategic Use of Available Funds*, and also strategies to raise funds, not only at institutional level, but also at the school-transcendent levels.

The ELFE 2 project has intended to enhance teacher unions' coherent view on both the pedagogical as well as the organisational aspects of successfully integrating ICT in education. The elaboration of specific teacher unions' recommendations on ICT components in teacher education, ICT policies at the institutional management level and the appropriate allocation of funds is innovative in itself, as it is the first time that teacher unions intend to develop a comprehensive policy addressing these three topics.

Project objectives and approach

The European eLearning Forum for Education, ELFE 2, was created to achieve a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of using ICT in education. Based on previous pilot projects, which included intensive use of ICT in secondary schools and in teacher education institutions, the ELFE 2 project was carried out in five different European countries (Denmark, UK, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia) and tried to:

1. *Identify methodologies used in schools and teacher education institutions in order to favour a use of ICT that promotes the added value of using ICT in education in terms of teaching and learning models (by building on the ELFE 1 findings).*
2. *Develop recommendations addressed to policy-makers, to schools and teacher education institutions and to trade union leaders on the three priority areas identified in ELFE 1.*

The ELFE 2 project elaborated the first project aim in a number of analysis questions reflecting two perspectives that are important in this project, the availability of an ICT infrastructure, as a necessary condition for pedagogical use of ICT, and the pedagogical and organisational aspects of intensive ICT use in school and teacher education institutions. Information needed to answer these questions was obtained from the head teacher, teachers and students of the schools and teacher education institutions visited, via interviews, as well as in two school questionnaires for the head teacher and the ICT coordinator. Furthermore, information from local brochures and websites were used.

To make a link to the ELFE 1 it was decided that it would be important to use the same instruments as in ELFE 1. In ELFE 1, the process of determining the information needs followed the approach developed in the IEA SITES-M2 (Kozma, 2003). The SITES-M2 study was a study of innovative pedagogical practices supported by ICT, and as such similar in goal and scope to ELFE 1. Based on the SITES-M2 operational design all the analysis questions, as well as the topics of ICT infrastructure and school background were elaborated and resulted in a full set of operationalised analysis questions (ELFE Steering Committee, 2006).

The ELFE 2 project applied a case study approach in two ELFE 1 countries, Denmark and the UK, and in three new EU member states, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia. The Steering Committee decided to select two secondary schools, excluding vocational schools, and one teacher education institution, providing pre-service education, in each of the five countries. They had to be advanced in the use of ICT and not receiving extra budgets. Selecting schools and teacher education institutions with advanced practice was fundamental to examine the challenges other schools will face when developing the use of ICT in teaching and learning. The criteria for selection of schools were basically the same used to select schools in the ELFE 1 project. Given the expected differences in development stages with respect to integration of ICT in teaching and learning between European countries, the criteria was to be locally defined. The schools should be regarded as advanced in respect of ICT use in their own country. Based on these criteria the final selection of schools/teacher education institutions was done by the national trade union representatives of the participating countries in the ELFE2 Steering Committee. The project budget provided the ELFE 2 team for a three day visit to each of the countries. This meant one day per school/institution. The ELFE 2 visiting team consisted of two representatives of teacher unions (one from the host country) and one expert in ICT in education. The external evaluator has visited one country.

Concerning the identification of methodologies used in order to achieve a structured and systematic pedagogical use of ICT in education that favours an added value of teaching and learning, the study visits have given the necessary basis to analyse the transferability of these practices among the EU countries. Teacher unions from all EU/EFTA countries also discussed these methodologies and exchanged experiences, identifying the possibilities of transferability during the two regional seminars.

To accomplish the second aim - *Develop recommendations addressed to policy-makers, to schools and teacher education institutions and to trade union leaders on the three priority areas identified in ELFE 1* - trade unions from five different EU member states, the project partners, have drafted policy recommendations. These recommendations have been discussed and amended by all ETUCE member organisations present at the final conference in September 2009. Thus teacher unions from all EU/EFTA countries have given their input and contributed in achieving the project aims and outcomes as regards policy recommendations. The main purpose of the conference was to debate a draft policy paper on the use of ICT in

education prepared by the ELFE 2 team. The recommendations have been adopted by the ETUCE Executive Board.

In order to successfully achieve its objectives, the ELFE 2 project included several activities that took place during the two-year period 2008 - 2009. For more information, please see section "Events in ELFE 2", <http://www.elfe-eu.net/>.

The ELFE 2 project objectives have a clear European dimension. Whereas the exchange of experiences and the recommendations to be developed will benefit national teacher trade unions in their work at national level as regards national policy makers, school management and the management of teacher education institutions, they will certainly have a European approach.

The ELFE 2 Project Description and Justification document has expressed that specific policy recommendations will be made to give an input to EU policy on education and training. The activities and outcomes of ELFE 2 will enable ETUCE to develop a coherent European teacher trade union policy on the use of ICT in education, as regards the three priority areas - ICT and teacher education, ICT and school management and ICT and strategic use of available financial means. ETUCE will be able to bring the views of its members on ICT in the priority areas to the EU policy development level. The analysis of transferability of good methodologies in the use of ICT in education and the policy recommendations developed in ELFE 2 will help the ETUCE in its work within the European clusters that perform peer learning activities in support of the programme Education and Training 2010. ETUCE holds a membership in three clusters as well as within the Education and Training 2010 Coordination Group.

The Steering Committee

The project has been conducted by the project coordinator and the ELFE 2 Steering Committee, supported by the ETUCE-secretariat, in charge of the project management. The project coordinator chaired the Steering Committee and organised and monitored the project, whilst the ETUCE secretariat organised and coordinated all operational activities in the project.

The Steering Committee (SC) consisted of eight persons: representatives from Teacher Trade Unions from five countries Denmark, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia and the UK, two experts/researchers in the area of ICT in education and an external evaluator, who also participated actively as 'critical friend' in the project.

Apart from the Trade Unions represented in the Steering Committee, other Teacher Unions, members of ETUCE, were involved in the project by discussing at three conferences the project findings as well as the conclusions and policy recommendations to the EU and the ETUCE and its membership.

Structure of the report

The next section of the report presents the assignment for the external evaluator followed by a section with the evaluation findings whereby a distinction is made between different activities within the project. The last section presents some final remarks and recommendations.

The external evaluation of the ELFE 2 project

In this section the assignment and the role of the external evaluator is addressed.

Work and duties of the external evaluator

The task of the external evaluator according to the work plan is:

- To evaluate the methodology, processes and outputs developed in the project in relation to the project aims.
- To contribute to the successful development of the project, by actively participating in the Steering Committee meetings.

For that purpose, the external evaluator was expected to (see contract):

- Interview key persons/Steering Committee members on the issue related to the project.
- Analyse and provide feedback on all documents.
- Attend regional seminars and the final project conference.
- Produce the interim evaluation report.
- Produce the final evaluation report.
- Participate in the six Steering Committee meetings.
- Have access to all the project instruments and reports developed as project outcomes.

The role of the external evaluator in the ELFE 2 project is clearly defined with a division between the role as the external evaluator and the role of the two project experts. The evaluation is to be regarded as formative as the evaluator has followed the project and the activities from January 2008 to September 2009. That means that the evaluator has provided feedback on documents, on construction of research instruments and also visited two schools and one teacher education institution in Slovenia. When the visits were accomplished, in December 2008, a questionnaire was sent to the SC members to collect their comments on and experiences about the accomplishment and at the final conference they were interviewed. Furthermore the external evaluator attended all six SC meetings located in Brussels, London, Warsaw, Riga, Copenhagen and Bled in Slovenia and the two regional seminars in Brussels and Riga as well as the final conference in Bled.

Findings of the external evaluator

This section addresses four different kinds of activities in the ELFE 2 project:

1. Steering Committee (SC) meetings.
2. School and teacher education institution visits.
3. Two regional seminars and the final conference.
4. The website.

The material used here are initial planning documents, minutes from SC meetings, interim reports from school and teacher education institution visits, the final report from study visits, internal evaluation reports, questionnaires and interviews with the SC members, reports from two regional seminars, questionnaires from two seminars and one conference, the policy recommendation report (draft) and the external evaluator's notes taken during the project.

1. Steering Committee (SC) meetings

The agenda of the meetings has been prepared in a timely and efficient manner and provided prior to the meetings. Having the precise agenda meant more effective work during the

meetings. There has been flexibility to deal with relevant issues between the meetings using e-mail and thus also to be prepared in advance. The practical arrangements surrounding the meetings have been good and the services and support of the administrators very appreciated. SC meetings located to each of the participating countries meant a stronger involvement of the host country in the project and a way to widen the perspectives. SC members consider their participation in the project as ‘a kind of learning environment’. The collaboration between trade unionists and researchers has been fruitful, a way to obtain tools to better understand the situation in schools and teacher education institutions in the partner countries.

The Steering Committee consisted of four members with experiences from the ELFE 1 project and four from new EU member states. That means that ELFE 1 experiences could be used – an advantage for the ELFE 2 project. On the other hand it also means that more time should have been spent to explain ELFE 1, to create a kind of common understanding among the SC members. The internal work in the Steering Committee such as engagement, capacity, responsibility and science could have been focused more during the meetings and in the whole project.

The composition of the Steering Committee, teacher union representatives and experts, worked out well. The experts in the Steering Committee assured that a proper balance between the union perspective and the broader educational and scientific perspectives on integrating ICT for pedagogical purposes was obtained. Besides, the union representatives played a key role in arranging the visits to the schools and teacher education institutions. According to the visits there has been a request for more central support for documentation, as a standard letter with all of the requirements of the project and visit, to be produced by the host SC member and sent to the schools and teacher education institutions in advance.

The work plan reflected a good approach to realize the project aims and to provide input for debate among the national teacher unions, the membership of ETUCE, resulting in valuable recommendations both to the EU and the ETUCE member organizations. Although all the SC members involved in this project have many tasks, other than in the ELFE 2 project, the time schedule has been followed according to the application. All members participated in the meetings, and there have been no problems with long-time absence of any of the persons involved in the project.

2. Schools and teacher education visits

This section deals with research instruments, selection of schools and teacher education institutions, accomplishment, findings, recommendation and ELFE 2 reports.

Research instruments

The school collaboration with the project was fine in general. Schools provided the ELFE 2 visitors with the necessary information

The design of the study for data collection procedures was adapted from the ELFE 1 project but the instruments had to be revised and adapted to the objectives of the ELFE 2 project. Members of the Steering Committee who participated in ELFE 1 were able to make recommendations about their refinement, based on their experiences of using the study instruments. New SC members made useful suggestions based on the education systems and requirements of their own countries. The need for the study instruments to reflect the aims and objectives of the project were stressed. However, important to notice is that, the Steering Committee did not spend sufficient time on reviewing the instruments, as the timetable of the

project did not permit a more in-depth work. This is of particular relevance for the instruments for the visits to teacher education institutions. The Steering Committee may have needed more time at the first SC meeting to discuss the instruments, but this would have been difficult because several of the SC members might not have been aware at that point how the instruments should be used. At the second meeting it was already to some extent too late to do major changes in the instruments.

Moreover it would have been an advantage to spend time to define and discuss in more detail what the SC members understood by the different concepts. The first aim of ELFE 2 could be an example. - *To identify methodologies used in the schools and teacher education institutions in order to favour a use of ICT that promotes the added value of using ICT in education in terms of teaching and learning models.* Had the SC discussed the project target, the instruments could have been more adjusted to this objective. However, this does not mean that the instruments caused any crucial faults according to the collected empirical material.

Securing all of the questionnaires and background documentation from schools and teacher training institutions, as required by the project, continued to be a problem. As in the ELFE 1 project, participating institutions had rarely completed both of the questionnaires prior to the visit and also often needed to be reminded several times to forward material to their national teacher trade union representative, despite the national teacher trade union representatives having made these requests both verbally and in writing to the schools before and during the visits. This added to the work commitment of the national teacher trade union representatives and could potentially delay the reports of the study visits written by the pedagogical experts.

Intercultural work is challenging and demands some basic conditions, such as a common language. English was mostly used as the project language in ELFE 2. As all SC members are not native English speakers the workload for those with more fluent English has been rather high. They had to fulfil assignments in terms of interviewing, note taking and transcribing interviews that was originally not envisaged. Furthermore, during the visits most of the teachers and students had to use a foreign language. That sometimes meant that less information and explanations were given. SC members also put attention to problems with note taking and interviewing.

Hence, more time should have been given to reviewing the instruments, discussing central concepts and preparing the ELFE 2 steering group members for note taking and interviewing.

Selection of schools and teacher education institutions (TEI)

The criteria for selection of schools and teacher education institutions were clear which enabled the SC members' choice of relevant schools and teacher education institutions. However, it is impossible to judge whether the most appropriate schools of the participating countries were selected. There are several indications that the visited schools are better equipped and use computers to a higher degree than other schools, often because of extra budgets for ICT equipments. The selection of schools within the countries resulted in a variety of schools reflecting lower and upper secondary education.

The selection of teacher education institutions was challenging. In some of the countries there are rather few institutions and some of them not located within a reachable area for the timetable of the visits. There are also differences in formal structures for teacher education institutions that make it difficult to select comparable institutions. However, the selected institutions reflected the situation in the partner countries.

There is a west-east balance among the partner countries (Denmark, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia and UK) that results in a variety of perspectives within the ELFE 2 project, a chance for intercultural encounters that has been appreciated and utilized. To include two countries, with a developed approach of ICT, from the ELFE 1 project, has given the ELFE 2 project some consistency.

Accomplishment – findings - recommendations

The case study approach followed in the project has been appropriate. The ELFE 2 project did not strive for generalizations of system characteristics or indicators, but aimed at getting a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of using ICT in secondary schools and in teacher education institutions. This was intended as an input for a discussion within ETUCE on policy recommendations to its membership and the EU.

Generally the visits were well prepared. At some occasions schools were more interested to show us the computers they have than to tell us how these computers are used. This could be understood as a lack of pedagogical consideration and of a curriculum including ICT content. The visits to the teacher education institutions generally were better accomplished than the school visits.

The time schedule was tight, but achievable as long as the school/teacher education institution was fully prepared for the visit. The length of the interview guidelines was demanding. In some cases it might have been tight because the visitors had to relay on interpretation during some visits. The clear division of labour between the SC members in ELFE 1 has not worked as well in ELFE 2. This may have had some impact on the quality of the interviews.

The ELFE 2 project was aimed to further develop the ELFE 1 project findings related to ICT and *teacher education*, ICT and *institutional management* and ICT and *strategic use of available financial means*. The intention to deal with those three areas in the ELFE 2 project has been fulfilled. The ELFE 2 project has focused on how initial teacher education institutions qualify teacher students for pedagogical use of ICT. Generally teacher students are digital literate from a technical aspect of using ICT but from a pedagogical aspect some of them express a need for further professional development. The role of institutional management is emphasised in all visited schools. The school management has either directly pushed for more advanced use of ICT or has been supportive to groups of teachers using ICT. It has been characteristic for many of the ELFE 2 schools visited in Slovenia, Poland and Latvia, that they have had access to extra resources besides normal public school funding, for example from private sponsors, ICT companies and parents. At the 3rd ELFE SC meeting in Warsaw the fact was discussed that many of the more inspiring examples of good use of ICT in education came from schools that received external funding to promote the use of ICT at their school. The condition at a newly constructed and well-equipped school is not fully transferable to all other schools because many of them lack resources. It raises the question whether examples from these schools can be used as inspiration for schools without access to funds beyond the normal school budget.

The issue was also discussed at the regional seminar in Riga and the conclusion was that you should not reject good inspiration just because it has been stimulated by external funding, some of it from private donors. It might have been easier for these schools to succeed but when experimenting new ways of teaching there should be room for trial and mistakes where all stakeholders involved learn from the process. This process can benefit from extra

resources and in several countries there have been larger pilot projects with extra public funding to find the good use of ICT in education. After a pilot phase these projects were amended and partly implemented in the national curriculum within normal budget limits. Furthermore, extra external funding often seems to be necessary to work with ICT in a more advanced way.

In countries where you do not have resources for larger national pilot projects an alternative can be to look for other kinds of funds and private sponsorships to try out new ways of teaching and to find better ways of using ICT in education. But it is important that the schools are aware that they should stay in full control of the pedagogical decisions and that sponsors should not be allowed to have any influence on how professional teachers decide to use the equipment or programs in their teaching. It is equally important that to ensure colleagues at other schools are informed on these experiences so they can learn from both good and bad examples.

It was clear that the five participating countries largely differ both in culture and in their education policies, resulting in a variety of attitudes among schools, teacher education institutions and trade unions to the use of ICT in education. This has given the project some challenges, but it also provided an example of the effect of cross-European projects.

ELFE 2 reports

From each school visit also an *interim report* was written, by the two experts/researchers in the ELFE 2 project. The first version of the report has the same structure as the matrix followed in the interviews in ELFE 2. A second, more elaborated, version was sent to the schools. They were asked to review these reports and propose corrections where needed. This provided the ELFE 2 project with an opportunity to validate the matrix structure school reports that served as the basis for the data analysis for the first aim - *To identify methodologies used in the schools and teacher education institutions in order to favour a use of ICT that promotes the added value of using ICT in education in terms of teaching and learning models*. The school reports were placed on the website of the ELFE project, whilst schools could use them for dissemination purposes.

To write the school visits reports has been extremely time consuming. Using all collected information and comparing the sources with each other it takes about a weeks' full time work to write one school report.

The *final school and TEI report*, also written by the two experts/researchers in ELFE 2, is based on a complete analysis of all collected material during the visits to 10 schools and 5 teacher education institutions. The final report constitutes a solid ground for preparing recommendations to schools and teacher education institutions, to teacher trade unions and to policy-makers on establishing technology enhanced learning environment.

Furthermore, in the ELFE 2 project three *internal evaluation reports* have been written by the trade unionists. The internal evaluation is aimed at assuring the achievement of the project objectives, the project strategy, the project tools as well as the quality of the process. The first report was drafted after the visits to Denmark and UK, in September 2008, the second after the two regional conferences, in May 2009, and the third report after the final conference, in October 2009. These formative evaluation reports have been useful for the project process, as an opportunity to reflect on the progress of the project and for highlighting potential areas for improvement.

3. Two regional seminars – the final conference

In the period from November 2008 - March 2009 *two regional seminars* took place: the first for representatives from the ETUCE members from the Western European countries and the second for ETUCE member organisations from the 12 new EU member states and candidate countries. Regarding the two regional seminars the number of participants and representations from countries were satisfactory although a few more participants could have been hosted as 2 out of 15 invited countries had no representatives in the Brussels seminar and 2 out of 12 invited countries had no representatives in the Riga seminar. During the seminars the experts presented their findings from the school visits in their respective areas. The purpose was to investigate the transferability of good methodologies on the use of ICT as part of the whole school development strategy, including ICT in initial teacher education, which promotes the added value of using ICT in education. Stakeholders in the area of ICT use in education have been invited to participate in the regional seminars and to give their input to the discussions.

Planning the regional seminars, the discussion was raised on how to stimulate debate and promote inspiration among the European countries beyond just having lectures on research projects and SC members informing about their impression from the visits to the relevant institutions. The result was a cocktail of experts, SC reports and speakers from the OECD and EU Commission who explained their vision on the use of ICT in education mixed with reports from representatives from the ELFE institutions. Representatives from the visited schools and teacher education institutions described visions and good examples. At a separate session during the conference they were able to meet in a group and exchange their experiences. They were encouraged to establish a network to continue their exchange of experience beyond the conference and the project itself. Reports from the two regional seminars are published on the website and have been sent to all ETUCE unions.

It has however been a problem in ELFE 2 compared to ELFE 1 that the involved institutions are less directly involved in the project. In ELFE 1 the ELFE-schools that were visited by the Steering Committee also went on a study visit themselves to one of the other ELFE schools. This meant that they had a higher interest in active participation and were quicker to respond to our calls for school descriptions and comments to our school-visit reports. Another example of the same problem is that none of the English schools found it possible to attend in the Riga conference, where both schools were invited to send one representative for free.

During the seminars evaluation questionnaires were distributed and answered by the delegates. They were satisfied with seminar content, environment, seminar documents, speakers and the options they got to actively participate and share experiences in working groups, however to a less extent in Brussels than in Riga.

During *the final conference* ETUCE members, around 55 delegates representing 22 countries were discussing the draft recommendations. So although the input for the discussion was based on the findings from ten schools and five teacher education institutions from five countries, participants representing trade unions from all countries approved the policy recommendations.

The final conference was good with an open minded and inviting atmosphere. The school and trade unions presentations were a good introduction to the conference, even though there were many presentations. The evaluation form indicates that the participants were engaged in constructive discussions about the recommendations and that the speakers were well selected for the purpose. The working group sessions could be planned better using creative and active

methods. The participants appreciated the electronic voting system that also provided the Steering Committee with the union delegates' opinions related to questions on ICT in education. This was for example a way to get information about the implementation of the recommendations from the ELFE 1 project, (50% of the answers were saying that the recommendations have been implemented to some extent in their countries). Finally the delegates were invited to think about the future, delivering suggestions for a possible ELFE 3 project.

The recommendations framed around the 21st century competences address separate target groups such as teachers, school leadership, teacher education institutions, teacher unions, the European Commission and ETUCE as pointed out in the ELFE 2 project proposal.

4. The website

As written in the project proposal for the European eLearning Forum for Education the overall aim of the ELFE 2 project is - *to achieve a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of using ICT in education*. The ELFE website is one part of the project that aims to contribute to better understanding of the use of ICT. The website is a concept that covers three separate sections:

- Information regarding the ELFE activities.
- A section for sharing information, mainly meeting minutes and reports.
- A section for debating the use of ICT in education.

The ELFE website is well structured and provides a lot of relevant information, easy to find. The ETUCE administrators have promoted the use of the website, as, very soon in connection with SC meetings and the three conferences, the documents have been available on the website.

The debate on how the European policy on the use of ICT in education should be developed has taken place with enthusiasm at the conferences organized by the Steering Committee and the ETUCE secretariat, but not on the website. The Steering Committee is aware that the discussion forum facility on the ELFE website has not been well-used and has discussed how to stimulate more interest in this, for example, by posing specific questions or "threads" to stimulate debate. The Steering Committee has acknowledged, however, that many such forum exist in each participating country, which may appear to be more relevant to schools as they focus on issues specific to individual countries. Furthermore it may be problematic to stimulate discussions on the internet as for many of the participants English is not their mother tongue.

Some final remarks and recommendations

In this section some final remarks are summarized and recommendations are addressed.

It should be stressed as a positive outcome that the ELFE 2 project accomplished its major aims, to identify methodologies and to produce a set of recommendations for which the ELFE 2 findings were used as the major source. One may conclude that the policy paper and its recommendations are a good and valued outcome of the ELFE 2 project, produced in cooperation with the conference delegates. The ELFE 2 project has been an interesting meeting place for union representatives and researchers, among these the external evaluator. The ELFE 2 project has also proved a good meeting place for union representatives, teachers, teacher educators and researchers. At the two seminars in Brussels and Riga and at the final

conference in Bled¹ researchers as well as teachers and teacher educators and representatives from EU and OECD were invited as speakers to provide input to the discussions.

One may conclude that there is an added value of the ELFE 2 project for the various target groups of the project teachers, school leadership, teacher education institutions, teacher unions, the European Commission and ETUCE. *Teachers, school leadership and teacher education institutions* were very much the focus in operationalizing the first aim of the ELFE 2 project - *to identify methodologies used in the schools and teacher education institutions in order to favour a use of ICT that promotes the added value of using ICT in education in terms of teaching and learning models*. As a result the policy recommendations for those three groups on the one hand focus on concrete activities in the classrooms and on the other hand on reflections and discussions. Interviews with students and teacher students have also, however more implicitly, contributed to the formulation of the recommendations. *Teacher Unions* were actively involved in discussing the finding and drawing up policy recommendations. *Policy makers* were always in the picture as a target group that clearly appears from the policy recommendations included in the project report, endorsed by the ETUCE Executive Board.

Transferability is an important part of the ELFE 2 project intention, i.e.; what could be transferred and learnt by others. Options to transfer experiences of ‘good practice’ are to some extent limited, as local context and culture have to be taken into consideration as essential conditions. The schools and teacher educations of the five ELFE 2 countries are different regarding for example school systems, curriculum, traditions and access and use of ICT. Schools can learn from each other when they also get to know about specific conditions related to a ‘good example’. According to that, relevant information about each country has been included to the final project report.

Sharing experiences and outcomes of the ELFE 2 project with for example teachers, students, teacher educators, teacher students, trade unionists, researchers and policy-makers all over Europe is important. Some current activities, October 2009, may contribute to transferability:

- A brochure will be written by the ETUCE secretariat and printed in 1000 copies – a certain number in French and English. It will summarise the project activities, findings and the policy recommendations. The brochure will have a practical approach towards the implementation of the policy recommendations and be a document that can be easily translated into other languages.
- Findings from the ELFE2 project have been presented at the ECER 2009 - European Conference on Educational Research - in Vienna (<http://www.eera-ecer.eu/ecer/ecer-2009-vienna/>) by the two experts and the external evaluator.
- The coordinator of the ELFE2 project, will present the project at the conference “Uddannelsesforum“(Educational Forum) arranged by the Danish Ministry Agency on ICT in Education (www.uddannelsesforum.dk) in Odense, Denmark in November 2009.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are not just to be regarded as critical summing up statements by the external evaluator. They will also serve as a valuable platform and starting point for a next

¹ At the conference in Bled there were participants from Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Kosovo. In Riga in addition there were participants from Estonia and in Brussels in addition to the list above participants from Austria, Luxemburg and Sweden.

step, ELFE 3 applied for by ETUCE that has been strongly recommended, also by the participants at the Bled conference.

Referring to the evaluation of the ELFE 1 project, January 2006, the external evaluator has stressed 'more time needed for detailed project design'. He has strongly recommended 'that a follow-up project assures sufficient time for trying out and field testing instruments for data collection' (Plomp, 2006). This statement is still relevant in the evaluation of the ELFE 2 project with a request for:

- More time during the introduction of the project to create a common platform of understanding among the SC members.
- More time to review the instruments, to discuss central concepts and to talk about how to take notes and to interview.
- More time for the selection procedure of schools and teacher education institutions to ensure the fulfilment of criteria.

The SC members are, as a group, satisfied with the accomplishment of the ELFE 2 project. However, some suggestions to strengthen the idea and fulfilment of the project are highlighted.

- To strengthen the efficiency of the visits a standard letter with all requirements of the project and visit is to be sent to schools and teacher education institutions in advance.
- To strengthen active participation among partner schools, school-to-school-visits (a model in ELFE 1), as well as TEI-to-TEI visits are recommended.
- To strengthen active participation among SC member visits to partner schools and TEI in each country are recommended for the whole SC group.
- When looking at good practice at school and teacher education institution level, it is important to consider how the involved institutions can see a benefit from participating in the project.
- Examples of 'good ICT practice' have to be presented in relation to its context, culture and tradition to be useful for others.

In the ELFE 1 project, 2004 – 2005, and in the ELFE 2 project, 2008 – 2009, the co-operation between trade unionists from ETUCE and researchers has been well established. Findings and experiences in the field of ICT in education are collected from European schools and teacher education institutions and presented in seminars and conferences as well as on the ELFE website, the first aim of the ELFE 2 project. Recommendations are drafted by the Steering Committee and elaborated and developed with trade unions in the conferences, the second aim of the ELFE 2 project. Hence, the two accomplished ELFE projects constitute a solid platform for a continuing work between trade unions and researchers according to the challenges of the 21st century defined as eight key competences for lifelong learning (Education Council, 2006).

References

Education Council (2006) *Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competencies for lifelong learning*. Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union, 30.12.2006

ELFE Steering Committee (2006) *Final Implementation Report to the European Commission of the European eLearning Forum for Education (ELFE) Project*. Brussels: European Trade Union Committee for Education [ETUCE]. Also available online < http://www.elfe-eu.net/flx/english/findings_and_evaluation>

Kozma, R.J. (Ed). (2003) *Technology, innovation, and educational change: a global perspective*. A report of the Second Information Technology in Education Study (SITES) Module 2. Eugene (OR, USA): International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE).

Plomp, T. (2006) *External Evaluation Report on the European eLearning Forum for Education project*. < http://www.elfe-eu.net/flx/english/findings_and_evaluation>