

Inclusive approach to secondary school teaching to tackle early school leaving launched across Europe

CARMA is the name of a European funded initiative that promises to launch an inclusive approach to *secondary-school-level teaching*, based on the introduction of non-formal learning practices and collaborative methods that promote interaction, creativity and reciprocal learning between teachers and learners.

Based on the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) of Danilo Dolci, a group of European partners from education and training backgrounds, has been working on an inclusive and innovative assessment tool that will allow teachers to monitor and respond rapidly to student's learning progress, while it also informs parents and update the wider school community about the learner's constantly changing needs.

Since early 2016, CARMA's partners have been dedicated to intensive research on the phenomena of *Early School Leaving (ESL)*, on collecting best practices concerning *collaborative learning (CL)* and on identifying existing national frameworks for assessing teachers' competences. As a result of such investigation, a comprehensive report entitled ***"Early School Leaving – Statistics, Policies and Good Practices in Collaborative Learning"*** (1) has been produced.

In this report, CARMA's partners showcase statistics about ESL in light of distinctive factors such as gender, ethnic minorities, foreign born and degree of urbanization. The analysis is taken one step further into the different national contexts and it is quite interesting to see that while in Austria and in France the rate of ESL (7.3% and 9.3% respectively) is below the target for Europe 2020 Strategy – which is set to 10% - all other countries of the partnership, present rates that are above this (10.1% in Belgium, 14.7% in Italy, 13.7% in Portugal, 20% in Spain and 36,4% in Turkey).

The report also showcases national measures, referred as general policy guidelines, promoted by governments, as well as a set of projects referring to concrete proposals – promoted at local/regional and/or national level - focused on strategies to overcome ESL. As example, measures implemented to tackle ESL, included promoting social inclusion of children and teenagers coming from vulnerable or unstable socio-economic contexts in Portugal, strengthening school and work experience through alternation in Italy or even youth coaches for job orientation in Austria. The identified measures and projects serve as a catalogue of initiatives designed to mitigate ESL within the seven partnership countries, and to demonstrate that it is indeed an important topic for governments and policy makers.

In their research, partners also strived to understand how teacher training and professional competence could be considered as a crucial factor for tackling ESL. Therefore, the report showcases an analysis of the different mechanisms used by governments to evaluate secondary school teachers' competencies - a novelty proposed by the project as there is not any actual National Framework in all 7 countries of the partnership that evaluates teachers'

competencies in light of collaborative working practices. However, partners wanted also to collect feedback directly from the source and have launched a survey for exploring CL from the perspective of all stakeholders within the school community: teaching staff and professionals within school education, students, parents, school service providers, civil society organizations and policy-makers in school education. The conclusions from the surveys can be found in the report *“Needs Analysis Survey Report”* (1). The results from over 1200 respondents highlight that not only students think they learn better in groups and they are happy in actually implementing group work, but also teachers think that their own students learn better in groups. Teachers and students are skilled to work collaboratively and CL is understood important to improve motivation among students and prevent them from dropping out. In terms of perceived needs, teachers reveal that it is fundamental to have the right technologies (or at least assistance), infrastructures and support from educational stakeholders to guarantee the successful implementation of CL activities. Another important factor is teacher training as it helps promoting and developing suitable collaborative practices.

One of CARMA’s main goals is to increase and improve the competences of teachers through training and the delivery of an assessment framework that fosters inclusive and participatory practices in teaching, developing collaborative relationships *in and out* of the classroom. Therefore, the results captured in both reports have been crucial for CARMA’s next steps as they have strengthened the relevance of the project and its aims, by exploring the real needs of teachers and quantified such needs in a way that enabled deeper knowledge on how to adapt non-formal learning methods in secondary education. Such knowledge obtained during the in-depth year-long phase of research conducted by the partnership will be used to filling in the gaps in the educational systems concerning ESL and learner achievements. The absence of existing standards and frameworks for collaborative learning in the partner countries, has given a clear rationale for the importance of the CARMA project.

Gianna Cappello, expert in European Educational Policies, says: *“The importance of the CARMA project is two-fold: first of all, by trying to integrate non-formal learning methods in secondary education, it helps support the European Commission’s principle that education is in fact a **lifelong experience** which unfolds itself across different learning settings: formal, non formal, informal. As the EC states in an important Communication issued in 2001, lifelong learning represents “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal civic, social and/or employment-related perspective”. Secondly, by collecting a series of empirical data, the Carma project helps building a solid information base on inclusive/participatory practices in teaching and how they can mitigate ESL so that new and better educational policies can be formulated at both national and European level.”*

Following this intensive investigation, partners have organised a set of *Train-the-Teacher activities*, including a European Workshop in Palermo, with participation from 25 teachers and 7 educational experts, and various **Educational Forums** across European Member States, where experts and professionals from different levels of education systems were informed about the current state of the art in regards to strategies and policies in ESL and low achievement, collaborative learning practices and CARMA objectives.

“There is a real necessity of new approaches and methodologies for motivating and attracting our students”, said one of the participating teachers of the educational forums. “CARMA will provide an entirely innovative approach that I will apply in my classroom as I recognise its importance. I hope I can see the benefits within my students, as I anticipate them!”, she concluded.

In the coming months, CARMA partners will focus on the development of a toolkit of resources and assessment tools to enhance collaborative teaching and learning practices that answer to the challenges identified by the educational community and which are stated in the comprehensive report.

For further information about CARMA:

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(1) Both reports can be downloaded here: <http://carma-project.eu/download-area/>