VET Student’s appearance concerns and the influence on completion rates in VET and on their success rates on the job market

The Mirror project

Background

Negative body image can adversely affect a person’s self-esteem which, in turn, impacts on all other aspects of his or her life, from school and work performance to daily interaction with friends and colleagues. The negative consequences cut across all key areas of living, including health, psychosocial wellbeing, education and vocational functioning as well as contributing to social exclusion. These negative consequences are recognized as formidable obstacles and therefore the EU highly encourage national governments to address these issues.

The aims of the project and target group

Mirror, Mirror has the aim of developing a teacher training pack that addresses the consequences of negative body image. The project sets itself the aim of lowering dropout rates and increasing completion rates of VET students in partner countries by focusing on precisely those dropout aspects seemingly ignored or avoided by others when addressing the same issue. By promoting awareness about these issues to teachers will ultimate contribute to an easier and more successful training completion and access to the job market for the students.

EU funded project

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LEONARDO DA VINCI-TRANSFER OF INNOVATION PROJECT
November 2013 - October 2015.
On the 10th and 11th of March 2015, “Escola Profissional do Pico” (Pico’s Vocational School), located on the Azorean Island of Pico, was host for the Mirror Project Training Package, delivered by Martin Persson and Nichola Rumsey from the Centre for Appearance Research of the University West of England, Bristol.

The training course was attended by teachers, trainers, psychologists and health professionals from the Town of Madalena, in Pico Island, and also from the Vocational School of the neighbor island of Fayal. The main objective of this Training was to create awareness among professionals who deal directly with young people on a daily basis, about issues that, even though, may seem superficial, are becoming ever more serious and alarming.

All six modules were delivered, “Society and Culture”; “Impact”; “Self-esteem”; “Mental Health”; “Psychological impact on appearance concerns” and “Communication”.

To reinforce the pertinence of this debate, we had the participation of two local nurses (Márcia Neves and Sara Gaião) who presented the results of a research study carried out in the framework of a Masters Course in Mental Health Nursing and Psychiatry, entitled “Suicidal sphere behaviors of adolescents from Pico Island”. The results that were presented show that there is a significant percentage of adolescents who present suicidal ideation and/or who have felt the desire to die as well as considerable percentage of young people who have already suffered from depression. The intention of this research is to give some contribution to the quick and effective development of more efficient strategies for the promotion of mental health, where adolescents are the privileged target group, considering they are at a stage in life in which they are building their personality.

The training was very interesting, interactive and enlightening according to the feedback given by participants, allowing these professionals to be more alert and open minded to these problems and more comfortable or prepared to intervene and/or to guide and council young people to look for adequate specialists.
The project has developed 6 draft modules to be used as a 1-day training course for trainers, social workers and HR-staff dealing with apprentices. Training package includes research materials, research summaries, reflection questions, assessment form, handouts and VET cases. Project partners have also been working on finalizing the Didactic Guidelines to help the trainers and facilitators to understand how to use Mirror Training Package Material in the context of providing training for VET teachers and counsellors, and give them general ideas on what to consider and how to work with the training package materials.

The partners organized pilot tests of the training package in Norway, Austria, Portugal and Denmark to see whether the materials are attractive, useful and work well with the envisaged target groups. Teachers, VET trainers and counsellors as well as HR managers participated at training course arranged by partners.

Here are some quotes from the participants:
- “I have never thought this was a major issue in education”
- “Have worked for 24 years in education but have never thought about this as such an important aspect of young people’s lives in connection with education”
- “Great materials and inspiring presentation”
- “Make it part of the curriculum contents pertaining to the subject of “Integration” or any other which will be adequate in other areas of Psychology or Sociology”

Thanks to the piloting results, the MIRROR partnership can organize the final adaptation and will launch the materials via the MIRROR web page in autumn 2015.
The 4th Transnational Partner Meeting

The project partners held their 4th partner meeting at PEJ Açores headquarters, in the city of Ponta Delgada, archipelago of Azores, on the 11th and 12th of March 2015. The project partners met to discuss the results, experiences and challenges they had during the piloting of the training package materials, to brainstorm about the structure and content of the Didactic Guidelines and customizing of the existing material based on needs and requirements found out in partner countries in previous steps and testing period.

Project meeting participants formed work groups, discussed different approaches and came to certain conclusions about the development of future material and training package revision.

All partners (except UWE who is the key expert in the project) have performed the testing of the training package materials in their countries and the feedback from the participants was very positive.

Partnership continues to work on the materials which are foreseen to be finished in June 2015.

The International Multiplier Conference

The international multiplier conference will be organized to share project’s results and attract key experts and researchers from countries not involved in the MIRROR project. World leading researchers in the field of appearance issues will present their findings at the conference focusing on the communication aspects of appearance issues, as well as on cultural and social context and psychological/physical impacts, which will be the starting point for the group discussions on recognizing appearance-related distress and offering support.

The event will be celebrated in Randers, Denmark, October 29th.
The conference was held on 9th and 10th of December 2014 at Kristianstad University in Sweden and had over 160 participants from 37 countries. For two days, leading experts, researchers and practitioners in the areas of education, vocational settings, public health, medicine and social & cultural aspects from 37 countries presented and shared their research and practical experiences in relation to appearance.

One of the keynote speeches were delivered by Dr. Martin Persson and Mr. Thomas Nilsen highlighted the critical link between research and practice and referred to the Mirror project as a good example. They introduced how important it is to bring research findings out in the real world through cooperation between researchers and for example vocational trainers and counsellors to provide best support possible for our target groups.

Other guest speakers, including leading experts in body image, eating disorders, child health, surgery and social work from around the world highlighted the need for more appearance-related research in these areas and reinforced the importance of dissemination to a wider and more diverse audience.
The partnership

www.mirrorproject.eu