Towards 21st Century Learning

The Mondorf-les-Bains International School (EIMLB) has set up the first transversal skills portfolio in the Grand Duchy. It is meant to make learning more human, more transparent and more integrative.

Each of us remembers an excellent teacher we had - someone who made learning exciting and challenging, someone human who really cared. Few, however, remember an excellent school that truly prepared them for life and really went beyond purely academic knowledge. Sir Ken Robinson, an inveterate educator, described eight skills that all great schools encourage in their students: curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, compassion, contentment and citizenship.

Nowadays, these eight competencies are often reduced to four, the 4 Cs (creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication) and all education thinkers in the world agree that these are key competences for learning - we are indeed no longer talking about teaching - that truly seek to prepare young people for the world that awaits them and that will require much more than traditional academic knowledge in order to solve problems that we are still unaware of today.

In order to initiate this learning and to consciously integrate 21st century skills into everyday school life, a true Copernican revolution in education, the Mondorf-les-Bains International School (EIMLB) has developed a digital portfolio of these so-called "transversal" skills. Therein, learners address aspects related to four areas of transversal competences defined in an internal frame of reference. The latter was set up by the EIMLB’s school development unit during the 2018-19 academic year. In order to make the areas of transversal competences and areas understandable, measurable indicators have been arranged for each competence.

Beyond the 4 Cs, this portfolio also includes the other 21st century competences and arranges them into four domains.

- The domain "Me, the world and my values" focuses on the role, possibilities and responsibility of the individual in society, planning and realising their life as human beings, members of the school community and citizens.

- "Me and my learning" encompasses all aspects related to the development of the learners' knowledge and skills, as well as their ability to reflect and regulate.

- "Me and the others" revolves around the notions of interaction such as communicative skills, team and civic spirit and empathy.
The "Me, the media and the digital world" domain finally focuses on elements related to digital, media and technological culture.

Since the start of the school year in September, all the learners have a personal tutor who provides weekly guidance and advice in their reflections and academic progress. Together, tutor and learner look at the latter’s transdisciplinary portfolio in order to make the appraisal not only of his or her learning, strengths and weaknesses, but also of his or her transdisciplinary skills, so that he or she can subsequently work consciously and coherently on his or her personal project.

At the beginning of the school year in January, the EIMLB organized its first Portfolio Days for all its secondary school learners. For three days, learners worked on finalising their transversal portfolio and developing a presentation of a series of transversal competences they had worked on during the semester. They were supervised by their teachers and tutors and were able to sign up for specific workshops designed to support them in these processes: presenting themselves in front of an audience, convincing through their presentation, speaking in public and arguing. Finally, they were able to meet in small groups or even review their work individually in order to get constructive feedback.

They thus got ready for the presentation of their transversal portfolio, which took place on Wednesday before a jury of three teachers and educators. During the 15 minutes of their presentation, the learners presented their personal and academic developments. The presentation was followed by a discussion.

After the presentation, the learners briefly relaxed in a room apart before writing down the resolutions made or discussed during the presentation. They documented these resolutions in their transversal portfolio along with the presentation. All learners thus have a record that will serve to guide their work and learning over the coming months.

After a global feedback on the 3 days, the learners finally could express their emotions and thoughts in a more artistic way by following either a pictorial expression workshop or an emotions workshop.

What are the prospects for the future? If improvements are planned for the spring session of the portfolio days, it should be noted that the formative character and the benevolence of the juries are an asset that will make this young audience evolve into reflexive learners who will not only express themselves with an adequate professional lexicon, but who will be truly aware of their abilities and above all proud to be able to show them, because the advantage of having a digital transversal portfolio is to be able to save it while adapting it as one grows. But what will be the real asset of these young people in the end? Some will say that school will have taught them how to learn and it's no coincidence that the EIMLB's slogan is "It's about learning!"