

The European Pedagogical ICT Licence Facilitator - training and key competences

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Abstract: The pedagogical ICT facilitator has become a central resource person in many schools. Based on the experiences of the European Pedagogical ICT License the central skills of a good pedagogical ICT facilitator can be grouped into three areas: *personal ICT skills* covering a broad range of areas and applications; *pedagogical competences* with regard to the integration of ICT; and last but not least *facilitation skills* and *interpersonal competences*.

Keywords: Pedagogical ICT facilitator, EPICT – European Pedagogical ICT Licence, teachers' ICT competencies, teacher training.

1. The Pedagogical ICT Facilitator

In many schools the pedagogical ICT facilitator is a central resource person mentoring colleagues who are not that confident with using ICT and media in education. But he is also a key person in the quality assurance of the European Pedagogical ICT Licence¹. The skills and the competences needed are the same whether the facilitator is part of the organisational structure of a school or part of an online, blended learning environment like the European Pedagogical ICT Licence.

Why is this so? This is the case first and foremost because in both environments the focus should be on the process of facilitation, i.e. on the *interpersonal* skills, and *not* on technical skills of the facilitator.

A facilitator who does not understand the essential elements of the facilitation process may of course provide good and valid answers to the technical and pedagogical questions and problems encountered by the colleague or participant. Providing answers, however, is not the central task of a facilitator. The task of the

¹ EPICT – European Pedagogical ICT Licence®. See <http://epict.org>. Outside Europe EPICT may be called IPICT – International Pedagogical ICT Licence or APICT – African Pedagogical ICT Licence.

facilitator is to *facilitate*, i.e. help the person being facilitated develop his or her own *personal* understanding, competences and skills.

Providing 'expert' answers will not – in itself – develop understanding; providing food for thought will.

2. What is EPICT?

The EPICT - European Pedagogical ICT Licence sets the standard as a comprehensive in-service training course on the pedagogical integration of information and communications technologies in education [1, 2, 3, 4].

EPICT combines pedagogical knowledge of ICT integration with basic ICT skills training. The course is based on a blended learning approach where the constructive feedback of the facilitator is one of the cornerstones of the process; the others being teamwork and pedagogical assignments based on the practical teaching context of the course participants.

In short, EPICT is a course concept that offers teachers basic ICT skills on a personal and a professional level by focusing on the pedagogical integration of ICT in the teaching practice. A course participant must as a member of a team do eight module assignments in order to complete the EPICT training programme – a process that is facilitated by trained and certified facilitators.

EPICT is currently in operation in a number of countries all over the world, from European countries like Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, and the United Kingdom to countries far away from Europe, e.g. Sri Lanka and Australia. Currently pilots are being planned in a number of other countries/regions of the world.

3. Facilitator skills

The skills and competences required by a pedagogical ICT facilitator can be grouped under three headings:

- 1) Personal ICT skills – covering a broad range of areas and applications
- 2) Pedagogical competences with regard to the integration of ICT – typically you will need experienced teachers with a track record of ICT integration
- 3) Facilitation skills and interpersonal competences

As we expect any new EPICT facilitator to have taken the EPICT licence – or have comparable skills covering the two first areas, the focus during training and certification of EPICT facilitators is on the facilitations skills and competences.

In the following we shall outline the agenda of a typical certification seminar and look somewhat closer at the facilitation element, and how we develop the facilitation skills needed in order to become a successful EPICT facilitator.

4. The EPICT facilitators training

The focus of the seminar is on the development of facilitation skills and interpersonal competences relating to the role of a facilitator. We do, of course, also discuss the rationale behind the course concept and all the other aspects that make EPICT special, and which contribute to its success. The intention behind this is to give the coming facilitators a deeper understanding of the concept and its elements.

The focus, however, is on developing the personal skills and competences of the participants. Our basic approach is very much a 'hands-on' approach, in that we make the participants go through the entire process and take on the roles of a course participant writing a learning scenario assignment; of a facilitator giving response to the assignments of other participants; and finally as a course participant receiving response on an assignment.

The first central task is to have the participants write at least one module assignment. This gives them an understanding of the situation of a typical course participant – and it allows us to discuss in detail what elements should be present in an assignment, and to develop a common understanding of the requirements of pedagogical learning scenarios. The most important thing, however, is that they get involved, personally and emotionally, in the assignments they write – and thus also emotionally involved in the responses they get. This makes the learning process far more personal – and certainly a lot more personal than a process based on reading and discussing a set of 'impersonal' assignments from people they have never met or even heard of.

This stage typically becomes a very intense part of the certification seminar where people work hard and go through all the emotions and the doubts and nervousness related to producing a piece of work under time constraints and stress.

After a general presentation of the elements of a good response, the participants are asked to write at least two responses to two different assignments by other participants in the seminar. Apart from writing responses to others, they will also be receiving typically two responses to their own assignment. Again it becomes a process of some emotional involvement, because all are normally anxious to see how others evaluate their assignment.

The final stage in the process, when we go, as it were, full circle, is when the participants are asked to reflect on the responses they have received – and the ones they have given in the light of their own thoughts and emotional reactions to the responses they themselves have received.

Finally we sum up good advice on writing responses and the facilitation process as a whole.

4.1 Constructive feedback and good responses

As mentioned above, the role of the facilitator is to facilitate, and not to instruct or to teach. A good pedagogical ICT facilitator understands the elements and basic principles of that role. As part of the EPICT facilitator certification seminar we present a list of good advice on facilitating, but stress that of course each facilitator will need to find his or her own personal style.

The key to good facilitation is constructive feedback. In order to provide constructive feedback the facilitator needs to understand and accept what the course participant, teacher or team is trying to accomplish. Once that basic understanding is there, the facilitator is ready to do the actual facilitation.

This is something that typically teachers are not particularly good at: they are used to telling what is right and what is wrong, and to marking and grading. The first and perhaps most central piece of good advice is to ask, preferably open, questions rather than to provide one's own, perhaps faulty conclusions as to what the team or teacher are trying to accomplish with their assignment or learning scenario.

Another good point about questions is that they will make the teacher or team re-think what they are trying to accomplish and how they have presented it. And this is exactly what we are trying to accomplish with the EPICT facilitation process. Questions open up for reflection, whereas answers, and particularly what could be considered 'expert answers', will close the reflection process of people, who are perhaps insecure as to their own skills and knowledge.

We also emphasize the point that it is important to stress the positive elements. For one thing because this will boost the confidence of the participants; for another because it will make whatever criticism, ideas or suggestions of things that could be changed more easily accepted.

But first and foremost, the facilitator should challenge the teacher or team. The central point of the EPICT facilitation process is to make the team go further than they could on their own, to make them think, speculate, argue for whatever they have done in their assignment/learning scenario. The facilitator should, however, also understand that he or she needs to meet the team 'where they are', and that challenge is not always the same. The level of challenge will depend on the person or people being challenged. Finally it is important to not to 'challenge' beyond reason.

The essence of constructive feedback as we see it: build up, do not tear down, and that includes the following general guidelines:

- Emphasise positive elements
- Challenge is individual
- Challenge within reason
- Give specific and concrete response
- Focus on things the team can actually change
- Be as descriptive as possible
- Be open: fixed opinions do not invite contemplation and discussion

- Ask questions that can lead to discussions
- Stimulate reflection and dialogue
- Suggest alternative ideas
- Offer suggestions or advice when reasonable

But remember:

- The more advice given, the less followed

5. EPICT experiences

As mentioned above, the pedagogical ICT facilitator is one of the cornerstones of the EPICT concept, and also one of the reasons why the concept has been a success in many countries all over the world.

In Denmark we have developed a course for teachers who are going to work as pedagogical ICT facilitators at their own schools [5]. Although some elements are the same, particularly the focus on the role of the facilitator and the process of facilitation, there are, of course, a number of important differences. A pedagogical ICT facilitator needs to have special competences with regard to the evaluation and use of subject-specific digital learning resources. He or she also needs to develop competences relating to all aspects of knowledge sharing and the cultural and organisational development of the school.

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