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**SUPPORTING SCHOOL COUNSELLING INTERVENTIONS THROUGH THE USE  
OF WEB 2.0 TECHNOLOGIES**

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**Abstract:** *The article presents the results of a research run by the Institute of Education Sciences – Department of Educational Counselling and Management in 2011 on the integration of the ICT tools in the activity of the guidance counsellors from different schools around the country. The article starts with a short overview of the way the web 2.0 tools are used in guidance counselling in other countries and what expectations are set for these new tools. Then the data collected on the use of web 2.0 tools are presented and analysed against the role of the guidance counsellors in the school context. The research involved a number of practitioners in the field of career guidance in a training course with a pre- and post- self-assessment of their different ICT competences related to the guidance tasks. The aim was to identify how good are the counsellors in assessing and improving their ability to use wiki pages (wikipedia, google docs, other wiki sites) to support a group of pupils creating a wiki project on study and employment opportunities, creating a thematically blog on a specific topic, helping pupils to participate in online decision making groups through web 2.0 tools, collaborating with other practitioners at national or international level in order to build a database with relevant information and teaching certain counselling related topics, using content management tools or self-assessment on-line interest/ skills questionnaires (ie. surveymonkey). The article ends with a set of specific recommendations for stakeholders in the national education system and new research and development areas to be approach forward.*

**Keywords:** *e-learning, e-guidance and counselling, web 2.0 technologies, collaborative learning*

**I. WEB 2.0 TECHNOLOGIES AS A FACTOR FOR CHANCE IN CAREER  
COUNSELLING**

The first phase of integration of Internet services in career counselling known as *web 1.0* mainly meant developing information and guidance resources and providing access to them for a wider range of beneficiaries without time and space limitations. With the fast emergence of the new ICT tools called *web 2.0* or „social software” (e.g. blogs, wiki pages, RSS, *podcasting* and social networking tools) which facilitate an improved communication process and collaborative development of micro-contents, career counsellors from Romanian schools need to rethink and innovate their very practices exploiting the familiarity of their clients with the technology and allowing for a more client focused approach [1, 2].

**1.1. Theoretical framework**

Specifically there is a large fertilisation potential for the field of career counselling through the application of the web 2.0 principles of organising social and educational interaction [11], namely: collective experience of clients, informal interactions, valuing serendipity through folksonomical techniques, enhancing interaction through signalling online presence, trust in community members, self-organising participation etc.

Counsellors need to be aware that today pupils are mostly digital natives, which are fully accustomed with the Internet, mobile phones, instant text-audio-video messenger and social networking. To a considerable extent the Romanian rural communities are still stuck behind in terms of access due to a host of factors (technophobia, local cultures, lack of resources). But even in these communities the access to mobile technology is quite high between the youth population and all schools have been equipped with IT laboratories. As they need to relate also with other actors (teachers, parents, NGOs, companies, local authorities), school counsellors should also be aware of the specific needs of the other categories of beneficiaries of guidance and counselling services: technophobes which are manifesting clear discomfort and reluctance towards modern technology and digital immigrants perceiving computers just like a useful tool to support own activity in the same approach as they practiced before. Therefore, counsellors are in the process of progressively adjusting their interventions to this new landscape.

From the pedagogical point of view there are two types of enhanced learning activities through Internet that counsellors and teachers needs to include in their current activity [10]. The communication activities involving direct or indirect interaction between pupils include diverse types of tasks: communication, group discussion, information and experience sharing, comparing/constructing/organising information, publications, individual or team problem solving, feedback to peers, simulation and mentoring. The investigation types of activities include: exploring subjects, problems (in order to improve knowledge and comprehension), synthesis, analysis/comparison/information evaluation, problem based investigation, preparing argumentations.

## **1.2. Current state of integration of technology**

A research from 2008 regarding ICT integration in the education system [8] confirms that most pupils possess not only good ICT skills, but also that they already started using ICT for educational activities outside the classroom: using ICT for projects (34,6%); for issuing schools publications (20,4%); for competitive activities (15,7%) and for distance collaboration activities with other schools (10,1%).

Similar to the situation from other countries where „the (digital) divide is now principally centred around issues of culture, education and skills, rather than the capacity to access an internet-capable device” [11], an recent report of the EU (*Key data on Learning and Innovation through ICT at School in Europe*, Eurydice, 2011) indicates also an increased access to ICT for the Romanian pupils including those from rural areas.

A resource analysis shows that there are barely any wiki pages realised in a real collaborative manner by pupils, involving rewriting others inputs and synergising contributions to a specific topic, through web 2.0 tools, while most of the cases involve some cooperative work with initial distribution of tasks from the teacher and then individual inputs from different pupils in order to get a common resource/ „final product”, and many more of these resources are mostly realised with the contribution of a teacher/counsellor (i.e. [cariere.wikispaces.com](http://cariere.wikispaces.com)).

Counsellors, like teachers in general, are quite accustomed with social software using, outside teaching/ counselling activity, a wide range of web 2.0 tools and platforms (e.g. [eTwining.com](http://eTwining.com), [etwinning.net](http://etwinning.net), [iTeach.ro](http://iTeach.ro), [Google+](http://Google+), [www.training.ise.ro](http://www.training.ise.ro), [www.iEARN.com](http://www.iEARN.com), [plaxo.com](http://plaxo.com), [www.edu.ro](http://www.edu.ro), [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com), [wikipedia.edu.ro](http://wikipedia.edu.ro), [myspace](http://myspace), [facebook](http://facebook), [twitter](http://twitter), [gradinite.com](http://gradinite.com), [didactic.ro](http://didactic.ro), [clopotel.ro](http://clopotel.ro), [elev.ro](http://elev.ro), [studentie.ro](http://studentie.ro); [cie.roedu.ro](http://cie.roedu.ro), [isjformare](http://isjformare), [fpse.ro](http://fpse.ro), [aepado.ro](http://aepado.ro), [www.calificativ.ro](http://www.calificativ.ro)).

An analysis of the training needs of guidance counsellors in using ICT in their activity [2] indicated that in Romania there is a very permissive legal framework with no compulsory training in ICT for career guidance practitioners. There are only few other organized ways of developing the ICT skills (i.e. knowledge transfer between the practitioners), therefore most practitioners do not benefit of consistent and relevant initial training in using ICT in career guidance while the continuous training remains very limited in content and addressability. Moreover, no formal quality standards exist for using ICT in counselling. In general, counsellors rarely use ICT for guidance and counselling purposes, most of the guidance and counselling activities limit themselves to face-to-face group counselling as well as to classes under Curricular Area Guidance and Counselling. Therefore, there is a great risk for the training provision to remain well behind the rapid development of technology.

### 1.3. Need analysis of guidance counsellors

One of the most important needs of the guidance counsellors [3] is the development of supplementary training resources in order to cover the whole area of the specific map of ICT competences in their activity. Another important mentioned need [idem] was an increased use of the developed tools (ie. e-portfolio) and improved training in the methodology of including the e-portfolio in their activity with the clients.

The above mentioned analysis shows a high level of practitioner's confidence in integrating ICT in their work, however, there is a considerable discrepancy between practitioners' and their clients' perceptions regarding the context in which they live. The young clients use extensively ICT, while many practitioners are still stuck in the traditional approach to career guidance and teaching which brings another important risk, namely that of rejecting young clients from counselling services as they do not any more meet their view on reality.

## II. RESEARCH RESULTS

### 2.1. Self-assessment of ICT skills

#### 2.1.1. General ICT skills of guidance counsellors

The target group consisted of school counselors coming from different regions of the country. Some of them had previous experience with the Moodle platform and the specific learning tools (forums, wikis, blogs) from the ISE Online Learning Centre ([www.training.ise.ro](http://www.training.ise.ro)). While around 100 started the course, only 28 graduated managing to pass the requirements of the course: ICT tools in pupils career counseling, of which on module focused on Collaborative ICT Tools for pupils' career counselling.

The areas of application of ICT in counselling In Romania are similar in content but to a smaller scale to the situation in other countries [11] were ICT has been mostly used to help meet three types of client demand: information delivery; providing automated interaction; or providing a channel for communication. Some previous national projects have developed specialised applications for all three areas. Our course participants expressed a high level of confidence and skills in employing ICT tools in counselling and guidance. Most of the participants mentioned great and very great abilities to identify clients' ICT skills (96,1%), for assessing the results of the ICT based process respectively a good knowledge the ethical code and the quality standards for TIC in counselling (92,3%), for identifying appropriate ICT tools for the specific needs of the clients as well as for analysing the specific advantages and limitations of different types of e-counselling interventions (88,4%). This very favourable situation can be explained by transferring their general ICT skills in their practice overcoming the lack of specific training programmes for using ICT in guidance. The lowest scores are found for their ability to analyse the factors influencing the system's capacity to integrate ICT in counselling.

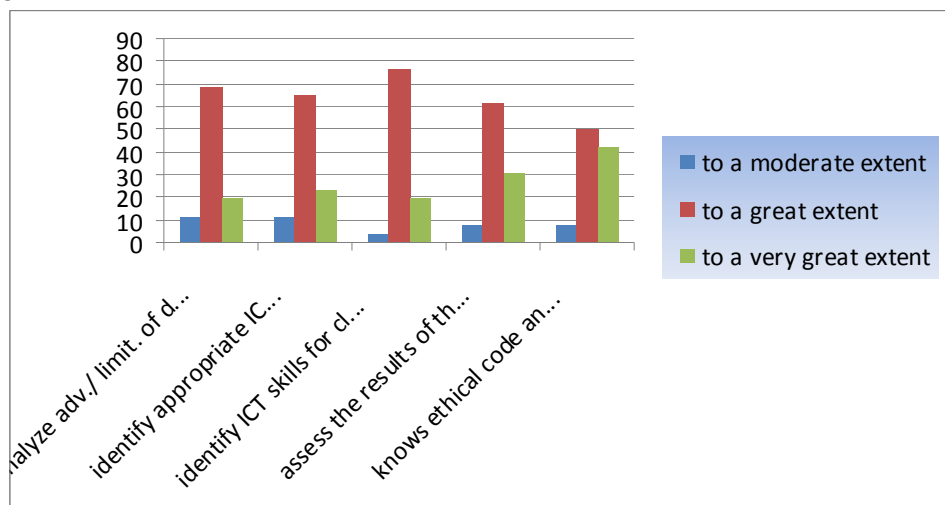


Figure 1. General ICT skills of guidance counsellors

### 2.1.2. Specific skills for using collaborative ICT tools

When speaking about their skills to integrate web 2.0 technologies in their activity, the course participants assessed in a lesser extend their abilities as *great* or *very great*, but these responses still amount for a considerable percentage from the total of respondents. Despite this high level of self-evaluation, the participants rarely organise this kind of activities with their clients, due to other formally set priorities and most probably because of not being well accustomed with the specific methodology for organising online collaborative activities. Most of the trainees (88,4%) indicated *great* or *very great* abilities of using web 2.0 tools for evaluating vocational interests of their clients (google doc surveys or surveymonkey). There is also a high occurrence (84,6%) of practitioners with good collaborative abilities (i.e. develop an wiki resource with information on youth career counselling), of practitioners with abilities to help clients to participate online in collaborative decision making through web 2.0 tools (80,7%), to create thematic blogs (76,9%) or to support clients in developing resources in wiki pages (i.e. with information about the career opportunities available at local level) - 73,1%.

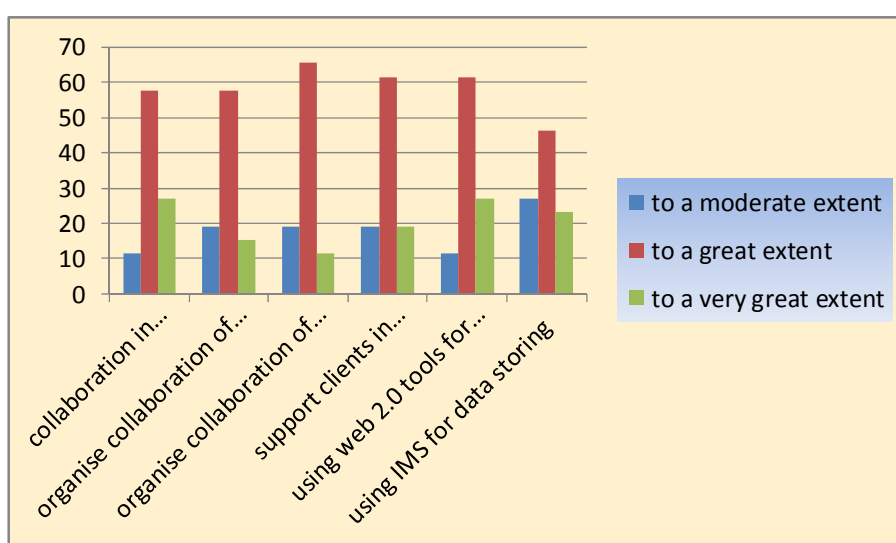


Figure 2. Specific skills for using collaborative ICT tools

### 2.2. Experiences from e-counselling practice

The feedback received through the online discussion forum shows that some guidance counsellors have a good understanding and experience in organising collaborative and cooperative learning situations with their pupils. Although the teachers in general and guidance counsellors in special are to a certain extent open to include the online social tools in their activity, this is hindered by a number of important obstacles like: inspectors focus on formal reporting documentation („not interested in seeing team work” when in inspection) or the scholastic national examinations (i.e. Baccalaureate) constraining the methodological freedom of teachers and gearing pupils to knowledge acquisition. Even the new Education law (2011) has an increased focus on competences assessment, so far the school culture focused rather on the pupils’ skills on processing abstract information than on the formally declared EU key competences.

Most of team work activities in the school are organised face-to-face; when rarely collaborative web tools are used, these activities are organised in a basic manner involving little interaction or synergies between the pupils in the process. The results of the face-to-face collaborative activities are almost never included in pupils’ e-portfolios or used for reflection on own progress or refining educational and professional plans.

The cooperative and collaborative learning activities provide for an agreeable learning environment and increased individual contribution in solving the learning task, increased opportunities for all pupils to express their opinions, to support and complement each other. Through these methods

the shy pupils get more assertive and express themselves easier in the group, while the lazy or undetermined ones become interested and competitive. As one counsellor mention she „noticed increased team spirit from my pupils .. a good development of empathy and of cohesion at the level of work groups, increased involvement in the tasks, a better time management in the learning tasks and enhanced critical thinking”.



**Figure 3.** Collaborative pupils' project on career education (M. Eminescu, Buzau)

### III. CONCLUSIONS

While the teachers had not a relevant prior experience with organising collaborative learning through web tools and they were not very proficient in organising them during the training period, some of them planned to implement in their future lessons on career education a number of online collaborative work. The specific objectives for including these methods were to facilitate deep learning, critical learning processes, to help pupils identify themselves thinking errors through the process of argumentation in the online spaces and accelerate progress in developing problem solving skills.

They also analysed the opportunity to include social bookmarking tools (i.e. delicious) for sharing and commenting web resources related to the world of careers, for using it as a tool to keep up to date in the career education theories (identify most popular bookmarks for specific fields), for identifying and managing online educational resources and last but not least as a learning and information management tool. Another important direction for integrating web-2.0 tools in future activity was using wiki pages as e-portfolios (i.e. wiki-folios) in order for pupils to manage one's own learning progress and as a reflective tool for enhancing metacognitive processes.

The main challenges identified to collaborative career counselling activities are to evaluate the learning progress of individual pupil, to structure and manage learning activities. While it is difficult and time consuming to trace individual activities in certain circumstances it could represent a difficult task for the school counsellors.

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