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TRANSNATIONAL STOCKTAKING REPORT AND EDUCATOR ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Executive summary

Many companies nowadays show great concern about the current or potential future shortage of skilled workers – a predicament many of them try to avoid by any means necessary. As a result, there is a broad support for the continuing vocational training of employees. The school section of VET also is willing to adapt their methodology to better prepare their graduates for the new challenges of the labour market.

The Covid-19 crisis brought a radical transformation to the whole educational sector, including the VET subsector. On the whole, many, if not all trainers, made the transition to a digital teaching environment. They managed to conduct at least some of their classes online and acquired new competences, speeding up the digital transformation. However, many teachers and trainers had very little time to prepare to the transition to online education, meaning that they lacked the necessary skillset to adapt to the new environment and kept using outdated methodology, unsuited for the new circumstances. As a result, this first experience of e-learning has been mostly negative for many trainers and learners alike.

Another reason for these difficulties is that VET trainings almost invariably have a significant practical, hands-on component, delivered in a face-to-face environment. The most frequently used model for education is the group practice. These preconditions mean that the area does not necessarily lend itself to an easy transition to a digital format of teaching.

Theoretical knowledge of concepts such as blended learning, self-directed learning, and curation, is still lacking among the majority of the trainers. The situation looks much better in practice – even if they didn't have the time to study these concepts, they already discovered some of their benefits in their teaching practice and have adopted suitable behaviours. However, this lack of an underlying theoretical framework may lead to disruptions and even contradictions in the practical execution of innovative teaching concepts.

Many educators agree that the learner is to play a central role in the future of education, not the educator, and that the learners' self-awareness, ability to trust, and to find meaning is paramount to the success of a distant form of training.

The pace of change these days means that teaching staff simply can't create all the content that learners require. Luckily, there is a huge amount of content readily available on the web that can be

accessed and made available to support learners. However, as far as the practice of curation of educational resources is concerned, there is a considerable gap between the expectations and practical implementation. Neuroscience and the application of AI promise to radically transform the entire educational sector. For now, though, few of the potential uses of AI are realistic and even those that exist are far from being in a phase that would allow for broad implementation. Chatbots and machine translation are fairly widely used, and machine analysis of class interactions, AI-assisted marking and feedback, and adaptive learning systems are taking their first steps.

Curation of digital educational resources poses both challenges and opportunities to educators. Faced with little preparation and significant time pressure, they are inclined to emphasise the first group at the expense of the other. However, as they acquire the competences necessary to deal with the challenges, they will have a greater chance to benefit from the many unique features of the new learning context. There is a general consensus that educators need a new skillset to adapt to the challenges posed by the new teaching environment. Digital and media literacy, as well as didactic competences, stand out as the most important priorities in the CPD of educators. However, few of them have the time necessary to undergo a fundamental skill retraining. Instead, practical, easy-to-implement solutions are in most active demand.

In order to best support the educators, this report identified several main areas for upskilling:

- Facilitating online learning:
    - Keeping the learner's attention
    - Strategies for establishing ongoing communication
    - Feedback
- Empowering the learners: enhancing their digital and self-directed learning competences
- Finding and assessing open educational resources (OER)
- Selecting and implementing appropriate digital tools
- Understanding copyright
- Educator self-care

The full report will be made available on the CUR8 website: www.cur8learning.online