

# WEF Partnership in the education sphere among local authorities, non-profit organizations and media

Partnership is a requisite form for support and development of quality education. A good example for this is the initiative of the Foundation “World Education Forum Bulgaria” which has been implemented together with the Municipality of Plovdiv and the media partnership of the education portal “U4a v Plovdiv” in Bulgaria. For a third consecutive year, this form of partnership is successfully applied through the “Innovative schools” Project. One of the set goals is to develop media awareness of students and their teachers.

*What does media awareness of children mean and what skills does it develop?*

The latest representative research of the Bulgarian Safer Internet Center indicates that more than half of the Bulgarian children cannot distinguish true from false information. 40% of their parents admit the same as well. At such a point the role of the teacher and the school is crucial. Therefore, it is necessary to take urgent measures to develop media awareness and critical thinking of the children as early as in the primary school course in order to guarantee their security in the digital-media world and to involve their parents, too. In Bulgaria, there are not yet adequate education programs for development of the key skills for “survival” in the ocean of information, like for example critical thinking, recognizing of wrong information, personal details protection, reaction in case of harassment.

Media awareness of children means for them to form the ability to find, evaluate, use and produce reliable information in the abundance of online resources. It helps students develop critical thinking skills, which they need in the virtual as well as in the real world, to understand how the different media statements are formed and what are their purposes, to discern disinformation and false implications, to take advantage of the abundance of information in order to learn, educate and develop. If they know how to distinguish true from false facts, they will protect themselves from abuse and online violence and will be able to express opinion on various matters. These are some of the skills which are necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we are responsible to rear them together with the parents.

***How does the “Innovative Schools” Project emphasize the need of media awareness and support its development at school?***

Certain modules have been developed for training of principals and teachers under the “Innovative Schools” Project and the topic of one of them is “Media, Public Communications and PR”. The program in it includes training in media communication, planning of public activities of the education institutions, essence and specifics of the media environment, stages for development of information and PR materials. The key topics are related to presentation of the different types of media, preparation of media and communication plans, social networks management, presentation of the Ethical code of Bulgarian media, crisis PR at school, image-making for the education institution. Time is dedicated for discussions of terms, concepts and practical situations in the sphere of integrated media communications. The teachers work on set cases, materials from the press and gain skills to discern unreliable newsfeeds, to filter information, to apply a set of tools to develop own advertising

campaigns and projects, to organize press conferences and to acquire skills to prepare annual media plan to promote good practices.



The training is done by journalists with long-term professional media experience, the publishers of the innovative education portal “U4a v Plovdiv”. This is an e-newspaper covering the everyday life at school, university, kindergarten, the actual events there, the problems and the good practices. It gives publicity to the topics that concern the participants in the education process, the changes they want to see. It supports the exchange of ideas not only in Bulgaria but also on European level, the innovative methods for quality change in the education in the context of “Europe 2020.”

The education e-newspaper promotes the good practices of the participants in the “Innovative Schools” Project as well as other initiatives of the Foundation “World Education Forum Bulgaria”. It contains reports, interviews, comments and analyses regarding the actual processes in education. In such a manner the partnership gains the necessary stability.

#### ***What do we conclude as a result of the implemented partnership within the Project?***

Stimulation of the exchange of good practices and development of partnerships between different institutions are noted. As a direct result, at school the students learn how to discern false news, to make a difference between facts and opinions. Their mentors are the teachers who have been trained. At the same time, an exchange of good practices runs through media public promotion. The creativity of all participants in the education process is stimulated. We register increase in the motivation of the children. The necessary media awareness is gradually formed and conditions for equal access to quality education are set. The established relations, the good relationships, the skills, the new friendships will certainly stimulate the processes for the necessary changes in a long-term perspective and after the conclusion of the Project. At present, 14 schools participate in it, almost all of the students, teachers and parents are involved. One small but very active professional community has been established. We change the education environment at Bulgarian schools.





A photograph of the newly-set creative corner for reading and surfing at "Raina Knyaginya" School, town of Plovdiv, Bulgaria

We have one important mission - to prepare the children today for the challenges of the highly-technological future, to develop their emotional intelligence and awareness. With the set mutual goal we work together and gradually make the necessary changes in the Bulgarian education system. We hope that they can make the world a better place to live and preserve the shared common human values.