Fostering Professional Learning Networks Through Online Collaborative Learning: The *Value* Case

Sara Romiti, INVALSI, Italy

Maria Ranieri, Università di Firenze, Italy

Donatella Poliandri, INVALSI, Italy

Introduction

In education systems that have introduced **school self-evaluation** (SSE), the literature has highlighted some key aspects:

- the importance of supporting schools in the self-evaluation process (OECD, 2013)

- the need to build adequate evaluation skills within the school staff (Hubers and Poortman, 2018), involving not only headmasters but also the teachers (Poliandri et al., 2019)

- the development of an evaluative culture in the places where learning takes place (Schildkamp et al., 2016)

Relevant practices to support school for SSE are: 1) peer review among schools; 2) formal interventions such as seminars, online courses; 3) counselling by experts (Fortini, F., Muzzioli, P., Poliandri, D., & Vinci, E., 2016).

VALU·E learn

Background & literature

Why fostering Professional Learning Networks (PLN) for SSE

- Supporting schools' **innovation** and **improvement** through bottom-up processes of knowledge sharing and exchange of practices across schools (Brown & Poortman, 2018; European Commission, 2018)

- Increasing **social** and **professional capital** of organizations by using **networking** and **collaborative inquiry** within, between and beyond schools (Chapman et al., 2016)

- Network goals (among others): supporting national policy development, connecting schools for school improvement, resource sharing, **connecting teachers for professional development** (European Commission, 2018) **for SSE**

VALU·E learn

Background & literature

Why fostering online, virtual PLN's for SSE

Digital technologies can support and enhance networking and collaborative processes of peer-to-peer learning, through the integration of informal digital environments and structured online platforms.

Online learning communities and networks offer a valuable alternative to traditional teacher training, and online interactions allow teachers to talk and exchange their practices on SSE more freely (Holmes, 2013)

Typologies of web-based professional networks for teacher professional development for SSE

- Community platforms for interactive communication, typically managed in a distributed manner

- Repository platforms for storing and distributing materials, with a top-down architecture and management

- E-learning platforms for PD, with online collaborative learning activities

VALU·E learn

The Value program

- The multi-year program is funded by European Funds, National Operational Program "Competences and Learning Environments for the school"

- Aim of the program: to support the functioning of the Italian National Evaluation System. Self-evaluation teams are engaged in school self- evaluation (SSE) and development planning by adopting national formats. The program is structured in several research actions for monitoring, evaluating and supporting the schools.

- **Value for schools**
    - Aim of the action: promoting professional development on SSE through partnerships with universities and Professional Development agencies, that have developed tailor-made programs for SSE groups for groups of 15 schools (45 schools involved in total). Decentralized approach.

- **Value.Learn**
    - Aim of the action: promoting teacher professional development on / for SSE through formal, centralized e-learning courses.

The Value.Learn action

Participants

- 45 primary and lower secondary schools
- 5-10 teachers per school, members of the SSE teams
- 5 schools per district
- 9 districts: 3 in the South, 3 in the Center and 3 in the North of Italy

Program and structure

- 5 courses, 10 units per course
- 4 video lessons, a self-assessment test, 3 e-tivities per unit

Contents

- School Evaluation and Students' Assessment
- Examining pedagogical and organizational practices in schools
- Using Social Research Method for School Evaluation
- Communication and Cooperation strategies
- Organizational aspects for School Evaluation

Design principles for (formal and informal) e-learning environments

- Experiential learning: case studies and learning by doing (Kolb, 1984)

- Self-directed learning: ensuring flexibility and personalisation to adult learners (Knowles, 1975)

- Social learning: promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange for professional development (Dron & Anderson, 2014)

- Active learning: activity designed to encourage active engagement by learners in an online environment. It will typically involve interaction or co-operation (Salmon, 2002)

VALU·E learn

The multilevel collaborative and networking model for SSE

Level 1

Aim: fostering teacher **cooperation within the school to improve SSE**

Method: Online collaborative learning

E-tivities with Moodle: Wiki and Assignment

Level 2

Aim: fostering teacher **collaboration** and **networking across schools** in the same district to **exchange practices and resources on SSE**

Method: Online collaborative learning and informal networking

E-tivities with Moodle: Wiki, Forum, Hot questions

Level 3

Aim: fostering **networking across schools and districts for sharing knowledge, resources and good practices on SSE**

Method: informal networking

E-tivity with Moodle: Forum and Hot questions

VALU·E learn

An exlample of e-tivity for fostering online collaborative learning

- Plugin: (group) ASSIGNMENT

- Title: THE WRITING OF A SHARED JUDGMENT

- Istruction: Try to summarize in a shared judgment the judgments given by two teachers regarding the behavior of a student. Work with a colleague to define a shared judgment.

User Invalsi

LA SCRITTURA DEL GIUDIZIO INTERSOGGETTIVO (INDIVIDUALE O DI GRUPPO)

Collabora con un collega alla definizione di un giudizio condiviso (intersoggettivo). L'oggetto di giudizio è il voto in condotta di uno studente, partendo da queste posizioni.

Posizione Docente A

Il docente A (italiano) descrive lo studente oggetto della discussione come particolarmente attivo ed interessato durante le lezioni. Interviene in modo opportuno e quando possibile si mostra disponibile ad aiutare i compagni. Ha un buon rapporto con il docente, rispetta le regole di comunicazione di base e si approccia in modo positivo. Durante le ore di lezione, a parte pochi episodi, non si distrae e non disturba i compagni.

Posizione Docente B

Il docente B (matematica) descrive lo studente come particolarmente passivo e poco interessato alla partecipazione durante le lezioni. Mostra spesso insofferenza durante le ore di lezione e la difficoltà ad interessarsi alla materia lo porta continuamente a ricercare l'attenzione dei compagni. Con il docente ha un rapporto superficiale ed evitante. Il rapporto con i compagni risulta buono, anche se nei momenti di maggiore distrazione dello studente durante la lezione, alcuni compagni mostrano insofferenza per gli atteggiamenti adottati dal compagno.
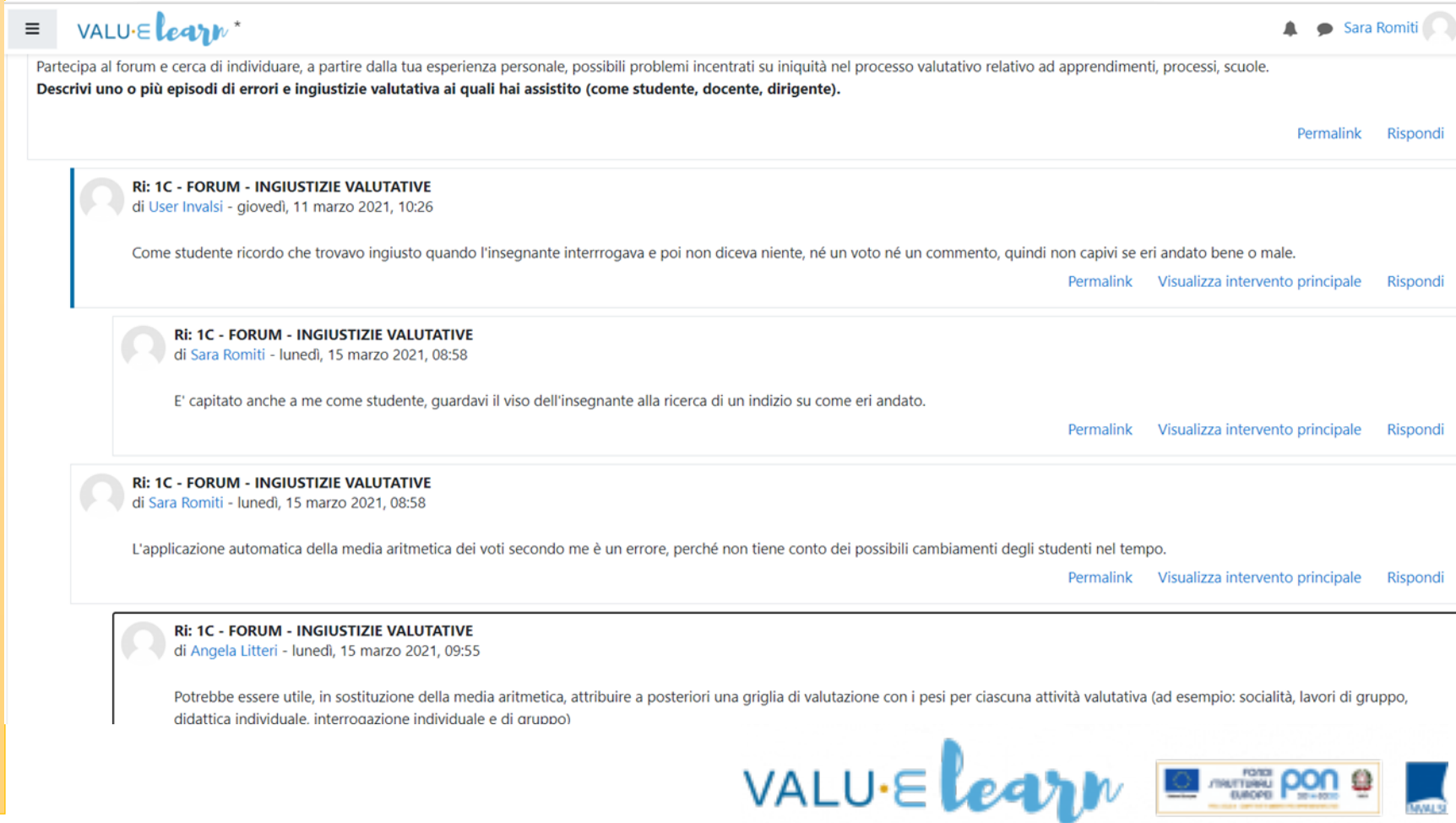
Testo online

L'alunna ha mostrato una buona capacità di partecipare e collaborare con i compagni, anche se l'attenzione in classe non è sempre costante (matematica).

An exlample of e-tivity for promoting knowledge sharing and networking

- Plugin: FORUM

- Title: UNFAIR ASSESSMENTS

- Instructions: Take part in the forum and try to identify, starting from your personal experience, possible problems centered on unfairness in the assessment process related to student learning, teaching processes, school functioning. Describe one or more incidents of unfairness in assessment that you have witnessed (such as student, teacher, school principal).

Monitoring the Value.Learn action

Is the multilevel collaborative networking model for SSE effective?

- Using **learning analytics** to explore the number and nature of social exchanges between teachers within the school, across schools in the same district, across districts
- Collecting **teachers' views** through online questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. An online questionnaire has already been provided, that collects information on school culture, relationships with colleagues, networks and collaborations in which the school participates

What is the impact of the PD action on the quality of SSE?

- Examining **SSE reports** at the end of the action. SSE reports of the previous years have been analyzed with textual analysis (Software Wordstat QDAMiner)
- Collecting teachers' views on the **SSE process** at the end of the action.

VALU·E learn

Final comments and open questions

Challenges

- E-learning courses are usually formal, structured learning promoted by an institution, with a top-down architecture and management, giving individual certification for competences acquired. We are emphasizing collaborative and social learning, and opportunities for networking within this framework.

Opportunities

- Vale.Learn allows us to monitor the functioning of PLNs in the context of formal learning and to evaluate the future feasibility of the model

What do you suggest for enhancing the collaborative potential of the e-learning environment?

References

- Chapman, C., Chestnutt, H., Friel, N., Hall, S., Lowden, K. (2016), Professional capital and collaborative inquiry networks for educational equity and improvement? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1, 3, pp. 178-197.

- European Commission (2018). *Networks for learning and development across school education*. Guiding principles for policy development on the use of networks in school education systems. Produced by the ET2020 Working Group Schools.

- Fortini, F., Muzzioli, P., Poliandri, D., & Vinci, E., (2016). Il Sistema Nazionale di Valutazione: conoscere le scuole per supportarle. *Scuola Democratica, 2, 451–466.*

- Fox, A., & Bird, T. (2017). The challenge to professionals of using social media: Teachers in England negotiating personal-professional identities. Education and Information Technologies, 22(2), 647-675.

- Muijs, D., West, M., & Ainscow, M. (2010). Why network? Theoretical perspectives on networking. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(1), 5–26.

- Ranieri (2019). Professional development in the digital age. Benefits and constraints of social media for lifelong learning. *FORM@RE*, 19, 178-192.

- Salmon, G. (2002). *E-tivities: the key to teaching and learning online*. Kogan Page.