

Embracing a balanced approach between Online engagement and OFFline alternatives [ON-OFF4youngsters]

[The problem:]

The Internet has become an integral part of children and young people's lives. However, the increased time spent online is prompting questions about whether they are in control of their internet usage and if they are aware of the side effects and the causes of the maladaptive behaviours related to excessive or problematic Internet use. However, even if youngsters are not addicted, recent European research analysis shows that it is not always or not only the time spent online that makes internet use problematic and 'excessive', but the impact of internet use on what might be called a 'balanced life'.

- Excessive online exposure may affect physical health (i.e. the sedentary lifestyle can be a prime risk factor for kids' obesity).
- Frequent multitasking due to digital lifestyle could affect their ability to stay focused leading to poor school or academic performance
- The constant feeling of being online negatively impacts their emotional well-being (i.e. a cause of anxiety to youngsters, a behaviour coined with the term "FOMO" (the "fear of missing out") that may lead to poor sleep quality, anxiety, and/or even depression.
- Problematic media use may also be related to lower empathy and social well-being or abstention from physical and offline social interactions.

[The solution:]

Recommendations call for empowering tools for children, teachers and parents providing more information, mediation, increased attention, and methodology on how they can mediate youngster's excessive online use and perceptions of causes that trigger the establishment and maintenance of online as well as its consequences that affect well-being and "balanced life" stirred by constant online engagement.

[The target group:]

Direct target groups:

- Teachers, who will be able to exchange opinions and experiences with colleagues from other countries with different educational systems. Moreover this network will act as a guide through the implementation of this non formal educational approach, and will help

the evaluation and the promotion of the curriculum and the AR Game and will help children develop a deeper understanding of how excessive Internet use may affect their physical health, emotional well-being, academic, familial and/or social life, and alongside it will infuse the value of pragmatic/offline activities into the play game rules as rewards or alternatives (i.e. role-playing, storytelling, sport events, free-technology evenings with parents) and the quality media usage (i.e. free educational software and guidelines for their use) with the aim to prompt the purposeful, respectful and focused use of technology.

- Students (12-14 years old), who will experiment towards identification of hidden messages behind constant online engagement and will be challenged through an AR game approach to adopt a balanced approach between online and offline interactions and activities.
- Parents who will participate in the AR game playing and testing and who will help along with the teachers their children to develop a deeper understanding of how excessive Internet use may affect their physical health, emotional well-being, academic, familial and/or social life.

Internet addiction researchers and youth coaches, who may value the provided approach and tools as supporting instruments in various educational or other social empowerment settings.

[Main objectives of the project:]

The development of a toolkit:

- to help professionals working with children reach out to children with a view to help them identifying the behavioural, situational and structural causes that lead to online commitment
- to encourage based **on fun and positive atmosphere** the uptake by youngsters of a balanced behaviour between online engagement and offline alternatives.

[Identifiable results:]

The *ON-OFF4youngsters* project aims to the development of :

- A new pedagogical approach to attract children's attention and then achieve the learning objectives by offering to the children a teaching and joyful interactive gaming experience. An important tool in this equation is the use of augmented reality (AR) technology as a delivery tool.

- A new curriculum for teachers and youngsters to be used in the classroom by the teachers, comprising a **teachers' guide and learning activities** that will raise awareness about the risks of constant and passive engagement with the Internet, while it will suggest ways about how youngsters can embrace more constructive and mindful use of Internet.

- An Augmented Reality Content Management System which will power the ON-OFF4YOUNGSTERS game but will be also used by teachers to develop new games or co-create games with children on any subject.

- An online network (ON-OFF4YOUNGSTERS Academy) involving:

(a) Teachers, allowing them to exchange opinions and experiences with colleagues from other countries with different educational systems.

(b) Pupils, allowing them to experiment towards balanced approaches between online engagement and offline alternatives.

(c) Parents having access to resources and tools about factors interacting with excessive online commitment of their children and the risks related to their physical, emotional and social development.