CUBE – Educational tool

Presentation of the tool for teachers and educational teams

Within the framework of the European project "Stay@School", the working group[1] coordinated by Inforef proposes a tool addressed to teachers in order to help them identify and prevent behaviours and situations that can lead to early school leaving.

This document explains the aims of the tool and guides the teacher when using it in class. It can also be used by other members of the school staff (educators, headmasters …).

Why a Cube?

The playful shape of the Cube makes it possible to view the 6 sides through a simple rotation with one's hands and to use it like a dice. Its colours, in reference to the Rubik's cube, arouse curiosity. Each side includes a catch phrase, which is the real testimony of a student who dropped out, and a QR code that can be scanned by a Smartphone or a tablet (using a specific application, downloadable for free) that directs to a specific video.

Aims:

1. To help identify risk factors of early school leaving.
2. To prompt reflection, ease discussions and seek solutions.
3. To catch students' attention, ease debate in class and help students talk and share ideas on a difficult topic.

What is there behind the Cube?

Following a reflection and consultation work on the various causes of early school leaving, the working group selected risk factors, the most common of which have been organised in 6 categories corresponding to the issues young people are often confronted to:

1. **Difficult integration into school**
2. **Problems related to the course of studies**
3. **Learning difficulties**
4. **School violence**
5. **Family background**
6. **Personal problems**

[1] The working group is made up of various actors of the education sector in the *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles* (French-speaking Community of Belgium): teachers, headmasters, educators, school mediators, psychologists, social workers, Ministry of Education…

These categories are not visible on the cube but can support teachers. Each is represented by a side of the cube. Thus, the first thing that catches their attention is a sentence or an image evoking a cause of early school leaving. In this way, students are free to think by themselves on the risk factor illustrated by each side and on the whole problem.

The quotes are real testimonies of students who have dropped out of school, gathered during the projects "School Inclusion" (http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/) and "I Am not scared" (http://iamnotscared.pixel-online.org/). The QR codes of each side are all different as they direct to a video that aims to bring a solution to the situation of school leaving addressed: a positive example, a message inviting to identify oneself and to seek a solution.

Selections of the videos

The videos have been carefully selected by the working group according to the following criteria:

- relevance of the subject regarding the situation illustrated by the sentence/image;
- neutrality (no propaganda or too typical cultural specificities);
- language;
- capability to draw young people's attention;
- length.

All the videos are gathered on a blog created by Inforef and accessible on the following address: http://inforef.be/projets/stayatschool/.

The six categories in detail:

1. Difficult school integration
It can concern a new student or an immigrant who is not used to his/her new cultural environment.
- **Sentence**: "I came from another country. I was hearing remarks about my origin and received indifference." (Tassos, 19)
- **Video:** the video introduces a program to help immigrant students catch up, for instance because they do not master the language. (2'51)

2. Problems related to the course of studies
This can concern any student who fails because they have chosen a course of studies that does not suit them or which was inadequately guided (for instance, the case of a student who studies sciences while he should be in a technical section).
- **Sentence:** "I do not understand the lessons, nor do I try to. I want to become an electrician-mechanic and the school does not provide such knowledge to me." (Tom, 14)
- **Video:** presentation of a vocational rehabilitation service in which students are trained to jobs they are really interested in. (5'41)

3.   Learning difficulties

Students who learn more slowly than others or need particular attention. Students with learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, dysphasia, dyscalculia...) are also concerned.

- **Sentence:** "I found it hard to understand my lessons and no one helped me" (Tassos, 19)
- **Video:** an inspirational video for students with disabilities, aiming to convince them they are not stupid. (1'28)

4.   School violence

Violence and bullying can be physical, emotional or be inflected through ICT (cyber bullying)

- **Sentence:** "The others always mocked me. I got used to it but nothing has changed" (Mathieu, 14)
- **Video:** interview of students giving their opinion of various aspects of bullying (its causes and effects, how to react…). (3'21)

5.   Family background

Family related factors that influence the student's success or failure (parents who are not able to help their children do their homework, students who have little time to study because they have to look after their younger brothers and sisters, whose parents are in a difficult financial situation…).

- **Sentence:** "It's hard to study at home and I have no one to help me" (Tom, 14 years old)
- **Video:** the video features a girl who needs help for her homework while her mother is busy, and who is disturbed by her little brother.

6.   Personal problems

They can be related to physical or mental health, various kinds of addiction (drugs, alcohol, video games…).

- **Sentence:** image with the sentence "Why don't you go to school anymore?"
- **Video:** features a young boy who spends hours playing video games and eventually drops out of school.

Assembling the cube

1.   Download and printing.

The pattern can be downloaded on INFOREF website (http://www.inforef.be/pages/outils.php) and printed in colour. Paper to be used preferably: A3 format, cardboard.

2.   Assembling the cube

You will need adhesive tapes or glue, a ruler, a pair of scissors and a box cutter.

- Cut out the pattern.
- Slice the two white openings on the yellow and red sides (see the diagram below).
- Fold the edges (A and B) and the sides.

- Assemble the sides and paste them one after the other.
- To close the Cube, insert the tab C in the opening on the red side.

The Cube is ready to be used.
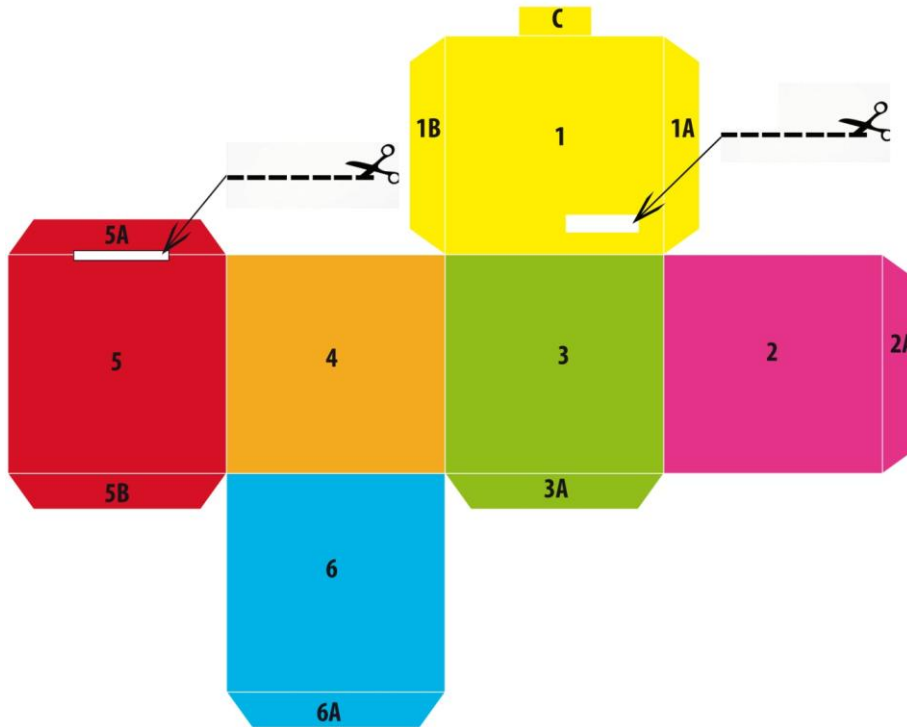
Ideas for use

Who is the Cube addressed to?

The tool was first created for secondary school students. However the range is large between a 12 year old kid who arrives in secondary school and a 17 or 18 year old teenager who finishes their curriculum (at best!). For this reason the tool was thought up to be adapted, for instance, to primary school pupils (see "Tool transferability").

How to use the Cube?

You can start the activity in two ways: either throw it like a dice and read the top side or handle it and choose a side.

The next steps could be as follows: read sentence/look at image, scan QR code, watch the video, launch the activity:

- Ask questions such as: what's the matter, what's the message, what does the teenager says with his testimony, what cause can be inferred, could it happen to you, what would you do in their place, what is the video about, is it related to the sentence, does it offer a positive message, which one, does it offer a solution to the problem, what solution can you imagine?...

- Motivate the children who do not wish to participate in the dialogue in the class to put a note in the cube through the opening (side 1), leaving them the possibility to remain anonymous; the purpose is to raise their motivation to participate and interact and to assist them in their questioning.

The students' reactions and the discussions that emerge will help the teacher spot more easily students at risk, for instance when a student identifies him/herself to the situation displayed.

Tool transferability

The working group wishes any user be able to make the tool their own and improve it.

In the framework of the Stay@School project

Teachers of the partner countries have the possibility to search videos in their national language and to join a QR code they can create by themselves. Likewise, anyone can adapt the sentences according to their context. For this purpose, a Word version of the pattern is also downloadable on INFOREF website (http://www.inforef.be/pages/outils.php).

To create your own QR codes, please follow these steps:

1. Choose the video that suits you best in your language (use YouTube, Dailymotion, Google...)
2. Create the related QR code:
   - Copy the address of the page on which is the video.
   - Go to the website http://generator.code-qr.net/. (Note: this is not the only QR code generator)
   - Paste the address of the page in the writing field entitled "URL" on the home page of this site.
   - Change the size (Size 3).
   - Click on the button "Generate" and your QR code will appear in the frame on the upper right side of the page.
   - Click on "download PNG" and save the file on your computer.
3. Edit the pattern:
   - Go to INFOREF website.
   - Download the pattern in Word format.
   - Edit the quotes if you wish.

- Paste on each side the QR codes you created and give it an appropriate size. Note that the code needs to have 2 cm sides to be readable.
- Print the pattern, preferably in A3 format. The cube is ready to be used.

For other users

To be used by external services (reschooling services, youth aid, social services…), users can draw inspiration from the ideas given to teachers and adapt them to their own situation.

The tool can also be used by any person concerned by education (parents, future teachers, youth organisations…).

Users' comments and suggestions

After the tool was presented during the working group meeting, the participants expressed the following comments:

- *"A nice and playful tool to take a global view"*
- *"A tool to identify students' problems"*
- *"On the whole, the tool is practical, playful, accessible and easily feasible. There are multiple possibilities of use that leave room to teachers' creativity regarding the method of use"*
- *"The sentences evoke stereotyped situations but they prompt debate"*
- *"This tool can be very instructive for the teacher in the way to communicate with the students"*
- *"The sentences correspond to secondary school teenagers' words, the activity cannot be considered as such in primary school, the sentences will need to be changed. This is possible thanks to the downloadable Word version"*
- *"Since the creators left the possibility to change the sentences, other uses are possible"*
- *"It would be desirable to define the transversal skills worked on through this activity"*
- *"From a technical point of view, the opening is too small"*

General comment:

Such a tool is not neutral!
The Cube is a "trigger", it "initiates something". The activity based on this tool needs a follow-up organised by the school.
If a student says, for instance, that he is bullied, he needs to be guided towards an existing device within the school that will take care of his needs.

Suggestions for experimentation

The working group members propose the following ideas *(to be experimented from the next beginning of term)*:

- **Using the cube in an individual interview** (teacher-student, educator-student …)

- **Fostering "coexistence", interaction, collaboration, solidarity between students** (for instance, building a story based on the sentence…).

- **Bringing students to create "their" cube with situations experienced by them or their classmates**. The activity will appeal to their experience and will take on its full meaning. The teacher could ask each student to create a sentence (anonymously or not), gather them all in the cube through the opening and ask the class to select the side of the cube that best correspond to the situation (informally defining the six categories).

- **If one consider that the student can carry out the activity alone**, with the help of the document to guide him/her in the use, **it would be relevant that the activity be collectively carried out beforehand with the teacher or an educator**. In this case, it would be possible that each student thinks individually, then express their impressions, ideas, emotions … collectively. The activity could be based on a context, an event at school that would justify using the cube, without which the cube would not make sense since one of its objectives is to prompt debate.

- **Using the cube during welcoming days in lower secondary school**.
  - ➢ Particularly for students who failed in the first year. The teacher or educator could carry out an activity based on the cube sentences and imagine solutions with the students (such as: if I had "*difficulties to understand*", what would I do?).
    The objective of the activity is multiple: liberate speech and emotional experience, put in perspective the fact that students have failed in the first year, think about the mistakes that the students may have made and find solutions. The solutions would be synthesised in a table that would be the object of intermediary assessments at several points in the year, which would make it possible to measure the students' evolution.
  - ➢ Students who have failed in the first year could also create "their cube", which teachers or educators could use as a prevention tool for 1st year students. *"We work on them making them think about the others"*.

Using the cube as a prevention tool in 3rd year, when most early school leavings take place (particularly in 3rd vocational year).