

DRIVING SCHOOL STUDENTS' TRAINING WITH THE USE OF MODULE CLOSE TO - AS A METHOD CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE IN YOUNG DRIVERS' ATTITUDE AND REDUCING THE NUMBER OF ROAD ACCIDENT WITH THEIR PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present the European Project "MODULE CLOSE TO". The project is executed in eleven European Union countries. The paper describes main objectives and guidelines of the project. The project's main result in the final stage should be the development of conditions for unification of drivers' training system across Europe by introducing into drivers' training new educational module. The module consists in realization of educational method called "peer-to-peer" during drivers' training, which is taken from addiction treatment prevention in which a peer reports on a problem to another peer. In drivers' training, the course participants are confronted with road accident offenders (course participants' peers) and their stories, which should lead to positive changes in attitudes and behaviours of young, beginning drivers and therefore to permanent reduction in number of both road accidents and their victims. The preliminary research confirmed that classes with road accident offenders have a positive influence on developing proper attitudes of young drivers. A discussion concentrated on offender, his/her susceptibility to risky behaviours, accident's circumstances, confrontation with its consequences and on serving an adjudged sentence makes an impression on young course participants. The project anticipates introduction of pilot classes in driving schools, high schools, etc. within the framework of drivers' training with participation of road accident offenders and also evaluation of its influence on course participants. The final effect of the project will be the development of conditions for introducing a new educational module into existing drivers' training system as well as developing conditions for recruiting accident offenders and actions motivating them to join the project realization.

Keywords: *road traffic safety, driving school courses, driving school students, drivers' training, road accidents offenders*

1. Introduction

Module Close To is a research project co-financed by the European Commission and executed in 11 European Union countries. Poland is represented in this project by Road Traffic Safety Center of Motor Transport Institute.

The idea of the project was taken from different programs aiming at preventing drug and alcohol addictions, struggling with AIDS virus, in which the addicted or infected with HIV tells others the story of addiction or illness, how did it happen and how do they fight to recover. They tell the story to prevent others from making such mistakes. Therefore classes with participation of such persons have a preventive character.

2. Project's guidelines

Peer-to-peer method in education, in which a peer reports on a problem to another peer is widely known. It was decided to use this method in driving school students' training, especially for young road users of 18-24 years old. Module Close To is an example of such use, in which road accidents offenders share their stories and emotions with driving school students. The instructor from previously conducted classes of addicted / ill person was replaced by the offender or victim of a road accident.

In this case, young beginning drivers (driving school students) are confronted with other young drivers' stories, who were road accidents offenders. Such drivers, called peer-mentors, participate in theoretical classes in designated driving schools. Peer mentors are prepared by appointed instructor, who was trained earlier in the appropriate field. The future trainers - young road accidents offenders - are usually recruited with the assistance of judiciary authorities or organizations and institutions dealing with the issues of road accidents, e.g. associations assisting victims of road accidents.

Appointing the road accidents offenders to participate in such courses for future drivers (doing an unpaid social work) is much more useful than adjudicating small sentences; it is also a form of compensation. In order to become a peer-mentor in the project, a group of young road accidents offenders have to go through a special training. Thanks to that the future peer-trainers obtain the knowledge how to run a class in driving course in an attractive way, creating an impression on addressees' attitudes. A group of peer-mentors is trained in a designated driving school, which should be situated in their neighborhood. Classes with participation of peer-mentors can also be realized in high schools, in which driving courses are executed. It is important that the offender has as many common characteristics as the course participants as possible - he/she should live in the same area, be of the same age etc., so the course participants can identify themselves with the peer-mentor and could imagine themselves in his/her position. Module Close To is an authentic story about the road accident which occurred recently in the area that is well-known to all participants of the course and was caused by a person of similar age; it is a story about the causes, circumstances and consequences of the accident. The closeness of sender and receiver of the information, the emotional character of the relation intensify the effects of such classes.

3. Project's aims and tasks

Project Module Close To aims at:

- changing the improper attitudes and behaviours of driving school students (young drivers)-making them more susceptible to their own behaviour in the road traffic as drivers and its impact on their own safety and health and other road users'; a self-reflection on their own behaviour in road traffic; anticipation and evaluation of own behaviour in road traffic; self-control,
- drawing the attention of authorities dealing with road traffic safety issues to the necessity of developing and executing classes for driving school students with new educational methods (e.g. as in the Module Close To) which purpose is to change the attitudes and behaviours of drivers, that result in reducing the number of road accidents and therefore improving road safety.

The general goal of project Module Close To is to carry out classes by peer-mentors (road accidents offenders) with ten thousands driving school students (young drivers) in partner countries: Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden. The execution and effects will be monitored and evaluated during each stage of project realization. Road accidents offenders will participate in driving school classes, relating their experiences. In order to evaluate how such story influences students and also to estimate how long the effects last after the course ends, the additional study before and after the course realization and after 3 months since the course end will be carried out. The groups with and without the participation of peer-mentors - the accident offenders - will be compared.

4. Expected results and pilot study

The application of peer-to-peer method in Module Close To will influence the awareness of drivers and their later behaviour in road traffic. The classes will include discussion on risky behaviours, which combined with lack of experience of young drivers is the cause of large number of road accidents in this group of road users.

Module Close To creates the background for classes execution, during which difficult topics will be discussed, such as young drivers' behaviours, consequences of improper behaviours, drivers' individual predispositions, driving a vehicle and drugs and alcohol. The classes are interesting supplement to training material realized during the course in driving schools.

The participation of peer-mentor and telling his/her own story about how he/she became the accident offender make the course participants aware of how little it takes to cause an accident. Small difference in age between the course participants and peer-mentor and living in the same neighborhood makes it hard to give a common statement „it doesn't concern me, it happens to other people in different circumstances, but never to me”. There is a huge chance that the meeting with peer-mentor will have an impact on behaviour and attitude change of future drivers with regard to their participation and posing a risk in road traffic, and that the question „how would I behave if I were him/her” will be posed.

The pilot study carried out in 2004-2006 in partner countries showed the effectiveness of the program. Also the adaptation of this method to the unique character of each participating country contributed to this success. Project's executors from Austria, Germany and Sweden have been working only with the accident offenders. In Austria the project was concurrent with the penal system, in Sweden young offenders were motivated by the insurance companies, in Germany by judicial probation officers. In 2003 no institution from either Poland or Czech Republic was interested in realization of the project. In these countries peer-mentors were recruited directly by main project executors and through Internet. In Czech Republic peer-mentors were the victims and offenders of road accidents, in Poland only the victims.

Project Module Close To in Poland was executed in Kutno county. Two peer-mentors participated in 12 classes in this region's driving schools. They related their experiences to driving school students, who as the future drivers maybe will not make such mistakes. These classes were evaluated very positively by the instructors and participants.

In 2007 project went through a major modernization. New partners from renowned European institutions and organizations joined the program. It was decided to extend its scale and range. Currently there are 11 participating countries instead of 5.

In 2007 Motor Transport Institute as a Polish representative joined Module Close To. In Poland there will be 35 instructors from different regions of Poland, who will participate in training and then will carry out instruction classes in their driving schools for accidents offenders. Each offender may tell his/her story no more than 3-5 times. It was decided that after 5th time peer-mentor would gain too much experience and his/her story wouldn't be so emotional. As a result there should be 1000 students participating in classes with peer-mentors.

5. Project realization

Realization of Module Close To in each participating country requires permanent cooperation with governmental and nongovernmental institutions and organizations, which would ensure the recruitment of appropriate peer-mentors. The stress is put on adequate authorities support, cooperation with the police, judicial organs, insurance companies as well as with trainers backgrounds and their active participation in this preventive action. Information on the project is available on the web site www.close-to.net accessible to all interested parties. There is also a special part designated only to partner countries, in which ideas and experiences can be exchanged.

In project's partners opinion the peer-to-peer method, which went through positive tests during pilot stage in 2004-2006 should be widely implemented and included into realization of theoretical part of driving courses in EU countries. The final effect of the whole project is introducing this educational module permanently into driving course programs in all European Union.

General objectives of the project:

- creating background for adaptation of new educational module into current drivers' training system,
- creating background for unification of driving courses in Europe,
- achieving an objective of change in attitudes of young drivers during confrontation with peer-mentors, who experienced road accidents,
- reaching the point of permanent reduction in number of road accidents with participation of young drivers.

Detailed objective of the project:

- creating background for recruiting peer-mentors,
- undertaking incentive actions for peer-mentors in order to encourage them to participate in the project,
- preparing trainings for peer-mentors and instructors,
- systematic implementation of the project into driving course system through peer-mentors and instructors or teachers (high schools, vocational schools) trainings,
- creating learning materials for instructors and peer-mentors,
- creating website for participants and executors of the project,
- project evaluation.

Project Module Close To includes 6 tasks. Motor Transport Institute is responsible for task 4. The project will be realized in 36-months period.

Task 1

- Analysis of legal system concerning drivers' training in each country participating in the project,
- identifying the possibilities of contact with driving schools,
- analysis of existing actions concerning drivers' training,
- review of existing learning materials useful for drivers' training,
- identification of institutions which help to recruit peer-mentors,
- elaborating the guidelines of motivating systems for peer-mentors.

Task 2

- Adaptation of analyses' results to suitable activity system and elaborating the plan of project implementation,
- concept elaboration of:
 - range of peer-mentors' and instructors' trainings,
 - learning materials for peer-mentors and instructors,
 - website,
- elaboration of motivating activities plan for peer-mentors,

- elaboration of materials useful for peer-mentors' and instructors' recruitment,
- guaranteeing the participation of suitable institutions for recruiting peer-mentors,
- creating a list of partner driving schools,
- elaboration of criteria and evaluation system of activities which are undertaken.

Task 3

- Recruitment and preparation of trainings for peer-mentors and instructors,
- training of driving instructors, interested teachers and peer-mentors,
- starting of the website,
- meetings with national authorities which would lead to realization of educational module, elaborated in the project in the drivers' training system.

Task 4

- Evaluation of Module Close To and its impact on young drivers' attitudes through the analysis of road accidents number in this group of drivers,
- questionnaire analysis of road users' attitudes changes in each stage of project's realization.

Task 5

The achieved results during the realization of the project will be disseminated in partner countries and all over Europe, which would enable the acquaintance with the activities' effects and winning the supporters of such training method.

Task 6

Thanks to the cooperation of national executive authorities with decisive bodies, the obtained results, which will be analyzed, would be transformed into recommendation to implement European Module Close To, and therefore they will have a form of amendment to national drivers' training programs.

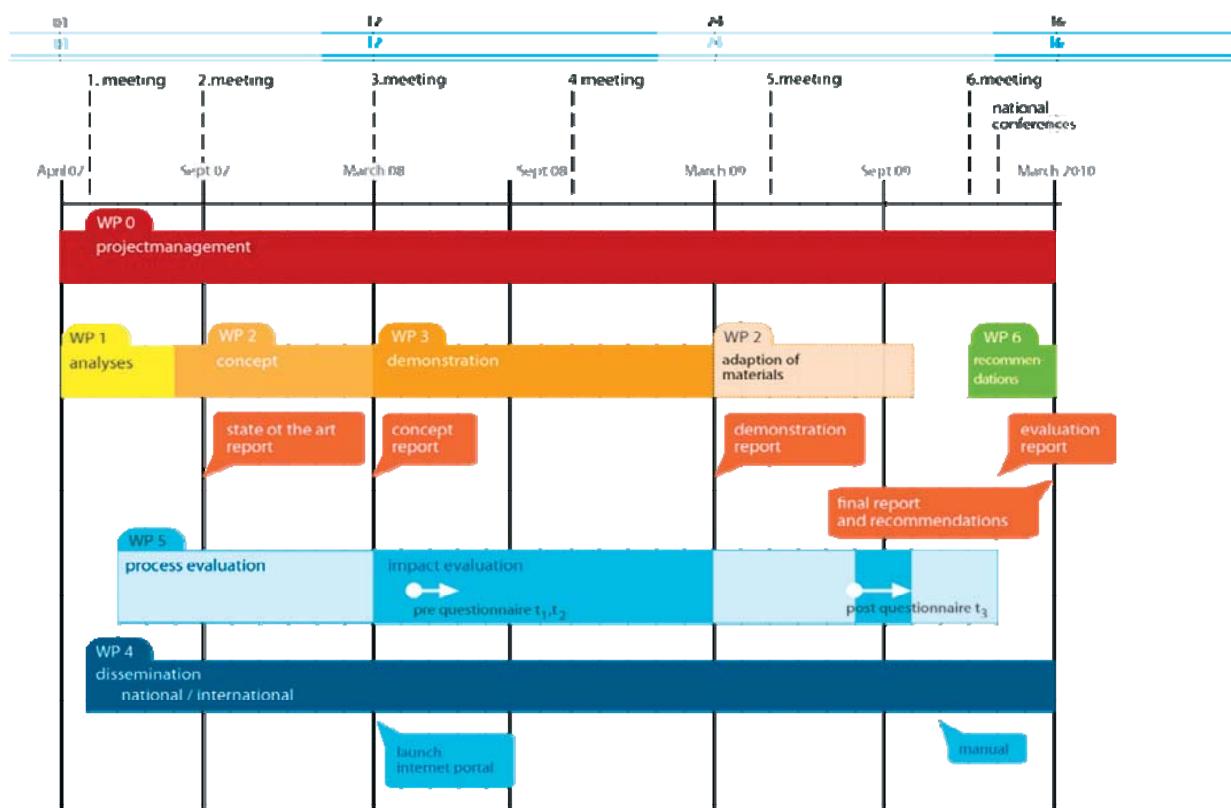


Fig. 1. Detailed plan of Module Close To realization in 2007-2010

6. Summary

From the conducted by project executors studies it appears that activities, such as classes with peer-mentors have a positive influence on developing suitable attitudes of young drivers. Studies showed that after a few months since classes with peer-mentors (road accident offenders) were carried out, 90% of them remember this meeting. 70% of participants stated that the meeting had an influence on their behaviour while driving a car, and 40% stated that they drive more safely and pay attention to other road users. Around 20% of young drivers participating in the classes declared the change of behaviour in situation when they are to drink alcohol and drive.

During classes the main stress is put on identification of relation student - peer-mentor, who is the accident offender, and on the reflection on own risky behaviours in road traffic which could lead to an accident. Identification with the victim of an accident is the easiest task. The victim is usually perceived as the positive „hero” of the story, and the accident offender as „dark character”. Students of the driving courses have feelings of sympathy towards the victim, they feel compassion for him/her; it is harder for them to identify with the offender. When peer-mentor is the accident victim it is easier for course participants to put themselves into his/her position. The history of the victim illustrates the result of wrong attitude. The offender in this case is anonymous. Module Close To concentrates on the accident offender - he/she plays the main role in the incident - his/her tendency to risky behaviour, accident circumstances, confrontation with consequences, serving the adjudged sentence. At the same time the project creates the possibility for the offender to atone for the crime through social service. This is a more effective rehabilitation method for the accident offender than short imprisonment or suspended sentence, during which there is no use of this person for the society. The possibility of reducing the period of punishment is a motivating element for the young offender to participate in the project.

The effectiveness of the project can be estimated only provided it will be systematically implemented in partner countries. Currently in participating countries trainings for peer-mentors and instructors are carried out. Experiences obtained during the project implementation stage, its execution and evaluation will be very beneficial for other countries interested in introducing Module Close To on their territories.

Project Module Close To is an interesting idea. In Poland with effective organization it has a great chance to succeed. Undoubtedly it will influence the development of new learning materials in training driving students and drivers and possibly it will require introducing changes in the way of carrying out classes during training for driving students and driving instructors. As a long-term project creating changes in attitudes and behaviours of drivers it can be perceived as the one that in the future will contribute to change in mentality of all group of drivers.

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