LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE:
HOW WE TRANSFORM VET EDUCATION WITH TECHNOLOGY, DESIGN AND INNOVATION

In an ever-changing world where creativity and innovative thinking are key factors for professional success, education needs to adapt and provide learning methods relevant to today's economic reality. The integration of Design Thinking and Graphic Design methodologies into the curriculum of vocational education and training brings significant benefits, contributing to the development of essential skills for the future workplace. The Erasmus+ DigitalCraft project, implemented by Free Trade Union of Education of Bacău County in partnership with UN-LAB Italy, demonstrates the real impact of these modern approaches on teachers and students in the VET system.

EDUCATION OF THE FUTURE: HOW DESIGN THINKING AND GRAPHIC DESIGN ARE TRANSFORMING VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (VET)

The world of work is changing fast and education needs to keep pace. Vocational and Technical Education and Training (VET) students can no longer be prepared only for traditional trades; they need to be equipped with digital competences, innovative thinking and creative skills. In this context, the Design Thinking methodology and the use of Graphic Design in education can bring a new breath to the teaching and learning process.

The Erasmus+ DigitalCraft project, implemented by the Free Education Union of Bacău County in partnership with UN-LAB Italy, had the mission to introduce these innovative methodologies in VET teacher training, with the aim of modernizing education and making lessons more attractive, interactive and future-oriented.

But how is Design Thinking and Graphic Design changing VET education? What real impact has the DigitalCraft project had? Let's find out together!

WHAT IS DESIGN THINKING AND WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL IN VET EDUCATION?

In traditional education, students are used to following clear and structured learning steps. However, in the real world, problems do not have unique solutions and the job market demands adaptability, creativity and the ability to solve complex problems. This is where Design Thinking comes in, a methodology that emphasizes exploration, experimentation and problem solving through creative and collaborative thinking.

The Design Thinking process includes five fundamental steps:

- ❖ Empathy - Understanding the real needs and challenges of students and the learning environment.
- ❖ Problem Definition - Clear identification of educational and professional challenges.
- ❖ Generating ideas - Brainstorming and exploring possible solutions. Prototyping - Creating visual and interactive solutions that can be tested quickly.
- ❖ Test and Improve - Adjust and refine solutions based on feedback.

WHY IS THIS PROCESS SO IMPORTANT FOR VET EDUCATION?

Because it helps students become critical thinkers, innovators and real-world problem solvers, which is essential for their professional success. Furthermore, Design Thinking encourages collaboration between teachers and students, transforming the classroom into a space for experimentation and active learning.

GRAPHIC DESIGN: A POWERFUL TOOL IN EDUCATION

In a world where visual information dominates, the ability to create and interpret graphic content is essential. Graphic Design in Education is not just about aesthetics, but about visual communication, clarity and attractiveness in the teaching process.

Using digital tools such as Canva, CapCut and TimelineJS, VET teachers can turn lessons into engaging visual experiences, making it easier to understand and retain information.

- ➢ Infographics to explain technical and economic concepts
- ➢ Educational videos to help you brush up complex concepts
- ➢ Interactive presentations that keep students' attention
- ➢ Digital timelines to visualize processes and milestones

VET students need visual and digital skills, and teachers play a crucial role in guiding them towards effective use of these tools. DigitalCraft provided this opportunity, helping teachers to develop their digital skills and apply them in the educational process.

IMPACT OF THE DIGITALCRAFT PROJECT ON TEACHERS AND VET EDUCATION

After training, the results were significant:

- ➢ **92.3% of participants consider that the digital tools used in the course are very applicable in their daily work.**
- ➢ **87.8% teachers feel comfortable or very well prepared in using the digital tools covered in the training.**
- ➢ The use of Canva and interactive platforms in lessons has increased significantly.
- ➢ Design Thinking has been recognized as an effective method for personalizing teaching content and developing creative thinking among students.
- ➢ Teachers have started creating visual learning resources, implementing interactive assessments and making learning more engaging.

WHAT HAS DIGITALCRAFT CHANGED?

- ➢ Teachers' mindset about technology and innovation in education.
- ➢ Using interactive and visual methodologies for teaching and assessment.
- ➢ Integrating digital competences as an essential part of the VET curriculum.

WHAT NEXT? HOW CAN THIS IMPACT BE CONTINUED?

- ➢ **The transformation of VET education does not stop here. The teachers participated the training activities within the Erasmus+ *DigitalCraft* project, implemented by the Free Education Union of Bacău County in partnership with UN-LAB Italy**, disseminated the knowledge and information gained during the training in their schools, but also in dissemination activities carried out at county level (methodical circles, meetings with union leaders at school/zonal level in Bacău County), and the next step is to **multiply these good practices** at a wider level, in as many schools in the county as possible.

How can we continue this change?

➢ **Formal integration of Design Thinking into the curriculum**.
➢ **Expanding access to digital tools for VET teachers**.
➢ **Create a community of practice where teachers can share experiences and resources**.
➢ **Organization of workshops and mentoring sessions to deepen the use of technology in education**.

This project has demonstrated that teachers are ready to modernize their teaching methods and bring innovation into the , providing VET students with an education adapted to the demands of the job market.