



Bednet: ICT to support the educational and social inclusion of learners with long-term or chronic illness

The context for the use of ICT for Inclusion

The non-profit organisation Bednet serves children and adolescents aged from 6 to 18 suffering from long-term and/or chronic illness in the Flemish-speaking region of Belgium. The service aims to decrease the learning gap caused by the illness and to help sick children re-establish or maintain social contact with the 'outside world', in particular their friends and teacher(s), via the internet. Bednet enables the child to attend their own mainstream school classes and educational activities through broadband internet links.

The policy context

The Bednet system supports social inclusion and combats underachievement and school retention. At the same time, this social dimension of learning also promotes the social bond between the ill child and the group in their mainstream class. The ill child not only participates in collaborative learning events during and after class with their classmates, but in each class a couple of classmates are responsible for establishing and monitoring the ill child's connection with the school during class time. This means the teacher can focus on teaching the class, without being distracted by the technology, and at the same time the responsibilities taken on by the classmates strengthen the bonds between the ill child and the social structure of the class group. Social inclusion is further promoted through the Bednet system's video-conferencing facilities. This takes place between the ill child and their classmates during breaks and occasionally after school.

The use of ICT

Bednet uses a specific interface using a PC, webcam, headset/speaker and printer-scanner at home and a PC, camera, printer-scanner and microphone in the classroom. Key to this interface is a specific software tool integrating board-view, class-view, learning materials, text scanning and transfer and tailored navigation tools.

Key outcomes and benefits

The Bednet system started in the 2007–2008 school year with a pilot project involving 39 children. In the 2008–2009 school year the total number of participants was 75. The current situation is that about 160 children can be served by the system annually. The aim is to be able to serve 500 pupils simultaneously.

Additional information

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Demo video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAqLDCLtTlo>