bye, Polarity
Thinking beyond Polarity
For Europe united in diversity

PROJECT RESULT 2: CONCEPT AGAINST POLARITY

2.1 CONTEXT- PAPER

Co-funded by
the European Union

BORG MISTELBACH

SYNTHESIS
CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

FUTURE BALLOONS
we take you higher!

bit schulungscenter
member of bit group

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 1

1.1 Background to the research 1

1.2 Addressing polarisation in education 1

2 Pedagogical concepts of “bye, Polarity” 3

2.1 Holistic learning 3

2.2 Experiential learning 3

2.3 Digital learning 4

2.4 Blended learning 5

2.5 Flipped classroom learning 6

3 The bye, Polarity Pedagogical Framework 7

3.1 Self-directed learning (SDL) for sustainability 7

3.2 Summary 10

4 References 11

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

Increasing polarisation in Europe and the entire Western world is a growing problem. Not only are politics and political views drifting apart, but also in society and in everyday life a division due to increasing polarisation is becoming more and more evident. Especially in times of crisis (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), increased polarisation tendencies are to be expected. Our world is increasingly characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

This context paper addresses in particular two facets of polarisation, social polarisation and political polarisation. Social polarisation refers to the widening of the gap between specific subgroups of people in terms of their social circumstances and opportunities (Chakravarty, 2015). The nature of relationships between high ethnic diversity and issues like social integration, public good provision, corruption, and growth has been explained in many significant contributions to the literature.

Political polarisation on the other hand, is the divergence of political attitudes away from the center, towards ideological extremes. Most discussions of polarisation in political science consider polarisation in the context of political parties and democratic systems of government.

In order for our society to master the challenges of the future, it should refrain from any kind of polarisation; instead, it needs cohesion, the ability to discourse, empathy, and diversity as an opportunity for holistic solutions. Young people, in particular, are on the one hand very impressionable with regard to polarising tendencies, but on the other hand, they can also exert a lot of positive influence on their environment.

1.2 Addressing polarisation in education

There have been different initiatives responding to international calls for programs to address social polarisation and extremism through education over the course of years. For instance, one initiative in England focuses on the cognitive and socio-psychological foundations of a critical thinking programme for secondary schools, called “Living Well With Difference” (LWWD) (Savage et al. 2021).

The programme addresses development of critical thinking about issues of social polarisation, prejudice and any kind of extreme thinking. These issues often involve the interaction of emotion and thinking, understood using a dual systems framework, explained through course methodology and content. The learning process aspires to promote cognitively flexible, complex and integrated thinking, supported by meta-awareness to enable emotion management.

Another notable example has been the Flemish case, where education plays an important role in the Flemish action plan to prevent violent radicalisation and polarisation (Goris and Van Alstein, 2022). Since 2015, a host of actions and interventions have been developed for and implemented in the Flemish education system. Goris and Van Alstein's findings suggest that the Flemish attempt to prevent violent radicalization in educational contexts, builds on a broad pedagogical approach. The focus is usually on the intrinsic values for inclusive education and of enhancing resilience in pupils and schools, rather than a one-sided, security-driven approach to the problem. Overall, the gradual broadening of the Flemish approach to violent extremism was deemed successful or towards the right direction by key stakeholders in the Flemish education system.

Taking the above into consideration, Designed in the above context, "bye, Polarity - Thinking beyond Polarity for Europe united in diversity" is a 24-month project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (EU), targeted for secondary education students (12-16 years old) and teachers. Overall, the project aims to sensitize pupils towards increasing polarisation in politics and society, train them in dealing with polarisation, and win pupils over as ambassadors for a united Europe.

2 Pedagogical concepts of “bye, Polarity”

In the framework of Project Result 2 for the project, a series of important pedagogical theories and approaches were deemed crucial, to inform the overarching framework to consider for developing the teaching and learning material. The basics of these concepts are addressed below.

2.1 Holistic learning

The holistic learning or holistic education concept, refers to the philosophy of education for the whole person. It is preferred in recent times, as an approach to overcome struggles to improve student outcomes. This whole child approach places children at the center and focuses on what works best for them and on what the other stakeholders in education – e.g. educators, families, policymakers, community members, and associations – must do to ensure their integration and success.

The basic tenet of this approach entails the belief that students will better engage in the learning process and reach academic success, when their other emotional, psychological, physical, and social needs are met (Slade and Griffith, 2013). Such a realisation takes a holistic view of education and of the children’s academic development; it requires to create the type of learning environments that focus on other competences and necessities of children, their families, the community and all the stakeholders involved in the educational setting. Hence, learners should have active opportunities to contribute to solutions that affect them, pertaining to bottom up approaches where children and young people and families (especially those coming from disadvantaged/deprived groups) are given a space to exercise their ‘voice’.

Learners are taught to reflect on their actions and how they impact the local and wider global community, as well as how to learn from their surrounding community. Educators often engage learners in projects that apply critical-thinking skills toward solving real-world problems. As already described in the introduction of this paper, such approaches are relevant to address radicalisation and polarisation in education.

2.2 Experiential learning

A renowned approach in formal and informal educational settings, experiential learning can be described as “Learning by Doing”. It is a theory coined and defined by David Kolb (2005), as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. What prevails is the belief in the power of engaging learners in hands-on experiences and reflection, so as to be better equipped to understand both theoretical and practical knowledge, and transfer their classroom experience into the real world.

Experiential learning adds a component that other learning theories do not; that of learning about the individual’s learning process in addition to the actual learning content. Experiential

learning promotes the learner's awareness about their own needs and it allows room for reflection that is recognised within a methodological framework for addressing polarisation as imperative, to gain in depth understanding of issues, create resilience and reverse stereotypes.

The Experiential learning process is based on 4 distinct components (Norwich University Online, 2017):

Experiencing: novel or familiar concrete experiences, whether they occur in professional, personal or educational settings.

Reflecting: reflective observation, which naturally occurs after exposure to new experiences and it is vital to adjust and adapt so as to solve new challenges and make critical decisions.

Thinking: it entails abstract conceptualisation which takes the reflective process a step further, by focusing on channeling those reflective observations into a set game plan or theoretical approach.

Acting: active experimentation to deal with the process of testing existing ideas by creating new experiences.

The above elements form a cycle of learning that allows for the acquisition of new skills, new knowledge and also a shift of attitudes towards empowerment and motivation.

Figure 1. The experiential learning cycle, distilled by Kolb, developed by Lewin

2.3 Digital learning

Digital learning involves information communication technologies to support the learner interaction with digital materials designed to help learners reach specific learning outcomes

(Vovides, 2019). In the context of this paper, digital learning is broad and not limited to online and blended; it is inclusive of instructional content, data and assessment systems, learning platforms, online courses, adaptive software, and personal learning technologies.

The understanding is that instructional practices employing digital technology, have the affordances to strengthen or augment a student's learning experience. This type of learning allows learners some control over time, place, path and/or pace. Importantly, for digital learning to be productive, it requires a combination of technology, digital content, and instruction (Valentine et al., 2019).

Digital learning is preferred in our era, as it allows for the use of data and information to personalise learning and provide targeted supplementary instruction, whereas technology enhanced learning environments, allow for rich collaboration and communication, which may include student collaboration with content experts and peers (Short, 2018). Digital learning is considered particularly useful to reach learners in remote or rural areas, thus enhancing issues of accessibility (ESSA, 2015).

2.4 Blended learning

Blended learning has emerged as a buzzword in the education community worldwide in the last two decades. The concept involves the combination of face-to-face and technology-mediated instruction (Porter et al., 2014). Garrison & Kanuka (2004) define blended learning as "a thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online experiences".

It is widely regarded as an approach that combines the benefits afforded by face-to-face and online learning components. Teaching within a blended learning environment implies that there are elements of student control over time, place, path and/or pace, also identified as affordances of digital learning. Blended learning can take different forms and styles; commonly referred to as blended, hybrid, and flipped or inverted - which are categorized based on the sequence of integrating face-to-face and online sessions.

When conducted in an optimum way, blended learning leads to several benefits, according to research findings. For example, Jusoff & Khodabandelou (2009), have identified that blended learning increases the interaction between teachers and their students; blended learning offers flexibility, pedagogical richness and is deemed cost-effective (Graham, 2006, pp. 3-21). Blended learning facilitates value interaction and learner engagement (Dziuban, Moskal, & Hartman, 2005, pp. 88–89), whereas it is thought of as valuable to engage different type of learners in a personalised way (Heinze & Procter, 2004).

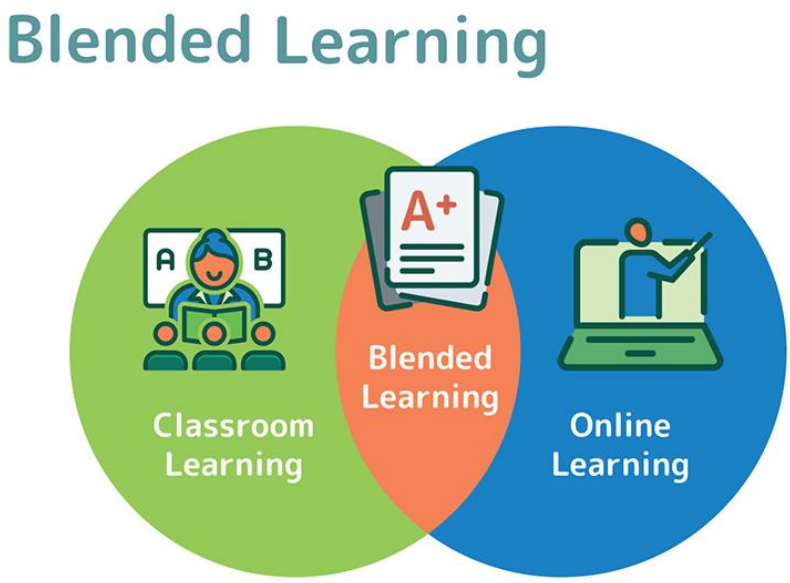

Figure 2. What is blended learning (Best)

2.5 Flipped classroom learning

The term is consistently used as a type of blended learning, where students are introduced to content at home and practice working through it at school. It is a popular trend in education, and the unique elements of it, have made it a favourite approach to use in the last decade.

The concept behind the flipped classroom, is to rethink when students have access to the resources they need most. If the problem is that students need help doing the work rather than being introduced to the new thinking behind the work, then the solution flipped classroom takes is to reverse that pattern.

This type of blended learning approach offers some of the perks of blended learning in general, like flexibility and cost-effectiveness, while it also saves time to prepare for class, stimulates interest and motivates students to engage in the learning process beyond the school environment. It is especially relevant to address polarisation, as it can enable a level of deeper understanding, critical thinking and facilitate self-directed learning.

To summarise this section, holistic education can be seen as a learning ecosystem approach to learning, where for instance experiential learning and digital learning could fall. Blended learning is a type of digital learning, and the flipped classroom concept, is a form of blended learning, ascribing to a particular sequence of delivering a combination of online and face to face instruction. All of the above are considered to facilitate learner interaction, enable critical thinking and a deeper level of understanding for the learner. Finally, these concepts facilitate a process known as self-directed learning. This will form the pedagogical framework for the project and is analysed in the next section.

3 The bye, Polarity Pedagogical Framework

A pedagogical framework (although definitions may vary) outlines the expectations for teaching and learning within a learning environment, regardless of level. In our case, the pedagogical framework will refer to secondary education for addressing social and political polarisation, however, it might be applicable to all levels of formal or non-formal school learning.

A pedagogical framework also reflects the values and principles of the institution and is directly linked to the learning methodologies and learning theories that the institution endorses. For the bye, Polarity project pedagogical framework, Self-Directed Learning is the overarching theoretical context.

3.1 Self-directed learning (SDL) for sustainability

The pedagogical framework in "bye, Polarity", draws on the pedagogical concepts described in section 2.1 of this context paper, under the umbrella of self-directed learning (SDL) for sustainability.

Self-directed learning is vital in today's world, as individuals must know how to take charge of their learning—to plan, develop, adapt, and change in a digital, interactive and global society. Self-directed learning can be defined as the outcome of creating an experience that empowers learners to make decisions about the information they want to become proficient in (Knowles, 1975).

While self-directed learning usually takes place in the experiential or co-curricular setting, it is necessary to introduce and develop the skills required for SDL in the didactic portion of the curriculum. This approach of gradually developing skills over time, is called scaffolding. The primary intention in SDL is for learners to take ownership of their learning, well beyond the curriculum and what a teacher might have to suggest.

Shifting away from content knowledge, learners are encouraged to acquire skill-based competencies such as problem-solving, curiosity and reflection, creativity, written and verbal communication, collaboration, accepting and applying critical feedback, applying knowledge to real-life problems, and managing and supporting constant change (Toit-Brits, 2019).

Most of the research on self-directed learning as a holistic concept, stems from the fields of adult education and studying informal and experiential learning. Research undertaken in the fields of K-12 education and psychology, focuses much less on self-direction per se. The bye, Polarity project seeks to promote self-directed learners, as they are in a position to adapt to changing social and contextual conditions (Jossberger, Brand, Gruwel, Boshuizen, & Van de Wiel, 2010; Morris, 2019), feel more empowered to take action when oppressed (Bagnall & Hodge, 2018), and are more likely to reach self-actualisation (Arnold, 2017).

Within the bye, Polarity project, self-directed learning is imperative, as it represents a process of learning that is individual, purposeful, and developmental. The emphasis on autonomy, choice, and self-actualisation, leads learners to take personal responsibility, choosing how they use information in the construction of meaning. Individuals initiate self-directed learning to find solutions to concrete goals or real-world problems. The learner assumes responsibility for setting their learning objectives, managing tasks, and controlling the methods and resources used to achieve personal goals, solve problems or meet perceived demands (Morris, 2019). Finally, self-directed learning is a vehicle for personal growth (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Individuals develop deep conceptual understanding, solve problems, and achieve goals by cyclically testing their ideas in real-world contexts, and applying personal reflection and external feedback to develop and further refine these ideas (Morris, 2019).

Self-directed learning gives learners the freedom and autonomy to choose the what, why, how, and where of their learning (Francis, 2017). The research literature reveals four dimensions of self-directed learning, namely self-regulation, motivation, personal responsibility, and autonomy.

Within the bye, Polarity project, we suggest that we approach polarisation through the self-directed learning cycle (Figure 3 below), developed by Summit Learning. Summit Learning is a research–based approach to education designed to drive student engagement, meaningful learning, and strong student–teacher relationships that prepare students for life beyond the classroom.

Figure 3. The Self-Directed Learning Cycle (Summit Learning)

In the Self-Directed Learning Cycle, teachers work with students to:

- reflect on what they've learned
- set goals for what they want to learn
- plan for how they will reach their goals
- learn new facts, skills, or ideas
- show or demonstrate their learning, then reflect

Eventually — with support — students internalise the Self-Directed Learning Cycle, giving them a foundation for success that is long term, targeting sustainability in education. According to Moore (2005), sustainability education must include multiple disciplines, collaborative, experiential, and potentially transformative. Sustainability often starts with problem solving and involves a need for interdisciplinary information and expertise. How will we make the intellectual, educational, social, and behavioral changes to move toward more sustainable living? It is important to address two fundamental needs, the first being a need for information and the second a need for transformations of thinking and behavior (Lander, 2010). Self-directed learning (SDL) is a key component of fulfilling both of these needs.

Throughout the design of the bye Polarity Pedagogical Framework, we aim to address the needs highlighted through our research for an approach that encompasses a technological component, a methodological component and a cultural component. Below we explore the main points of the proposed framework:

- Connect with the learner's experiences (get to know your learners, assess their technology familiarity level, be aware of the cultural context of learning, identify previous experiences that may hinder a learning experience)
- Personalise (making use of digital learning and blended learning, the experience can be adapted to the needs of each individual learner. The educator / facilitator can tailor important aspects of the learning experience so that each learner's voice is heard and is empowered to contribute more actively)
- Support/scaffold the learning experience (make sure appropriate and interactive resources are available to support the learning experience in terms both of equipment and of cultural context)
- Be flexible and adaptable (maintain some flexibility to accommodate for the diversity and varying levels of competency / experience that learners might be experiencing)
- Be versatile in the tools and methods used, employ digital means (it might be necessary to introduce the flipped learning classroom approach in a step-by-step induction process, utilising more conventional or familiar tools in the beginning of the learning process)
- Bridge formal and informal learning experiences, through a holistic educational approach (combine the training content with the lived experiences of participants and their existing background knowledge)
- Promote transversal/soft skills (make sure to address the knowledge and skills requirements set in the beginning of learning and fulfill the learning outcomes; the component should not overshadow the core of the learning focus)

- Active knowledge construction (recognize the learners as co-creators of the learning experience and motivate them to create the knowledge rather than just receiving it)
- Participation & Involvement (the learning experience might be unfamiliar or daunting at first, make sure to engage and involve all learners, and take corrective or support measures for learners that are struggling)
- Collaborative learning (peer to peer learning might be an excellent option for learners that are less familiar or comfortable with the power structure of a conventional classroom)
- Learning through experiences (utilise hands on learning to enable connection to references to real life and encourage memorable learning process)
- Experiment and inquiry (empower learners to explore innovative ways or methods or think outside the box, applying skills or knowledge or techniques)
- Reflective learning (motivate learners to reflect not only on the didactic content, but also the overall learning experience).
- Reinstall the joy of learning (utilize the learning experience as a way to re-introduce the joy of learning to students)
- Define general and specific curricular learning outcomes and goals, including learning scenarios relevant to polarisation.

3.2 Summary

This context paper provides the overarching framework of pedagogy for the bye, polarity project. The intention was to provide guiding principles for instructional practices to be pursued, through a creative synergy of overlapping theories and pedagogies to address the current increase in polarisation noticed in schools, and overcome the latter through dedicated, theory-informed approaches and content.

The literature review and pedagogical concepts of holistic learning, experiential learning, digital learning, blended learning and flipped learning, were explained in the context of polarisation in education, whereas self-directed learning is presented as the pedagogical framework. The ultimate goal of this context paper, relates to setting the foreground for the procedures to follow and for designing content and facilitating instruction within the bye, Polarity project. The ultimate goal should be to make use of the framework to develop the type of tools and resources to reach pupils as holistically and intensively as possible, informed by the needs and challenges identified by the target groups in the qualitative interviews undertaken.

4 References

Arnold, K. (2017) Literacy Teaching & Learning in a Nicaraguan Primary School. *Undergraduate Review, 13*(1), 31-41. Retrieved June 27, 2022, from http://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol13/iss1/6

Bagnall, R. G., & Hodge, S. (2018). Contemporary Adult and lifelong education and learning: An epistemological analysis. *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning*, 13–34. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55783-4_2

Chakravarty, S. R. (2015). Social Polarization. In *Inequality, Polarization and Conflict. Economic Studies in Inequality, Social Exclusion and Well-Being* (Vol. 12, pp. 77–95). essay, Springer. Retrieved June 25, 2022, from https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-2166-1_5.

du Toit-Brits, C. (2019). A focus on self-directed learning: The role that educators' expectations play in the enhancement of students' self-directedness. *South African Journal of Education*, *39*(2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39n2a1645

Dziuban, C.D., Moskal, P.D. & Hartman, J. (2005), Higher education, blended learning, and the generations: Knowledge is power-no more. In J. Bourne & J.C. Moore (Eds.), *Elements of quality online education: Engaging communities* (pp. 88-89). Needham, MA: Sloac-C

Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *7*(2), 95–105. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2004.02.001

Goris, K., & Van Alstein, M. (2022). *The role of education in the prevention of violent radicalisation and polarisation – Insights from the Flemish case*. Flemish Peace Institute. Retrieved June 22, 2022, from https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Analysis_Insights-Flemish-case_Education_MvA_-web.pdf.

Graham, C. R. (2006). Blended Learning Systems: Definition, Current Trends, and Future Directions. In *The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, local designs* (pp. 3–21). Pfeiffer.

Groen, J. E., & Kawalilak, C. (2016). *Pathways of Adult Learning: Professional and Education narratives*. Langara College.

Heinze, A. & Procter, C.T. (2004). Reflections on the use of blended learning. Salford: University of Salford. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/1658

Jossberger, H., Brand-Gruwel, S., Boshuizen, H., & van de Wiel, M. (2010). The challenge of self-directed and self-regulated learning in Vocational Education: A theoretical analysis and synthesis of requirements. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, *62*(4), 415–440. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2010.523479

Jusoff, K., & Khodabandelou, R. (2009). Preliminary study on the role of social presence in blended learning environment in higher education. *International Education Studies*, *2*(4). https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v2n4p79

Knowles, M. (1975). Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers Malcolm Knowles New York: Association Press, 1975. 135 pp., Paperbound. *Group & Organization Studies*, *2*(2), 256–257.

Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *4*(2), 193–212. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2005.17268566

Lander, L. (2010). 24th International Self-Directed Learning Symposium. In *Self-Directed Learning and Sustainability Education: Can Self-Directed Learning Save the Planet?*

Moore, J. (2005). Is higher education ready for transformative learning? *Journal of Transformative Education*, *3*(1), 76–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344604270862

Morris, T. H. (2019). Self-directed learning: A fundamental competence in a rapidly changing world. *International Review of Education*, *65*(4), 633–653. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-019-09793-2

Nasri, N.M., & Mansor, A.N. (2016). Teacher Educators' Perspectives on the Sociocultural Dimensions of Self-Directed Learning. *Creative Education, 07*, 2755-2773.\

Norwich University Online. (2017). *The 4 components of the experiential learning cycle*. Retrieved June 15, 2022, from https://online.norwich.edu/academic-programs/resources/4-components-experiential-learning-cycle

Porter, W. W., Graham, C. R., Spring, K. A., & Welch, K. R. (2014). Blended learning in Higher Education: Institutional Adoption and implementation. *Computers & Education*, *75*, 185–195. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.02.011

Savage, S., Oliver, E., Gordon, E., & Tutton, L. (2021). Addressing Social Polarization Through Critical Thinking: Theoretical Application in the "Living Well With Difference" Course in Secondary Schools in England. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *9*(2), 490-505. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.7037

Short, M. N. (2018). Technology and Digital Content: Promoting Learner-Centered Pedagogy. In J. Keengwe (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Digital Content, Mobile Learning, and Technology Integration Models in Teacher Education* (pp. 227-243). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2953-8.ch012

Valentine, A., Gemin, B., Vashaw, L., Watson, J., Harrington, C., & LeBlanc, E. (2019). Digital Learning in Rural K–12 Settings: A Survey of Challenges and Progress in the United States. In T. Heafner, R. Hartshorne, & R. Thripp (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Emerging Practices and Methods for K-12 Online and Blended Learning* (pp. 100-133). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-8009-6.ch005\

Vovides, Y., & Lemus, L. R. (2019). The evolving landscape of instructional design in higher education. *Optimizing Instructional Design Methods in Higher Education*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-4975-8.ch001

bye, Polarity

Thinking beyond Polarity

for Europe united in diversity

www.byepolarity.eu

https://www.facebook.com/bye-Polarity-103509115621549

https://www.instagram.com/bye_polarity/

BORG MISTELBACH

SYNTHESIS CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

FUTURE BALLOONS we take you higher!

bit schulungscenter member of bit group

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union