

European Dialogue Lab

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SUMMARY

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Introduction

The third and final European Dialogue Lab (EDL) in the Agile EDU project took place on 19 September 2025. Hosted by the project coordinator, European Schoolnet, the half-day online event brought together 33 participants from a variety of backgrounds.

The aims of the EDL were twofold:

- To discuss recommendations arising from the project activities to enable policy makers to promote meaningful and ethical use of education data for education improvement;
- To identify and share examples and good practices to illustrate and strengthen the recommendations.

Prior to the dialogue lab, participants were provided with the draft recommendations and background information about the dialogue lab approach and the Agile EDU project. They were asked in advance to choose two of the four themes in the recommendations for discussion in small groups at the event:

- Infrastructure, standardisation, security and data quality
- Ethical considerations and transparency in using education data
- Towards a school data strategy and culture
- Professional development and data literacy.

This summary is based on plenary presentations, transcripts of recordings of discussion groups, feedback from rapporteurs and contributions to the conferencing chat feature. Thanks are due to all who contributed experiences, fresh ideas and recommendations to the discussions.

Opening plenary

Patricia Wastiau (European Schoolnet) welcomed participants and explained that the Agile EDU project, launched in 2023, has examined the responsible use of education data across three dimensions: regulation/rights/privacy, teaching and learning, and governance. Using an iterative methodology combining research, practitioner insights and policy analysis, the project has produced nine case studies, 18 practitioner learning stories, three annual policy surveys and a MOOC for educators, as well as two expert workshops and country and European dialogue labs for exchanging views and discussing initiatives. Increasingly linked to debates on Artificial Intelligence (AI), the project stresses the importance of transparency, privacy and trust while ensuring that education stakeholders remain in control of technological developments. Today's discussions will help refine the draft recommendations to guide EU-level action on learning data for the common good.

Professor Kay Livingston (Glasgow University) outlined the dialogue lab approach. Dialogue Labs provide structured spaces for meaningful discussion, not superficial exchange. They bring together

stakeholders from diverse contexts — policy, EdTech, classrooms, municipalities — to explore education data issues from multiple perspectives. Dialogue lab sessions, typically full-day in-country or half-day online, combine small-group work with plenaries, fostering dialogue and idea generation. Contributions are recorded anonymously to ensure voices are heard while protecting participants. The aim is both to listen and to act: identifying gaps, opportunities, challenges and concrete next steps. Today's dialogue lab focuses on refining draft recommendations arising from previous rounds of country dialogue labs, with participants' expertise and insights expected to strengthen proposals for advancing education policy and practice at EU level.

Kay Livingston then outlined the first two discussion group themes. The first concerns infrastructure — standardization across municipalities, countries and systems, ensuring data security, quality and interoperability. Participants were asked to propose EU, national, industry or local steps to overcome obstacles, as fragmentation remains a major challenge. The second theme focuses on ethics and transparency in educational data use, a recurring concern across countries. A key question is how to embed transparency and trust conditions at the design stage of digital tools and throughout their lifecycle, involving all relevant actors. In four groups, participants were asked to briefly introduce themselves and then discuss these themes, prompted by a reflection question, aiming to ensure the diverse perspectives shape actionable recommendations for education data governance. Each group had a rapporteur and a moderator.

Participants were then automatically assigned to one of two groups to discuss their chosen topic and moved to breakout rooms for the first of two 30-minute discussion sessions.

Discussion group session 1

Infrastructure, standardisation, security and data quality

Reflection Question 1: *What are your suggestions regarding steps that should be taken (by EU, government, industry, local authorities etc.) to overcome obstacles and enable more interoperability across systems?*

Group 1

- The recommendations should recognise differences between countries. In decentralised systems such as Sweden, Belgium Flemish Community and Switzerland for example, government has no mandate to impose standards or interoperability on schools and municipalities, making change a slow process. In Sweden administrative data are standardised but there is no obligation to provide it. In Flanders schools feel that they own the data and it is for them to develop and apply standards.
- The importance of engaging stakeholders and public authorities in discussions was underlined. It is a challenge to raise interest among some stakeholders, including schools themselves, where data may not be a priority.

- The fact that systems used in education are not built for education makes it difficult to design systems that meet educational needs (e.g., to promote wellbeing) and match education's ways of working. Algorithms are developed by industry but used by the education sector.
- The end goal of data collection and use is missing in the draft recommendations. Data that are useful nationally or for the system vendor may not be useful for teachers. It is therefore important to constantly ask why data is being collected and what is it to be used for. "There is so much data gathering, but no one's using it," as one group member said, is data useful for the teacher or just more effort with no added value? Systems should require as little extra work as possible for teachers and be designed to minimise data entry errors.
- Recommendations should recognise that standardisation and interoperability issues have been discussed for 20-30 years (e.g., learning management systems in the early 2000s) and not solved, but that lessons from the past can be learned. There is long experience in developing standard data models to describe schools and students and to map processes. The issues have not been solved in the past and are more complex now, calling for a recognition of the difficulty of the challenge and sustained efforts over time.
- Other sectors, especially health, offer lessons for education, in particular for data modelling and how AI might impact on systems, possibly making life more rather than less complicated.
- Political changes can have profound effects on education, for example, shifting from top-down to network-based governance or using data provided on trust for government control or commercial profit.

Group 2

- The recommendations should include the need to justify interoperability, as it is not always clear why it is desirable. What are the benefits and needs? The tech industry in Sweden produced a [ten-page report](#) setting out the rationale for action which has had an impact.
- The recommendations could be clearer and more categorical about the responsibilities of the different actors and their accountability, and stress that responsibility needs to be given and people nominated.
- It should be acknowledged that politics can impede standardisation and interoperability, for example, regions may not wish to be compared or ranked: "Datafication is not a vote winner and is very complex politically."
- Systems used in education are driven by business to generate profits, not to benefit teachers or learners. Industry resists any pressure to alter their business model.
- The recommendations should underline the importance of specifying rules about data access, sharing and use. There are risks as well as benefits as datafication increases. For example, in the UK the national pupil database, the biggest in the world, has been offered to third parties and subsequently misused, e.g., to target immigrant families for deportation, sold on for AI companies to use for data harvesting and training, or allowing pupil data to be accessed years

later by a prospective employer. The benefits, on the other hand, include using datasets to analyse attendance and intervene at an early stage to improve school attendance.

- Some principles of delivery should be formulated when creating interoperable systems. Governments are 'not very good' at creating big tech systems, and the private sector is often better, but they need to be given very specific principles of delivery.

Plenary

In a plenary session, chaired by Kay Livingston, rapporteurs highlighted key points made in the breakout groups and in an open discussion on the first topic, the following points were made:

- Making policy is a complex area: "You don't win elections on interoperability". It's important that the recommendations show clearly and in an easily understandable way what the problem is, how it can be solved and what value can be created. It is important to talk about policy responsibility because otherwise it is easy to dodge because it's a difficult area.
- Economists should attempt to assess the cost of the flow of data from our public, our children at school into business and estimate what would be a fair return from business to schools.

Ethical considerations and transparency in using education data

Reflection Question 2: What are the conditions needed to increase transparency and trust at the design stage of digital resources/platforms? How can these conditions be integrated at different stages of the process? (applied by any actors e.g., ed- tech providers, policy makers, practitioners)

Group 3

- The design stage concerns not only developers but other stakeholders. The recommendations should state specifically who should do what.
- The recommendations should recognise that digital ecologies comprise layers of apps, tools and services designed years ago and built up over years. Therefore, "it's hard to be an agent in that kind of process".
- Acknowledge that there is scope for governments to act differently. Governments in Europe have taken different positions vis-à-vis Big Tech companies, e.g., Google Workplace for Education, from unquestioning acceptance of its terms to negotiated deals and total refusal. Not one of five AI education apps (e.g., CoPilot) respects GDPR, in particular by sending data to USA. Moreover, laws are not enforced and sanctions not applied.
- The design issue is more than data protection and privacy, it is about an ethical perspective on human rights, information systems ethics and national education policy. Designers need to understand these ethics and need guidelines. This has costs.
- Learner autonomy should be respected and the benefits for them should be at the forefront.
- Granular as well as broad macro recommendations are needed because that is where there are likely to be disagreements and a need for informed debate.
- There is a risk of non-ethical use of data, for example to remove a child from school on the basis of data predictions so that the statistics look good rather than giving them additional support.

- It is often the case that only the commercial provider has access to data and, despite laws, they may misuse the data for purposes other than those for which it was collected, e.g., research, product development.
- There is perhaps too much focus in Europe on data protection and privacy and not enough on biased algorithms that inhibit inclusion for example.
- Only when rights are enshrined in law do they have power: “It's a struggle for underfunded schools and underpowered governments to address these monolithic companies and the entirely opaque and often non-compliant ways in which they define education and indeed data and safety and the rest of it, and they are very, very far from learner centered”.
- Teachers are the gatekeepers of ethical practices in schools. Their input at the design stage should cover not only usability and pedagogical aspects but also ethical concerns, e.g., does the platform reinforce inequality?

Group 4

- The recommendations should encourage people to challenge the value proposition of a tool, to ask what its added value is and what evidence there is to justify why data need to be collected.
- There should be more clarity on potential risks and misuses and regulation by administrations or institutions, accompanied by certification to ensure that tools meet standards and a framework with which to use the tool for all the stakeholders involved.
- Impact assessment should be designed in from the start, “so that once it's rolled out, we don't have any surprises and new information that comes about because we didn't do the previous field work”. Robust data protection should be designed in.
- Disadvantaged students might not be taken into consideration given that algorithms “love to profile, to be very generic leading to risks that disadvantaged students may be forgotten”.
- There is a lot of technical jargon in this area, but “more transparency does not necessarily lead to more clarity”. The focus should be on making information accessible, taking into consideration the level of understanding of users and on developing the critical thinking and digital literacy of actors including parents, young people and teachers.

Plenary:

After rapporteurs' feedback from the two groups discussing the second topic, the following points were made:

- If trust is used as an indicator that all is well, some scepticism is needed too. In demonstrably fair systems trust automatically ensues. However blind trust is not the be all and end all; it can be a consequence of opaque systems where people feel powerless: “Kids tell me they trust Google and Amazon because they're so powerful”.
- One possibility is to share data in a 'data sandbox' (see [the report by UNICEF](#)), making it available for further use by researchers and developers and to stimulate competition in the sector. The focus is often on data collected by the public sector, but industry collects a lot. In this way “we

can learn something from all this information rather than a company keeping them for themselves”.

- Trust is good but so are empowering ownership of data and agency.

Discussion group session 2

After a short break, Kay Livingston introduced the final two questions to be discussed in the second 30-minute session.

Reflection question 3 is about moving towards a school data strategy and culture. When the reports that came from the cross-country dialogue labs were analysed, they focus on the strategy needed, how teachers have different expertise and use data in different ways, and how you build a culture that has that data literacy built in. The question is therefore how can schools be supported in changing from where they are now to having a comprehensive and up-to-date culture that really meets that sense of data use and how can they bring that strategy into place?

The fourth question is about professional development: what are the knowledge and skills needed for teachers? This includes talking about skills needed for students to adopt purposeful, ethical and transparent data practices. In what ways is this different from current practices? Where are the gaps? Where can we help move schools forward from where they are? What are current and desirable future practices?

Participants were reallocated to four new groups, again based on their preferences, to discuss the two questions.

Towards a school data strategy and culture

Reflection Question 3: How can schools be supported in changing from where they are now to a comprehensive and up-to-date data culture and strategy?

Group 5

- Data culture is complex and diverse across countries, schools and individuals, and is shaped by non-educational cultural factors. Therefore, there are different expectations and different practices. It takes time for a data culture to develop, and a range of cultural and structural obstacles to overcome: “it’s not something that will happen overnight”.
- Data set ups in schools tend to be ad hoc, specific to their context and shaped by the patchwork of platforms, tools and services acquired over time.
- There is a wide range of teacher – and pupil - interest in data and data use. It is difficult to get policy makers to grasp this diversity and the complexity of the issue.
- Data strategies are often developed by a small group in schools. Interest in building a data culture can be enhanced by showing data’s usability, how it can be used in teaching and networking

between schools to share ideas and issues. A useful way forward is to link data culture with a particular challenge faced by teachers such as reading skills.

- Tools developed in Germany and Switzerland [a report Data Usage Policy - Development Approaches was submitted after the dialogue lab, in [German](#) and [French](#)] enable teachers to self-assess their data competence and level of data maturity. Results are displayed in a spider diagram showing strengths and weaknesses and personalised professional development resources are highlighted that can increase data competence.
- Competence in data security, data leaks and cybersecurity is important, but so is realising that data is only a partial representation of the real world. In the UK, governmental data culture is quite punitive, all about performance measurement and accountability, holding schools to account for pupils' performance and, "in the worst cases", closing down those schools. It also leads schools to focus only on data for which they are accountable, reading and mathematics for example, and neglecting subjects which do not fall into that category, arts and languages for example. This leads to a particular kind of data culture which is concerned less with accurate data than with 'gaming' the data to secure funding or support.
- The recommendations should talk about data cultures in the plural rather than a single data culture as there is no single monolithic data culture accepted by all.

Group 6

- The recommendations should suggest the value of learning from business. Schools vary enormously in their understanding and expertise (legal, technical, educational) about data and many are getting left behind, but business may have this expertise and be able to help. In some cases, decisions could be made not at school but at higher levels: municipality, region, national, but they must leave room for schools' agency, including parents' and children's.
- Data culture is about community and agency more than process; people must feel trust and be informed and involved.
- Value should be considered, the usability of data, "What does the school gain from all of this effort at capacity building and determination?" The "unmet challenge" exists of data coming back to school and ensuring that it benefits the school and the decisions it makes. In France there is an open data portal, and collaborative partnerships are built around it so that the data collected within the school then benefits the wider community.
- Children should be re-centered in the debate: as learners, agents, as citizens in a conversation that can often quickly become top down about what states, schools and adults should do. Keep in mind that children are part of this community and culture, agents in their own right, "after all, it is their data".

Plenary

Following the two rapporteurs' summaries of their groups' discussions, one participant suggested that the recommendations should outline what data means to the different stakeholders in education, stating that the value of data for government (e.g., performance metrics) is very different from its value for schools (e.g., pedagogical insights, professional development).

Professional development

Reflection Question 4: What are the knowledge and skills needed for teachers (students?) to adopt purposeful, ethical and transparent data practices with data? In what ways is this different from current practices?

Group 7

- Current professional development focuses on the technical side of data rather than pedagogy, change management and securing buy in.
- Understanding the value of data for teachers themselves is the key to bringing about change: how data can help them better understand their learners and meaningfully personalise and differentiate teaching.
- Professional development should aim not to present data as something distinct and new burden but integrated into what is already being done, thinking about it specifically in relation to teachers' own classroom, how it benefits their students and how it helps them to improve their learning. Training must therefore be, above all, practical, seeing how a tool can be used, how it benefits learning.
- Ethical training too should not be an add-on but integrated and related to practical training.
- Training, beginning in initial teacher education to build confidence from the start, should include talking to children and parents about the value of data, not constantly using the word 'data' as it sounds technical but using simple language, e.g., 'using information to help the child'.
- There should be professional development tailored for school leaders, covering topics related to their role, e.g., building a school data culture.
- Students should learn how to understand and design their own learning experiences to build their critical skills around data.
- Edtech companies should be involved in professional development, not only as providers but also as learners, understanding better the needs of education and teachers in a mutual learning opportunity.
- Professional development is needed for those responsible for procurement of tools and platforms, often not at school level but at municipality or national level, in order better to understand school needs.

Group 8

- As teachers are now more aware of data security issues and practices, the skills debate should move on to how to interpret and use data pedagogically, including critical thinking about tools used and the purpose of using data. The shift should be from teachers as passive users of data to teachers using data actively and critically. In Norway, despite the existence of tried and tested tools, teachers are still "grabbing" tools, including AI tools, that harvest student data they found without thinking about what happens to the data and what the tools are doing to users, their digital footprint for example.

- Teachers (and schools) start from different standpoints. It is important how professional development is configured and how it is offered and that is a responsibility of training providers. Professional development should be tailored to the age taught. Using data in upper secondary level does not require the same skills and competences as in primary education; the pedagogy is different, therefore training on how to use data and incorporate it in teaching also differs.
- The issue of having equal access to professional development and training opportunities needs to be addressed, for instance for teachers in rural schools or in disadvantaged urban settings.
- Ideally professional development should be on a just in time, as needed, basis, and on the job, in the school rather than decontextualised. Some ethical principles are very abstract and are better explained in real life contexts, for example, what is the impact of data protection in this situation? Professional development should cover three levels: the knowledge and skills to use a tool, how to use it for educational benefits, and how to use it ethically, transparently and responsibly.
- Students are the data subjects therefore they should be given opportunities to be heard.

Plenary

After the rapporteurs' summaries of group discussions on the fourth topic, a participant suggested that data literacy and AI literacy should be part of the school curriculum because students' data literacy can benefit their self-regulated capacity building, enabling them to understand better their own learning and design more accurate learning experiences for themselves.

Roger Blamire (European Schoolnet) concluded the dialogue lab, reflecting on how discussions had moved on since the first one almost two years previously and on emerging themes from today's exchanges. He thanked participants for their engagement in the productive discussions and in shaping the project recommendations and invited them to follow the project as it approaches its conclusion at the EMINENT conference in December 2025.

Implications of the discussions for the recommendations and guidelines

- The recommendations and guidelines can be improved to be more standalone documents. Concepts such as 'interoperability' or 'data culture' are complex and may not be clear to all readers. It is necessary to check that interoperability is not used interchangeably with 'data exchange'. E.g., researchers, local authorities and Edtech can exchange data without large improvements to the technical infrastructure of data holders in the public and private sector. Infrastructure on the other hand, implies the use of data standards and APIs.
- Participants suggested that the recommendations should define the actors and their responsibilities. The recommendations could use a more active language, e.g., 'ethical data use practices should be in place at design stage' vs. 'when developing their products, EdTech

developers should foresee ethical data use elements, while education authorities should require these elements/standards as a condition before the product can be sold to schools’.

- The guidelines talk about ‘data culture’ without defining what is meant. The term could be defined from the point of view of Agile EDU; a quick rough example:
 - ‘To have a growth mindset linked to the belief that organisations and professionals can learn and improve by looking at systematically collected, qualitative/quantitative, digital and non-digital data and not only by reflection based on professional judgement and intuition. Systematic data collection means that any school data is collected with a set of criteria, having in mind clear questions to address, and not just doing a post hoc analysis on data that already exists. Having a data culture also means to know that data does not perfectly reflect reality, but it can still provide information that helps professional growth.’
- A recurring theme is that pressures of accountability lead to data practices that are ultimately not useful to schools (e.g., see example of the punitive approach in the UK). And the industry is reluctant to share their data because it can be used to judge the value of their product. It seems like there needs to be an in-between scenario of some minimal accountability, without punitive approaches. The recommendations could address this point: ‘how to convince all stakeholders that data collection and exchange can only be meaningful without a policy of strong accountability and performativity imposed on schools and EdTech?’
- Another recurring topic is to give more voice to the students about the use of their data by EdTech. This could be addressed more in the recommendations and guidelines.
- This is also a recurring theme: ‘Edtech companies should be involved in professional development, not only as providers but also as learners, understanding better the needs of education and teachers in a mutual learning opportunity.’ – We could perhaps link to the EmpowerEd project, which linked EdTech developers with teachers who act as ‘pedagogical mentors’.

Annex: Dialogue Lab Participants

#	Name	Organisation
1.	Demetrios Sampson	University of Piraeus
2.	Alexander Patrick Green	Future Education Institute Modena (FEM)
3.	David Schiller	University of Applied Science of the Grisons
4.	Jannie Jeppesen	European Edtech Alliance/Swedish Edtech Industry
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6.	Martina Weber	Educa
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