

Skills for Professional Development

17th November 2011, 2.15-4 pm

Facilitated by Denise Shannon & Siobhan Wallace

The objective of this workshop was to provide an opportunity to reflect and discuss how participating in European projects (Leonardo, Comenius, Grundtvig) OR attending training, conferences, job shadowing, work placements in another European country, facilitates ones professional development. Participant discussed the impact and value of professional development occurring in the European context through mobility.

The workshop commenced on time with 14 participants present. The participants split into 3 groups with an average of 4/5 per group. The workshop began with a brief introduction by the facilitators to the workshop theme and an explanation of the planned activities. Each table or island had an islander/facilitator to lead out the discussions. The islanders were all briefed in advance about their role.

The groups began by reflecting on the word mobility and what it meant to them. Each table had photographs which were used as a stimulus for discussions. The members of the groups each chose a photograph which to them most represented their understanding of mobility and explained why to the group. This was a useful exercise with which to commence discussions and also provided participants with the opportunity to introduce themselves, their organisations and how they were involved in LLP activities. The participants were from a wide range of backgrounds with all sectors of education represented from school education, vocational training and adult education.

Following these discussions each of the 3 groups focused on 3 themes related to quality & value; professional networks and teaching & learning methods. Each group had 15 minutes at each island to focus on key questions related to the themes. The groups moved after 15 minutes to other islands to focus on new questions, one islander remained present at each island to update subsequent groups.

The following was reported back to the plenary as being the outcomes of the discussions on the 3 themes:

Theme 1 Quality & Value

Q1. What has been the benefit to you professionally of engaging in a mobility activity (tangible and intangible questions)?

- Upskilling – teaching, language, creativity, methodologies
- Motivation – enthusiasm
- Research – awareness, comparative activities
- Reflection – observe good practice

Q2. How has this experience influenced other parts of your work?

- “measure of quality”
- Language & cultural awareness

- Transferability of skills to other parts of work
- Upskilling – ICT, presentation skills

Q3. How has it impacted on your organisation?

- Not just management but all staff
- Enthusiasm/motivation
- Managing change
- Shared practices, contribution to practice
- Reflection, self-evaluation & respect
- Mobility does not have to be physical
- Reciprocity of learning experience

Theme 2 Professional Networks

Q1. What kinds of opportunities are presented by having access to professional networks through mobility activities at a European level?

Q2. What do they look like – what happens in this space?

Q3. How do you communicate? And how often do you communicate?

Formal:

- Organised/managed with a theme or focus. May take the form of events, seminars, conferences. Allow for sharing of ideas and best practice. Also allow for discussion of roles and identities of professions. There is often academic input and issues around language, terminology and definitions may arise.

Informal

- Emerge from projects or training activities. May have contact with 'a friend abroad'. Develop relationships and a feeling of connectedness. They are often loose, sporadic. They are harder to maintain due to their informal nature and lack of focus, organisation.

Learning:

- Access to real resources and local information
- Cultural insight
- Sharing resources, ideas, problem solving
- Innovation
- Encouraging/motivating
- Space to ask questions that you might not ask locally
- Brainstorming
- How to become unstuck if you have a problem

'Nothing beats face to face communication'

'Friendship acts as a grease'

Theme 3 Teaching & Learning Methods

Q1 How has participation in mobility activities contribute to your teaching and learning methods?

- Exposure to new teaching methodologies
- Exposure to new cultures and languages
- How ICT can be used to support T & L

- Sharing of knowledge and experience
- Transfer of knowledge back to Ireland/peers
- Validation of practice in Ireland
- Helped to develop a more open minded sharing culture

Q2 What was the influence/impact on systems/on delivery?

- Changed how ICT was viewed and understood
- Helped change practice
- Built confidence
- Informed programme development
- Offered opportunities to share practice

Q3.What was new? What was the WOW Factor?

- ICT
- Facilities
- Some parts of different cultures
- How some schools supported pupils, parents (crèche) & the community

All participants at the workshop participated very well in the discussions. The split into 3 islands with a small number of people at each island gave great space for people to speak in small groups. As the groups moved around the islands the discussions progressed. Having one islander remain to at each island to update subsequent groups was a wonderful way for people to hear what went on previously.

The use of photospeak at the beginning of the workshop was very useful and helped stimulate discussions and focus people on the overall theme of the workshop.

The mix of sectors also worked very well and allowed for discussions to take place at a different level.