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Country: Italy

Reflection on my experience and learning

Reflective Journal

This Reflective Journal is a useful means for your **professional development**. Please take a moment to reflect personally on the programme and write a few lines every day on your thoughts.

Possible areas of reflection: my *professional development* today, *cultural understanding*, *participation* in and understanding of *debates, talks, visits to schools, sharing of expertise* and building of *future partnerships* (Dissemination Strategies), *European Dimension*, etc.

Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where does your journey start? - Greatest challenges as an educator? - How will you incorporate what you have learned? - What are your goals for this programme?
Cultural Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What you have learned about the host culture. - Communication with the locals and other participants. - Cultural differences between Ireland and your country.
Language Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change of perspective (teacher/learner) - Self-expression in a group setting - Communicating in a foreign country
Dissemination of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How will you share what you have learned? - With whom? - Conversations with colleagues
Meaningful Moments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Something specific that affected you on a personal / professional level? - Photos that you took - Music or sounds that you heard

If you decide to use an online platform for your journal please paste the link here:

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Sunday:

The first day in Helsinki combined with the celebration of Vappu Day. I found out that it is the important celebration for Finns because, besides celebrating workers, Finnish people also celebrate the beginning of spring after the long winter and the imminent end of school. My Italian colleagues and I were overwhelmed by the cheerfulness of this people. After a lunch at the characteristic fish market along the harbor, I reached the course location. There one of the organizers welcomed us creating an engaging atmosphere. All the participants from 11 European countries introduced themselves. Immediately the organizers encouraged us to interact by creating mixed groups in order to start creating productive intercultural exchanges also in view of future contacts for student exchanges. The first impact was not easy but I am sure that my communication skills will improve as time goes by.

We then listened to a lecture about Finnish society, culture and history. I found out that there was strong Swedish influence during the Middle Age and later, during the Russian Empire, Finland achieved independence in 1917. The history of Suomenlinna Fortress impressed me and I would like to visit it in the next few days.

Monday

This morning the alarm clock went off very early because I had to get to the school "Lisviniemi koulu" in Espoo. I was very curious to see for myself what I had read and seen in documentaries.

Before entering the school I noticed a large playground where many children were playing happily. As soon as we entered, I sensed a lot of silence. Every space was well organized and functional for learning. Even the corridors were set up with round tables and comfortable chairs to encourage work in small groups. The director welcomed us and spoke to us in a simple and direct way about the organization of the school. They focus a lot on relationships, on creating a serene environment in which children feel free to express themselves. The children seemed to me very autonomous, they are given a lot of trust. In the thematic classrooms, rich in materials, the children learn to sew, to work with wood, to weave with a loom. In the well-equipped classrooms, there was no shortage of electronic tools with which the children worked in small groups to complete projects. By the "Education system" seminar, the organization of the Finnish educational system was illustrated. There is a free and compulsory basic education for students from 7 to 16 years old by comprehensive schools.

In order to provide people an equal access to schooling, the Finnish education features a free and equitable system under which education is free from pre-primary level to higher education. In addition to tuition-free education, students in pre-primary and basic education are also entitled to free textbooks, daily meal and transport. I like the idea of schools that all offer the same learning and development opportunities to their students and that, not accepting private funding, are not in competition with each other but in collaboration.

Tuesday:

This morning we heard a Finnish teacher talk about some strategies for teaching foreign languages. In the first grade in the Finnish school there is a lot of focus only on comprehension and not on writing foreign languages and the fact that it is more important how and not how much. Also in Italy we have this kind of approach using songs and games for foreign language learning. It was fun to be involved in games for learning numbers in Finnish.

In the first field learning project, "Pictures of Finnish Society in Helsinki," I learned about the most important places in Helsinki and a lot of information about the country's history. I learned how much Sweden influenced Finland, which is why Finland remains a bilingual society to this day. In Senate Square there is a statue of Alexander II, Russian tsar who ruled in Finland, in recognition of his work in the country, since he ended many conflicts and granted more freedom to the country.

Wednesday:

Today we took classes at the University of Economics. Teacher Marja Merikanto showed how important it is to teach mathematics using concrete methods to develop mathematical and logical thinking and also how using different tools and environments reinforces learning. It is also important to create a positive environment where the child feels free to experiment and also to make mistakes. One game that I will definitely offer in my classes is "The Thrashgame" a game about the ascending or descending order of numbers.

Teacher Maija Salaspuro told us about the "Team class," a strategy to enable greater pupil involvement as required by the Finnish National Curriculum. This team, consisting of the teacher and four pupils, can for example plan weekly playtime, plan a new seating order, projects, create and implement their own ideas, organize parties for important events, plan with the teacher how to study, learn, and evaluate different subjects. In this way children take more responsibility, feel that the teacher cares and has time to listen, feel their importance, uniqueness. Afterwards we worked on the Learning Portofolio with our Spanish colleagues. Our educational systems are very similar, which is why in analyzing the Finnish educational system we were fascinated by the same aspects: the integrated approach, pupil involvement, joy in learning, the importance of self-assessment, pupil autonomy and responsibility, and trust.

Thursday:

This morning we listened to teachers from Secondary and Upper Secondary Schools. In the afternoon it was very interesting to visit the quaint town of Porvoo. It is one of the oldest settlements in Finland, and the traditional architecture of its charming old town on the lake is a sight not to be missed. Very characteristic are the red huts overlooking the river, dating back three hundred years, originally used as warehouses. The Cathedral, which is located in the heart of the Old Town, is a very beautiful building. The river, which freezes over in winter and on which the inhabitants move as if it were a road, is one of the reasons I would go back to Finland.

Friday:

Today we crossed the Gulf of Finland to Tallin, a beautiful medieval city. It was nice to find ourselves in the midst of medieval life, among craft stores, churches and original stone buildings, which have not been scratched by time and history.

This is why the Old Town of Tallinn has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The houses painted in pastel colors and with pointed roofs, the Town Hall building, and the old Pharmacy made this a magical visit. The tour guide also told us about how Estonia is a highly digitized country and how schools have been ready to meet the digital challenge imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

2 stars and a wish

Please share 2 aspects of the course that have fulfilled your goals and 1 that you will continue working on.



I am happy that now I know...
more about the Finnish educational system and new teaching strategies.



I have been inspired and plan to...
experiment with new strategies that will make my teaching more exciting and engaging.



I would like to know more about...
formative and final assessment in basic education.

A final overview of my experience in this European training programme:

This European training program has left me with a lot of ideas that I will try to disseminate so that a change, albeit small, can take place in the way I teach. I realized that it is important to breaking down internal boundaries in order to share European values. In the same way I have to improve my communication skills in order to create many more connections and create dissemination. I will disseminate through my classes, social media (school facebook account, official school website), meetings with colleagues.

Thank you!!

Well done on completing your Reflective Journal.