

Joint staff training mobility

Intermediate report

Based on <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Belgium-Flemish-Community:Overview> and your own experience during the 2-week job shadowing mobility, you must have a good understanding of the German educational system in general and the one at Miniemeninstituut in particular.

1. Please compare the Belgian system in general and the Miniemeninstituut organization in particular to the situation in your country and your school.

Comparison of school systems

The school system in Flanders is rather different from the Italian one.

The first difference regards the numbers of school years: 15 in Italy, 14 in Flanders.

In Italy, we have four grades of school: pre-school (age 3-5), primary school (age 6-10), first grade-secondary school (age 11-13) and second grade-secondary school (age 14-19). In Flanders they have three grades: kleuterschool (age 2,5-5), lagere school (age 6-12) and secundair onderwijs.

Italian pupils give exams only at the end of secondary school both first and second grade, but during the school year, they have a lot of oral and written tests in all the subjects. Exams are organized by the ministry of education and are the same in the whole country and in all school.

Belgian pupils, once they go to secondary school, give exams three times per year: before Christmas, before Easter and before summer. Exams are organized by the teachers and are different from school to school.

As it's a bilingual country in Flanders they start studying French at primary school (lagere school), but they start studying English only in the second year of secondary school (secundair onderwijs)... incredible!

In Italy, pupils start with English at pre-school... then how come do they know English so much better in Flanders? Is it thanks to the geographical position? So more exchanges and more chances to practise it? Is it because of TV? In Italy everything is dubbed, in Belgium you can watch a lot in the original language. And considering that young people in Flanders don't know French very well (even though it's a French-Dutch speaking country and they start studying French at primary school) I must believe that it's thanks to TV if they know English better than us (besides the fact that Dutch is a Germanic language and very similar to English)!!! So does the school system have any effect on the pupils' knowledge of a foreign language? Or does that knowledge depend on something else?

Another difference consists in the way teachers are hired: in Flanders the headmaster decides after a job interview. No application forms to be filled every three years, no list with positions in the list given according to work experience and qualifications... A bit shocking at first! Indeed it seems easier, but...

Strip to Identity

Comparison of school systems

you must be lucky enough to know that there's a vacancy, then you write your motivation letter and you send it with your curriculum. Then maybe the headmaster calls you for an interview and if he likes you he'll offer you the job. And what if you're an excellent teacher, but not good at selling yourself?

In Italy there's a local education authority which gives you a place in a list according to how much work experience and qualifications you have. Then all the headmasters must communicate the vacancies to this authority and before the school year starts this authority calls the teachers to offer them a job. The first in the list can choose among all the availabilities, the last gets what's left.

The last big difference is about diversity at school. Italy has an inclusive type of education: foreigners who don't know our language, pupils with learning disorders and pupils with disabilities both severe and not are in the same school and in the same classes like the normal and native pupils.

Even though things are changing toward a more inclusive system, Flanders still have a parallel school system: special schools for pupils with severe disabilities and also for pupils with learning disorders and the mainstream education. They also have a type of schools for those foreigners who don't know at all Dutch when they arrive. So these pupils are sent to OKAN where they stay a couple of years during which they are taught the language they need to follow lessons at the mainstream schools.

That's more or less the biggest difference between the Italian and Flemish education system.

Strip to Identity

2. Please describe what your staff training mobility consisted of. Which activities did you do?

Your activities

During my mobility I have done different activities:

- 1) I visited a few special schools for pupils with severe disabilities; I interviewed teachers, headmasters and people working for agencies which cooperate with schools. I also had to read a lot of material about the Flemish education system.
- 2) I job shadowed a teacher in a special school for pupils with a severe disability.
- 3) I job shadowed a SEN teacher who worked in a mainstream school.
- 4) I wrote a detailed report about the difference between the two education systems.
- 5) I made a list of possible strategies to be used to improve pupils' reading ability.
- 6) I taught basic Italian to pupils who had to leave for a mobility experience in Italy and I used the flipped classroom method.
- 7) I job shadowed teachers in a special school for pupils with learning disorders.
- 8) I wrote a detailed report about the special strategies used in the special school for pupils with learning disorders.
- 9) I visited an OKAN school where teachers teach foreign pupils the level of Dutch they need to go to the mainstream education.
- 10) I wrote a report about OKAN.
- 11) I did some co-teaching with two English teachers of the coordinating school.

3. Which activities did you find most useful and why?

Most useful activities

So far job shadowing the SEN teachers in the special school and in the school for pupils with learning disabilities have been the most useful activities. On one hand because I learnt a few new strategies and on the other hand because I experienced another type of organization. The Italian system is for sure better as regards the integration of pupils with disorders and disabilities (even though sometimes I have the feeling that their integration is only temporary and that it ends with the end of school), but as regards what you can really teach to these pupils then maybe the Flemish organization is more effective. The question is: what's most important? Integration or learning something?

Strip to Identity

4. Which activities did you find least useful and why?



Least useful activities

Studying in details the Flemish education system was less useful than the other activities and yet it wasn't useless. On the contrary I needed it to better understand the reality I was (and still am) working in.

5. Which recommendations would you make to improve your school's infrastructure and organization?



Recommendations

6. What obstacles have you met during your mobility and how have they been solved?



Obstacles and solutions

The only big obstacle was the fact that the Italian ministry of Education doesn't finance a substitute teacher for those who leave on a long mobility period. But the project coordinator and the manager of my school worked very well. They also contacted frequently their own national agencies and in the end they found a solution. So we had to split my 11 month into shorter periods.

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7. To what extent did the training mobility correspond with your expectations? Have you been able to take initiative, which contributed to reach the aims of the mobility?

Your activities

I didn't need to take any initiatives because the project coordinator planned my activities extremely well. I expected to enlarge my knowledge, to improve my competence, to become more open to a different culture and more able to face unexpected situations in an unfamiliar context. That's what happened, so yes, my expectations are fulfilled.

8. Did you get a good look at the different project levels (comic book creation - use of SharePoint - learning and teaching mobilities - special educational needs teaching)? How will you inform your colleagues at your school about these levels?

Link with different project levels

I took part to all the different project levels (comic book creation - use of SharePoint - learning and teaching mobilities - special educational needs teaching). I have already informed orally and in an informal way a lot of colleagues after my first mobility period. Moreover I have written a report about every activity that I have done so far.

Strip to Identity

9. How would you assess your training mobility? Think of the combination pedagogical / social activities - communication - information - work load - timing etc.

Personal assessment

The training mobility made me a richer person and I'm not speaking of money! I'm speaking of knowledge, competence and emotions.

Job shadowing in special schools taught me different type of organizations, of techniques and strategies. Moreover I have trained my English and my Dutch pretty much so definitely my cultural background has been enriched and my linguistic competence improved. But that's not all! As an English teacher, I'm used to travelling abroad and communicating in a different language and as a SEN teacher I'm used to facing diversities. And yet during my mobility I found out that I still had something to learn!!! Here everything is different: everyday life-rhythm, culture, habits, language, weather, food, education system. I had to communicate and cooperate with unknown people in a new context using a language that wasn't my mother tongue and without counting on the familiar people I'm surrounded by when I'm at home. No need to say that as regards my social and communication competence I'm stronger now! I learned to adapt myself to a new context and I learned a new culture.

A training mobility isn't useful just as regards job-related knowledge and competences. It affects you as a person. You become MORE and that's what you need if you're a teacher, because teaching WHAT and HOW is not enough. We help young people to become adults in a multicultural and multilanguage world made of quick changes and exchanges. So if we really want to help our pupils to find their way in this new "European Life", we first need to be able to call ourselves "European citizens".

10. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for improvement of future staff training mobilities?

Comments and suggestions

It's important that the teachers who go on a mobility period know well what the project and their mobility is about and above all it's important that their activity is well organized.

Knowing English is essential, but it's good not to exclude those who don't know a foreign language. It might be the trigger to start and learn in the future!