

My Reflections

Aarhus, Denmark

In Denmark, we visited a youth centre in Horsens. I particularly enjoyed this trip as there were many similarities between the project I work in and this service. Students, young people, practice partners and academics had an opportunity to share stories about how we currently work. A partnership approach between schools, social work and police “SSP” or “super snitch patrol” as young people jokingly call it. Despite this, the young people identified this way of working as a positive experience. The SSP identifies young people at an early stage and offers supports if needed. E.g. School absenteeism (before it escalates or young person is identified to be getting in trouble with police).

An exercise which I felt worked really well with our group was “The broken down bridge”. This activity provided an opportunity for all participants to turn around the idea of finding the perfect youth worker but rather what makes a bad youth worker i.e. the broken down bridge. The qualities of a bad youth worker seemed easier than identifying the good qualities. This is possibly because it is often easier to describe what we don’t like that what we do like. The exercise allowed us to share stories about good and bad experiences and then focus on building a strong bridge or youth worker.

Bucharest, Romania

Our collaborative exercise in Romania worked very well also and personally I felt I had the opportunity to reflect on our current work practices in Ireland and the contrast to Romania. In particular, practice partners in Romania were much more tactical in their approach to young people to express their affection towards their service users. In Ireland, our child protection history and safeguarding practices create a distance from service users, where a hug or form of touch must be

avoided. We discussed how for Romanian practice partners, this contact is hugely important and shows the young people they are cared for. In Ireland our distance is to show professional distance and worker/child safety

Amsterdam, Holland

Our trip to visit the youth mentoring project based in a school in Amsterdam was hugely interesting. We had a wonderful presentation from a teacher in this school on "street life". This talk explored the reality of a young person's life on the street through music. This resonated strongly with me as I would often use rap music in my work to explore feelings/ struggles in a young person's life. The mentoring project was similar in many ways to the Irish experience; however, the "in school" concept would be a hugely beneficial step forward for mentoring in Ireland.

Our visits to two Moroccan women's centres provided a diverse experience and exposure to different cultural norms. We had the experience of observing community spirit in action and inspiring new ways to establish vibrant social spaces.

Valencia, Spain

A lot of my thoughts return to the Spanish experience. When we were first told we would be part of a clown workshop, I thought it might be easier to hide away. This was as a result of a fear long time fear of as clowns. However, I faced my fears and decided to take part. I was so glad to have taken part as it allowed me to see behind the "clown mask." This make-up/ mask can be used as an alter ego to show parts of our personality that we might usually be awkward to do without the disguise. E.g. role plays or dance activities. A clown can be foolish and silly, something which in our professional roles is not allowed.

Overall Experience

Over the past three years, I have had many wonderful experiences and fun times with a wide range of people from various backgrounds. Throughout our meetings we have explored many ideas, shared stories of what works in our country, become lost in translation from the various languages, but ultimately co-created products which can be used in all countries and adapted for our cultural norms.

On various occasions while standing or sitting in a circle, awaiting instructions for a new ice breaker game/ activity was uncomfortable for me. Usually I would try to avoid eye contact in order to delay my inclusion in the activity for as long as possible, but ultimately getting involved and realising it as actually enjoyable.

Reflecting back on these games, I now realise while I talk the talk, I quite often avoid walking the walk. The uncomfortable feeling at the start of the learning experience is what we want our student/ young people to put to one side and just participate (knowing best that they will like it when they take part!). At times I felt embarrassed and awkward but in the end I had stepped out of my personal comfort zone and progressed to the learning zone.

This project has provided wonderful opportunities to look at the way we work. There were opportunities to reflect on what we need from the future social care workers/students and what techniques work in other countries that could be used in our agency.

The “wicked problems” in different countries allowed me, as practice partner, to broaden my sometimes insulated view and focus on what we can do through collaboration to address wicked problems rather than look for the antidote to solve all. While our logic model planning is a useful tool in mapping where we are going, it does not have to be deemed a failure if our outcomes are different than we anticipated because of a multitude of factors.

Lastly with both the research and pilot module, in particular, they gave the young people in our project a voice and their views were listened to respected and seen as equally important as everyone else.