



### Learning Games

#### in Budapest

The final student blended learning session and teacher training event of the learning games project took place in Budapest in February 2017. The event was hosted by Budapesti Metropolitan University. Five students from St. John's Central College and three teachers attended the event. The primary goal of the group was to complete work on the software application which will act as a tool for teachers in organising gamification activities in their classroom. Due to unforeseen circumstances some delays had occurred in the implementation of the back end of the application and intensive work was required in Budapest in order to bring the project back on schedule. All of the students who attended raised their level of work to meet this challenge and many hours were spent coding, creating avatars, working on dissemination and other promotional material. By the end of the week a working version of the application was available and while some additional work still needs to be done significant progress was made. Students were also afforded the opportunity to see some of the main attractions of Budapest with visits to Heroes Square, the cathedral, Fisherman's bastion, the largest Synagogue in Europe, the Parliament and of course some of the cities lively nightlife. Two of our multimedia students also produced a

short film of the project activities and this is available on youtube.

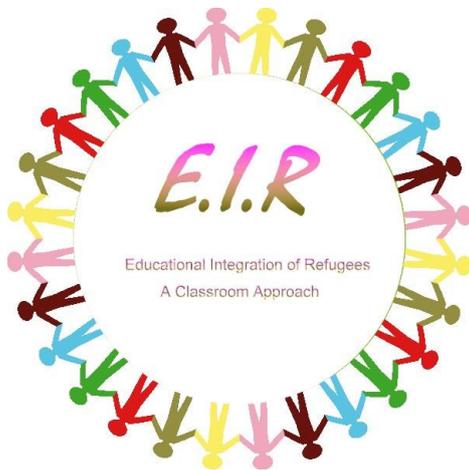
In addition to our students the blended learning sessions were attended by students from Turkey, Germany and Spain. The mix of participants allowed for a high degree of intercultural learning and the student groups worked very well together.

During the meeting the host partner organised a guest lecture on GeoGebra and GeoMotech. GeoGebra is dynamic mathematics software for all levels of education that brings together geometry, algebra, spreadsheets, graphing, statistics and calculus in one easy-to-use package. The principal aims of the GEOMATECH project are to raise the standard and appeal of mathematics and science in the Hungarian public education and to motivate primary and secondary school students to study STEM subjects. In the GEOMATECH project, 1800 high-quality digital teaching materials for K-12 STEM education will be developed, which will not only help to create an efficient, playful and experimental learning environ-

ment, but could also improve Hungary's international stance in these fields. The GEOMATECH project will offer free access to its online digital teaching materials to anyone. Our colleagues both in Hungary and abroad develop digital teaching materials that are up-to-date, based international research methodologies, and meet the requirements of the Hungarian national curriculum with the help of GeoGebra, one of the world's most popular STEM software. GeoGebra enables teachers and students to visually represent abstract STEM concepts and phenomena. The project heavily relies on the professional potential of the international community, since colleagues at the University of Cambridge and the International GeoGebra Institute in Linz also cooperate in developing methodological foundations for the project.

The final meeting of this project will take place in Asturias, Spain in June. This will include a two day multiplier event, the results of the project will be presented as will the final version of the gamification application.





## Educational Integration of Refugees

### Staff Training Event

The first phase of the Erasmus+ KA2 “Educational Integration of Refugees – A Classroom Approach” project was create a dialogue with refugees in each of the project partner countries and in particular to listen to the experiences, concerns, fears and hopes of refugee students and the educational staff who work with them. This objective was to be achieved in two main ways. Firstly through the creation and analysis of a questionnaire to be completed by refugees in each partner country and secondly through a teacher training activity where direct contact would be made with refugees and those who work with them. In an Irish context it was decided that the project would be enhanced by inviting ETB staff working with refugees to become actively involved rather than confining participation to staff within St. John’s Central College. To this end Ronán O’Chaoimh, Further Education & Training Area Coordinator (South Cork) and Marion Hennessy who works with refugees at the Q-Centre Mallow joined the project team.

The Questionnaire has now been completed in each country and an analysis of the results will be completed before the end of March.

The teacher training activity took place in Regen, Germany from Sunday, 27th November – Saturday, 03<sup>rd</sup> of December. Regen was selected as the venue for this activity due to the fact that the region has become home to a very large number of refugees in recent years and our partner organisation there, VHS Regen, is directly involved in providing integration and training courses for many of these refugees. In addition the relatively compact size of Regen made it possible

to visit all of the stakeholders involved in the German refugee process, from initial registration, through integration courses and into the workplace,

Visits to and meeting with the following stakeholders took place:

Professional Career Activation Courses

Language Integration Course

Meeting with Volunteers

Secondary School

Vocational School

Visit to an Employer

Meeting with unaccompanied minor refugees.

Meeting and discussion with all authorities: head of district, Jobcentre, Labour office, and network manager for refugees

BAMF / Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

The meeting with BAMF provided participants with a very clear understanding of the German refugee process and provided a framework through which the other meetings could be viewed. There are seven main stages in the German asylum procedure:

Arrival and Registration in Germany

Initial distribution among the Federal Länder

Reporting to and accommodation in the competent reception facility

Personal application to the Federal office

Examination of the Dublin procedure

Personal interview at the Federal office

Possibility for decision making in the national asylum procedure

This procedure can lead to the following possible outcomes:

Acknowledgement of entitlement to asylum

Award of refugee protection

Award of subsidiary protection

Imposition of a ban on deportation

Outright rejection – with a notice to leave the country

Rejection as “manifestly unfounded” – with a notice to leave the country

There is also an appeals procedure against the decision of the Federal Office in place.

Participants at the training activity witnessed first hand the main stages of this process, this included seeing the registration and interview process, visiting the refuge accommodation at the initial reception facility, talking to staff who conduct the interviews, meeting staff who check for forged papers etc.

The meetings at the career activation course, the language integration course, the vocational school and secondary school allowed the participants to talk directly with refugee students and their teachers about the difficulties and positive aspect of their educational experience. As would be expected the importance of language learning came very much to the fore as a key step in accessing the other educational opportunities available and ultimately accessing the



EIR Project group at VHS Regen, Germany

employment market. Some students did express concern that their own culture could be diluted by the process. One man pointed out that many customs that we in the west see as religious are in fact cultural and that this fact is not fully appreciated. Another man told us that his wife and family were due to arrive the next day. He explained that he had been forced to let them behind in Syria close to two years ago and it is not difficult to understand his impatience to be reunited with his family. Many of the adult refugees we spoke to had a reasonable level of English but very few had any knowledge of the German language prior to arrival in the country.

In the secondary school the importance of having a native Arabic speaker on staff both as a translator and support for the students was very evident. Many of the refugees have been through horrific experiences and the process of recovery from such trauma can be a long one and requires good support services.

For many of the training activity participants the meeting with refugees who arrived in Germany alone as minors was perhaps the most emotional encounter. These students were aged between thirteen and seventeen and came from a wide range of countries including Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan. One fifteen year old Afghan told us how his father had given him \$300 and sent him on the journey to Europe crossing Iran and Turkey on foot and by public transport, then on a small boat to Lesbos in Greece, eventually reaching the mainland then through Macedonia, Hungary, Austria and Germany. Another Afghan spoke of how he left home with his father when he was twelve, how they both worked in Iran for three years to make money to continue the journey and how

his father sent him on alone once enough money for one journey had been raised. Another fifteen year old student told us how his only relative in Germany was his cousin, but he had turned eighteen a few weeks previous to our visit and had been deported. There were many similar stories.

During this visit we had dinner with the refugees in their boarding school and went to see their rooms. We took note that the students were allowed to decorate their rooms themselves, which of course helped to make the accommodation feel less institutionalised. Some had maps of their country on the corridors with their place of origin marked, others had country flags on their walls, some had created wall murals which showed clear artistic talent. One student had written "Allah is the greatest" across his room door. This last statement helps to highlight the need to provide religious education for young refugee students and indeed we were informed that the German government is planning to introduce Islam into the schools. Clearly this is desirable as it would give young Islamic refugees a focus for and recognition of their religious beliefs and could be an important step in counteracting extremism.

We did note that many of the refugees had good contact with home and within their own networks through social media, whatsapp, viber etc.

Another interesting meeting was with the volunteers who give time freely to help refugees integrate into German society. Such help can be as simple as showing a refugee how to buy a bus ticket or use an ATM machine, how to manage household bills, assist with completion of forms or simply provide a sympa-

thetic ear where support is needed. Many of these volunteers are retired people and interesting some had become involved in this type of work during the Bosnian refugee crisis. This of course means that there is quite a wealth of experience within these volunteer organisations.

A visit to an employer also gave us the opportunity to meet with a refugee who is now engaged as an apprentice. There is a clear plan in Germany that most refugees will be integrated and ready to join the workforce within five years of their arrival in the country. The meeting and discussion with local authorities: head of district, Jobcentre, Labour office, and network manager for refugees allowed us to see how the different agencies work together to achieve the necessary level of refugee integration and education to achieve this goal.

Following on from this work the next teacher training event took place in Bacau, Romania where we examined techniques / strategies being used to integrate minority groups into mainstream education and how these same techniques may be employed in working with refugees. Teachers in Bacau have significant experience of working with the Roma community. The group visited a number of schools working with the Roma community and spoke to students and teachers about their experiences. We also spoke to mediators who encourage Roma families to engage with the school system and visited centres for young volunteers and a home for the elderly being run by non government organisations. We also engaged in workshops on the topic of inclusion and on methods that might be used to achieve inclusion of minorities and refugees in the classroom.



EIR Project group, Bacau, Romania

## Student Mobility Projects



Student Work Placement Sweden

Students from the college travelled abroad on Erasmus+ KA1 mobility projects during the months of February and March. The projects were of three weeks duration and students went on work placement to host companies in Germany, Slovenia, Lanzarote, Sweden, Lithuania and France. As part of their workplan students return weekly reports to the college. This allows us to monitor student progress and evaluate the overall success of the program. Examples of some student comments are given here: "I'd just like to say thank you once again for allowing me to have this amazing opportunity to experience a veterinary clinic in another country. I have loved every minute of my experience here" (Veterinary Nursing)

"I helped the keepers with feeding and cleaning Australian animals enclosures and learned how to use inhaler for asthmatic horses and what supplements help horses with arthritis. After work I was exploring the city centre" (Animal Management)

"This week was great.... I got the kind of work experience I was looking for" (Motor Maintenance)

"My time in Sweden to date has been an experience of a lifetime. I am learning a

great deal with practical application" (Motor Maintenance)

"I have worked five days this week and I have been waitressing. I was on for morning shifts which is serving breakfast and also did evening shifts in the restaurant clearing tables and learning how to carry plates etc." (Tourism)

"They have a great set up there. I am working on a car the past few days doing different jobs on the engine. The teachers are nice and the students are very helpful, if they you have encountered a difficulty with the job you are doing they will be over to help you. I think I have learned a lot" (Motor Maintenance)

"Daily tasks include cutting wood to size, making and assembling finished cuts to complete design plans made by Mr Oeynhausens, varnishing, edging boards. I was taking part in the building of an office suite with custom made furniture, I also shadow and assist Mr oeynhausens two apprentices." (Furniture Making)

"I can't thank you enough for the experience. As I was saying from my last report we checked the snowmobile engine and discovered that it needed new pistons and piston rings. Once these parts were delivered to us we changed out the old parts. The teachers at the college were a great help and source of information their English was far beyond my Swedish which helped a lot. We also had a customer come into change his thermostat, this was very important to do correctly as he was waiting on us. Getting hands on knowledge and practice with running vehicles has in my opinion advanced my ability and confidence with problem solving and application." (Motor Maintenance)

"On the last day of college we had to do an upstyle on a live model on one of the students. After we finished we took a picture with our models. The teachers talked to us and thanked us for coming to their country and that they learned from us as we learned from them" (Hairdressing)

There are many more comments of a similar nature from other students but they do serve to highlight how much the experience can add to a students learning both at a vocational and personal level.

We have also hosted students from Lithuania, Spain and France during this period. The group from Lithuania were with us for a period of five weeks. On this occasion they were all hairdressing students and were given a fantastic welcome by Anita and the other members of the hairdressing department. Without the cooperation of teachers these exchanges could not take place and great credit is due to all staff members who take the time to bring visiting students to their classes, help to organise work placements and introduce the visiting students to our own groups. Students also assist by engaging with the visitors, bringing them to social functions, generally showing them around and in many cases meeting with the visiting students over the weekends, in the evenings etc.



Student Work Placement Slovenia

The group from Talavera in Spain were only here for a little over two weeks but during that time were given the opportunity to travel to Dublin with our Tourism students. Currently we have two students here from Cholet in France. These students are on a three month Erasmus placement in the vocational area of International Marketing.

## Teacher Job Shadowing



This year, for the first time, we obtained funding to send three teachers on an Erasmus+ project job shadowing project to Utbildning Nord in Övertorneå, Sweden. Övertorneå is close to the Arctic Circle and we have been working with Utbildning Nord on Leonardo Da Vinci and Erasmus+ student mobility projects for close to ten years. All of the participating teachers returned reports on their experiences and the description of the Swedish college given below is taken from these reports:

### Background and History

Utbildning Nord was created in 1970 as a joint project between the governments of Norway, Sweden and Finland. It is located in the small town of Övertorneå in Northern Sweden in the province of Norrbotten close to the Finnish border. The college has the status of a foundation and its board consists of two members from each of the co-operating countries. The campus is divided into two: one located in Övertorneå town and another at a short distance in the locality of Hedenäset.

### Entry Requirements

Fifty percent of students come from Sweden and the other half from Norway and Finland. The students come from the ranks of unemployed workers and each government pays towards the upkeep of their respective nationals. New students are admitted every three weeks. Assessment at the entry point means that an individual learning plan can be created for each student. A one year stay is normal but students are free to finish earlier

or to take more time if needed.

### Individual Learning Plan

At the entry point students are assessed and an individual learning plan is created by teachers to best accommodate the student. Templates are used with the necessary amendments. Any work that has been previously completed by the student whether at a formal level i.e. certification or at informal level i.e. recognition of prior learning is taken into account during the creation of the individual learning plan. Students work autonomously on their learning plan and can consult their teachers when necessary. This format means that there are no 'classes' as such rather sessions where students are working individually and at different paces.

### Academic Culture

The relationship between students and teachers can be described as informal. Student's study is mostly self-guided as opposed to our system in Ireland where further education students are taught mostly in a classroom based setting. A student centric approach is adopted where staffs act as facilitators and advisors. There is an open academic atmosphere and an excellent rapport was evident between students and staff within the College.

Peer mentoring among the students is used widely and seems to work very well as students all come from different backgrounds with different experiences.

Students read around topics that are course related a lot more themselves than our students would. They are however guided by tutors and spend a lot less time in formal classroom sessions. This seems to work well for those who motivated to learn and allows them to finish their studies quickly.

Students only study or train in Vocational subjects pertinent to their own vocational area. Unlike our student here they do not need to study compulsory subjects such as IT or Communications if it is not needed for their career part or apprenticeship.

If I was to use two words to describe the academic system I would use autonomy and investment. It was evident that a huge amount of money was invested into the system by each of the 3 countries involved in terms of equipment, facilities and low pupil teacher ratio "

### Study Support

Students from Sweden who present with learning difficulties are given support. No support is offered for specialist IT certifi-

cation.

### Attendance and Retention Rates

Students attend the College daily from 7.00 – 15.30 except the IT department who allow a more flexible approach to attendance for students so as to shadow the flexible nature of the IT industry. Student s must attend for 8 hours a day, 5 days a week.

If the student plans to be absent from classes for a longer duration of time, the teachers expect to be informed. Attendance is mandatory and if a student is absent they need documentation to explain absences i.e. medical cert or appointment letter.

The College have gathered data over the last few years and informed us that retention rates for student numbers have improved in the college since they moved from classroom based setting to the IEP's.

### Staff CPD

Staff interviewed in the IT department said they are regularly upskilled due to the ever-changing demands of IT certification.

### Communication

Due to the close proximity to Finland and historical border changes one of the local languages is Meänkieli which has achieved the status of an official minority language in Sweden. Other languages used are Swedish and its close linguistic cousin Norwegian and finally the linguistically distinct Finnish. We also noticed that English was also in use particularly with students whose mother tongue originated from outside the Scandinavian countries.

### Assessment

Assessment for IT skills takes place on campus. The college uses the services of Pearson UK and is an authorised test centre. There are approximately fifty exam sessions per month and six students is the maximum number for simultaneous testing. The exams are conducted mainly in English as none of the Scandinavian languages features as a testing language. The labour department of each country pays for their candidate's testing fee.

### Work Experience

Work placement took place at the end of a course of study. Students spend approximately six to eight weeks in work experience. Students are particularly in demand in the IT and healthcare sectors. Staff may help students to find work placements but encourage students to contact employers themselves.

## Physical Environment & Well-Being

One of the most noticeable features of the college campus was the attention paid to the physical work and rest environment. As we arrived in winter it was difficult to assess the outdoor environment due to a heavy blanketing of snow so our observations were uniquely of the interiors. Areas that stood out as examples of elegant design were lighting and window treatments; they performed not only functionally but also created a welcoming and relaxing atmosphere. Student and staff rest areas were impeccably clean and tidy with copious room for food storage and preparation. Communal coffee breaks and lunch times meant that students could socialize and staff members could catch up on news. Free on-campus sports facilities are provided for staff and students.

## Links to Higher Education and Progression

There are no formal established links to Higher Education from this system. It is more likely students from Higher Education will come to Stiftelsen Utbildning Nordkalotten to gain vocational skills following academic studies.

It is interesting to note that Utbildning Nord have a very high job placement rate for their students and they demonstrate very well the importance of having good vocational skills as a means of entering the job market. It would seem clear that the experience of job shadowing in another college where Vocational education is delivered in a way quite different from what we experience here was rewarding for the participating teachers. One of the benefits of course is to allow teachers to reassess their own methods of course delivery and indeed the methodologies we use within the college as a whole.

Plans are already in place to send additional teachers on work shadowing through the Erasmus+ program to colleges in Spain, France and Estonia.

## Visiting Teachers and Students

Over the last few months we have hosted a number of visiting teachers and educational Managers. The biggest visiting group were from Mercantec in Denmark. Mercantec is the largest educational institution in Viborg Municipality with approximately 500 employees and 3000 annual students, apprentices and course participants. Mercantec has a wide range



of upper secondary educations, courses and in-service training. Moreover, it is one of the largest suppliers of in-service courses in Denmark and its teachers are well-known for their high level of expertise. Mercantec is building a new campus which is set to be finished in November of 2018. The management team visiting St. Johns included: Mrs Kirsten Holmgaard, Director of Mercantec, Mrs. Mette Selchau, Vice Director, Head of Hotel and Restaurant School and Business School, Mr. John Hansen, Head of "House of Technology, Auto Technical Center, Metalcraft and International departments, Mr. Bo Lykke Fredsgarrd, Head of the Business and Technical Gymnasium, Mr. Kurt Thomsen, Head of Construction Department, Mrs. Marianne Bukh Villesen, Head of Youth and Occupation, Mrs. Helen L. Nøhr, Head of Economics and Administration, Mrs. Lene Stenholt, Head of HR and Legal Department and Mrs. Charlotte Aaen, Personal Assistant to the Director.

The visit to St. John's Central College was part of a strategy seminar for the managing team to gain inspiration from other schools. The areas which the managing group were interested in were:

- 1) Pedagogy and methodology of St. John's, also including the implementation of these into the strategy of the college?
- 2) Thoughts of pedagogy and methodology into the construction of the new campus/building?
- 3) Digitalization - Does the college have a digitalization strategy and how does the school make sure this strategy is car-

ried into effect?

4) How does the St. John's cooperate with local companies?

5) How has the cooperation with Apple been established?

6) Does St. John's have an international strategy and how is this carried into effect?

All of these questions are interesting from our own perspective and it was valuable to discuss them with a visiting management group.

Viborg is going to be home to a new data center for Apple Computers. So as part of their visit to St. John's we organised a visit to Apple Computers. Apple were extremely accommodation, they arranged a tour to their manufacturing facility and extended invitations to Mr John Fitzgibbons, Director of Further Education & Training and Mr Pat McKelvey, Director of Schools to join the Mercantec team for the visit. They also organised a number of short presentations on Apple Computers and Sean O'Gradaigh delivered a presentation on the use of digital technology in Education. Miriam Walsh attended as a Distinguished Apple Educator.

Other teachers who visited us job shadowing this term included: Pilar Sainz Madrazo, María Cruz Crespo Martinez and María Sonia Sáez Melero.

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