

COMETS

Communicating meaningfully with others

Cardiff (UK) from 23 – 28 April 2016



REPORT

The training course was organized by



Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport.
The Erasmus+ UK National Agency is a partnership between the British Council and Ecorys UK.

in cooperation with

SALTO-YOUTH
TRAINING AND COOPERATION
RESOURCE CENTRE



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT of COMETS

ETS and COMETS

In the context of the European Training Strategy (ETS), SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre (SALTO T&C RC) developed the Competence Model for Trainers Working at International Level - www.salto-youth.net/trainercompetences

As a tool to reflect on and work with and on the competence model, the 'COMETS training courses' were developed as a support for trainers in their competence development, each course focusing on one competence area of the above-mentioned model.

More concretely, the COMETS courses follow a training for trainers' format which will, in the forthcoming years, provide trainers, being advanced¹ in the implementation of international trainings for youth workers, with opportunities to come together to reflect upon, discuss and develop further on different competence areas of the ETS competence model. In the context of COMETS, 'advanced' means that the trainer-learner has the capacity to direct his/her own learning and in particular, the ability to self-assess his/her own competences.

The general aims of the COMETS training courses are:

- To contribute to quality development of youth work and of training practice in the field;
- To put the ETS competence model into practice;
- To support National Agencies and other youth sector organizations in working with trainers on competence development;
- To contribute to the professional development of trainers in the field.

The intentions of COMETS

COMETS training courses intend principally to offer trainers a space to reflect, exchange and contrast their practice and understanding with regard to a certain ETS competence area. The main purpose is to enable participants to take further steps in their professional practice.

The COMETS courses respond to a strategy developed by Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme National Agencies and SALTO T&C RC to provide opportunities for trainers to develop their competences according to their needs and needs of training providers like National Agencies. For more information: www.salto-youth.net/trainercompetencedevelopment

The principles of COMETS

No matter the focus on each course, COMETS are all based on a series of principles, which are:

- Awareness: me – the group – the field – the context;
- Readiness to question and to review practice;
- Readiness to stretch boundaries;
- Being explicit about choices as trainers;
- Integrity: Walk the talk!
- Giving space to the whole person: body - mind - soul - heart;
- Awareness: Being here as learner in a community of learners;
- Giving to Caesar what's Caesars': acknowledging [re]sources of practice.

COMETS COMMUNICATES

The COMETS COMMUNICATES in April 2016 in Cardiff, UK was the 2nd edition of COMETS. The 1st edition took place in May 2015 in Bulgaria and focused on the competence area “Intercultural Competence”.

COMETS COMMUNICATES was based on the competence area ‘Communicating meaningfully with others’ as it is described in the Competence Model for Trainers Working at International Level:

- An ability to listen actively
- An ability to be empathetic
- An ability to clearly express thoughts and emotions
- An awareness of identity-related issues
- Being diversity-aware

The team had following intentions with the course, at the end of the report a summary of the achievement is available:

- Exploring sources (theories, methodologies, approaches) in forming trainer’s practice,
- Supporting work on the interconnections between being a trainer, the group the trainer works with, and the context,
- Create space which invites the ,whole person’ (Body-Mind-Heart-Soul),
- Creating a learning environment which invites participants to stretch boundaries, and
- Critically reviewing our practice and underlying attitudes as trainer in respect of meaningful communication, empathy, and emotions.

The team of trainers delivered COMETS COMMUNICATES were Peter Hofmann (Austria) and Gerald Dowden (UK) supported by the ECORYS visit coordinator Fergal Barr (UK) and Rita Bergstein (SALTO T&C RC).

PARTICIPANTS

	First name	Surname	Country of residence
1	Gabi	STEINPRINZ	Netherlands
2	Lenka	UHROVA	Iceland
3	Gabriel	WOLTER	German
4	Olga	PODDUBNAYA	Belarus
5	Chergui	MALIKA	France
6	Samer	AL-KASIH	Jordan
7	Mohammed	TAZROUTI	Morocco
8	Bartosz	PRYDA	Norway
9	Roxana	TURCU	Romania
10	Vasile	DEAC	Romania
11	Billy	HILLMAN	UK
12	Tadej	PUGELJ	Slovenia
13	Luca	PAOLISSO	Italy



PROGRAMME

	Saturday, 23/04/16	Sunday, 24/04/16	Monday, 25/04/16	Tuesday 26/04/16	Wednesday, 27/04/16	Thursday, 28/04/16
9h30 – 13h00		<p>Co-creating a fruitful peer learning environment</p> <p>What do the children and the youth in us want to experience in this course?</p>	<p>The Village exercise Listening, Observing, Sensing – important instruments in communication</p> <p>Developing my communication competence – what is my focus?</p>	<p>The Village exercise</p> <p>Sharing of inspiring methods and theories around communication</p>	<p>The Village exercise</p> <p>Open Agenda: What is still open from my learning needs that I would like to talk about/reflect upon with colleagues here?</p> <p>Competence Development for trainers:</p>	Departure of participants
15h00 – 18h30	Arrival of participants	<p>The Village exercise: exploring communication beyond words</p> <p>Learning needs present in the group</p> <p>Background and contexts of participants</p>	<p>On-going review: What makes communication meaningful?</p> <p>Opportunity to practice communication</p>	<p>On-going review: What makes communication meaningful?</p> <p>16.30: Departure for Cardiff – free time in the city</p>	<p>Further competence development</p> <p>Evaluation of the course</p> <p>Closing</p>	
20h30	Welcome evening	Guess my passion	Option: Movie night	Dinner in Cardiff	Farewell Party	

Team Conclusions

Overall the team considers the second COMETS training course, on the competence area “Communicating meaningfully with others” a success. Many participants confirmed the great value of having such a quality space to critically review their practice. The duration of the course combined with the deep level of experience of the colleagues participating allowed for in-depth reflections and discussions.

The group of participants

The relatively small group size (13 participants) certainly contributed to a trustful and safe learning environment. Relationships could be established quickly within the group and sharing in the whole group was easier due to the small numbers. On the other hand, more participants could have brought more experience and knowledge to draw from.

There was a great diversity within the group in terms of training and facilitation experience. Half of the group could definitely be considered “advanced trainers” as stated in the profile of participants COMETS TCs are looking out for. Three to four participants had very little experience as trainers and considered themselves more youth workers doing facilitating work in the frame of youth exchanges or other youth-related activities.

All participants though were fully committed to the course and engaged from the beginning to the end in the activities. There was great peer learning going on – participants were referring in particular to the “Case Clinics” (reviewing critically training practice) or the “Peer Coaching” session regarding the self-assessment of the competence area. Four participants (out of 13!) contributed by delivering method workshops for the group.

Intention 1: Exploring sources (theories, methodologies, approaches) in forming trainer’s practice

We put more emphasis on the peer learning and reviewing practice elements in the program than exploring sources. As a team we brought in the concept of “The 4 levels of listening” (after “Theory U” by Otto Scharmer) and offered a resource table with some literature around communication.

After seeing the background of selected participants we decided to draw from the experience and knowledge of some participants and herewith strengthen also the community of learners aspect – one of the guiding principles of COMETS training courses. The method workshops delivered by the four participants were of a high qualitative level.

Intention 2: Supporting work on the interconnections between being a trainer, the group the trainer works with, and the context

One risk we saw when working on the competence area “Communicating meaningfully with others” was to “be all over the place” with the reflections and discussions – due to the obvious fact that communication plays a role in all fields of life. We therefore made a conscious effort in debriefings and joint reflections to bring in the context of training and facilitation work.

On several occasions participants made reference to the relevance for meaningful communication of “being connected” – connected to yourself (an increased awareness about one’s communication patterns, emotional literacy, body-mind connection) as well as connected to the group of learners.

For the latter we introduced the notion of “sensing into the group” – “sensing” meaning ‘listening’ with all senses.

To explore “sensing” we offered “The Village” as a recurrent activity every day. This activity invites participants onto an imaginary village square where there is no talking and only 5 different “vocabularies” (lying down, sitting, standing, walking and greeting) are allowed. During these 15 minutes every day participants are invited to sense into their body as well as the group as a social body, and base their actions on this sensing (rather than controlling them through the mind only).

The recurrent nature of the activity allowed for observations on the development of “the village” over the four days. Many participants were amazed by the richness of observations they could make about their own behaviour as well as that of the group. They were able to notice many details about mutual influencing (the aspect of initiating and following), about what attracts their attention and what not, about thought patterns and usual behaviour and much more. One participant said after the last “village-activity”: “I want only to do village now. It is incredible how much you can notice and observe when talking is not distracting us.”

Intention 3: Create space which invites the ,whole person’ (Body-Mind-Heart-Soul)

The experience with “The village” was an explicit invitation to the “whole person”. We “warmed up” for the village every day with a 10 minutes mindfulness exercise to be able to tune in more to the body and the heart. Many participants mentioned at the end how essential it is for the competence to communicate meaningfully to synchronize more body and mind – some would even suggest this holistic approach is at the source of meaningful communication.

We introduced the concept of “the 4 levels of listening” as a reference to this “whole person” communication. One participant, after their “Case Clinic” dialogue, mentioned that there was a kind of “magic” in their conversation – also due to the fact that there was listening beyond hearing.

Intention 4: Creating a learning environment which invites participants to stretch boundaries

The physical learning environment in the hotel – the working room, the lobby as break-out space, the outside environment – was adequate. Smaller venues (the hotel had more than 200 rooms) with more nature around (the hotel was surrounded by big roads) normally contribute more to a learning environment where participants can relax, open up and thus potentially become readier to stretch their boundaries.

In our approach we aimed at establishing an atmosphere where comfort, trust and safety were important components. The small group size certainly supported this. Over the days participants dared to open up more and more (to different degrees naturally) and on the last day – in the “village” as well as the reviewing of the learning journeys – there was a touching degree of openness and sincerity.

Intention 5: Critically reviewing our practice and underlying attitudes as trainer in respect of meaningful communication, empathy, and emotions

The “Case Clinics” session, in which participants could review training situations in relation to communication that had left them with doubts or ill-feelings, was used particularly by a number of participants (6) to dig deeper. There were a lot of insights, learning and relevant reflections connected to this session.

Major questions resulting from these reflections were:

- What makes communication meaningful in the context of training and facilitation? Does it have to have an outcome (learning, relationship building, etc)?
- What are the limits of taking into account identity-related issues? How much do I need to disclose about my identity as facilitator / trainer?
- What is the connection between self-empathy and empathy for learners?
- What is the relationship between empathy as an attitude and empathy as a competence?
- What is the value of showing emotions as trainer / facilitator?