

PEERMENT Guidelines for the training of Education Specialists.



Foreword

These guidelines are designed to provide support to Education Specialists on how to gather and facilitate a Peer Mentoring group as well as use WebQuest as tools to work on ESD. It is part of the PEERMENT (Peer Mentoring for Teachers "Change - Builders") Key Action 2 Erasmus + funded project that focuses on Peer Mentoring in Education for Sustainable Development.

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The project partners are:

- 1. Centre for Environmental Education and Research - University of Malta**
- 2. Solski Center Nova Gorica (Slovenia)**
- 3. Comité National de Solidarité Laique (France)**
- 4. Consorzio degli Istituti Professionali (Italy)**
- 5. Udruga za rad s mladima Breza (Croatia);**
- 6. ProgettoMondo Mlal Onlus (Italy).**

Acronyms

ECTS - European Credit Transfer System

ESD – Education for Sustainable Development

ICT - Information and communications technology

PEERMENT (Peer Mentoring for Teachers "Change - Builders") Key Action 2 Erasmus + funded project.

SD – Sustainable Development

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Introduction

The PEERMENT pilot process is based on peer-to-peer, activating, small-group learning experiences along with the facilitation conducted by educational experts.

The aim of these guidelines is to provide an outline of the training for Education Specialists, during which they will learn:

- how to gather and facilitate a Peer Mentoring group;
- how to master the use of WebQuest as tools to work on ESD.

The expected learning outcomes are Knowledge of WebQuest as tools for ESD teaching, personal engagement, activation and professional development of Peer Mentors.

These learning outcomes can be used as a basis for the evaluation at the end of the specified training.

Process

The PEERMENT project aspires for participants involved in the training to get the most out of themselves during their time in the project. The model core strength point is the wide range of opportunities for peer interaction and small-groups of Peer Mentoring offered. The model expects to see participants reinforce their engagement and commitment to the teaching of ESD and their self-consciousness in their potential as ESD trainers.

The same values and methodologies that Education Specialists will propose to teachers will be promoted and used in their own training seminars. The maxim of “practicing what you preach” is considered to be particularly powerful within ESD. Values are caught as much as they are taught. Matching actions with stated beliefs is core to ESD, and conducive to progress towards our chosen path and learning outcomes.

4 Main features of the Peer Mentoring for ESD Model

During the training seminars Education Specialists will be introduced to the 4 main features of the Peer Mentoring Model for ESD. These features are the following:

1. A shared definition and commitment for ESD

ESD is the shared challenge which glues participants and motivates their engagement in the local training groups of Peer Mentors. A working definition of ESD adopted during the

decade was that of education that “empowers people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future (UNESCO, n.d.a)”, specifically:

“ESD empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society (UNESCO, n.d.b).”

2. The Peer Mentoring for ESD methodology

A cursory look at the definitions of the various transformative educations indicates one common trend – the need to move from knowledge and awareness towards personal involvement (hence values) and informed actions (hence skills). This provides guidelines to what the specificities of peer-mentoring for ESD can look like, namely a reciprocal holistic process of teachers supporting each other in a trusting environment, in which one shares knowledge and skills that contribute not only to the teacher’s personal and professional growth, but to the process of effectively becoming active visionaries and agents of a sustainable future. PEERMENT is convinced that Mentoring is one of the more effective methodologies for teacher in training, and Peer-Mentoring is a way to use all the potential existing inside the schools to guarantee the continuous professional improvement of the teaching staff. In other terms, Mentoring and Peer Mentoring are an excellent way to turn schools in "learning communities".

3. The use WebQuest as tools to design educational experiences and to grow into a community of practice

Bernie Dodge, the originator of the WebQuest concept, defines a WebQuest as:

"an inquiry-oriented activity in which most or all of the information used by learners is drawn from the Web. Web Quests are designed to use learners' time well, to focus on using information rather than on looking for it, and to support learners' thinking at the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation." Starr, L. (2000).

Web Quests adopt the constructivist approach to learning and are considered to be a super learning tool, where according to Kenton Letkeman:

“With many research projects students feel that they are sucking up information and regurgitating it onto paper for no other reason than to get a good grade. Web Quests give students a task that allows them to use their imagination and problem-solving skills. The answers are not predefined and therefore must be discovered or created. Students must use their own creative-thinking and problem-solving skills to find solutions to problems.” Starr, L. (2000).

According to Dodge (2001) the success of a WebQuest depends on five specific rules:

- “1. Find great sites
2. Orchestrate your learners and resources
3. Challenge your learners to think
4. Use the medium
5. Scaffold high expectations”

4. Flexibility and freedom of choice according to context

In order to do justice to participants’ wide variety of academic backgrounds and talents and to adapt to local context and school systems’ peculiarities, trainings are planned to build a space whose contents will be organized demand driven: alongside a uniform compulsory core training sessions (on ESD, on the Peer Mentoring methodology and on the design and use of WebQuest), and participants are free to put together their own focus of work within the boundaries laid down by the facilitator meant to safeguard the level and cohesion of the different piloting experiences throughout Europe.

Experiences worldwide and examples of good practices across Europe

An examination of various European case studies indicates that the reflective practitioner as a theoretical framework is relevant for both the formal sectors and the informal sectors of education. Furthermore, the following points were brought to the fore:

- *The fluidity in the roles of mentor and mentee.*
- *The centrality of networking.*

- *The role of “accompaniment”.*
- *The added value in international cooperation.*
- *The centrality of children empowerment (for the formal sector).*
- *The necessity for continuous Monitoring and Evaluation.*
- *The necessity for knowledge and experience sharing in the field of intercultural education.*
- *The distinction between information and formation.*
- *Environmental sustainability as the basis of social sustainability.*

Structuring a Mentoring path: different possible implementations of the model

The format and length of training can be adapted according to contexts, levels of familiarity of Education Specialists in Peer Mentoring for ESD, and possibilities that the different institutional realities on the ground permit. Typically, it can vary from the equivalent of 1 ECTS to 2ECTS, and covers ESD and the peer mentoring approach, how the design of Web Quest complements such a pedagogy, and other peer mentoring aspects not directly linked to Web Quests. The pedagogy is based on active learning by doing, where the Education Specialists as learners, explore the themes together and share their knowledge and expertise, choose what they need to further research, experiment and deepen while ensuring relevance and practicality for their contexts.

One model based on the equivalent of 2ECTS is proposed here and can be adapted for shorter or longer versions according to context and institutional possibilities. This will add up to around 60 hours of teaching, learning, developing, (testing) and assessment (i.e. all inclusive), of which around 10 – 15 hours will be direct teaching. This would mean that the training will provide participants with between 10 – 15 hours (unless provisions are made for online teaching, google hangouts and so on). One way of organising this will be through three sessions of around 4 hours each.

1. **Session 1:** ESD and the peer mentoring approach. Mapping of ESD and Mentoring? What challenges does this pose? What opportunities does this present? What specificities of Peer Mentoring for ESD? How can one ensure that the principles of ESD are not only “content” but reflected in the training design?

2. Session 2: Practical learning on WebQuest designing and how it fits into the pedagogy of ESD.
3. Session 3:
 - a) Peer Mentoring aspects not directly linked to the Web Quests;
 - b) “Homework” - development of WebQuest online;
 - c) Each learner introducing the WebQuest to at least another learner and take feedback so as to ensure that the focus on the peer mentoring dimensions is kept at the centre;
 - d) Evaluation; and Report sheet to be filled in.

Session 3 allows:

- i) To discuss country context in particular where ESD is done as a transversal topic. This is surely an area where peer mentoring is necessary, and the sharing of resources is necessary as an only possible means for some teachers to practice ESD in schools.
- ii) Furthermore, as the Finnish model suggests, a lot of the support that teachers need to give each other through Peer mentoring is not “technical”, but more about the personal and social development of participants. This often requires subjects such as how to deal with a difficult or non-supportive head of school or how to keep “hope” alive and the role of the teacher in transformative education. This goes to the very heart of mentoring.

With this model, the “assessment” will be the development of actual Web Quests. These might be the first inputs towards the actual Web Quests we will be developing later. It can be introduced in Day 2 and presented and shared during Day 3.

Evaluation can be either ongoing i.e. per day or done at the end of Day 3. It is important to think of the evaluation of the first run. To include:

- i) An evaluation of the Web Quests/a questionnaire on the actual designing process of the WebQuest for feedback;
- ii) A report sheet to be filled in that ensures feedback from participants who also act as “auditors” of the course.

Whatever the different formats that can be adapted in different countries across Europe, there are a number of factors that are key to the model:

- The four main features outlined above, namely a shared definition and commitment for ESD, the Peer Mentoring for ESD methodology, the use WebQuest as tools to design educational experiences, and adopting flexibility and freedom of choice according to context.
- Education Specialists remain at the disposal of teachers throughout the mentoring cycle.
- Feedback loops are created for the monitoring and evaluation of the process.
- A focus on peer interaction.
- A focus on the creation of learning communities.

How to recruit and select the teachers to be trained

The recruitment and selection of teachers is dependent on various factors, not least already existing relationships and institutional factors. The following checklist can give some pointers to Education Specialist when they come to the point of recruiting and selecting teachers who will embark on their own path of peer mentoring.

- Attendance is sometimes completely voluntary, sometimes linked to an awarding driver. Understand this in your own context so you can plan accordingly.
- Where available, make use of already existing networks.
- Build on the inherent motivation of those who already display an interest in ESD.
- Link up with teachers who are already teaching the subject of Sustainable Development (SD) or involved in a project linked to SD.
- Some principals are willing to recommend teachers who might be interested to join the peer mentoring process for ESD.

How to develop a session of Mentoring

The Peer Mentoring Approach essentially combines a group style in which the expert(s) pass on knowledge to a group where necessary, with the Circle style, in which co-learners share knowledge. This combines the best of a top-down and bottom-up approaches, which tallies with the requirements of an Education for Sustainable Development approach.

The following points provide some pointers on how to go about translating to practice such an approach and can be used as a checklist:

- Use a circle rather than theatre format.

- Create an informal atmosphere, and include coffees, water and fruit.
- Trust needs to be ensured. If it is not there, it might not be the right timing to start such a process, and more preliminary work and group building might be necessary before embarking on this process;
- Sessions are built on participation and discussions. While the learning by doing approach allows for short presentations and inputs by those having more experience or expertise in different parts of different sessions, ample time for discussion and sharing needs to be built in the programme in a conscious way.
- Time ought to be planned that allows say for each learner to introduce the WebQuest to at least another learner and take feedback. It is here understood that when planning the time allocated to each session, it is not about how many items are crammed in to a session, but there is enough time for the process and focus on the peer mentoring dimensions to be kept at the centre.
- Make sure that the facilities of your chosen venue are suitable for reviewing and creating Web Quests. A multimedia room might be needed.
- There is no limit to the creativity that can be employed during the sessions. The use of games and simulations has been proven over time. If creating a simulation of the mentoring process, remember that the agenda is usually set by the mentored person, with the mentor providing support and guidance to help develop the mentee professionally.
- The role of the Education Specialist should not be underestimated: he/she has to be deeply prepared with tailor made trainings that are specific to the trainee group. Some examples could be: familiarisation with the syllabi and learning outcome frameworks, which are parts of the so-called vertical part of the training. In fact, where this condition was accomplished, the relationship between Education Specialist and Local Training Groups grew meeting after meeting and finally, it ended up to be authentic, intimate and enriching for both parts.
- The success of the use of WebQuests is also partly dependent on finding a balance in the roles of the Education Specialists and the teachers, according to the context. While some teachers might require a lot of support in the design and use of a tool that they feel they do not know so well, for others this might be interpreted as putting them in a passive role and depriving them of the

control and choice of teaching resources. For some the role of “testing a tool” further accentuates such a feeling, which is contrary to the partnership approach and the equal footing promoted by a peer-mentoring approach. Thus, the balance of the horizontality of the “circle” model of peer-mentoring with the vertical inputs of the Education Specialists is not a constant, and needs to be adapted according to context and expectations.

Conflict management

The model proposes the availability of Education Specialists that can be called upon and relied upon to mediate if required.

“Mentoring involves communication and is relationship-based (Finnish National Agency for Education. (n.d.)”. It is therefore important to ensure the creation of a conflict free environment built on trust and openness. The following checklist is helpful in ensuring such an environment:

1. Ensure that all those present are present on a voluntary basis.
2. It is OK to move out of the group.
3. Ensure there is understanding and consensus of the peer mentoring process.
4. If the above point is not clear an outlining session will be necessary.
5. Ensure any monitoring and evaluations of the process are not limited to technical issues but do include issues pertaining to needs and expectations of the mentor-mentees, and the perceived mutual benefits emanating from being part of a mentoring relationship.
6. When it comes to practical decisions e.g. the choice of topics for Web Quests it is not a question of the “majority wins” but rather that everyone feels included and listened to in the process that led to the final operational decision.

On line support

In the PEERMENT model, education specialists are expected to offer support to the teachers participating in the peer mentoring for ESD path, during the entire experimentation and implementation phase. This often requires also an immediate response. However, Education Specialists are not obliged to offer in person support and can make use of social media, Skype, email or any other form of ICT as agreed between the Education Specialist and the

teacher. It is advised to place all relevant documents in an online drive accessible to all. This also allows for changes to be made directly on the drive, and for any feedback posted there to be automatically visible to all and all participants to be automatically notified of any updates.

WebQuest Topics

The WebQuest topics that each training seminar for Education Specialists will tackle will focus on relevant "global challenges" such as migration, climate change, sustainable development, Agenda 21, food, citizenship, clean energy, water, and sustainable lifestyles.

How to monitor and evaluate the training path

The main goal of monitoring the peer mentoring path is to foster the success of the mentor-mentee relationship for ESD. Evaluation on the other hand is more concerned with informing the development of appropriate training paths in Peer Mentoring for ESD and continually improve them. Ultimately both are aimed at leading to a better quality of life (personal and professional growth) for the educational practitioner (the teacher) and an improved quality of ESD in schools – teaching and learning - as a result of this.

It is the task of the education specialist:

- a) To support the creation of a positive atmosphere for effective peer mentoring to take place among teachers and in schools; and
- b) To monitor the quality and level of the tasks given and provide any support where necessary.

Clearly a number of tools can be used, and these include:

- The classical evaluation questionnaire.
- The use of narratives and attention to the subjective experience of participants.
- Open discussions.
- Individual and group interviews.
- Processing at the end of each session/encounter.
- Debriefing – thus allowing participants to self-correct and enhance their performance.

Linking with the learning outcomes helps keep the path on track.

Both the mid-training and end of training monitoring and evaluations are useful and allow an assessment of the quality of the training path and give feedback on how to improve. In

particular, a mid-training monitoring and evaluation is useful to bring the path back on track well in time to re-adjust and go back to the path leading to the desired learning outcomes.

Resources

1. PEEMENT Intellectual Output 1 (peerment@um.edu.mt)
 2. Guide and manifesto examining the key concepts of global education and glocal education. See: <http://eduglobal.eu/educational-resources/manifesto/>
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