

WBL-PRO Professional Peer Network: The team talks with the professionals – Maria Kuncheva, Haskovo, Bulgaria

Today we are happy to present to you **Maria Kuncheva** from Haskovo, Bulgaria. She has a Master degree in Psychology and possesses more than 23 years as a pedagogical advisor at St. Paisii Hilendarski Secondary School in Haskovo. Maria is a certified Global Career Development Facilitator, career counselling supervisor and trainer in different career counselling project of the Ministry of Education and Science.



Please find below what she has shared with the WBL-PRO team related to the experience of pedagogical staff in work-based learning:

1. Please share with us what the main advantages with respect to work-based learning are:

Career development is a life-long process in every person's life. It encompasses the work, activities and spare time initiatives which everyone chooses. The personal decisions taking during this process are influenced by many factors such as culture, family environment, values and social factors.

Work process nowadays is very different compared to the one in previous periods. Change and uncertainty has become a norm. This requires continuous education and training. Today the emphasis is on life-long learning and a number of career transitions. Work-based learning leads to competence improvement and satisfaction from achievements. In order to maintain high internal motivation and interest in each profession, in particular those in the pedagogic field, skills upgrade is need in connection with the feeling of own value.

The advantages of the work-based learning lead to:

- deepening of the theoretical knowledge of pedagogical staff related to problems they have chosen as well as to the teachers personality, it provides opportunity for an adequate self-evaluation;

- elaboration of different cases and possibilities for solving problems which lead to better self-confidence;

- acquiring competences related to the new technologies and new elements in pedagogical communication aiming at overcoming conflicts in interaction with parents and students;

The forms and methods of group work and trainings for teachers differ in regard with topics, voluntary principals are implemented , the duration is several hours at least once a week.

2. Please share with us what the main challenges with respect to work-based learning are:

Professional - personal communication groups are an open system of meetings for joint work-based pedagogical work:

- Training in the framework of the joint work - all tasks and experience are related to the group context using the dialogue approach in the communication process.
- Training based on the acquired professional experience with emphasis on the cognitive processing of emotional experience derived from group work. Situation in which all participants are equal because of the will for joint work and sharing independently from the personal experience
- Training aiming at the teacher's personality and activities.

This is an open system for group work with different participants and their needs, with different implementation approaches, duration, problems and characteristics of each group of teachers. The format and training approaches are created from the facilitator but the teachers participants also create rules. Thus these groups are distinguished with the overall impact on the teacher's personality and his/her professional performance. They counteract to the growing fragmentizing of the teacher's consciousness, reflection and evaluation stemming from the new distribution of teacher's work and the more and more complex character of the educational and social reality.

Traditional training formats classify problems in accordance with their significance. At the same it is difficult to do the same in teachers' meeting groups as each can be a starting point for reflection, personal change and transition to significant and deep analysis. The importance of a problem is mainly situational. It depends more on the content than on the group opinion about it, to the extent every participants identifies it as his/her own or their will to work on it. That is why the aims and problems to be

solved in a group should be determined, regularly reformulated and discussed in accordance with the group development.

3. Please describe any solutions with respect to challenges and/or weaknesses related to work-based learning:

The main solutions can be formulated in three aspects:

- Personal: I develop myself if I am authentic in my relations with students and colleagues. I learn and take bigger responsibility at work. I am more open, share easily and trust my colleagues, I possess better knowledge for the educational system procedures.
- Personal - professional: related to acquisition of professional, social and communication competence as well as enhanced abilities for understanding and interpreting educational reality.
- Personal - group: the main idea of group meetings is to achieve the training objectives with the support of their colleagues complying with the interpersonal communication principals.

Every participant develops close relations with the rest and tries to get to know them in the best possible way. Participants achieve adequate self-assessment, effective relations and feelings expression, deep self-analysis.

The distinction between the decisions in personal, professional and group aspects is rather relative. Every participant tries to formulate and reformulate his/her objectives in the group work process, to be involved and personally interested in the training process which is the difference compared to the traditional training methods.

The facilitator is responsible to elaborate an agreement with the group with clear rules and work objectives. His/her role is significant for the group and individual awareness of the participants as well for the identification of the concrete educational system problems.

The facilitator is the person who organizes, prepares and determines the preliminary directions of the group development. This role should be assigned to a teacher, psychologist or pedagogical advisor.

4. Please share what the most important knowledge, skills and competences for the work-based learning professional are according to you. What kind of trainings are necessary to acquire them?

The work-based learning groups aim at professional attitudes and skills change and their transition into self-improvement bodies that bring in the new things in the conservative educational system.

Work-based learning is a valuable support in searching for the answer of the question: What the nowadays teacher should be like - in his/her relations with the students, colleagues, parents and the public?

The teachers group meetings facilitator should be calm and balanced, to be able to not express his/her feelings, to create pleasant and peaceful work atmosphere. He/she should possess good relevant knowledge, patient, unbiased and emotionally intelligent.

The communication competence is the basis of the team work knowledge and skills. Situational adaptivity, excellence in verbal and non-verbal means of social behavior are also important skills for the facilitator. Required are as well team work skills, belonging to the group, positive self-evaluation and self-assertiveness and self-development.

The facilitator should possess excellent organizational skills, creativity, time management and academic knowledge in the respective field.

Please feel most welcome to like our facebook page and join the linkedin group to get acquainted with many best practices and other useful materials, tools and resources supporting the high quality performance of work-based professionals around Europe and beyond its borders!

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