



GUIDE Good Guidance Stories

Case Studies as an Innovative Cross: Cultural Training Material for Guidance Practitioners

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Abstract

GOOD GUIDANCE STORIES – case studies as an innovative cross-cultural training material for guidance practitioners – GUIDE

GUIDE is funded under the LLP – Leonardo da Vinci from 1st December 2012 to 30th November 2013. GUIDE is carried out in a consortium of 8 partners from 7 countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Spain).

Educational and vocational guidance is becoming more and more an important element of lifelong learning. Individuals have to handle multiple transitions. In these situations guidance plays a decisive role. Adequately trained career guidance practitioners are a prerequisite for a high quality guidance service. The project aim is to enrich the debate on continuous professional development of guidance practitioners through the development of teaching and training material in the form of case studies.

The guidance practitioner's perspective is in the center of the project. Guidance practitioners have ideas about and experiences with relevant work situations which trainees must first learn to master. Therefore, one important step was to ask practitioners to describe the most important needs and relevant competences for a successful guidance process.

The first step in the project was the development of a questionnaire (filled in by 144 guidance practitioners). The results built the basis for 6 identified fields of competences: (1) Ethical practice, (2) Recognise & respond to client's diverse needs, (3) Develop ones' own capabilities and understand any limitations, (4) Communication facilitation skills, (5) Enable access to information, (6) Update own skills and knowledge.

In a next step every partner wrote one first case study draft and a corresponding teaching note draft which focused on one field of competence. Aside from the questionnaire results, interviews and focus groups have been used in order to receive enough information for the case study development. We decided on the case studies as a method because they can be used in different settings and are useable for a wide range of guidance practitioners. Professionals must not only know things – they must be also able to act effectively and within given rules in their field. This makes the case study particularly interesting for the diverse field of guidance. It is not important to use the case with a specific approach; it is important to find a way to solve the case and thereby develop and strengthen specific skills.

Currently we are in the preparations of the case study testing which will be finished by April 2013. The testing will show if the case studies will withstand a reality check. In order to check if the case study works outside of the original organization, the cases won't be tested from the case study author organization, but from another partner organization. The results will be evaluated and interpreted and will form the basis for the finalization of the case studies and teaching notes in June 2013. Furthermore, the testing results will lead to the discussion of intercultural differences between the participating countries in regard to the characteristics of the different competences and skills.

1 Introduction

This paper describes the project approach in developing learning and teaching material for guidance practitioners. In a first step we give short background information on the training situation of guidance practitioners in Europe. In the main part the used approaches and methods to develop the training material are described. The paper ends with the discussion of the used process and methodology and gives an outlook to new questions that arose during the project.

The project is funded by the European Commission in the frame of the LLP as a LdV Multilateral Project for development of innovation. It involves the following partners: TYPA - Finland, BJC - Ireland,



C.I.O.F.S.-FP -Italy, ZSI - Austria, DOCUMENTA - Spain, Budapest Esély - Hungary and gsub-Projektgesellschaft – Germany.

2 Background

With the increasing importance of flexible labour markets and the need of individuals to prepare themselves to changes; career guidance is becoming more and more an important element of lifelong learning. There is a clear consensus in Europe that high quality guidance and counselling is a key component [2] and helps to bring more people into jobs and training. With the focus on the guidance practitioners it means that adequately trained career guidance practitioners are a prerequisite for making high quality guidance service.

A clear need in Europe for training for guidance practitioners is seen. The current training provision in Europe is diverse. Training may be mandatory or optional, systematic or ad hoc, and at any level from short uncertified courses to master's degrees.

It is obvious that further training for guidance practitioners has to play an important role, however in order to develop high quality training courses it is important to know what kind of competences a guidance practitioner should have.

3 The project approach and the used methodology

With our approach we want to enrich the debate on continuous professional development of guidance practitioners - from their own guidance practitioners' perspective.

In order to reach this aim we identified the following two objectives:

- The identification of the most important needs for a successful guidance process from a guidance practitioner's perspective and the resulting competences, to be developed and strengthened.
- The development of training material which can be used from guidance practitioners in different roles and settings.

3.1 Identification and analysis of the most important needs

The first step in the project was to see what the state-of-the-art in the VET of guidance practitioners in the participating countries is. This information was collected in a standardized format. In a next step it was checked what competences are in the focus of these existing trainings. Furthermore the state-of-the-art is a result itself as it shows the situation of further education for guidance practitioners in the different countries.

The basic project approach is to let the guidance practitioners decide which competences they find important. It was decided to work with already existing competence lists. Therefore the competences defined by CEDEFOP [2] and of the German National Forum [4] were analysed. The partners then decided on the European competence list to build the basis for the ranking of the competences according to the importance for the practitioners. This was done using an online questionnaire. In addition to questions regarding the competences the questionnaire contained also some socio-demographic questions and the description in which situations and in which settings the guidance takes place.

All the questionnaires were analysed and interpreted in total and on country level. The main result was to find out which competences were ranked as most important (in which country). So the following competences are the subject of the case studies:

- "Update own skills and knowledge" (Finland)
- "Communication facilitation skills" (Spain)
- "Ethical practice" (Ireland)
- "Recognize and respond to clients' diverse needs" (Hungary)
- "Develop ones' own capabilities and understand any limitations" (Italy)
- "Enable access to information" (Germany).

Four of the competences belong to the "foundation competences" and one each to the "client-interaction competence" and "supporting competence".



3.2 Development of training material

In order to write professional case studies a “case study development and training workshop” took place led by a case study expert from the University of Lüneburg. The goal was to gain the relevant knowledge in order to write case studies for teaching purposes.

Case studies are bridging the gap between theory and practice and between the academy and the workplace [1]. They come in different forms and are used in a variety of ways. The project partnership decided to use the following case study types:

Case study method: All relevant information is given but neither the problem is stated nor a possible solution is given. The focus is on the analysis and identification of a core problem and on decision taking and development of solutions.

Case problem method: All relevant information is given and the problem is more or less clearly stated. But the case does not contain a possible solution. The focus is on the critical discussion and development of solutions.

Stated problem method: All relevant information is given, the problem, the decisions and solutions are more or less clearly stated. The focus is on the critical discussion of given solutions and eventually development of alternatives.

Regarding possible teaching settings the partnership decided on the “classroom situation”.

Part of every case study is a corresponding teaching note. “A *teaching note serves two main purposes. Primarily it provides information helpful to other users of the case, by summarizing the learning objectives the case writer had in mind, salient issues within the case and the writer's experience in using the case with students.*” [3]

All case study writers agreed on a common structure of the case studies and teaching notes.

The partnership agreed on a procedure which ensured a quality exchange within the partnership during the case study writing phase. So for example an online help desk with the case study expert supported the writers during the development process. Furthermore tandems between the writers were established and all case studies have been intensively discussed face-to-face.

Before finalizing the case studies and teaching notes a testing under real conditions and in the language of the testing country was seen as an important point in order to make sure that the case studies are appropriate learning and teaching material. For this reason a testing setting was developed which ensures that minimum rules like number of participants, qualification of the trainers, etc. are respected without restricting the creativity of the trainer. Different tools like questionnaires for the trainer and the participants but also participating observation will support the project partners in reviewing the case study testing.

4 Discussion

4.1 What would we like to reach with our results?

Firstly we would like to assist the guidance practitioners in developing and improving the needed competences for their field of work. Furthermore, using the case studies the guidance practitioners get to know new cases and situations they might not be confronted with in their daily work. This means that they might have a new view on things, they might even be confronted with a situation of irritation and this leads to the reflection of the own work and thus to learning situations. Even if guidance practitioners often use the advice of their colleagues and speak about their cases, to work with a case study is still different as the material is especially adapted for the classroom use and follows a structure in using it.

In addition to the case studies it is planned to compose a methodological guideline to show the variety of learning situations in which the case studies might be used. The guideline also gives the guidance practitioners the possibility to improve their professional approach.

The case studies can also be used by other professions near to the field such as social workers or street workers.

4.2 Are case studies an appropriate learning material for guidance practitioners?

The testing workshops will show, if case studies are really appropriate learning material for guidance practitioners in training as there might be limits in use. Furthermore we will ask the testing workshop participants if the specific competence was successfully trained during the case study.



4.3 Why can the case studies be used in different European countries?

The case studies are written by partners in six different countries and describe situations that occur on site. They also describe the frame conditions in which the guidance practitioners work and these of course differ between the countries. Due to the fact that we use different types of case studies and that in most cases no solution for the case is provided, they can therefore be used in different countries as the guidance practitioners can find a solution that applies to their legal and administrative frame conditions. The case studies stimulate the practitioners to compare the described system with their own and thus to reflect their own systems and their view on the profession.

4.4 Did the chosen procedure with its specific approaches and used methodologies make sense?

The project is not yet completed. In its current state however the implementation works well and the taken path appears practicable and wise.

Looking back it is seen as crucial, that every partner had a clear and identifiable need on learning and teaching material for guidance practitioners. As a result, important decisions are taken and discussed by the whole group during face-to-face-meetings. Critical points could be the testing workshops in the partner countries as here the case studies and teaching notes have to pass the reality check.

During the project initiation it was planned to develop case studies for different settings like for example private studies and online learning. However, the group decided to concentrate only on the setting "classroom" in order to achieve the required quality due to the project limited resources.

5 Outlook

Currently the testing of the case studies in the partner countries is taking place. The testing must be evaluated and the case studies and teaching notes must be modified regarding the evaluation results. The "final version" case studies will then be translated into all partner languages.

Our project leads to new questions that might be interesting to explore:

In our research we found some differences in the ranking of the competences between different countries (due to the lack of space we cannot go deeper into it in this paper). It would be interesting to find out the reason for these results.

Furthermore the next step now would be to appoint credit points to the case studies and decide and describe them according to the EQF.

How to ensure the use of the developed project products? With this question the project partnership was working from the very early beginning of the project. The planned train the trainer course plays an important role. The aim of the course is not only to train guidance practitioner teachers but also to build up disseminators in order to ensure a sustainable use of the material. The course provides the possibility for the project partners to train their own staff, too.

The dissemination and exploitation of the project results and products will take place in each partner country. In order to ensure the use of the products, it is important to consider the individual situation directly.

The project will close with a final conference to be held in Berlin in October 2013.

References

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