

IZVJEŠĆE S TEČAJA: Communicative skills for European Teachers

Porto, Portugal: 5th – 9th July 2021



On Sunday evening the group met our course organizers Joao, Carlos and Carolina at "Fonte dos Leoes!" in front of the university and then we all headed off to a restaurant called Casa do Carma.

There were 15 participants from the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Spain and Latvia. Over dinner and port we mingled and got to know a little bit about each other. The dinner was amazing, consisting of 12 different types of tapas each representing Portuguese cuisine.

Monday/Tuesday

The first session was introducing the course aims and learning outcomes with the emphasis being on Soft skills, communication skills and coaching. We discussed - What are soft skills? Why are they important? Different ways of communicating - non verbal, body language etc

Our first activity was a getting to know you activity. Each person had to create a picture using drawings, words and symbols which represented themselves. The pictorial representation was then used as an aid for each person to talk about their hobbies, family, home, interests etc.

The second activity was the Telephone Game - miming. All the participants were instructed to line up according to their birth date (month, year) starting from January to December without speaking, only miming was allowed. I was then chosen to read a situation and mime it to the next person and so on until it reached the last person. The last person miming was then compared to the first person's mime to see if there was a difference. A very hilarious activity for everyone involved, especially as the mime moved down the line. Incredible to see how everyone either added a little bit of this and that or forgot part of the mime they had seen.

The third activity was all about "Who are XXI century students?" In groups of 5 we brainstormed and discussed what our students are like - curious, stressed, environmentally aware, engaged in all types of social media, highly motivated etc. Each group presented their mind maps and explained their reasons. The next activity involved writing vocabulary describing the skills and qualities identifying our new colleagues in the course. Using post stick notes, we moved around the class and attached these to our colleagues in the classroom. The focus of the activity was to have a students' profile and a teachers' profile and then discuss the relationship between learners, teachers and education.

Wednesday/Thursday

We started off the morning with a Ken Robinson's TEDTALK video, which I found very interesting and motivating. Robinson mainly spoke about the much needed changes in education, more attention given to art, music, drama and creativity in the classroom. The most important message he conveyed was that in order for us to be creative and innovative we need to be prepared to make mistakes.

The following activity was related to being creative and thinking out of the box. Our task was to connect 9 dots with 4 lines without lifting the pen off the paper. We were encouraged to have a go and not give up, which most of us nearly did. Many of us were frustrated at not being able to complete the task which was partly due to literally not thinking out of the box and the fear of failure.

The third activity was called the Walt Disney Process - Dreamer stage, Realistic stage and Critic stage. We were divided into small groups and given a task. Due to the school becoming more environmentally friendly and the ban on plastic cups there were thousands of them in stock. Our task was to create another use for the plastic cups. The process involved creating a new product, naming it, preparing a short explanation and then presenting it to the rest of the class. During the presentation the other groups had to assess their colleagues from 1-10 based on the idea, support materials, verbal communication, presentation skills, body language and group work and collaboration.

The last activity of the day was to form groups of 4 and to imagine ourselves on a sinking boat/ship. As a group we had to make a list of 15 things to take with us and explain why we had chosen these particular objects. The fifth person's role was observer. Her/She did not participate in the task at all. Their main role was to observe, take notes and record - who took leadership, did everyone contribute, were there any passive members in the group, body language, disagreements regarding the items chosen etc.

Friday

The last session was devoted to COACHING. What is a coach? Their role in the whole process and how to go about being a good coach.

Assessments and a brief discussion of the course aims and learner outcomes were completed followed by the presentation of our course certificates. Finally a glass of port to celebrate the end of the course, heaps of photos and the exchange of emails and phone numbers marked the end of another Erasmus experience.