

Part D – Jobshadowing and the monitoring process of the testing innovative practices

Jobshadowing method: implementation, added value, facilitating conditions

Within the Equap project, which focuses on parent participation, practitioners in ECEC had the opportunity to engage in a jobshadowing activity. This is a method of shared learning, in which practitioners join their colleagues on the work floor in a different country and get actively involved in the work there. This learning method has proven to be very valuable and much appreciated by all participants. They all witnessed that they had an eye-opening and rich learning experience.

While this jobshadowing was organised to work on different methods of involving parents in ECEC, we are convinced that this learning method can be used on many other themes as well.

In this document, we share the main points of interest, as well as some caveats for implementation.

"Job shadowing is a very enriching and inspiring way to learn. It opens up your mind, as a professional and as a person."(Narimane Sidali)

1. Before

Announcement and initial information

- Clear announcement and explanation on what the JS will entail, to everyone who could possibly get involved
- Use of different information channels to make sure everyone is informed
- Provide as many details as possible: on what JS is, where to go, languages, document requirements (visa etc), period, what service...
- Be aware of possible barriers and consider how these can be dealt with (not used to travel for work, language issue, home situation....)
- Make it clear that JS is not just another study visit, but a time to work and learn and really get engaged in a quite unknown setting.

Who can go?

- Collect info on who is interested

- Not too many criteria need to be put forward, but some are worth considering: basic knowledge of languages used, commitment, eagerness to learn, ability to report and give some feedback
- Added value of sending duo's (or more) people from the same centre, with different functions within their centre: supporting each other, being able to reflect together during the JS period, combine different perspectives on the job (both at home and abroad), better opportunities to share within the whole team across different levels afterwards...

How to prepare?

- The preparation is very important to make the JS experience as rich and meaningful as possible.
- Preparation is needed on two levels: the content (What will we be doing? What is the meaning of the jobshadowing? Why get engaged? ...) and the more practical arrangements (travel documents, reservations, timing, materials: notebooks, the focus areas...). It is wise to appoint a 'JS coordinator' in this phase to take charge of this preparation and all the details.
- Arrange for meetings before the JS to take a closer look into the issue at hand, go through relevant background literature/documents, get acquainted with some basic information on the place that will be visited. Again, be clear and detailed on both content and practicalities.
- Make it clear what the focus issue will be, what perspective will be taken, how the reporting will be done, what instrument could be used as some kind of 'compass'.
- It is advisable to have team discussions on the content at hand, collect ideas and underlying convictions and views on the topic to know how you stand within your own service.
- The different JS partner organisations should inform one another (e.g. by some kind of Identikit: who are we? What do we do? Staff? Experiences? What is our approach on...?) This exchange of information not only helps people decide where they want to go and why, but drafting this can also make people even more aware of their own work and why they work the way they do. (Writing an identikit of your own centre, can be a reflection exercise on your own work: why do you want to tell what to the visitors? Why do you stress this and not that? What do you seem to take for granted?...)
- Keep the rest of the team, who do not go JS, informed throughout this process as well.
- .

2. During

"Instead of looking for what can NOT be done, open your eyes to see what CAN be done."(Bouchra Chfira)

Being welcomed

- Receiving colleagues in a warm and welcoming way. Be aware that some people are not used to travel for professional reasons at all and that the visiting colleagues do not know much about your work
- Try to take nothing of your work for granted. Be ready to explain whatever is being asked.
- Get the JS colleagues really involved in your daily work (unnecessary to set up major events especially for them, but do what you usually do)

- Organising a nice dinner or reception to have everyone introduced to each other
- Inform everyone at the work places where JS will be done and explain what this entails, so that receiving centres can be prepared as well.
- Be sure that you can offer activities or working methods that relate to the issue at hand.

Where to go?

- Depending on the issue or what they want to witness and engage in, different places can be involved (centres, community meetings, workfloor...)
- Make it clear in the JS program whether people will stay in the same service or centre or will move around to different work places (both have advantages and disadvantages. Staying in one setting for a couple of days can deepen the learning and make people really part of a team. Moving around on the other hand offers more opportunities to see different ways of working.)

Reporting and regular briefings

- A daily debriefing or reflection moment makes sense. There are so many impressions that it is good to look back on that on a daily basis (not to forget too much). This also helps to stay focused on the issue at hand.
- Take a moment a day to write down some notes on what you experienced and felt during the day (little culture shocks, surprising practices, new approaches, things that made you feel good...) make it into some kind of 'JS-diary'.
- These reflection moments can also be the start of looking into ways how you could 'import' or 'translate' a certain practice in your own work setting.
- The diary can also serve as a first basis for the JS reporting to the team at home

Professional and personal relationships

- When visiting and receiving colleagues succeed in getting to know each other well, it adds to the JS experience. The closer the working relationships, the deeper the learning.
- Engaging in another workplace, opens opportunities to think about your own work and also appreciate that more.
- Jobshadowers need to keep a learning attitude and an open mind. Be curious about the work of others; JS is not about teaching the hosting colleagues how to do their jobs.
- Send regular updates and news to the team at home

3. After

- JS serves a purpose: the learning abroad needs to be brought 'home'.
- Be sure to inform your colleagues about the JS experiences, the things you learned. This way they can also get involved in the search on how new practices could be implemented
- Be aware that a mere cut/paste of practices, methods or activities will NOT work. Need to adapt things to your own organisation, setting, target groups and context
- Keep a focus on the issue at hand
- Discuss in team what could be 'imported' and what goal that would serve (the WHY? Question)
- Getting out of the comfort zone and of your own routine also gives new perspectives and ideas, but remain realistic. Enthusiasm is good but the regular work needs to be continued as well.

“Listening to their stories, inspired me to make some changes in our work, even when I did not go jobshadowing.” (Frieda)

Receiving jobshadowers from partner countries

- On the receiving end side as well, preparation is vital. Think and discuss well about what and how you want to involve people on the workforce, what to show and explain about your work and.
- Get everyone well informed about what is going to happen, who is coming and what the purpose of the JS is. Have everyone (mentally) prepared to have jobshadowers around for a week
- Arrange for a warm welcome and offer some activities in the free time as well. Consider that people are away from home and their usual work surrounding and that things, that seem ordinary to you, may be very new or strange to them.
- Focus not only on the strong points in your work but also have the courage to show what you're less sure about, things that do not go perfectly; in short, the real life in the job. (perfection doesn't exist anywhere)

*“We did not only visit Elmer, we smelled and felt Elmer.”
(visitor from Slovenia)*

Reflection and comments

The overall reactions on the jobshadowing range from positive to extremely positive. The word 'boost' is a recurring theme in the interviews..

- Possibility to arrange job shadowing for a shorter time or closer to home so more people could join
- Job shadowing is 'contaminating': more people want to go and the ones who stayed home also got inspired by the jobshadowing colleagues. The ones who did leave, want to do it again.
- Strong bonds were created, beyond the work level. People are keeping in touch.
- Job shadowing also positively affects the interaction among colleagues; going away together changes and deepens the connection with the people you work with.
- The choice to combine different functions to participate together in the jobshadowing has actually enriched the experience, the follow-up and the outcome, as practices are being implemented on all levels.
- Jobshadowing can be an extremely important learning opportunity for ECEC-practitioners and it can be a powerful professional boost and an eye opener.
- The Elmer jobshadowers travelled with colleagues that were not always working in the same location. This has advantages (getting to know each other, information from different locations) and disadvantages (not taking the same experiences and ideas back to the same work place, not bringing back a shared experience). Some would prefer to do it with their own colleagues, others enjoyed getting to know colleagues from other Elmer locations.
- Working with the focus areas was not always easy. The wording was not always so clear and the different areas sometimes overlap. Then again, it provided a common language, a good

start and could lead to what the focus needed to be. It gave directions at what to look for. Again, investing in a good preparation, also on the focus areas, proved essential.

- Jobshadowing is positively exhausting. If it would have been easier or less demanding, it wouldn't have stuck so well.
- The regular feedback and reflection during the jobshadowing is really vital. Sharing the things you see, comparing the little things ('did you find it strange too that...?'), discussing what could be taken home.
- Having an analytical view, an open mind, being curious and having a reflective attitude does make the jobshadowing a lot richer.
- Jobshadowing makes you appreciate your own work as well, become more aware on how you work and teaches you to enjoy your own successes more.
- In some places there was hardly any actual parent activity to witness or take part in, which was a pity.

Some conclusions on the conditions for successful jobshadowing:

- A thorough preparation is necessary for deep learning, on both content and logistics and on both ends: the travelling and the receiving team (on activities, on the focus areas, on visiting ECEC provision and sites, on what you want to show and do together...).
- Discuss expectations and keep these realistic
- Make sure that possible jobshadowers fully understand what it is all about (e.g. explain, translate documents, clear program...)
- Be aware of possible confrontations or cultural shocks and try to prepare for that (professionally but also personally).
- Be aware of anxieties or feelings of possibly being judged
- Combined functions in one jobshadowing team create an added value.
- Be sure to also take care of the people who stay in the home base
- Regular debriefing during the jobshadowing is needed and valuable
- A warm welcome and feeling of 'fitting into the team' adds a lot to the learning experience
- During job shadowing it is vital to get ample opportunity to really see the ECEC practice in a different setting; avoid too many presentations and formal meetings, but really dive into the work.
- Structural changes: to get child free hours, add staff or rearrange time schedules
- Questioning routines, breaking down what seems so evident, changing the ways 'as we've always done it'
- Job shadowing can add to professional growth and in this way to overall ECEC quality
- Be ambitious but at the same time realistic: the enthusiasm after returning is surely contagious but you can't do it all.
- Keep the focus on the issue at stake, in this case parent participation. There is so much to see and look into, on so many other issues that staying focussed can be quite a challenge.
- Continue to ask questions during the jobshadowing on how, what, who and especially WHY?
- Receiving teams need to know clearly what they want to show to jobshadowers