


Presented by Margaret Thorne
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Crossing boundaries, building bridges in the academic apprenticeship

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Introduction

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CROSSLIFE study program

- Cross-cultural collaboration in lifelong learning and work (CROSSLIFE).
- European supported experimental program for VET professionals and Masters and Doctoral students enrolled at six partner universities (Monash, Tampere [Finland], London Institute of Education, Malta, Zurich and Copenhagen).
- Eighteen month study program from 2007 to 2008 involved participation by six university 'home groups'. The Monash 'home group' for Malta involved five participants from VET backgrounds at different stages of their postgraduate courses.
- Three workshops in London, Finland and Malta provided diverse cross-cultural contexts to aid the development of communication, skills and expertise in a global environment.


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Aims of participants

- As professionals and researchers, to learn about transformations in lifelong learning and work around the world by participating in cross-national workshops, thereby sharing and reflecting on VET experiences in Europe and Australia.
- Acquire more understanding and knowledge about changes in education and work due to globalisation and movement of people and ideas.
- Experience being students in a cross-cultural classroom in another national context.
- Engage in research-based activities to increase knowledge.


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Aims of participants (cont)

- Establish ongoing networks with other VET professionals and researchers in Europe and Australia to provide further research support and opportunities.
- Experience visiting vocational, learning locations in another country and meet other professionals in their workplaces.
- Share new knowledge and ideas with professional and research colleagues in Australia.
- Incorporate new ideas into VET teaching practices in Australian classrooms and workplaces.


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Monash 'home group' task

- Involved the development of an innovative, web-based collaborative presentation on workplace learning for the CROSSLIFE workshop in Malta, related to our VET workplaces and research, based on core readings and our national context.
- Extension of the continuing theme of travelling ideas from earlier workshops in London and Finland.

Similarities among participants

- All involved in teaching multicultural VET learners in the classroom and workplace.
- All use information technology as part of program delivery in VET.
- All have a strong commitment to social equity in education.

Critical Incident

The process of developing a collaborative web-based Monash 'home group' presentation, within an apparently culturally homogenous group, represented a 'critical incident' and window for the three authors to reflect on the cultural 'border-crossing' and negotiation of identity.

"Growing up in a certain cultural context entails the imparting of these meanings, practices and tools of discourse. This process is not necessarily explicit, but is more likely to be implicit, involving what can be referred to as 'embodied knowledge' (Kamler & Thomson, 2006, p.62).

Learned experiences

- As part-time and full-time students, all participants were at different stages of their academic apprenticeships.
- Differing use of workplace and academic terminology among participants.
- Participants from different VET work environments with different expertise, work-related and research skills, knowledge and time constraints.
- Negotiating a theme for the Malta presentation that resonated with all participants was time-consuming because of diverse professional VET interests.

Learned experiences (cont)

- Differing interpretations and perceptions among participants relating to the guidelines and delivery of an innovative web-based task reflected different values, VET teaching practices, contexts and timelines.
- Initial expectations and later evaluations of our perceived effectiveness of the delivery of the web-based presentation to a multicultural audience in Malta were based on assumptions arising from our Australian VET workplace roles and professional experiences in different learning cultures.
- As part of a multicultural cohort in a different national, learning context, it provided us with more detailed insight into what our students experience concerning their transition to VET classrooms and workplaces in Australia.

Conclusion

The development and delivery of a collaborative presentation in another national context was a very valuable learning experience for us as professional VET educators, researchers and academic apprentices.

Our previous understandings of 'culture', 'border crossings', 'boundaries' and 'identities' were challenged and redefined as we negotiated our new learning spaces. 'Imagined communities' no longer exist for us.