

Erasmus: A Finnish-UK Experience

by Anne Riekkinen and Barbra Georgellis



Authors Barbra and Anne in London

Do you sometimes feel bored with your job, lack new ideas and need some inspiration in the classroom? Would you like to get some new pedagogical ideas and develop new insights related to teaching? Maybe you would like to forge some new international relationships and share knowledge with your new colleagues? We had the possibility to pursue these goals, thanks to the Erasmus Programme.

Anne's experience

Our shared journey began almost three years ago. This was the first Erasmus project I had taken part in, whilst Barbra had already been a part of a project, called V.I.O.L.A. (Values in Our Lives Always) with 6 other countries. In both of our schools, there was a specialist Erasmus coordinator, who could help with the application process and our joint project began at Joensuu yhteiskoulu, an upper secondary school in eastern Finland. Teachers of different subjects joined together and created a group focused on accessing Erasmus funds to allow for training and professional development. None of us had perfect English speaking skills, but it didn't prohibit us at all in the application process nor in undertaking courses as part of the programme.

My first project contained both a course and a job shadowing opportunity and my goals were to enhance my digital storytelling skills and develop my understanding of how to use flipped learning as an effective teaching tool. The first step was to find a course aligned with my school's project goals from the School Education Gateway's course catalogue. It is important to choose the course organisation carefully so that you can be sure it is a professional one and not just a travel agency. I eventually chose what turned out to be a marvellous course in Athens called "Digital Storytelling Tools & Educational Video Production" organized by ITCS.com. It was a very educational experience and the teacher was highly qualified. My second goal was to find a psychology teacher who was already using the flipped classroom effectively for teaching and learning. Utilising social media for this search, I posted my request on the Facebook page of the British Association for the Teaching of Psychology (ATP) and got several responses immediately. Barbra's response made it clear we had mutual goals and could share our respective knowledge, which would benefit both us and our schools. My digital skills and ideas, especially after the course in Athens, matched Barbra's pedagogical objective, to use technology more creatively in the classroom. Barbra was also interested in job shadowing at my school in Finland.

My job shadowing at the Royal Masonic School for Girls was an unforgettable experience. Observing lessons provided me with numerous ideas on how to implement the flipped classroom strategies in my own classroom. I participated in many lessons, not just psychology, and my most creative pedagogical ideas today have their origin in that week in London.

After a visit to the Sigmund Freud museum in London, Barbra and I, as part of the goal to use technology more creatively, began a shared digital storytelling project we referred to as Psychodynamic World 360*. In April, Barbra took part in job shadowing in Finland and this gave us a chance to work closely on the digital storytelling project, whilst Barbra had the opportunity to see how technology is used in the Finnish classroom.



Royal Masonic School for Girls

Barbra's experience

The fantastic opportunity to take part in job shadowing at Anne's school in Joensuu, Finland allowed me to experience a very different education system, see how Finnish teachers utilised technology for learning and experience another culture. My key objectives were:

- 1) to come away with new ideas about how to use technology more creatively to enhance the learning experience of my own students
- 2) to work with Anne to produce a unique technology-based resource to broaden the flipped learning experience of my students for the specification topic 'The Psychodynamic Approach to explaining behaviour'.

My week in Finland at Joensuun yhteiskoulu involved observing teachers in a range of subjects and seeing how teaching methods and use of technology differed from the UK. Although forms of assessment and course structure differ considerably, inspiring students and helping them develop their knowledge and, where appropriate, achieve their full potential in their examinations, are goals that cross international borders. From Psychology to Mathematics to Religious studies, exposure to new ideas helped me develop my teaching and broaden the ways in which I can use technology in the classroom. One of the most amazing opportunities involved the use of virtual reality technology which I had a chance to experience for the first time. I learned how Anne's school had used virtual reality technology to share a trip to a museum with those unable to attend and I was able to 'virtually attend' myself – an interesting experience that, if the cost of the technology was not so prohibitive, could allow for virtual travel and a less expensive way of students 'visiting' historic sites, different cultures and museums, widening their learning experience. Through another VR project, I was able to 'step into' a virtual reality art show created by her school's students, complete with voice recordings about their paintings.

Our objective to create our own 3D learning experience with a simpler and less expensive tool – digital storytelling programme Thinglink – began with a trip to the Freud Museum in London to capture 3D images of Sigmund Freud’s London home.



Freud Museum London freud.org.uk/

These images were then uploaded to the programme to create a virtual world that could be explored by the students. Anne then added facts, images and links in Finnish, which would allow her students to navigate this world, achieving certain learning objectives along the way. I then created a similar world in English for use with my students as part of our flipped learning strategy.

As my students require greater depth on this topic in order to pass their national exams, the digital ‘story’ was accompanied by a workbook that they completed as they navigated the 3D world, undertaking tasks such as watching video clips about Freud’s theory and life, reading information from selected websites and hearing a digital recording of an interview with Freud.

Being a scientist keen on empirical evidence, I gathered data on how students viewed this learning task in terms of their education, enjoyment and motivation. An anonymous survey was conducted and the response was overwhelmingly positive with students commenting specifically on how it increased their motivation to be able to use technology in this way, how completion of the workbook alongside the Virtual World allowed them focus on key information they needed to retain and how when they came to lesson, they felt they already had a very good level of knowledge of the Psychodynamic approach prior to teaching - a key goal of flipped learning. With a few tweaks related to content and length of the task, I have continued to use the project each year with my student with similar success.

The job shadowing exchange and joint technology project was a fantastic opportunity for both Anne and me. As part of our project objective to share our experiences, Anne, myself and my colleague Sarah, who is Head of Psychology at RMS, led a workshop on digital tools for learning, including Thinglink, at the Association for the Teaching of Psychology Annual Conference at Leeds University in July 2018.

Where are we now?

Anne continues to develop her knowledge and skills related to the use of digital tools for learning. An Erasmus course, “ICT for teachers” in Dublin, Ireland and organized by English Matters, gave her new ideas and tools to create even more creative lessons. She has also participated in a very inspiring “Flipped Classroom” course in Prague organized by ITC International and now some of her students are able to use these digital tools too. As a result of the courses attended and the project itself, Anne’s English language skills improved considerably and this has allowed her to begin teaching on an International Baccalaureate (IB) programme in Joensuu.

Barbra and her colleague Sarah continue to use flipped learning as their primary teaching technique, developing independent learning skills in their students in order to prepare them not only for their Psychology A Level examinations, but also for the more demanding requirements of higher education. Technology continues to play a key role in this process, and learning about the weird and wonderful world of Sigmund Freud and the Psychodynamic approach using Thinglink, is just one method amongst many used to achieve these goals.

Anne Riekkinen
Joensuun Lyseon lukio, Joensuu, Finland

Barbra Georgellis
Royal Masonic School for Girls,
Rickmansworth, England

Useful link:
Erasmus+ Course Catalogue: “School Education Gateway”
<https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/latest.htm>