

SELVET - Social and Emotional Learning in Vocational Education

Evaluation of the 2nd Meeting, 11th -13th June 2014, Göttingen

Written by Elizabeth Mc Donnell (UK partner)

The stated aims of the second SELVET meeting in Göttingen were:

- To introduce the new participants from Malta & the Netherlands
 - To better understand the nature of SEL and how it works
 - To obtain an overview of the German school system & vocational education
 - To experience playing The Real Game™ and reach a understanding of it
 - To prepare our next tasks and the work on the toolkit.
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The meeting was hosted at Volkshochschule Göttingen and was attended by 10 participants from Germany, the Netherlands, Malta, Hungary and the UK. The content of this evaluation is based on the responses received from 5 of the participants via a Survey Monkey questionnaire (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>) along with some additional information from other sources.

1. Overall impressions of the meeting

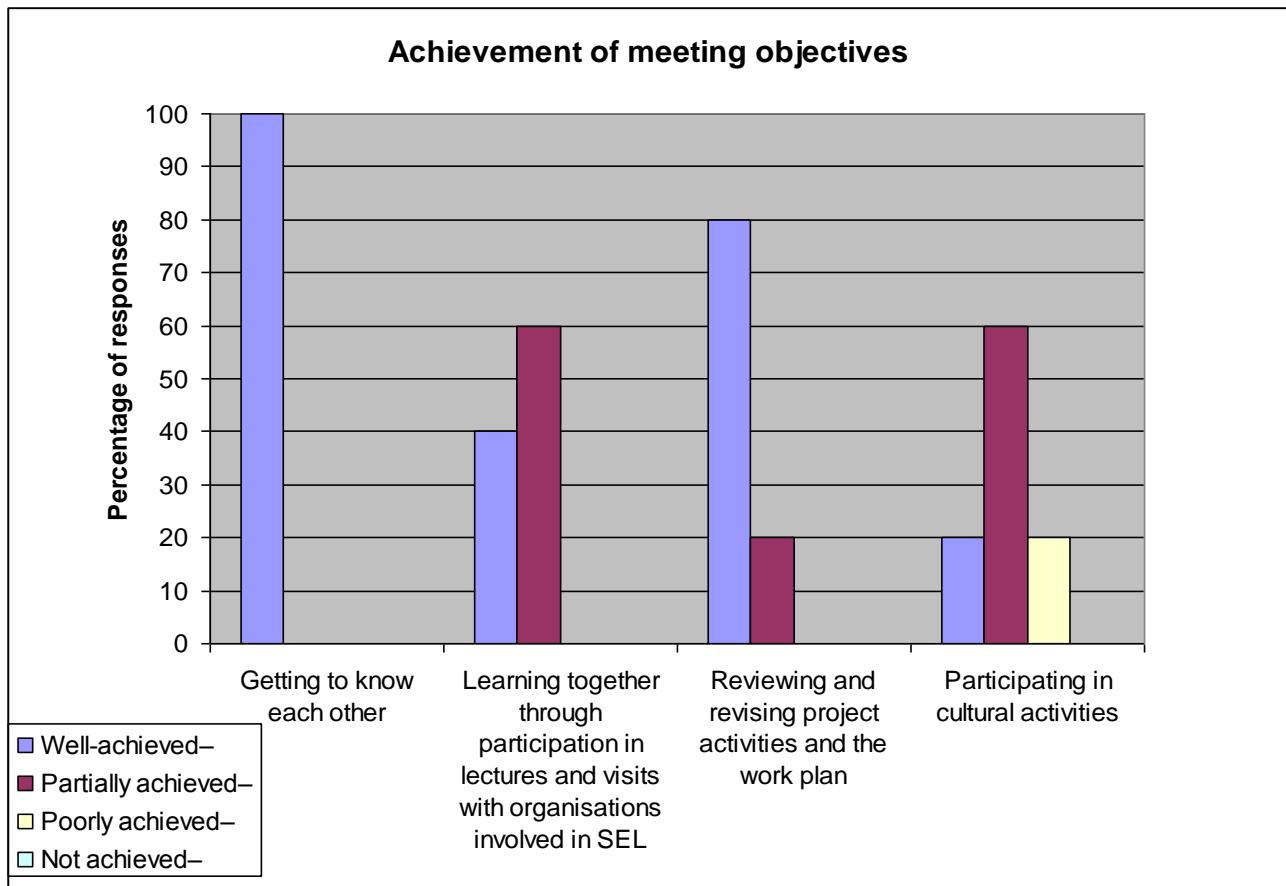
All were very positive about their time spent at the meeting in Göttingen. It was interesting with a warm environment. The arrival of group members from Malta (Marthese and Robert) and new members from the Netherlands (Marion and Lotte) was welcomed and the group gelled very well. The wish was expressed that all will continue to be involved in the project and in future meetings. The input from other professionals with expertise in the field of SEL was appreciated, all engaged productively with the topics and asked questions. The organizers were a little apprehensive beforehand as to the quality of the program and in ensuring all visitors enjoyed their time in Göttingen. They felt all had gone well with a good balance of time for sharing knowledge and learning, and for socializing.

2. Achieving the meeting objectives

Explanatory note: The aims listed for the survey questions are taken from those for the first meeting in Budapest and do not quite match the stated aims for this second meeting (apologies!). However, there is enough overlap to glean some useful feedback.

Figure 1 provides an overview of responses. All agreed that the meeting succeeded in helping all to get to know each other. Learning together through visits and lectures was well-achieved or partially-achieved, and most (80%) agreed that revising the work plan was well-achieved. Participation in cultural activities received mixed responses. The comments that accompanied these responses are summarized below and full comments can be read in appendix 1.

Figure 1: Achievement of meeting objectives expressed as percentage of responses (5 in all)



Factors that helped the process and learning included the structured programme, clear objectives, good physical environment, time for all to speak and to contribute, and the input of ideas and experience from a range of external speakers. The active participation of all during the sessions and willingness to share, be open and give feedback is very constructive. It was noticeable that a number of respondents commented that going out to eat and spend quality time together is very worthwhile and that such socializing is helping to build a strong, cohesive group. Most would have liked to get out on field trips and visit some institutions rather than rely solely on guests coming in to give presentations. However, it was recognized that some trips had been planned but could not take place due to school exams. Cultural visits were lacking. Also we could have dealt with the project and work plan in more depth during the meeting and a concern was expressed on whether we will be able to find a way for practical implementation of our findings.

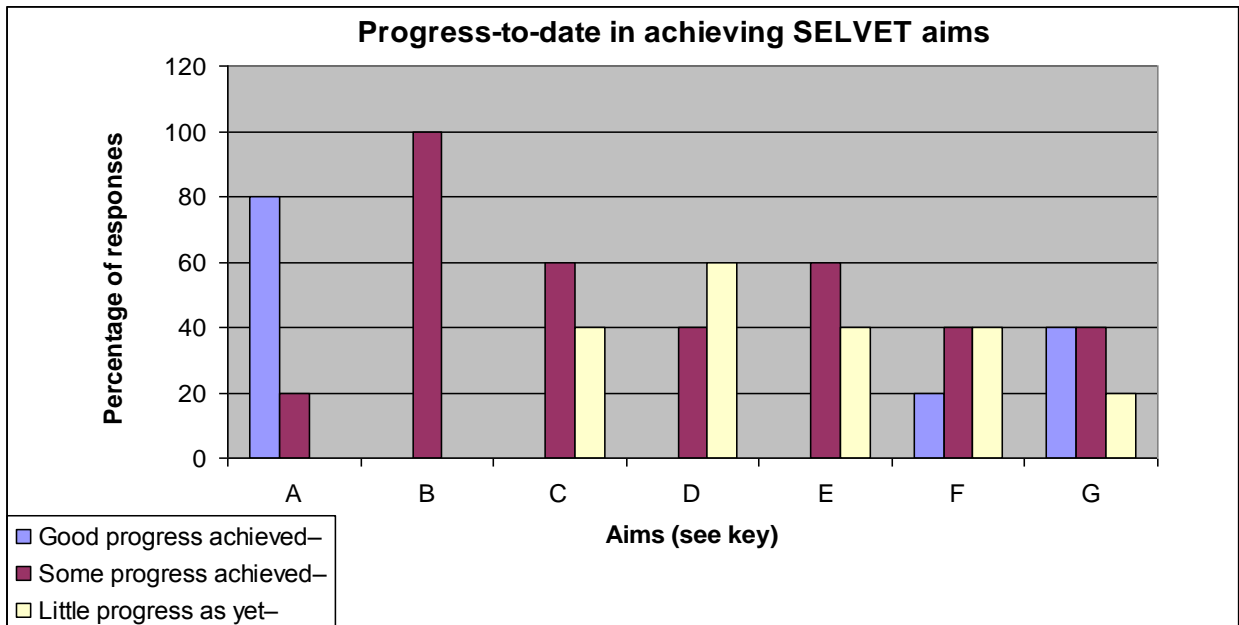
In terms of the details – room set-up, agenda, flow of the day etc - the following comments were made:

- The room was good although too warm and stuffy at times. The availability of a plentiful supply of refreshments and snacks helped and was most welcome. More comfy chairs would be nice since we were seated most of the time. There was no internet connection which was unfortunate.
- The first day seemed rather long especially for those who had travelled a long way the previous day. Time for introductions and getting to know new participants was welcomed.
- Enjoyed the Game of Life
- Plenty space and time was given for questions and comments; appreciated the feeling of being involved by other members of the group
- Would have liked opportunity to move about more, more small group work and time to engage in more in-depth discussions
- Great to meet again those who attended the Budapest meeting and to meet new people. Hope Aniela and Robin will be able to join us in the following meetings.

3. Progress in achieving SELVET aims

The next question sought some feedback on participants' views on our progress-to-date towards achieving the aims of the SELVET project. Figure 2 provides a summary of responses (good progress, some progress, little progress) against each aim.

Figure 2: Progress in achieving SELVET aims expressed as percentage of responses (5 in total)



Key to aims:

- A. Learn about ways SEL programmes can be applied to vocational education and to after-school settings
- B. Identify the kind of training needed for VET teachers to conduct SEL classes
- C. Identify the critical success factors needed for sustainable implementation of SEL programmes
- D. Involve VET students in the exploration and evaluation of the presented best practices
- E. Examine the transferability of the studied methods into the partners' countries
- F. Lay down the foundation for future international joint projects
- G. Disseminate the presented best practices and project ideas in the local and wider life long learning communities

Respondents perceive that most progress has been made in learning about ways that SEL programmes can be applied in vocational education and after-school settings (A) and some progress made in identifying the kind of training needed for VET teachers (B). Less progress has been made in identifying critical success factors (C), in involving VET students in evaluation of best practice (D), and in examining the transferability of methods (E). There has been some progress in laying down foundations for future projects (F) and in dissemination of ideas and best practice (G).

It was observed that we are at the beginning of the project and have had only two meetings to date so it is not surprising that progress is mixed. The meetings will build on each other and we are starting to develop a rhythm and flow. We need to do more on developing the toolkit and on exploring the adaptation of SEL practices in partner countries.

4. Moving forward

All respondents agreed there is a need to build on our work so far and keep up momentum between partner meetings. Ways of doing this included keeping in email contact and continuing to build relationships; agreeing on what we can do between meetings and arranging Skype calls; alerting each other to new materials and ideas; making a commitment to spending some time each month on development of SELVET and to sending material to Roberto for posting on the project blog (<http://selvet.weebly.com/blog>).

Detailed suggestions:

- Agree a plan for what we would like to do together between the meetings, then set deadlines and arrange Skype meetings to discuss our progress. Not everyone needs to take part in every Skype call.
- Get on board other individuals from our own organisations as otherwise it can become rather isolating. Contact through emails between us, even informal ones. The social dinners we had were great ice-breakers and we need to substitute these with other

forms of activities. How about sharing occasional pictures from home? Some brainstorming on this might be a good idea. Sharing of our work in relation to this project will help us feel supported by each other.

- (1) Setting up a rule-of-thumb to answer mails and calls within a short time (i.e. 3 days top), even if it's only briefly. (2) Scheduling at least 1-2 hours a month entirely to the subject of SEL and have some thinking on how to improve elements from the previous survey page for yourself or at least at the next partner meeting. (3) Send short notes, news, ideas to Roberto to put it on the webpage blog, AND visit & read the blog in those scheduled 1-2 hours per Month as well.
- Further ideas, videos & information can always be uploaded in the Drop-Box - an email would be gladly appreciated as a notification of any new material being added.
- Contribute to the blog with some SEL-related and relevant pieces of information between the meetings, just contact Roberto and send him the content you want to share on the blog. Our blog is the visiting card of our project, so it would be nice to bring life into it by regular postings from all participating countries and by reacting to the posts in comments. e.g. make a list of different currently running programmes and projects on SEL and update it throughout the project e.g. permanently collect ideas and/or some observations concerning SELVET and make it accessible to all the participants (Google Document)

5. Some tentative conclusions (EMcD)

What comes across strongly from the feedback is the sense of a strong and positive group dynamic and the success in building a constructive working atmosphere. All express enthusiasm and commitment to the SELVET project. Participants appreciate the work put in by organizers of each meeting (Budapest and Göttingen) and the hospitality shown. The creation of this healthy relationship and of welcoming settings means that all feel able to participate actively in

the meetings, to ask questions and to give feedback. The input from external speakers is appreciated and stimulates new ideas. However, there tends to be an overemphasis on presentation and on listening to received wisdom. Inclusion of some engaging and interactive activities would create a greater sense of energy in the room and suit a wider range of individual learning and communication styles.

There is a sense that we are making progress in achieving the aims of the SELVET project and that this second meeting has built on the first held in Budapest. We are learning about SEL programmes and their application in different settings, and beginning to explore the kind of capabilities and training that teachers may need in implementing such programmes. An ongoing concern, also expressed after the Budapest meeting, is that our work may remain rather theoretical and abstract, and thus idealistic. We need to explore more fully the practical applications, and opportunities for implementation of SEL initiatives in different settings, and take into account the very different contexts of the partner countries.

Something to which we may need to give more attention is how we progress the project between meetings. It seems unlikely that we will achieve SELVET's full potential if we rely solely on partner meetings to carry out the work. However, doing more requires some commitment of time and resources by all partners, difficult when everyone is so busy - and the funding does not pay for our time! Perhaps we should consider this issue at our next meeting, create some kind of realistic plan and commit to it? For instance, at the Budapest meeting we did create an action plan (Table 1, copied below) with names and responsibilities. Some of these actions have been carried out, some not. Maybe we need to put in place a means of monitoring progress on an agreed action plan e.g. by checking at each meeting / or via Skype, what has been achieved, what has not been achieved and what needs to change?

Table 1: Action list (agreed at the Budapest meeting, November 2013)

	Action	Who	When	Done?
1	Research e.g. in UK, what kind of SEL/ SEAL-related activities are going on?	All partners	ongoing	?
2	Logo	Creative Youth (Chinese logo from René)	early 2014	Y
3	Invite a teacher in VE/ SEL to The Hague	All partners		?
4	Keep record of local activities	All partners	Ongoing	?
5	Blog and website	Roberto	Ongoing	Y
6	Send stuff for blog to Roberto	All partners	As and when	N?
7	Send reading list	René to send/ all read!	asap	Y
8	Write meeting report	Anna	asap	Y
9	Send evaluation forms to all partners	Elizabeth/all to complete and return	End Nov 2013	Y
10	Write evaluation report and circulate	Elizabeth	Early Dec 2013	Y

Appendix 1: Comments from Survey Monkey questionnaire

Achieving meeting objectives: What is working well and why?

- By now we have a clear view about what we would like to achieve together, by the end of the project. Going out together for dinner each day was very helpful to get to know each other on a personal level as well.
- All individuals are knowledgeable, open to share, ready to give feedback and learn. This contributed to open and constructive discussions. Structured programme with clear objectives, creative ideas and variant. Physical environment - clean and suitable. Time for everyone to view his/her viewpoints.
- It is particularly visible, that on each and every evening all the participants came together for some quality time together which shows how strong the bonds between the members of this group are growing. Also, some basic and important knowledge on our main topics such as SEL, Coaching and school systems diversity were well provided.

- We managed to get to know each other mostly during breaks & lunch time as everyone was very keen to socialise. We also managed to get along well with each other - this might have been reinforced due to the fact that we were generally together as a group, even during dinners. Most of us actively participated during lectures, which helped in contributing to the topics - or making things clear where they weren't as much. The visits from organisations involved in SEL also helped to broaden our ideas further, especially about what is going on in Germany (in this case).
- I think, everything is working well so far. We are getting to know each other, we get along well, we organize various activities to learn about the situation of SEL(VET) in our countries (presentations, guest speakers, field trips, discussions). I think, we have clear goals. And during our trips to our partner countries we also have the opportunity to see the country, its people and the culture.

Achieving meeting objectives: What is not working so well and why?

- Unfortunately we couldn't do any field trips (as there were exams in the school we had planned to go to).
- Could have done with a visit or two to organisations involved in SEL, rather than having guests come over themselves. Cultural visits were lacking and there was not enough time to get to know more about Goettingen.
- I wish we could have managed to see some institutions from the inside though...
- Revision of the project and work plan took place during the meeting, but I feel that it was not given much depth - in fact my ideas about the tool kit are still a little blurry. Yet I think that we will be getting clearer instructions in the following meetings. I was a little disappointed that cultural visits were not given importance, yet I'm very pleased that we had the chance to tour around together on Friday.
- I hope that everything we are working at will not remain theory and we will be able to practically implement our findings and conclusions.

In helping us to evaluate our progress with SELVET, what would help us to know we are on track, and to alert us when we need to adjust or change something? Can you suggest any specific milestones or ways of monitoring progress?

- I think this question will be important from the Hague partner meeting on - when we start to create the toolkit together and when we start thinking about possible future applications to be submitted together. it would be great to discuss a work plan for creating the toolkit (with deadlines, tasks, Skype meetings) by the end of the Hague

meeting. Also, we could start to think about the outlines of a possible future project (in the framework of Erasmus plus Strategic partnership, or other calls).

- Record any changes happening locally in relation to SELVET. Find ways of involving students. Short and regular evaluations.
- The blog could really function as a news motor - provided, people send their thoughts and snippets of ideas/information regularly!
- This questionnaire is already very relevant to this matter. I also found the daily feedback sheet as quite relevant for me to reflect about what was carried out.

Additional comments and observations

- This evaluation form seems an effective way to get feedbacks, so I'm looking forward to the summary of all partners' answers.
- We need to keep in mind that SEL is not only about acquiring skills but also about managing emotions, which requires deeper and individual work at times. How are we catering for this?
- Overall I am very happy & satisfied in having contributed to this project. I feel very lucky I make part of our current team and I hope to give my best in our future meetings. If I may suggest something - I think it would benefit all of us if during the next meetings we give a little space for the development of group dynamics by introducing more group work and activities related to our project.

Send any questions or comments on this report to:

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