MenSI
Mentoring for
School Improvement

D4.2 Report on Bottom-up, Self-organised, Mentoring School Clusters

31 December 2022

The MenSI project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004633. Neither the European Commission (EC) nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for how the following information is used. The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EC.

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Deliverable number:	D4.2
Due date:	31 December 2022
Nature[1]:	Public
Dissemination Level[2]:	PU
Work Package:	4 – Experimenting with different whole school mentoring approaches
Lead Beneficiary:	MZO
Beneficiaries:	All MenSI partners

DOCUMENT HISTORY

V.	Status	Date	Comments	Authors
1	Draft	27 December 2022		Arjana Blazic, MZO
2	Final	31 December 2022		Arjana Blazic, MZO

[1] Nature: R = Report, P = Prototype, D = Demonstrator, O = Other
[2] Dissemination level:
PU = Public
PP = Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)
RE = Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)
CO = Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)
Restraint UE = Classified with the classification level "Restraint UE" according to Commission Decision 2001/844 and amendments

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Introduction

The deliverable D4.2 is the MenSI project's overview of how project school clusters have implemented different types of bottom-up, self-organised approaches to cluster management, including the contribution made by online mentoring and different incentive/reward schemes. The document assumes that the reader is familiar with the MenSI project, its core activities and objectives. If not, relevant information can be found at the MenSI website[3].

Within the MenSI project experimentation phase that lasted during the academic year 2021-2022, 24 mentor schools and 96 mentee schools from the six partner countries experimented with a variety of whole-school mentoring approaches, both top-down and bottom-up. In every country, some of the clusters, at least one per country, were self-organised and self-managed to a much greater degree than the top-down clusters. Other types of bottom-up and self-organised mentoring initiatives were invited to join the project, in particular the European Schoolnet Future Classroom learning labs as self-organized grassroots initiatives.

Unlike in top-down clusters, there was no formal requirement for mentor schools in bottom-up clusters to produce an operational plan and timetable, although many mentor schools found it useful and beneficial for their work to create one. Some degree of support and steering was still required from national MoE coordinators, particularly early on, to help mentor schools establish a cluster with their mentee schools. After the cluster had been established, national coordinators became less proactive than for clusters that adopted the top-down approach. The national coordinators exercised a 'light touch' approach when providing support to schools in bottom-up clusters. However, at the end of the experimentation phase each of these mentor schools was still required to work with the mentee schools to produce a diary/report that outlined the mentoring work carried out and lessons learned during the experimentation phase.

The following sections in this deliverable will analyse in further detail the different elements mentioned above as the outcomes of the direct discussion with the national coordinators during the regular Steering Committee Meeting and other ad hoc discussions and is aligned with the evidence presented in D5.1 and D5.2 project reports. To learn more about how project school clusters have implemented different types of regional hub mentoring models please see deliverable D4.1.

[3] https://mensi.eun.org/

Bottom-up approaches

Within the MenSI project, both top-down and bottom-up mentoring approaches were explored. The outcomes of the implementation of the top-down mentoring model within the MenSI project are described in D4.1. In this report, we look at the outcomes of the integration of the bottom-up approach to mentoring.

A clear explanation and differentiation between the two approaches to mentoring needs to be provided: bottom-up and top-down mentoring models refer to how the clusters were set up. Top-down clusters were set up by the ministries, whereas bottom-up clusters were set up either by the ministries or by the mentor school itself. There were also differences in how the information and the work flowed in a cluster. In a top-down cluster the information flowed from the ministry through mentor school to the mentee schools, whereas in a bottom-up cluster the information flowed in all directions with both mentor and mentee schools being more flexible and independent and deciding together how they organized their work, why they were doing it in a certain way and what were the outcomes and the results of implemented actions. Bottom-up clusters organized their work internally or more horizontally than the top-down clusters.

In all the partner countries, the Ministries of Education (MoE) have set up the school clusters based on their geographical location or type of school. At the beginning of the project, all the schools, regardless of the approach they adopted, needed clear instructions from the national coordinators on how to proceed and how to organise their work. Once they had started their work, schools became more independent and self-organized (for most schools), but especially those schools within the bottom-up clusters. It was important that the mentor schools could hear and understand clearly what the needs of mentee schools were as well as their expectations from the mentor school. The mentor schools involved all the mentee schools in their cluster in the organization of training, implementation of activities, ways of communication, cooperation and evaluation. The mentor schools *"wished to design the mentoring process together with the mentee schools in their clusters, so that the participants were active creators of learning and not merely passive listeners"*[4].

The bottom-up mentoring model varied to a certain extent from country to country, but there were also many similarities. The following subsection provides a short description of the bottom-up approach outcomes per country:

Belgium (Flanders)

Bottom-up clusters were more difficult to lead for some mentor schools, as there was more responsibility involved on the school's side. Some schools faced challenges especially when it was

[4] Getting to know the schools in the cluster and the beginning of cooperation, Danica Bavčević, MenSi Blog, 2022

not clearly stated or understood what the mentee schools needed and wanted or when the activities were not targeted at the real needs of the schools, which resulted in less learning and less mentoring. Lessons learned from Belgian clusters are that some basic structure needs to be provided by the MoE, especially at the beginning of the project when more clear guidance is needed. However, everything else concerning the contents of the meetings, the what, the where and the who of the workshops needed to be bottom-up. In other words, teachers know best what they need, what they are interested in, what works in their classrooms and that is the reason why they need to have more freedom to organize mentoring activities according to their real needs. It is important, however, for the mentor schools in bottom-up clusters to also know that they can rely on advice and support of the national coordinators throughout the project whenever they need it.

The mentor schools taking on the leading role was not always necessary for the successful organization of the cluster activities, but it was good that there was always someone in the cluster who took the lead to ensure that learning was happening and that all the mentee schools were actively involved. Schools also reported that it was not crucial for the activities to be perfectly organized but it was more important that the work was divided by the members of the cluster, so that everyone was engaged.

Croatia

Bottom-up mentoring model can be used as a good example for policy makers to encourage the development of the mentoring culture. In a bottom-up model, the role of the school coordinator was vital, which implied that the school coordinator was independent and had flexibility in planning, organizing and adjusting the events and the activities to fit the needs and interests of the schools in their cluster. Also, it was very important that each school in a cluster had a good technical infrastructure and that they had adequate channels for collaboration and cooperation, for example through the same learning management systems. Bottom-up clusters organized different types of activities for their mentee schools, such as expert webinars, Teachmeets and classroom observations.

In bottom-up clusters it was even more important to engage all the teachers equally so that everybody was provided with opportunities not only to learn, but also to teach each other. Peer teaching proved to be a valuable source of learning, especially after the pandemic, as it was not only mentor schools that had expertise, but also mentee schools were able to share their knowledge, experience and expertise with the “advanced” schools.

Czech Republic

As far as the bottom-up mentoring approach is concerned, the MoE believes that mentoring should be encouraged on several levels. First, it is important to start by sharing a good practice because there is good practice from even before the MenSI project. In retrospect, a slightly different narrative could have been employed which would involve encouraging schools to mentor without knowing that they were mentoring because project schools were discussing different ideas or topics with their peers and exchanging experiences, even outside the project. This is a type of mentoring practice that the MoE wants to retain after the project ends.

Another approach to mentoring should be learning by living. Every mentor school regardless of the mentoring model should be provided with at least some support and guidance by the MoE, the national coordinator or the project coordinator to guide them through the organization and implementation of the mentoring activities.

In general, mentoring should be implemented in development plans, not only of top-down and bottom-up clusters but mentoring across the whole school in terms of being open to learning from others. However, there needs to be more specific training provided for those involved to ensure that mentoring activities are successful.

Hungary

In Hungary, the MoE set up all the hubs, which meant that the first national project meeting was more top-down. It was decided which two clusters would follow the bottom-up approach to mentoring and which two would pursue the top-down mentoring model. Even though there were some concerns in bottom-up clusters on how they would coordinate and lead their clusters and organize their work, it turned out that the mentor schools appreciated the flexibility provided by a bottom-up approach and were apt to lead the cluster work for their mentee schools. They were more in control of the situation and offered more concrete solutions to the other members of the cluster.

However, when working with schools using a bottom-up mentoring approach, it is still important to have clear guidelines on how to work in clusters, provide teachers with timelines, deadlines and goals and ensure that structure on the work within the cluster is provided for all the participants, especially at the beginning of the project to allow for a smooth transition to self-organized activities and independent organization of mentoring practices. It is also important to help teachers build a network or a community of practice where they would be able to find advice, support and help and where they could share their ideas and best practice to inspire each other.

Italy

In Italy, the MoE national coordinators provided support and coached all mentor and mentee schools and provided ideas on how to introduce innovation within the teaching context. At the same time, they provided the bottom-up clusters with autonomy in terms of organizing mentoring activities, school visitations, online meetings and also when it came to organizing or planning support activities. For example, one of the clusters organized a face-to-face meeting during the pandemic autonomously but invited the national coordinators to join them. The coordinators observed and documented what happened during the meeting, such as cooperation and communication among the teachers, participating in the mentoring process and designing of learning activities, and provided all the participating teachers with support and advice as well as feedback.

The feedback received in turn from the schools was very positive. The teachers appreciated being provided with MoE support, felt valued and appreciated having a considerable amount of freedom,

autonomy and flexibility to identify and implement the best solutions for them to be transferred into their teaching context.

Portugal

In Portuguese schools, introducing top-down and bottom-up mentoring models was a completely new approach to mentoring for teachers. Before the MenSI project, Portuguese teachers were familiar with one-to-one mentoring, especially in relation to mentoring novice teachers, but the concept of whole-school mentoring model was a new and innovative concept for them. Because of that, the national coordinators provided support and advice to all the school clusters, regardless of their mentoring model. For school clusters that adopted the bottom-up model, the support and guidance by the national coordinators was seen as necessary only at the beginning of the project in order to build their confidence and encourage them to be more independent and autonomous in organizing activities for their cluster. As the project progressed, bottom-up schools became more independent and proactive. For all schools it was important to have the support of the school leadership and to build trust between all the stakeholders was fundamental.

Almost all the clusters worked very independently, except at the beginning of the project when more influence of the national coordinators was clearly visible in all the clusters. As the project progressed, less advice and support was requested by the schools as they became more independent and autonomous in their work. Another interesting outcome of this way of working in clusters is that there was no clear hierarchy in the cluster; they all worked together on equal terms as teams and shared their expertise and experience in their community of practice.

FCL Learning labs

The project particularly aimed to encourage participation as mentor schools from the growing network of learning labs that have been inspired by EUN's Future Classroom Lab. These predominantly 'bottom-up' initiatives have been instrumental in helping the schools concerned to develop an innovative whole-school approach to implementing ICT. A number of these learning labs were invited to work with and mentor clusters of less advanced schools in order to accelerate the adoption of the FCL model and the innovative pedagogical practices involving ICT that are available in these labs.

MenSI Learning Labs

The MenSI proposal aimed at involving some schools in MenSI that had been inspired to set up a Future Classroom Lab (FCL). By so doing, the project hoped that it would be better able to understand what has motivated these schools to set up their own learning labs and to see whether some incentives/rewards/support could help them to provide mentoring to other schools.

FCL Network of Innovative Learning Labs and Spaces

European Schoolnet's Future Classroom Lab (FCL) has inspired hundreds of teachers, schools and other organisations to create their own "learning labs" based on the FCL model or to enhance their learning spaces in some way. Also, other independent, similar initiatives have shown interest to link up with FCL to develop their concept and exchange ideas. To link these different initiatives together, the Future Classroom Lab has created an open network of Innovative Learning Labs and Spaces[5].

What is a 'learning lab'?

All the learning labs are independent initiatives, often inspired by the original Future Classroom Lab created by European Schoolnet in Brussels. All learning labs are unique and different since they have been created and adapted to the local context and to provide for local needs. However, the main ideas of the Future Classroom Lab are present in most cases, such as the learning zones. The criteria suggests that:

- It is a flexible learning space and allows for easy reconfiguration according to the needs of the learning activity. It allows for easy and flexible repositioning of learners and teachers.
- It has a mission to host innovative learning. Learning activities taking place in the learning lab aim to incorporate new visions on pedagogy, 21st Century Skills and technology-enhanced learning.

[5] https://fcl.eun.org/fcl-network-members

- There is a variety of activities taking place. It is a place for learning and training activities, but also for meetings and discussions about education. A learning lab is a place for practice but also for reflection.
- It aims to involve and to connect to different stakeholders. It creates a dialogue between teachers, school leaders, policymakers, commercial partners, students, parents, etc.
- It encourages the development of an open culture, e.g., teachers can observe each other's lessons and provide mentoring. Students use the learning lab to take part in European projects like eTwinning.
- Communication is an important part of engaging the stakeholders and informing the outside world about the activities. A learning lab can be an inspirational lighthouse for the area (e.g., for other schools in the region).

School-based learning labs are labs that are embedded in K12 schools, they have a limited target audience (e.g., students and teachers) and they do not have many commercial partners. The size of the space, amount of technology or the number of commercial partners is not crucial. What is important for a learning lab is its ability to help a school to rethink teaching and learning, promote innovative pedagogies, and support the competences of both students and teaching staff to use technology in schools in a sustainable way.

Collaboration with MenSI

As part of WP4, the consortium proposed that a number of these school-based learning labs could be invited to work with MenSI school clusters and/or schools within other EU countries in order to accelerate the adoption of the FCL model and the innovative pedagogical practices involving ICT that are available in these labs.

In order to achieve this, an open call targeting the FCL Network Learning Labs was launched in Spring 2022. Out of all applications received, 10 learning labs were selected to collaborate with the MenSI project and were encouraged to establish their own mentoring scheme. Out of the 10 learning labs selected, 9 labs signed a memorandum of understanding and joined the MenSI learning labs network[6]. **The MenSI learning labs are based in Austria, Croatia, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Turkey and Ukraine.**

Bottom-up mentoring

As already explained, the rationale behind involving a set of FCL-inspired labs in MenSI, was to be able to better understand what has motivated schools to set up their own learning labs and to provide mentoring to other schools (e.g., to help mainstream future classroom scenario development and the FCL process).

In this regard, a collaboration with 10 FCL learning labs was launched, for which 20.000 EUR were allocated (2.000 EUR per learning lab). During the duration of the agreement and under the

[6] https://mensi.eun.org/mensi-learning-labs

coordination of EUN, each Learning Lab committed to collaborate with the MenSI project by developing the following tasks:

1. Follow the guidance and instructions of EUN but also be proactive in the dissemination of the MenSI project's activities.
2. Incorporate MenSI in the school development plan into its dissemination activities.
3. Organize at least 2 online/f2f workshops targeting school representatives at national level and/or EU Level.
4. Encourage teachers/schools to actively participate in the MenSI Community of Practice at national and European levels.
5. Support the evaluation activities proposed by EUN.
6. Participate in online meetings with the other Learning Labs selected.
7. Support the engagement of the network of FCL network of Innovative Learning Labs and Spaces.

Reporting

As part of their MenSI related activities, Learning Labs have submitted a report where they briefly summarize the following three key areas:

- Experience in fostering a learning lab
- School training activities
- Future plans beyond MenSI

The full reports have been made available within the learning labs section of the MenSI project's website:

https://mensi.eun.org/mensi-learning-labs-reports

Online mentoring

The MenSI project included as an objective, “exploring new approaches to online mentoring.” At the time of writing the H2020 MenSI proposal, it was thought, that “potentially online mentoring could be more cost-effective in terms of mainstreaming whole school use of ICT”. As it turned out, online mentoring in fact became essential and much more central in MenSI as the project had to respond to the Covid pandemic disruptions.

As a result of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were involved in online mentoring much more than anticipated during the planning phase. Two face-to-face workshops at the Future Classroom Lab in Brussels needed to be cancelled because of the measures in force at the time of the planned workshops, and instead, the meetings were organised online. One of the advantages of this new arrangement was that more teachers were able to participate in the workshops, including more teachers from mentee schools, which was an opportunity they appreciated greatly. All the teachers reported that they were more confident in using online mentoring tools as they had the opportunity to participate in the online workshops. A drawback was that teachers could not meet in person and develop professional relationships with each other and many of them suffered from burnout and online fatigue due to the pandemic.

Schools in all the project countries reported that successful whole-school mentoring requires a blended approach combining face-to-face meetings, continuous professional development workshops and school visits with various forms of online collaboration and professional development support. For teachers it was important to find the time to network and learn as well as to acquire the new mindset for sharing and learning from and with each other, which could be facilitated through a networked community of teachers where teachers could meet like-minded peers and provide each other with help and support as well as inspiration and to nourish connections and relationships. Even though mobility is an appreciated and motivating factor, being a member of an online network or a community of practice is very important as it provides teachers with new channels for communication, peer learning, discussions, sharing and documenting good practice, which are fundamental factors for successful whole-school mentoring.

Teachers reported that time was priceless for them. Face-to-face networking and training required more time and attention from all the participating schools as well as more work and challenges when trying to coordinate everybody's agenda. However, all the participating teachers reported that face-to-face networking was more beneficial and effective for their work in the clusters, as they could visit each other's schools and experience how their colleagues were teaching and implementing innovative teaching methods. In other words, they could interact with each other and observe what good practice means or looks like in the real classroom and learn from it.

When it comes to organizing face-to-face meetings, teachers reported that organizing several meetings in a shorter period of time, instead of one big meeting, was not only more beneficial for teachers, but also more practical, because it generated more commitment and more efficient

learning, especially at times of the pandemic when meetings were suddenly cancelled at a very short notice.

There is a plethora of digital tools and technologies that support online collaboration and communication to be used to reach out to all the participating teachers more easily and quickly. However, it needs to be ensured that schools have all the necessary infrastructure as well as training to be able to use these technologies.

At the beginning of the project the schools in all the partner countries were provided with a reviewed list of useful digital tools and mentoring software that they could potentially use in their work. Mentor schools were free to use whatever online tools or platforms they were familiar with and to explore others that they thought couldsupport and facilitate online mentoring and peer exchange.

The list below is by no means exhaustive, but highlights some of the most commonly used tools by MenSI schools.

Digital tools and technologies

Community and Learning Management Systems

MenSI platform

MenSI website serves as a community platform for the participating schools from all the partner countries. It provides the teachers with a space to meet, exchange their experiences and good practice, learn from each other, inspire and get inspired. The website offers certain interactive features, such as discussions, surveys, partner finding tools and live events.

Besides the MenSI platform that gathers all the participating schools, each cluster in each country was able to choose a learning management system (LMS) that served as a place for supporting mentee schools, communication and collaboration as well as sharing and exchanging ideas or creating content collaboratively. Even though mentor schools could choose different LMS's, it was recommended that all the schools in a cluster were familiar with the selected LMS. For example, in Croatia and Portugal Moodle was used in all schools as it was supported by the education ministries in these countries, which meant that teachers were familiar with its features and functionalities.

Moodle

Moodle is a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments. Moodle is open-source software that offers a rich selection of learner-centred tools for the creation of educational content and collaborative learning environment. It provides a flexible toolset to support both blended and distance learning and professional development courses.

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is an Office 365 application that enables users to communicate and collaborate with their colleagues and students, to schedule meetings and hold video conferences and to share content. It helps teachers and students to stay organized and quickly catch up on messages and notifications via the chat functionality. It supports collaborative work on files. Teams can be customized by adding different types of applications and services.

Collaboration Tools

Collaboration was encouraged throughout the duration of the project within a cluster itself, and among clusters at national and international levels. Even though LMS's include tools and apps that leverage collaboration among partners, additional third-party tools were also recommended to boost collaboration and communication, enhance the planning, brainstorming and decision-making process, curate or crowdsource useful content, and reflect and provide feedback to peers.

Padlet

Padlet is a digital canvas to create different types of projects that are easy to share and collaborate. Padlet enables real time collaboration by posting text, images, audio and video recordings and files and web links.

Content Creation Tools

Both mentor and mentee schools were provided with numerous opportunities to create content by using different tools and applications to support online mentoring.

Canva

Canva is a real-time collaboration platform that offers thousands of professional templates, images and quality content to choose from. Educators can sign up for Canva for Education for free. Canva has built-in comments to communicate, work, and resolve suggestions in real-time.

Genially

Genially is a tool used to create interactive presentations, posters, infographics, quizzes and games. Users are actively engaged in the content created with Genially.

Reflection Tools

Learning diaries

The manner in which school clusters deployed and utilised online mentoring was recorded in the learning diaries kept by teachers from the participating schools. The diaries were featured within the MenSI platform and shared with a global audience for the purpose of project dissemination and sharing of best practice in online mentoring. Teachers were able to use the MenSI platform blog to post their diaries, where they reflected on their work, mentoring approaches used during the

different phases of the project, and collaboration and communication among partners. They were also encouraged to provide feedback to their peers' diary entries.

Besides writing a diary as a story in the form of blog posts, teachers were able to choose to keep a learning diary in different formats, e.g., as a video or audio reflection or animated video. Further ideas on the use of learning diaries can be found in How To Make Your Learning Diary.

Incentives and rewards

A specific task in the MenSI project was dedicated to exploring the potential impact of different incentive and reward schemes for mentor schools to mainstream their innovative practices along with the factors that motivate mentee schools to participate in the project school clusters. The 24 mentor schools in the project were provided with a range of different incentives in recognition of the considerable amount of work and degree of commitment that they were required to make as mentors. Financial incentives of 4.000 EUR were offered only to the mentor schools in all the project countries except in Hungary, where the amount was divided between the mentor and mentee schools. The schools were responsible for the budget themselves and the ministries had no control over how the budget was spent, which gave schools more freedom and autonomy in how to utilise these incentives. The schools were also not asked to report on how they spent the money received in order to avoid administrative burdens. A huge advantage of such an arrangement was that the schools were able to target specifically their needs and they were able to give incentives to those who were directly involved in the project.

Offering cash incentives to schools proved to be important and worthwhile for teachers as a motivating factor for keeping schools engaged. Having the freedom to spend the funding on the real needs of the schools involved was reported to be one of the positive aspects of cash incentives.

Because of very strict legal regulations and administrative burden regarding allocating funds to schools in almost all the project countries, it was very difficult to make any amendments to the contracts that mentor schools (and mentee schools in Hungary) signed at the beginning of the experimentation phase or to transfer additional amounts of money to schools, for example to buy additional software.

Other Incentives/rewards

Other incentives and rewards included new learning opportunities; additional organisational support to enable them to provide continuous professional development training and mentoring to mentee schools; opportunities to visit their mentee schools and to invite their mentee schools to pay them a visit; participation in the MenSI international mentor schools community and the travel associated with project meetings of this group; recognition at national and international level along with the prestige that comes from this

Non-cash incentives and rewards were very important for all the teachers. For examples, in Croatia, certificates of participation were a very useful reward for teachers because certificates of participation in national projects lead to teachers' career advancement and along with it comes a higher salary. Non-financial incentives such as the opportunity to stay connected with peers and to meet each other in local face-to-face meetings or in the online community, participating in

conferences or collaborative writing of case studies for conference papers was an especially important and effective form of reward for the participating teachers.

Schools reported that for them it was a matter of pride to be a member of a group of schools to be chosen to participate in this program. Being part of an international project and community of teachers was a special reward for schools.

Conclusion

Important lessons learned from the bottom-up, self-organised clusters included a variety of findings. Further conclusions on bottom-up mentoring will be drawn following the workshop with the learning labs to be held in Lisbon, in February 2023 prior to the end of the project as all the learning labs have been invited to join this international networking meeting to discuss the reports, project findings and the sustainability of their activities.

The findings from the experimentation phase on the implementation of the bottom-up mentoring model include the following:

Level of top-down support

Bottom-up, self-organized clusters were more challenging for mentor schools as, generally, more responsibility and knowledge was required by the mentor schools in order to successfully coordinate and lead school clusters. It is advisable in this sort of mentoring that national coordinators provide more support to bottom-up clusters at the beginning of a project, but with time, as the project progresses and schools become more knowledgeable and confident, the national coordinators can provide guidance only when asked by the school coordinators.

Degree of autonomy

At the same time teachers in the self-organised school clusters appreciated having a considerable degree of autonomy in deciding what were the most relevant solutions and pedagogical approaches that could be transferred to their own local context; and what sort of mentoring approach worked best for them.

Blended strategy

Schools in all the project countries noted that a blended strategy combining in-person meetings, ongoing professional development seminars, classroom observations and school visitations with different types of online cooperation and professional development training workshops, is the most promising strategy for successful whole-school mentoring.

Online mentoring

Online mentoring proved to be more efficient throughout the pandemic in terms of providing equal quality and equal opportunities for all the participating teachers, regardless of where they live, be it in small rural or big urban areas. The experience of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic has helped the teachers be more receptive to online mentoring. The teachers reported that the experience from the experimentation phase supports the view that there is a wide variety of digital tools and platforms at their disposal, which can be utilised to support online mentoring.

Peer learning

Policy makers need to formally acknowledge peer learning and peer sharing between schools and recognize it as a formal professional development opportunity to enhance and encourage whole-school mentoring.

Face-to-face mentoring

Providing opportunities for face-to-face networking, training and mentoring especially among schools that are in close proximity to each other was particularly important for teachers and as such even more crucial for the successful whole-school mentoring. When it comes to the face-to-face networking, face-to-face trainings are more efficient and preferable, and teachers are more motivated to work in the project if they know that they will be able to meet their peers. The findings from both types of mentoring models reveal that face-to-face meetings are important for successful mentoring, but teachers feel strong that in bottom-up mentoring model it is even more crucial as it allows for easier building of professional relationships and sustainability of the clusters.

Incentives and rewards

Rewards, incentives and prizes are vital for schools because they lead to a motivation boost, higher commitment and they bring added value to the school as a whole. Inviting teachers to participate in international workshops at the Future Classroom Labs and providing them with opportunities to learn about the latest developments in using digital technologies in the classroom and for mentoring purposes is regarded by teachers as a motivation boost.

Financial incentives are important because without having the funding, schools would not be able to organize diverse types of events. Teachers see financial remuneration important, but not as the key element of the mentoring process, as opposed to their intrinsic motivation to participate in international projects and share with and learn from peers who teach in different contexts. Even though the MenSI project provided schools with a low level of financial investment, teachers were still efficient in organizing many different formats of professional development for schools in their clusters. Having the freedom to decide how to spend the allocated budget was one of the motivating factors in participating in the project.

In some countries, it was difficult to allocate additional budget to schools. Ministries and policy makers need to take into consideration how to make it easier for schools to receive funding which they could use to enhance teaching and learning and boost whole-school mentoring. Experiences from Erasmus project might be useful in this regard. Furthermore, ministries could provide schools with guidance on how the allocated funding can be used as an incentive for the teachers or how to use the funding to purchase tools that they need for mentoring.

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