

## **Roots and Wings Leadership programme – Cycle 2** **Programme evaluation.**

The beginning of the second cycle of the “Roots and Wings Leadership programme” was held at the Demidoff Hotel, 8km outside Florence between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2003.

This report is a synopsis of the evaluations submitted by the participants at the end of the three day programme. Twenty four evaluation reports were submitted, reflecting the views of twenty six participants, as one trio completed their evaluation on one report.

### **“What were your expectations of the programme?”**

The head teachers were expecting to:

- acquire a clear understanding of the Italian education system,
- to gain skills with regard to questioning and embarking on dialogue
- and to challenge each other in their role as coaches.

### **“To what extent have these expectations been met?”**

Generally the heads thought that the information on the Italian education system was presented ineffectively. One head stated that:

*“A rushed presentation limited my wish to fully understand a complex and volatile education system”.*

He goes on to say that the provider:

*“Skimmed over complex issues far too quickly, I needed a framework before going into the Italian context”*

The original aim was to send information regarding the Italian education system to the head-teachers prior to the second cycle; however this information was not forthcoming. Several head-teachers commented that detailed communication about the programme content should also have been sent before the conference:

*“It would have been nice to know that we were going to work with visions for our school. We could have prepared ourselves. If we can prepare anything for cycle 3, we would like to know.”*

### Which aspects of the programme did you find most useful?

The **practical aspect of learning about coaching methods** and putting their newly acquired skills and techniques into practice was welcomed by a large percentage of the participants.

This aspect of the programme was deemed to be very successful possibly because the head teachers could see its practical application and its relevance to their individual circumstances. They succeeded in gaining insights into the many assumptions and beliefs underpinning their visions and began to challenge and explore each others' values and how those values are embodied in the way they act.

*"I particularly enjoyed the sessions on coaching and trying to grasp the idea of engaging in dialogue"*

The practical exemplification was well received and one head teacher saw value in:

*"The modelling of processes especially coaching"*

Having twenty seven head teachers working together in trios in a different environment and far away from the hum drum of every day school life enabled a good deal of **individual and group reflection** to take place. Sharing what may have been very private opinions and beliefs in a "safe" scenario was sometimes enlightening:

*"I also found it valuable to have time for personal reflection and to ponder about the ideas being presented and my reaction to them."*

The "**social gatherings and networking**" were deemed a great success and virtually all the trios gelled and cemented their friendships and working relations. The Hotel, food and general ambiance were met with universal approval by all participants.

### "Which aspects of the programme did you find least useful?"

Aspects of the programme that could have been improved were highlighted by a great many participants.

A clear theme which emanated in very many evaluations was the **lack of clarity regarding the aims of sessions**.

Several head teachers remarked that there was much confusion and a distinct lack of clarity regarding the purpose of the programme sessions. This was deemed contrary to the overall programme values for example *“committed to the best outcomes for the whole system”*. Whether this lack of clarity was an oversight or a deliberate ploy to disorientate the head-teachers in order that they begin to acquire clarity by questioning and by delving deeper is another matter.

However it must be stressed that this was a constant criticism by a significant number of heads:

*“Purpose and objectives should be clearly stated to the project members at the beginning of every session”*

*“The agenda needs to be clear otherwise mistrust can set in”*

*“I expect the aims of learning to be clear (shared clarity). It would be useful to let the heads themselves say what they think and what they feel”.*

**Lack of clarity within the sessions** was also raised by very many of the participants:

*“The discussions about value and values are still not clear to me and therefore not so useful”.*

This again led to a certain degree of frustration and this came across in very many of the evaluations:

*“If I can't see the use or the connections between activities and my learning – I waste my time.”*

Many heads felt that there was an imbalance between the discussion of abstract concepts and their practical application and one head stated that an attempt should have been made to:

*“Move the balance between theoretical input and practical tools”*

Discussing complex abstract concepts was difficult in itself, but this difficulty may have been compounded by the challenge of working in a second or even third language. One head felt that:

*“More account should have been taken of language differences in exploring concepts and to give more clarity to all participants”.*

A clear message was that the heads felt that **practical examples, case studies and discussion in context** would have been useful:

*“I would like cases about leadership and discuss solutions in the 3 countries – discuss the different contexts and the different cultures”*

Several heads commented that the mode of the presentations was for the most part a **teaching paradigm which was not effective** or conducive and comments such as:

*“Less teaching, more learning”, and*

*“More stress on facts and doing rather than being”*

were put forward by quite a few of the participants. One head felt that:

*“Some aspects of the delivery were exasperating”*

and others questioned the relevance of some of the activities:

*“Some of the first day’s activities were not relevant”*

*“Arm- wrestling! Also other activities on Saturday afternoon – a low point – difficult to see where we were going”*

It was also felt that having **more interaction within their trios and also with other trios would have been productive**:

*“More chances to exchange ideas with other trios”*

*“The need to examine together what is being achieved in groups/trios and how the various trios have worked together i.e. what outcomes have been apparent?”*

Some head teachers quite clearly stated their discontent with regard to some aspects of the Saturday programme:

*“The programme for Saturday was, apart from meeting other head-teachers, a waste of time”*

This probably contributed to a certain tension felt by one participant:

*“People were tense on day one, much better atmosphere on day two and three”.*

Two heads commented that the **serious nature of the programme** and its delivery was not always conducive to learning.

*“The solemnity of some of the delivery”*

was a point raised by one head after the first cycle and was again repeated here whilst another head suggested that the programme should allow the participants, as well as the providers to:

*“Relax a little”.*

Two heads raised the **possibility of changing the format of the third cycle** and having the conference either side of the school visit.

*“Possibly having a day or so at the beginning and the end of the course and the school visits sandwiched in between”*

*“Start the cycle with a school placement and then following with the conference”*

This is an interesting idea allowing for greater clarity regarding the context of the host school thus enabling the trios to discuss and explore issues using a common framework. Practical and cost implications need to be clarified before this route can be considered.

Finally, despite many points being raised in the evaluation reports, it is fair to say that overall, the programme was a success. One head described it as being:

*“A valuable professional development exercise”.*

Another stated:

*“I do feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to develop and extend my learning of how to be an effective head teacher in conjunction with my international colleagues and in such a beautiful setting as Florence”.*

## Conclusions/ lessons from the Conference at the Demidoff Hotel.

Although aspects of the second cycle were a success, there is a general feeling that many aspects could have been so much better. Some of the messages from the first cycle were not heeded and this may have compounded an undercurrent of frustration.

Many clear messages have come to the fore:

1. **The aims of all sessions need to be clearly elucidated** – this would undoubtedly have prevented much of the confusion that emerged during the Florence programme. Also prior knowledge of the actual content of the programme would have enabled the participants both to do some preparation before coming and to bring, for example their present school vision with them as a basis for discussion. Guidance on some background reading on, for example – the Italian education system would have helped greatly especially in the context of the in-effectiveness of the Italian provider.
2. **The theoretical basis needs to be put across in clearer terms with examples to illustrate.** Many head teachers found grasping some of the more abstract concepts very difficult and found that applying the theory to their own practice was well nigh impossible.
3. **A more varied approach needs to be adopted by the providers,** as well as using more providers including possibly nominees from amongst the head-teachers themselves.
4. **The head teachers valued the opportunity to embark on dialogue and participate in group discussions as well as beginning the process of coaching each other.** They see that sharing, challenging and interacting with each other in trios and in larger groups can be an effective forum for learning. The third cycle should allow for an increased opportunity for this to happen.

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