



Peer Approaches to Learning, Innovation and Social Inclusion

7th Meeting of the West Midlands Co-Production Network Birmingham University, 29 January 2013

These minutes, prepared by Lindsay Barton of [Golden Kite Solutions](#), provide the key learning points of the 7th Meeting of the West Midlands Co-Production Network on 'Peer approaches to learning, innovation and social inclusion', hosted by the University of Birmingham and with a Finnish delegation from the Tampere region.

Introduction

The event was well attended with 28 participants from a wide variety of backgrounds. After the introductions, Elke Loeffler of *Governance International* welcomed everyone, especially our visiting Finnish colleagues, who were on a study visit to the UK to find good practice cases which paralleled innovations in co-produced learning in Finland. Elke highlighted that numbers in the West Midlands Network are growing - there are now 74 members and many of them have become regular attendees at the regional events.

Elina Harju, the organiser of the Finnish visit, gave all network members two small polished stones – in the Finnish tradition, Elina suggested that, when someone compliments us or gives us a good idea, we should pass them one of the stones. So that's what we did for the rest of the meeting!

Elina also pointed out that, by definition, learning is co-produced - it always needs the active engagement of both the teacher and students. However, recent developments in e-learning and social media have opened up new forms of learning and the Tampere region in Finland has become a leader in these new e-learning approaches.

Elke showed the group a table of *The Programme for International Student Assessment 2009*, in which Finland scores highest for its outcomes in education – [click here for more](#). The possible reasons for this were briefly discussed by the participants:

- The culture of reading has a long tradition in Finland - women had to be able to read before they could get married and the tradition of mothers reading to their children is still strong.
- Workforce: Rigorous standards for teacher certification, higher teacher pay (high school teachers with 15 years experience make 102 percent of the average salary of fellow university graduates), and attractive working conditions.
- Broad curriculum with a greater proportion of time mandated for arts and crafts, and learning by doing.
- Allowing teachers to design their own courses, with the national curriculum as a guide, rather than a blueprint.
- Small class sizes.
- Ensuring that officials in education ministries have practical experience of teaching.
- A homogeneous population.

- An equal and transparent society: For example, how much tax each person pays is publicly available information.
- An achievement and outcomes approach, rather than an exam culture as in the UK.
- There are no private education institutions, with education being free of charge for students

[Click here for an article with more information on the performance of the Finnish education system.](#)

Co-operatives as a learning environment

Salla Majanen, Project Manager Development and Adult Education Unit, West Pirkanmaa Consortium of Education (LPKKY)

The consortium is a versatile learning and development organisation, including 8 colleges in the West Tampere region and over 30 different study branches operating in a rural region. This partnership enables students to access a variety of specialist courses and to work on real business projects. It is the first step towards becoming an entrepreneur and makes it easier for students to start their own business later on. The Taidosto programme for crafts and design and the KAIKU programme for music both enable college students to produce and sell their products and services.

Due to the success of this collaborative approach, a Teaching Schools Alliance has been set up, with clusters of schools sharing facilities. This means schools can focus on a specialism, such as music or sport, and provide the best facilities, while their students can access a broad range of options across the Alliance members.

The Internet Bus for better ICT skills, health and wellbeing

Elina Harju, Project Manager, Learning Bridge, Opinpaja Ltd.

In 2000, through the eTampere initiative, the city library provided *Netti-Nysse*, a mobile internet bus, equipped with ICT to help local people to use the internet. The training is provided in an informal atmosphere and the trainers are expected to show a lot of patience and a good sense of humour!

Elina revealed that the original bus (“The Old Lady”) has recently retired but her “son” is now on the road and now provides an even wider range of services, e.g. media education for pre-school children and helping the elderly to create digital stories.

Since autumn 2012, health and social care services are also provided in the bus, e.g. information on self-help groups and medical advice. A survey of service users shows that this has helped 50% of users from having to make visits to their doctor. A flu jab was also administered from the bus – a hugely successful service. Additional activities are also being explored, such as showing outdoor movies and providing a mobile voting booth on the election evenings.

More information on the *Netti-Nysse* the Tampere Internet bus can be found at:

<http://kirjasto.tampere.fi/index.php/in-english/libraries-and-opening-hours/netti-nysse-internet-bus/>

Finnish Online University of Applied Sciences – virtual mobility since 2000

Teija Lehto, Senior Planning Officer, Finnish Online University of Applied Sciences (FOUAS)

FOUAS is a network of all the universities of applied sciences in Finland, established in 2001 to coordinate online courses, 95% of which are free and accredited.

The whole ethos is focussed on:

- co-production of learning material between the universities;
- co-evaluation of quality;
- co-administration of the services and courses.

The next step is to become more international by offering online courses to students across Europe. In discussion, network members highlighted free online learning that is already being offered and pointed out EdX as an exciting example of this - <https://www.edx.org>

More information on *FOUS* can be found at:

<http://www.amk.fi/en/index/ammattikorkeakoulut/strategia.html>

Gemilo - using social media to gather ideas

Katri Lietsala, CEO and Co-founder, Gemilo Ltd

Gemilo is an award-winning safe and secure browser-based learning solution and collaboration tool. It works on PCs, tablets and smartphone devices such as iPhone, iPad and Android. The solution motivates people and communities with common interests to work together. In this way, innovation and co-production become part of the daily work pattern. More information on *Gemilo* can be found at: <http://www.gemilo.com>.

Social Media Surgeries in Birmingham as a peer-to-peer learning approach

Nick Booth, CEO, Podnosh

Nick Booth discussed how Social Media Surgeries bring local people together to learn and teach each other about how to use the web. The first social media surgeries in Birmingham took place in 2008, as part of the Blog Action Day on Poverty. It brought together two different groups: members of community groups with limited social media skills; and bloggers and individual with knowledge of how to use social media (the 'surgeons'). The two groups mixed, shared ideas and learnt how to take advantage of social media tools and put them to new uses. The [Jubilee Debt Campaign](#) grew out of this day, and many of the original 'students' have since become 'surgeons', such as Karen Caine, a member of the Birmingham City Centre Neighbourhood Forum. Read their blogs at: <http://brumcitycentre.wordpress.com/>

The success of the day spurred Nick to hold further Social Media Surgeries. In 2010, he got nearly £5,000 in funding from the local strategic partnership *Be Birmingham* to provide social media surgeries in three Birmingham neighbourhood to improve the digital skills of local people. The funding also helped Nick to develop <http://www.socialmediasurgery.com/>, a Social Media Surgery website which provides a systematic guide on how to design and run local surgeries, support them and assess their impacts. The website now supports over 70 Social Media Surgeries – most from the UK, although a number have developed internationally. The success of these Social Media Surgeries resulted in Podnosh receiving a [Big Society Award in 2012](#).

More recently, social media surgeries in Wolverhampton have established a successful learning environment amongst public sector partners and communities. This peer-to-peer learning is evidence of thriving co-production practice.

More information on *Podnosh* can be found at: <http://www.podnosh.com/> and a case study of social media surgeries can be read at: [http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/social-media-surgeries-building-community-capacity/?no_cache=1&sword_list\[\]=podnosh](http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/social-media-surgeries-building-community-capacity/?no_cache=1&sword_list[]=podnosh)

The Resident University programme in Birmingham

Paul Slatter, Director, Chamberlain Forum

The Chamberlain Forum launched this peer learning approach to involve “resident experts” in dialogue around how to change community outcomes and the quality of people’s everyday experiences. It was piloted in 2007 and the main programme ran between October 2009 and March 2010, consisting of 8 lectures, 34 seminars, 15 podcasts, 18 briefing papers, 7 online courses and a weekend conference. The programme provided useful skills and resources for communities on:

- Setting up a community food project
- Asset transfer and development
- Timebanking
- Being an effective board member
- DIY fundraising
- Social Media
- Co-production
- Tactics for getting increased influence
- Group legal structures
- Influencing local decision making

The Resident University also included study visits, where groups were guided around a number of neighbourhoods in Birmingham, such as Balsall Heath ([click here for more information on its resident-led renewal](#)), to see and share best practice.

Over 750 people participated in the Resident University. Paul Slatter demonstrated the powerful impact of the programme by asking network members to read out statements by local residents who had participated in the programme. More information on the *Resident University* can be found at: <http://www.residentuniversity.org/> and more information on *The Chamberlain Forum* can be found at: <http://www.chamberlainforum.org/>.

Following these two presentations, Catherine Needham of the University of Birmingham facilitated a lively debate on potential sources for conflict in social media surgeries and resident universities. Both Nick and Paul emphasised that such forms of learning need to be kept quite open, without too many expectations about specific results to be achieved.

Finally, everyone expressed their thanks to our Finnish visitors, the case study presenters, *Governance International* for organising the event and Birmingham University for hosting it.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the network is being hosted by Warwickshire County Council on Friday, 26 April between 10:00 and 13:00. The event will be held at Northgate House, Northgate Street, Warwick – [see map](#). The event will focus on co-production in social care, including a session on the Peer Review Scheme of Warwickshire County Council, which enables service users with learning disabilities to assess the quality of care providers.