

MeTalent YouTalent mini-conference stimulates talent development in European higher education

Report
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What are your own views towards talent as a teacher? And how do you spot talents in your students? A group of talent educators from around Europe came together at University College Copenhagen (Denmark) on 15-16 November 2018 to discuss these and other questions relating to talent development in higher education. New instruments were presented and used, aiming for further improvement and with co-creation as guiding principle.

The two-day working event, called the MeTalent YouTalent mini-conference, was the first presentation to the outside world of the project Working in Europe to Connect Talent Development in Higher Education (CoTalent). In this EU-funded project, nine organisations strongly committed to talent development in higher education have joined forces to provide teachers with tools to stimulate their talented students. Baseline of the project is: Europe simply cannot afford to waste talent.

Two instruments

During the two days, focus was on two instruments for teachers developed in the CoTalent project:

1. an instrument to self-evaluate views towards talent development (MeTalent Mirror)
2. an instrument to spot talented students (YouTalent Spotter)

Both instruments consist of different tools. Participants used these tools in practical working sessions and provided feedback to the CoTalent team. After the event, the instruments are published on the project website, free to use for everyone.

Three keynotes

In addition to the working sessions, three renowned keynote speakers provided the audience with food for thought and discussion.

Professor *Marca Wolfensberger*, who leads the Research Centre for Talent Development in Higher Education and Society at Hanze University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands and is also President of the European Honors Council spoke on her favourite topic: honors didactics. Honors programs are selective study programs linked to higher education institutions. They are designed for motivated and gifted students who want to do more than the regular program offers. These programs have clear admission criteria and clear goals and offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than regular programs. Teaching in honors programs implies a specific 'signature pedagogy', Wolfensberger stresses: it should be based on creating community, offering bounded freedom and enhancing academic competences.

Nynne Afzelius, Head of Talent at Astra, the Danish organisation working to strengthen the teaching and learning in science, asked everyone to reflect on their own views about talent.

Where does it come from: genes, practice or environment? Participants were asked to divide ten points over these factors, which opened a nice discussion. Afzelius then stressed the importance of provision. First make sure that paths for talented students are available. Then a skilled teacher can change the world.

Finally, Vice-Chancellor of University College Copenhagen *Stefan Hermann* focused on the Danish policies towards talent development. In his opinion, it is now firmly on the agenda and the Law of Jante (a cultural saying placing a heavy focus on strict equality) is sleeping heavily. He is firmly committed to strengthening talent development policies within his own institution and beyond.

Participants

The event was hosted at University College Copenhagen (Københavns Professionshøjskole, KP for short), one of the CoTalent project partners. University College Copenhagen has just started the Copenhagen Honors College, for students in science teacher education willing and able to do more than their regular program offers. These students also joined the event. Other participants joined from Denmark, Norway, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Romania and Lithuania.

In a final evaluation session, comments from participants included:

-‘I realise we as teachers can make a difference high up in the system’

-‘It is good to hear that it is actually okay to work with talent’

-‘It is hard to fit all this into what I am doing now, but it links to what I want to become’

-‘I am looking forward to diving deeper into the contents of the toolbox you are creating’

-‘It is great to build a network in Europe’.

Logo

Last but not least, the project logo was revealed. This was the result of a competition for students all around Europe. The winner is Amy Hill, student of Fine Arts at Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands. See more in a separate press release on the project website.

New events and more information

The two main external events in the CoTalent project will be the next MeTalent YouTalent event in Münster (Germany) on 21-22 November 2019 and the CoTalent Wizard Event in Groningen (Netherlands) on 11-12 June 2020. You can register your interest in these events by sending an e-mail to info@cotalentwizard.eu

The newsletter of the European Honors Council (EHC) also contains regular updates about the CoTalent project and its upcoming events. Anyone interested in talent development in European higher education can join the EHC for free at www.honorscouncil.eu

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