

DKG Zoom Survey Meeting

The Zoom survey meeting with Cindy Miller from Avenue M on 21st April was very interesting. Her first questions were about my own teaching experience, where I lived, what I had taught, where and to what age groups of pupils/students. The next group were on my own teaching approaches, skills, my best, memorable teaching experiences. This was followed by questions on my most challenging, least successful experiences. In both cases what support had I received, from whom and from where had I received it, all very personal questions.

From this the focus moved on to changes in teaching approaches and experiences over the years from when I began teaching to the present time. My response was that teachers today have little autonomy in the classroom at any level of education compared with when I joined the profession. The demands of the National Curriculum and its key stages leave little room on the timetable for meeting the specific academic/creative/physical needs and talents their pupils may have. A bureaucratic, teaching to the test approach to satisfy Ofsted has developed that is time and energy consuming. The choice of teaching as a profession is now unpopular and the state system struggles to recruit and retain staff. This problem has been exacerbated by the experience of the pandemic and how it was handled by the Department of Education at all levels.

The survey questions then moved on to how I became a DKG member, who had introduced me. In my case it was a respected secondary head teacher, a friend of a friend. I was then asked what I believed were the most valuable aspects of my membership. My answer was the international links and experiences and the strong supportive relationships with professional people in education I had developed over the years – the sisterhood.

The final section of the questionnaire tackled the issues concerning educators today and those concerning DKG as a Society. My response was, as far as dealing with pupil needs and priorities were:

- a. Dealing with pupil/student post pandemic mental health issues, the loss of educational experience, loneliness, lack of social/emotional development.
- b. Meeting pupil/student needs and concerns about gender LGBTQ+ issues.
- c. Responding to concerns about climate change and continuing damage to the planet.
- d. Meeting the needs of traumatised refugee children.
- e. Assisting secondary/tertiary level students with problems accessing higher education because of increasing cost of loans, debt and rising cost of living.

I explained GB's membership problems giving the following reasons:

1. The loss of long standing members through death, health problems for them or family members. moving too far away to make attendance possible.
2. A reduced membership has meant a reduced income and made funding events and venues difficult. Travel costs are much higher now and our members are scattered over a wider area than before.

3. Attracting new members is difficult because of the current poor state of the education system with long hours, heavy workloads, poor pay and conditions. Teachers are not keen to spend precious leisure time with educational groups and topics.

The final questions about how I thought DKG might be able to assist us cope with any of the issues I had raised I found difficult to answer. What I did was point out some of the positive strategies we had developed in recent years to retain members and hope to interest potential members during challenging times.

1. The use of Zoom for meetings. Members unable to travel could attend and these meetings are recorded on restricted access You Tube for members unable to attend at the planned Zoom time.

2. This initiative attracted members from around Europe and U.S.A. to join in or even be a speaker and the European Forum then set up a monthly Education Hour with a presentation from each country in turn speaking on a current topic.

3. This arrangement allowed us to have

quality speakers we could not have afforded to invite to a face to face meeting.

4. Holding joint meetings.

5. Devising a regular monthly programme of meetings on wide ranging topics with excellent speakers plus face to face events that are popular to give frequent opportunities to get together on screen or in person..

My final comment was that we are still an active, if small, group in GB with a reasonable percentage attending Tampere in July. We hope future conditions for educators in our country make membership growth a possibility. What use DKG may be able to make of any of this remains to be seen. The one query I took from our AGM about the cost of the survey was not in my interviewer's remit to answer.

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