Once teachers have started to think about a research question and have brought research into practice, they get enthusiastic and will extend their research to all kind of areas of the teaching and learning process. The most simple start is to analyse a test of all the classroom pupils.

After analysing the results, questions will arise: Who failed? Was it me, the teacher? Was my explanation (not) good enough? Is my teaching language OK? Do they understand me?

Or is it the student? What do I know about this specific student? Do I have a record about this student? Recently the BBC3 channel started to broadcast how young teachers are doing during their first years. The programme is a little bit voyeuristic as the family of the young teacher and her/his personal history is also taken into account.

Professional support could be improved by giving young teachers tools to analyse their own and students’ behaviour. Pedagogic research tools could be supportive in order to create the teacher’s own reflection. Research (in one way or the other) is an innovative instrument to improve teaching through reflective practice.
The Learning Teacher Network’s 10th International Conference will be held at the five star Sheraton Zagreb Hotel in Zagreb, Croatia on April 16-18, 2015. The title of the conference will be ‘Innovation for Development in Learning and Sustainability’.

The Call for papers and presentations has now been issued. We would be delighted to receive your proposal for contribution to the content and programme of the conference. See the conference website www.learningteacher.eu/zagreb-conference-call.

In order to meet the challenges for the future, education and training need to address the areas of innovation, learning and sustainability.

Development of today’s education and training is crucial to the ability to create innovative solutions and find new paths to enhanced learning and a better future.

Innovation and innovative are words we use to describe things, events, methods, and ideas that are new and useful.

Innovation is defined as “the process of making changes to something established by introducing something new.” It applies to “...radical or incremental changes to products, processes or services.” Over the years there have been many changes in the way education is designed and delivered in parts of the world. Innovative approaches in teaching and learning aim to inspire, challenge and engage all young people in rich and rewarding learning experiences that will equip them with the essential skills and attitudes for life, learning and work in the 21st Century.

Learning is acquiring new, or modifying and reinforcing, existing knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, or preferences and may involve synthesizing different types of information. Learning is contextual. It does not happen all at once, but builds upon and is shaped by what we already know. To that end, learning may be viewed as a process, rather than a collection of factual and procedural knowledge.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is not a particular programme or project, but is rather an umbrella for many forms of education that already exist, and new ones that remain to be created. ESD promotes efforts to rethink educational programmes and systems (both methods and contents) that currently support unsustainable societies. All educational programmes need to be based on five fundamental pillars of learning: Learning to know: Learning to do, Learning to live together; Learning to be; Learning to transform oneself and society.

The conference will contribute to the exploration of these perspectives.

The conference venue
The five star Sheraton Zagreb Hotel is located in the city centre, just a stroll away from the main attractions where Zagreb’s history and tradition can be witnessed in museums and galleries, architecture, numerous theatres, lively cafes, and bars. The bright and spacious venue offers a personal and inviting atmosphere and modern conveniences. The hotel restaurants are recognized for the best of Croatian and international gastronomy.

www.hotel-sheratonzagreb.com/

Invitation to proposals for presentations
Hereby we invite to proposals for presentations (workshops, lectures, round tables, or paper presentations) for the Zagreb Conference 2015. Proposals are kindly to be submitted either by using

* the on-line form on www.learningteacher.eu/zagreb-conference-call, or
* the separate File Card for Contributions (paper format)

The deadline for submitting your proposal for a presentation:
Monday 23rd June, 2014
EDUCO – Social Value of Sport
- Information about the EU EDUCO project (part 1)

Nowadays welfare systems are undergoing much stress due to lack of resources, the same resources that in industrialized EU countries has formerly produced systems of social services providing important social functions targeted at communities.

The global crisis is affecting these systems and their stability, opening the doors to the involvement and the commitment of other kinds of subjects and different political visions that could respond to the crisis of social cohesion system and widening social discrimination.

EDUCO largely addresses contemporary social needs assuming sport as one of the fundamental educational and social cohesion resources that operate within society communities, seeking to promote social competences of sports coaches through informal in-service training.

According to a survey of Eurobarometer 14% of European citizens aged 15-24 is devoted to sport practice with a frequency of five times a week. There are about 70,000 sport organizations of various kinds, the majority of which are of nonprofessional nature and mostly managed on volunteer basis, therefore provided with a huge amount of social capital.

Within sport organizations, the coach is a key role profile. Coaches, in fact, are those who are directly on contact with and responsible for the educational path that youngsters undergo within their sport practice.

In our opinion sports coaches have to be openly and unanimously recognized by society as performing the key role of "educators within the society/community" and therefore also both their competences in this sense need to be recognized and valorised and their learning needs need to be addressed.

At partnership level, EDUCO is strongly entrenched within its own partners missions and visions to the extent that all partner organizations can be ascribed to those civil society organizations that, just like schools, take direct responsibility for community members within educational and re-educational services and processes.

EDUCO’s vision is crucially based on the vision that the EC promotes on sport. In the previous twelve years the added value provided by EC into the sports sector has been clearly identifiable.

It declined, for instance, from the Nice Conference (2000) to Lisbon (2007) and going through the European Year of Education through Sport of 2004 and the consequent White Paper on Sport (2007) and the Pierre Cubertin Action Plan, to the Communication "Developing European dimension of Sport (2011). From all these
documents evidently what emerges is the will of seeing in sport all the potentialities of an educational path, whose basis resides in the somewhat "natural" presence within sport of values such as team, solidarity, tolerance and correctness.

In other words, the EC considers sport as having social, cultural and educational functions that are capable of developing competences and skills of youngsters and improve their social and curricular possibilities. Sport has also a crucial role in social inclusion processes especially of potentially marginalized persons, such as migrants and economically underprivileged persons.

It is not a case, in this respect, that many international NGOs use sport practice as a co-operation device, to promote empowerment and inclusion among underprivileged societies.

Sport is therefore deemed to be a fundamental element that improves the quality of national educational systems and, in this respect, the EC itself encourages the opportunities offered by its funding programmes in this sense.

Why EDUCO?
The EDUCO project promotes the social value of sport, recognising the importance that sport coaches play in the development of essential social and life skills in the lives of young people as well as encouraging excellence in sport itself.

The world of sport has a lot in common with the worlds of learning and work as in all these spheres team playing, problem solving, communication and conflict resolution for example, are essential.

It follows therefore, that learning and achieving through sport can improve young (and older) learners' all round skills and abilities and critically, in the current economic climate, enhance their chances of finding employment.

• EDUCO’s aim is to create a curriculum and qualification for sports coaches, the ‘EDUCO Passport’, which focuses on their role in developing sports learners’ social and life skills.
• EUDUCO is a two year project, which began in December 2011 and ended in October 2013, is funded by the European Union Lifelong Learning Grundtvig Programme with partners in Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and the UK.
• The final product from the project is “EDUCO Training Handbook” which aims to train sports coaches working with children and young people, in order to provide them with knowledge and tools to make them fully aware of their social role and able to play that role effectively (http://www.educoproject.eu/uploads/Handbook_Oct41.pdf)
• The project website is http://www.educoproject.it, where you can find the full content of the “EDUCO Training Handbook” and the “EDUCO Passport” in all partners’ languages.

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The Nigerian teacher is deemed only to be fully qualified after obtaining an Education degree from a government recognised university. Programmes to meet the demand for this qualification include a ‘sandwich’ education degree for practising teachers without qualification but in possession of other taught disciplines.

While such provisions are in place to meet the need for teachers in the vast Nigerian economy, very little or no provision is made for continuous professional development. Teachers are therefore expected to fulfil their role in the classroom with minimum support, and high expectations of teaching rigorously to the curriculum (syllabus) and ensuring students achieve ultimately good grades in the School Certificate exams. For teachers in primary school, it is expected that pupils are able to demonstrate proficiency in all aspects of the curriculum by the time they proceed into secondary school.

 Provision for training, skills update and professional development seems to have been largely neglected for most teachers, while teaching managers – heads of department, principals and vice principals have been often been invited to teacher conferences held within the country. These conferences are organised by the state ministry of education to discuss and resolve issues, provide a platform for networking and mainly offer a strong voice for the Nigerian teacher. Whether the resolution to raised issues are cascaded to teachers remains unknown but largely teachers of long years of service need to be trained and updated at least once a year so that they can meet international standards and improve their practice to the overall benefit of their learners.

As the education provision continues to expand in Nigeria, emerging rapidly is the proliferation of private schools, primary, secondary, polytechnics and universities which have been approved, or are in the process of approval, by the federal government. Such institutions charge premium fees, which are willingly paid for by desperate parents who want the best for their children.

It is assumed that these private schools not only supplement the state provision of education, but also offer good quality education, maintain regular institutional calendars with minimum government intervention and ultimately deliver good results through high student achievement. It is expected that professional development is provided for the teachers in such schools.

If so, certain questions must be answered: How regular is the professional development? Is it relevant to the teachers’ need? Does it improve the quality of teaching and learning? What impact has the training on enhancing teaching skills? How is the effectiveness of the training measured? What records are kept as evidence of the training? These and many more questions need to be answered with the emergence of these new private institutions, particularly with expected value from huge tuition fees.

In the light of the above, the need for training arose which was developed within an appropriate theme with a universal appeal and application irrespective of cultural or national differences.
The theme Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity was selected and adapted to the Nigerian context as much as possible. The modules included basic teaching practices established in the UK: setting of SMART learning outcomes, an awareness of equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI), teaching techniques that embed EDI and the institutional incorporation of EDI.

Group work to set learning outcomes was quite revealing as many teachers were unaware of, but also welcomed the benefits of using Bloom’s taxonomy in lesson plans.

Emphasis was given particularly to secondary school teachers to share with students and address such objectives at the beginning and end of each lesson in order to measure achievement. As the training progressed, discussion included the diversity in the Nigerian community made up of 3 large ethnic groups: Hausa to the North, Igbo to the ‘East’ and Yoruba to the West. Closely related to the main groups are minor ethnic groups which may be overlooked. Included in the awareness of diversity is the changing family make-up, learning needs which include dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, physical impairment and behavioural difficulties.

Though the training (in Lagos) was provided for some 180 teachers from 6 different schools, there were strong recommendations for the same training to be delivered in many other schools. Feedback has been immensely positive with strong pleas for further training. Plans are in progress to revisit the schools and for teachers to measure the impact of the training on teaching and learning.

As the world organisations continue to develop resolutions to improve teaching standards, there is a strong demand for education professionals to support their counterparts in developing countries to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that youths all over the world can benefit immensely irrespective of national barriers with a purpose of contributing positively and effectively to their local and international communities.

It is believed that this constitutes a strategy to achieve one of the 8 Millennium Development Goals, i.e. to achieve universal primary/basic education and to sustain development, a part of ESD programmes.

A lesson for practising teachers in developed countries is the unwavering enthusiasm, appreciation, resilience and adaptability displayed by the recipients of the training. In addition, the high levels of motivation, inspiration and aspiration for youths are so overwhelming in a society dogged by insecurity and limited opportunities.

Teachers are highly committed, motivated, passionate and dedicated to their jobs. There was a real and strong sense of belonging with a modest sense of pride for the trainer, an experience worth sharing with fellow teachers.

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"Why Mexico?" is the question most people asked me. I think I gave a different response every time! The list of reasons seemed to be endless, right at the top for a biologist is the enormous biodiversity, what nature enthusiast in their right mind would pass up the opportunity to visit one of the world’s few megadiverse countries? However, it was not just the variety in nature that tempted me but the abundance and wealth of culture, both prehispanic and contemporary.

The idea that I would finally visit the once home of my greatest idol, Frida Khalo, was exhilarating! Unfortunately at some point or another my excitement would be clouded as Michael Gove entered the conversation. Like countless teachers in England, the reason I have given for leaving our education system was the draconian and damaging reforms orchestrated by our Secretary of State Education, Michael Gove.

Over the years Gove’s relentless attacks on teachers began to wear away our enthusiasm and eventually break us. Even the most energetic and inspiring teachers in our school had become ghosts of their former selves. We had all become exhausted by the constant race to improve grades for examinations with ever shifting content and grade boundaries. Not to mention further elaboration of our administrative nightmares and endless jumping through performance hoops as part of Gove’s mission to prove that none of us were capable of teaching.

I became hopeless and started to see myself as part of the system that created disillusion youth and further ingrained social equality, taking opportunities away from the most needy and degrading the self-worth of individuals with ‘unconventional’ talents unrecognised by our current government.

It seemed to me that school had suddenly become a factory and that my role was simply to churn out obedient automatons ready to recite from memory any ‘fact’ deemed necessary but entirely incapable of questioning, critical thinking and decision making.

I could not reconcile myself with the fact that I was incapacitating and damaging young people rather than helping to reach self-actualisation and happiness.

Even though I was immensely excited about moving to Mexico, the greatest motivation for my move across the globe was the ethos of my new school, which celebrates both the natural and human diversity of this beautiful country. I was really impressed by the values of the school which were most earnestly expressed in the attitudes of the heads of school during my interview. Believing all that was happening too good to be true, I have to say that I was very pleasantly surprised to see upon my arrival that the values of honesty, respect, tolerance, responsibility, community spirit and collaboration really were the guiding principle of how the school is run.

For me it was a dream come true to be part of a school that values learner well-being more than anything else! I was in complete shock on the first day of school, when during our training day, there was absolutely no mention of grades or league tables! A meeting completely void of threats and a distinct lack of a dramatic atmosphere of impending doom! Instead we spent the first hour discussing the ‘colour of care’.

The values of our school are truly evident in all that we do and I have to admit that I found this very hard to get used to. Even though I was always seeking more freedom in teaching, dreaming of banishing exams from my classroom, the fact is I had become indoctrinated. I was full of fear. I had no idea where to begin if the main objective was not the all-important examination. The Mexican system has al-
owed me the freedom to create my own assessments and to assign grades not just based on achievement but also on effort. This has been quite a challenge for me because I have found it very difficult to strike a balance between academic achievement and effort.

Now that I have settled in, I am constructing assessments to suit my learners better, ones that they enjoy and can succeed in. I feel like I am cheating, because however high I set the academic criteria, they are achieving! But there is much work to do as we are a bicultural school, learners are also sitting the conventional international exams, such as the IGCSE and the IB. I am proud to be in a school that values learner development above all else and gives learners the opportunity to succeed in both systems, and I hope that we can continue to build on what we have to create a harmony between learner self-actualisation as young individuals and the necessary standardised testing.

I have little idea whether our school is representative of the education system in Mexico, and to be honest as it is a private bicultural school, I doubt that it is. The challenge of improving education and modifying it to suit modern needs is universal, Mexico is no exception and the struggle between the government and educators was very evident at the start of this academic year.

The main square of Mexico City, one of the biggest tourist attractions, the Zocalo or Constitution Square, was a vast camp site for education activists during my first couple of months in Mexico. The government introduced a mixed bag of non-negotiable reforms that culminated in riots quashed by armed police and tanks. It may be a near impossible task to unravel the full story of these riots and the true impact of the reforms, but the effect of one of the changes is clear.

The school year has been further extended and it has left teachers feeling undervalued anddowngraded to child-mind-er status. As any teacher will recognise, learner motivation levels diminish as the term goes on but this becomes difficult to ignore during the 20th week of our longest term in Mexico.

At this stage there is little that separates the school from a youth club. The debate of whether the quantity of teaching hours will affect the quality I am sure will continue for many years to come but unfortunately the impact on my own teaching is all too clear. Mexico is now down to just two weeks holiday in the winter and spring and only three weeks for the summer. I am just under half-way through and terrified!

One very positive feature of the Mexican timetable is the great opportunity for professional development. It is law that every school has one full training day every month. Obviously the quality of training offered varies, however this undeniably a very progressive policy which shows the dedication to the development of teachers.

Under Gove head teachers, feeling financial pressures, became much more selective of the professional development opportunities that they allowed staff and in my old school most teachers became disillusioned and simply stopped asking. At my new school the opportunities are abundant, I write this having just finished a day of developing my computer literacy and looking forward to two days at an international teaching conference next week.

When I first glimpsed the job advertisement, my most optimistic moments allowed me to dream of a school with supportive observations, that always looked for the positive but still gave you the room to improve, of continual professional development, of freedom to assess learners in my own way and a curriculum that was open to interpretation, of school trips to explore the great biodiversity that needed nothing more than awe for education.

I dreamt of all of these things but I never thought that this dream would actually come true.

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St. John’s Central College of Further Education and Training, Cork, Ireland has coordinated a Comenius bilateral project which was written to help young people appreciate the learning opportunities that travel presents, to share this knowledge with other students and to gain a much greater understanding of the culture of our partner country.

All too often television programs and other media portray young people on holidays as only being interested in all night clubbing and binge drinking. This image does not represent the reality for large numbers of young people who are interested in the culture, history, architecture, music and other aspects of the country they are visiting.

Our project which bears the title “Travel as a Learning Environment” (TALE) seeks to help young students to understand the learning potential of travel, to appreciate the value of preparation and study before visiting another country, to appreciate the value of cultural diversity and to understand the importance of language learning.

Hasan Fatma Onal Anadolu Lisesi, Kusadasi, Turkey was selected as a suitable partner because of its location in a traditional tourist destination, the large number of cultural/historic sites in the hinterland of the school and an existing working relationship between the two institutes through the Grundtvig Partnership program. Turkey provides a unique geographical location and has been described as a “bridge” between the cultures of the East and West.

For this reason it is an ideal partner country for students to gain a greater understanding of cultural diversity and the need to respect the cultural identity of others.

In preparation for the project we also took a decision to apply to host a Turkish assistant under the Grundtvig Assistant program. In fact we were fortunate to be allocated two Turkish assistants and this has allowed us to make Turkish language and culture classes available to a significant percentage of our student population. Preparation for the project was further enhanced by both institutes signing up for eTwinning.

Students who participated on the project have attended language and cultural classes, communicating with their partners by email and have engaged in research on cultural/historic sites in the Kusadasi and Cork regions. They prepared the itinerary for their mobility activities in Turkey and Cork. They are created a number of presentations about their region, its cultural and historic legacy and the Education system which they delivered during the course of their mobility.

They also created a booklet about their partner region incorporating the sites they were to visit during the mobility phase of the project. This activity helped to focus the students learning by increasing their knowledge of the culture and history of their partner region. This learning was then further enhanced by the site visits and cultural activity organised for the mobility phase of the project.

The Irish student mobility to Turkey took place at the beginning of June 2012 for fifteen days and involved twelve students and two teachers. Activities undertaken included a series of presentations at Hasan Fatma Onal Anadolu Lisesi, a meeting with the governor of Kusadasi and cultural visits to Ephesus, Troy, Gallipoli and Pamukkale. Following this mobility students maintained regular contact with their partners in Turkey. They recorded
their experiences in a multimedia format and used this material to convey the learning gained during the mobility to their fellow students.

The Turkish student mobility to Ireland took place in March 2013. As with the earlier project mobility the students made a number of presentations in Cork, visited the Lord Mayor and engaged in visits to Blarney Castle, the Burren, Cliffs of Moher, Cobh and the Cork Harbour area. They also visited Dublin and this visit was planned to coincide with the St. Patrick’s Day festival. This allowed the students to experience first hand the atmosphere surrounding Ireland’s biggest national holiday.

While it is difficult to quantify, it is very clear that participation on the project also had a significant impact on the students’ overall attitude to learning. Clearly, participating students demonstrated greater self confidence, improved teamwork skills and demonstrated an ability to organise events, site visits and social activities for their visiting partners.

Communication skills were improved through the use of ICT in maintaining contact with their partners. Email and Facebook were the main medium of communication between students. The fact that every participating student took a lead role at some point during the delivery of presentations also helped to improve their confidence and the use of IT tools such as Powerpoint, Word and a variety of photo-editing and video software packages.

The experience of participating on this project, which was funded through the Irish National Agency, Léargas, under the Lifelong Learning program has been a very positive one for the teachers, students and the college as a whole. We confidently expect that the links we have established with Hasan Fatma Önal Anadolu Lisesi will continue to develop well into the future.

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Fancy a night in the most sustainable hotel room in The Netherlands?

When I heard that we would be opening the most sustainable hotel room in the entire Netherlands at our campus I was elated and could not wait to spend my first night there.

It was no coincidence that October 11, 2013 was chosen to launch this initiative being National Sustainability Day and a joint project with Buro Kees, design specialists in the field of sustainable hotel rooms. Stay Now is one of the 20 hotel rooms in the ‘Skotel’ situated in the same building as the Hotelschool The Hague in Amsterdam and run by our students.

The room is fully equipped with the most sustainable materials and solutions. These include items made from recycled material (circular economy), components that save energy (energy footprint), parts that are biodegradable (for heavy use of disposable parts) and used products (second-life).

Renowned partners of Buro Kees such as Philips, Auping, Desso and Form Finish were also involved in the project all having certificates that guarantee sustainability. They contributed carpets, which are in line with the Cradle® philosophy and thus comprise biodegradable materials and bed linen made from 100% organic cotton which carries the Fairtrade and Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) labels.

The latter is the worldwide standard for the production and manufacture of cotton products that fulfill the highest environmental requisites. Another contribution was wallpaper made from natural products such as sugar cane and corn fibres. Even the type of paint has been considered with technique and contents taken into consideration.

The amenities in the room include the most sustainable toilet designed by Villeroy & Boch, a “cradle to cradle” bed by Auping, which is probably the first bed to receive a silver certificate for being safely produced and containing environmentally friendly products.

The bedhead is made from “rubber” wood, a member of the maple family known for its durability since it has little or no chance of warping or cracking. However it has really only be used for firewood because after it completes its latex producing cycle, it tends to die. The designers acknowledge its eco-friendliness in the sense that it is now being used for an alternative purpose rather than going as waste.

Every attention to detail has been taken into consideration in the design of Stay Now from the art work on the wall in the form of a bike made of recycled bamboo, to the guest supplies, which carry ECOCERT and COSMEBIO labels and are also certified with the Nordic Eco label and naturally the EU Eco label, to the recycled cardboard lamp.

According to Buro Kees all the products in the room will be replaced once more sustainable alternatives becomes available.

Finally, this concept offers a practical form of learning for the students in which they can see sustainability in action rather than in a book. What a great way to learn! For more information please visit http://www.projektburokees.com/#duurzamehotelkamer

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PISA, Finland and the Curriculum reform: - The importance of the memories of the process up to 2016

After the Pisa 2012 results were published in December, there was debate on how the Finnish education system should be changed so that we could regain number one position.

Ranking as one of the top European countries was not enough. Therefore, major changes in our schooling system were insisted upon by politicians and the media. We, the educational professionals, were not so hesitant about undertaking such dramatic changes, because we knew the changes were already on their way. We were only worrying about the economic cutbacks in the educational field.

Nevertheless, Finnish students once again reached top results in Pisa. So why do we want to reform a well-functioning system? The world around us has undergone major changes since the beginning of the 2000s. Thus, the competencies needed in our society and working life have changed, requiring new skills for building a sustainable future. That is why the content of teaching, pedagogy and school practices should be reviewed and renewed in relation to the changes in the operating environment and the skills required in the future. Our goal is to build more participatory, physically active, creative and linguistically enriched schools as well as integrating teaching and learning.

In Finland, the entire general education system will be reformed in terms of objectives, lesson-hour distribution, the National Core Curricula and Local Curricula. The reform of the National Core Curricula and local curricula provides us with an opportunity to discuss the changes taking place in today’s world and to develop schools and teaching.

The essence of our new National Core Curricula will be simple. Instead of asking “why” and “what” we will ask “how”. How can we recognize the uniqueness of every child? How can we increase co-operation and participation among pupils? And how can we enhance learning in the multiple dimensions of broad-based competence?

I believe that no-one can change the entire system – not even a visionary. The reform of the National Core Curricula and Local Curricula provides us with an opportunity to discuss the changes taking place in today’s world. Now we have a common framework as well as time and structures to carry out this discussion.

The answer lies within the staff of our schools. The backbone of the Finnish Education system is formed by highly educated teachers in all sectors of education from kindergarten to university. This issue needs to be discussed with teachers and pupils as well as parents and the whole society.

The target will not be to change the contents of the curricula but to re-organize how our schools work. We are about to focus on the structures of schools. We should keep what is worth keeping and abandon what we no longer need. And, consequently, we should improve what we decide to keep.

This January I educated some 400 teachers to think about the future. They were excited and happy, that we, the leaders of the Curricula reform in our area, were interested in hearing their opinions on how things should be.

We are only about to begin our journey. But, as a pupil of mine once said, “The journey is important because in the course of that journey you make memories that last for a lifetime.” Let us see what kind of memories we made when the reform is ready in August 2016.

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The Peaceful School

Already in 1998 some schools in The Netherlands started the concept of “The Peaceful School”. In these schools too many fights and conflicts took place and one of the school directors introduced this concept in her school. Other schools adopted the concept. The school where it all started was located in a socio-economically deprived area.

Nowadays this school has some 650 children (aged 4-12) and 34 nationalities. The intention was to teach children to cope with democratic values and educate children to support each other and society. Children got and get the role of mediator and, after a certain period, other children will get this task.

If necessary, during breaks, they are sitting together with those who have problems. They will put on their yellow cap and start their mediating task. Gossip and conflicts are the most spoken about issues. Meetings will often end up with shaking hands. It is not just an idea of adults or professionals. In the meantime children are eager to become a mediator as they hate conflicts in their school and especially in their classroom.

As the concept was very successful, many schools in The Netherlands also wanted to become a “Peaceful School”. Nowadays the idea has spread widely over the country, especially in the big cities.

But not only this: learning more about the key ideas, several community houses in socio-economically different areas, in socially mixed areas and/or multicultural areas took over.

The idea behind this is if this concept is working in the school, why not in the area where it is sometimes hard to live together? The school is one of 76 schools which achieved the accolade of being “Excellent”.

The Netherlands has some 6,700 primary schools.
Personal and Social Development is a subject facilitated in primary and secondary schools in Malta and Gozo. PSD “aims at empowering students to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes which will enable them to live and participate fruitfully and effectively in their environment” (Abela et al., 2002, p.3).

PSD is student oriented. The topics address the students’ needs. The main topics are group building, myself, relationships, citizenship, growing up and health and safety. So, PSD helps children to develop attitudes and skills like self-awareness, building confidence, emotional literacy, good communication, respect, celebrating diversity, building good relationships, cooperating with others, resolving conflicts, responsibility, how to keep themselves safe and decision-making skills.

PSD is very interesting and relevant to the children’s lives because they have the opportunity to participate in discussions and activities, share their ideas and opinions, be creative and learn skills which will equip them to become happy and fulfilled individuals prepared for their life experiences.

In PSD, there is an emphasis on learning by doing through experiential learning (Camilleri et al., 2012). So, students are learning from experience through role-plays, case scenarios and other activities. Then, there will be the processing which leads the students to transfer and apply the skills they learned to real life situations. During PSD, students are seated in the form of a circle which according to Roffey (2006, cited Camilleri et al., 2012) is very important because it represents inclusion where no one is left out and it also symbolizes connection.

In one of the primary schools where I facilitate PSD, I worked on an interesting project to celebrate diversity. In order to strengthen more the students’ values of inclusion, unity and respect, I worked on a project which I entitled ‘Embracing Diversity Project’.

Aims of the Embracing Diversity Project:
1. To learn what we mean by the word ‘difference’
2. To identify what is unique in every person
3. To understand that everyone is different and that we are all special in unique ways
4. To understand that different people have different skills
5. To appreciate that difference is a positive thing
6. To embrace diversity
7. To celebrate respect, unity and inclusion.

When students are young, they start to form attitudes and opinions. So, through this project, I tried to instil in them, positive attitudes which can last for their life. I made use of stories, a play, short video-clips and discussions to encourage students share their views and to reflect more on the importance of diversity and respect.

Students understood that each individual is unique and has differences which can include cultural background, ethnicity, gender, age, language, abilities, skills, beliefs, religion, interests, traditions and so on.

The project was about understanding each other and moving to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity found in each other. Students understood how boring it would be if, in the world, we were all alike, with no differences among us, to make each individual unique.

Through processing students expressed themselves, understood others and their ideas, while attitudes were challenged. For example, a student had the impression that a visually-impaired person cannot go out and or use the computer. But, amongst other things, this student and the others learned that visually-impaired persons can have a guide dog which
gives them more independence and can even use a computer having suitable software and an e-mail can be read through the computer’s programme.

Processing helped students integrate and internalize what they experienced during the various activities. Therefore, students were empowered to transfer the learned skills to real-life situations.

I also encouraged students to make some drawings on diversity. At the end of the project, I involved Year 2 students (6 years old) to form a flower by using handprints. Students excitedly put their hand in the paint and made their handprint. They formed the petals, the stem and the leaves of the flower. The petals of the flower symbolized unity.

So, they realized more clearly that in their classroom, each of them was important and they had to include everyone in what they did. If the flower has some missing petals it is not complete; the same applies in classroom and in society.

Then, I involved Year 4 students (8 years old) to form a rainbow using handprints. Students were eager to make their handprints and form a rainbow with vibrant colours. The colours of the rainbow symbolized diversity and inclusion. The aim behind it was that students realize that, like the rainbow which is made up of different colours, in the society in which we live we find many different people and we must respect diversity.

Students were really enthusiastic during this project especially during the play, role-play, discussion and when making their hand-prints. They learned many important values which enriched their character in order to become responsible citizens and take action to create a better and a safer society where difference is celebrated.

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References

The conference venue
The international seminar will be located to the five star Barceló Eresin Topkapi Hotel, which is situated in the Old Town, in Istanbul’s European quarter. The historic centre and the Grand Bazaar are only 10 min by tram which stops right in front of the hotel.

Take the golden opportunity to combine this interesting seminar with a visit to Istanbul at the best time of the year, and to enjoy a high quality stay in the absolute centre of the city.

The complete conference package €530 (single room stay) or €385 (shared double room stay) is strongly discounted and very price competitive. The fee includes 3 nights of accommodation, lunches/coffees, materials and the Friday evening dinner in charming location.

Organised in national collaboration with Regional Environment Center (REC) Turkey

Read and register on
www.learningteacher.eu/istanbul-seminar-2014


By interactive discussions among the participants the seminar will discuss key issues that bridge the soon ending Decade for Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 to UNESCO’s forthcoming Global Action Programme from 2015 and onwards.

The seminar topics address improving the purpose and quality of education; Improving curriculum development; Knowledge, skills and values for the future.

The registration period is open until 1 June, 2014

Welcome to exciting Istanbul
Register with ‘early bird’ fee before 15th April
Science Theatre in Schools
- Live theatre as teaching aid

Marie Curie stands in her laboratory, in a long black dress, polishing a glass beaker. Piano music plays, Chopin. As the children enter, Marie greets them warmly. The music fades out. In the silence she holds up the beaker, then turns it upside down.

Marie: A glass beaker. It’s empty. Do you agree?
Children: Yes.
She crumples up some tissue paper, puts it in the beaker, then walks to a long glass cylinder filled with water.

Marie: If I push this beaker, upright, under the water, what will happen to the paper?
Children: It’ll get wet!
Marie: So, let’s test our theory. Who wants to help me?
A forest of hands goes up. Marie selects an assistant and instructs her to roll up her sleeves, submerge the beaker, and pull it out again. Marie pulls out a wad of soggy paper. The children laugh.

Marie: So! The paper is wet. Our theory was correct. But now, another question. What would happen to the paper if I submersed the beaker upside down?
The public is divided: It’ll get wet! It’ll stay dry!
The assistant pushes a new beaker upside down into the water. The paper stays dry.

Marie: Something is holding the water back. What could that be?
Children: Air! Air!
Marie: Exactly. Air. In science we must be very precise. This beaker is not empty but full, full of air, and air might be invisible, but it’s not nothing.
She moves her arms through the air.
Piano music plays.

This excerpt from The Lessons of Marie Curie (based on recollections by one of Curie’s students) contains all the elements of a typical Pandemonia Science Theatre production: style, simplicity, humour, and hands-on interaction.

For twenty-five years Pandemonia has been producing science theatre for a wide variety of audiences – children, family groups and adults, both lay people and science or teaching professionals, national and international.

Whatever the subject - air pressure, dna, the centre of gravity, or organ transplantation - our goal is to make science enjoyable and accessible. In schools our performances help the teacher generate interest in “dry” and “boring” material.

It’s educational theatre, but the aim is not to teach. Our goal is to spark the students’ imagination and stimulate scientific curiosity; to create the mindset for effective learning. The teacher takes it on from there.

In schools, for the 8-12 age group, the shows deal with basic science topics. For older students, 15-17, they explore the impact of science on society, and raise ethical issues which generate lively post-performance discussions.

Each production is for us a process of discovery. During intensive research we seek out the most effective storyline, the clearest demonstrations, and the most inventive interaction techniques.

There are also practical considerations. The productions must be as flexible as possible, have minimum build-up time, and be adaptable to a variety of playing spaces - a stage, a school gym, a lecture room.

On stage, we invite our audience to join us on that journey of discovery.

Teachers’ comments on Pandemonia:
... these wonderful shows really bring the issues to life for our students...
... every time they perform (we’ve had four of their shows at our school) Pandemonia engages our students with the themes directly and sometimes very emotionally ...
... in May or June, as soon as I get the plans for the new Pandemonia performance I get in touch with my head of department to plan it in...
... the performances confront the students with the dilemmas that developments in the natural sciences present in a light-hearted, but visceral style ...
... thanks for the wonderful evening!

A.L. Maples
Artistic Director

Contact:
Lea Witmondt (business director)
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www.pandemonia.nl
Good practice to safeguard the environment

Maria Regina College Naxxar Primary School Malta caters for 415 pupils with ages which range from 3 to 11 years.

Year 6 pupils attending our school have put theory into practice by working on the publishing of a set of eight colourful A3 stickers that promote good practice in the use of recycling site facilities in Naxxar.

The launching of these stickers was held on Friday 22nd November 2013 at one of the bring-in sites in Naxxar. The Hon Charlò Bonnici (spokesperson for Social Development, Environment and Climate as well as the Naxxar Mayor, Dr Maria F. Deguara, attended this original initiative.

Messages on the stickers encourage the general public not to dispose of waste such as batteries, neon tubes and bulbs, milk cartons and juice packets in the recycling sites. They also encourage people not to leave any separated waste or bulky refuse next to the bins. The Naxxar Local Council’s telephone number for the bulky refuse collection service is also displayed on these stickers for all to see and make use of.

This project was a joint effort between the School Pupils’ Council, the Eco-School Committee, the school’s PSD (Personal and Social Development) and Art teachers as well as the pupils who finished Year 6 last June. The latter have contributed by working on the art work in groups.

Our school has just been awarded the Green Flag, a prestigious international award presented to eco-orientated schools for their efforts in promoting an environmental and sustainable developmental education in their immediate environment and healthy eco-friendly habits among the school community.

Looking back it has been another a busy year for our young eco heroes.

Thanks to a €1000 sponsorship from a local bank, we managed to turn a particular area in our school garden into a wildlife corner for insects, birds and indigenous plants. With these funds we bought indigenous trees. We also bought some creepers like jasmine so as to embellish our newly-made garden as well as homes to attract butterflies, bees and birds. Bird feeders were hung to tree branches and a bird table was placed on one side of the garden to attract birds.

In one particular area of the garden, we planted crops such as cauliflower, frizzy lettuce and parsnips. On another side, we grew ten types of herbs. This was our introduction to organic gardening where pupils had the opportunity to plant the seeds and watch the process of growing vegetables daily. Subsequently, we utilized these home-grown products in healthy recipes appropriately created so as to be prepared at school during class cooking lessons.

In March, pupils planted various flowers in different areas of the garden.

Our project also included harvesting water from the school’s roof drainage system by installing five tanks holding 200 litres each. The water collected is mostly used for watering plants but can also be used for cleaning.

Containers used for planting trees are being re-used. Two in particular were labelled Green Bin and Brown Bin. In one we collect raw leftover vegetables, scraps of fruits and green leaves whilst in the other we collect dry leaves for our newly bought compost bin. This bin serves to produce our own compost and Eco Wardens make sure to water it and turn the material regularly so that composting takes place.

The Butterfly Houses have attracted huge numbers of caterpillars whereas the bugs corner or ‘Bugingham Palace’ has attracted a large population of different species of bugs which are beneficial to soil. These living organisms can be observed gradually developing through their life cycle in their natural environment, adding yet another exciting first-hand learning experience for our pupils.

Keith Agius, Sylvana Bonello, Vince DeBono (Eco-School Committee members)
Pierre Tonna, Karen Cutajar, Sonia Brincat (Pupils’ Council Members)
The traditions, the habits, the Romanian traditional clothing and the folklore are the true values which define a nation, making it unique in the world, constant and immortal. The elements of culture and popular tradition pass on values and create bridges between generations.

By folklore we understand the artistic creation, oral and anonymous collective of a single nation which reflects our conception about mankind and life.

The classification of the Romanian folklore is based on the criteria bound by the opportunity that they were created and the role they have for society and for each person.

Thus, we can celebrate:
• WINTER CUSTOMS - from Sf. Nicolae (6 December) to Boboteaza and Sf. Ion (6-7 January);
• SPRING, SUMMER AND AUTUMN HABITS - Scalaianul, Dragaica, claca, the Feast of Saints (Sf. Ilie, Sf. Maria);
• HABITS OF FAMILY LIFE:
  - the nuptial repertoire, the bride’s song, the groom’s song;
  - the christening;
  - the funeral repertoire (the burial) - the lamentation.
• TRADITIONAL DANCES AND SONGS CUSTOMS of both rural and urban geographical areas, for children - for old people, with yelling, hand clapping, beaten steps, shouts;
• POPULAR ART – fabrics, needlework, braids, pottery, painting.

Winter customs
Further I will refer to the traditions and customs that are the most anticipated by children in Romania - winter customs:

1. Saint Nicholas (6 December)
   This holiday opens the winter holidays. Typical of this day is the holiday which is the most expected by the children, because only the ones that have been good the whole year will find sweets and gifts in their boots, at the door. The children polish their boots in the evening before the holiday and they put them at the window. Sometimes children receive a stick (because they have not been obedient).

2. Christmas (25 December)
   At Christmas, adults, but especially children, walk from house to house singing carols and announcing the Birth of Jesus Christ. When they finish the carol they are rewarded by the host with sweets, apples, nuts, bagels or money.

3. New Year’s Eve (1 January)
   On this day children walk to say New Year greetings (Sorcova), wishing their hosts a happy New Year full of happiness, wealth and many achievements. The rewards can also be sweets or money.
We, the educators, shape the earliest ages, the children, these unpolluted souls, sensitive and willing to understand, to feel. In kindergarten we focus on promoting these traditions and customs among children for them to know their national identity so then they deliver to future generations of children.

Their young age constitutes an advantage. In these children, we can foster love, respect, admiration, a passion for the knowledge, keeping and passing on of tradition, habits and Romanian folklore.

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The next issue of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in June. Articles may be submitted no later than May 15th 2014.
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Istanbul, Turkey
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Register with the 'early bird' seminar fee before 15th April 2014

Full seminar information on www.learningteacher.eu/istanbul-seminar-2014

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