Engaging parents in children’s learning

What makes a true teacher?

Children’s travelling language library
From September to November 2010 the European Commission held an online public consultation about the future of the European programmes for education and youth.

Results were published at the end of May 2011. The main findings and recommendations concentrate on areas already focused on by “Brussels”, like improving the quality and efficiency of education and training, making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship and promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.

At first glance these concepts look vague and without content. However, those who have ever participated in a COMENIUS or ERASMUS project will know that the Commission is really serious when it comes to action in these areas.

Beside these recommendations to the Commission there were also many specific ones as well. Several focused on the work of the National Agencies and others focused on simplifying the process of project application.

When the Learning Teacher Network started (10 years ago) one of the tasks of the network was to invite teachers from all levels to start with projects (under Comenius). Contact seminars were organised in Dublin (2004) and Ljubljana (2005) and each of these seminars had an average of 7 to 8 projects applied for and successfully selected.

The 2010 public consultation has had huge support for these programmes for the future and it is also the Network’s conviction that such projects are a real innovative strategy for educational renewal.

Gerard de Kruif
Editor

The Future of European Education Programmes

The Learning Teacher Magazine

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Content
What makes a true teacher?  3
Searching for quality  4
The importance of teacher reflection  5
EuroLib - the European children’s traveling language library  6
Young entrepreneurs  7
The challenge of teaching in a rural area  8
Sustainability aspect in education in Nepal  9
Engaging parents in children’s learning  10
Cultural education policy in Amsterdam  12
Short news  14
Lifelong learning  15
Just what makes a child special? The story of a label  16
The 8th International Conference  17
Project-oriented teaching of pupils in Smorgon, Belarus  19

Authors in this edition
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Front page photo
Image credit: Photo by Myra May
What makes a true teacher?

How do young people perceive a teacher as authentic? This was the main question of the research that Tom Vermeylen and myself conducted at the Arteveldehogeschool University College of Ghent.

Our research has shown that the main thing pupils want to do in school is learn, but there is more.

Why is this question on authenticity so important?

Many sources already have shown authenticity to be a main selection tool for information. The importance of this concept has augmented as we live in an age of information overload. If we have so many sources to pick from, we choose the one perceived as most authentic. So, as school nowadays is just one of the sources of information, what makes a teacher authentic?

In education we have known for quite a while that authenticity is important in communicating with pupils. But it’s rare for someone to describe what being authentic actually means.

**Method**

In our research we conducted in-depth interviews with pupils aged 15 to 19. After thorough analyses we tested our results in focus groups and with several experts.

In the interviews we found that the respondents listed good knowledge of the subject, authenticity and the capability of adequate class room management as the 3 main elements that form a good teacher.

We asked them which was for them the most important of the three and subsequently asked them to describe what the 3 concepts meant to them.

**Findings**

First of all: almost all respondents had problems understanding the word ‘authenticity’, but saw it as important when given the synonym ‘real’.

We discovered 4 distinct criteria that pupils use to perceive teachers as being authentic:

1. **The knowledge of their topic** as main criterion. A fake teacher is one that doesn’t know what he or she is talking about.

   At first we thought this finding was connected to how our research was conducted, but most of the respondents, even those who picked authenticity as the most important element, explicitly linked it to the knowledge of the topic.

2. **Passion**. A very important second criterion, which pupils translate into awareness of the actual context and being up to date. They need to feel that teachers are constantly involved in their topics and teaching.

3. **Uniqueness**. They want a unique experience and want to be approached as a unique individual in a unique class group.

4. **Distance**. Don’t stand so close to me: pupils don’t want a teacher to be their friend. They want a teacher to be interested in their life, asking if everything is fine in informal moments, but they want the teaching staff to be prudent in sharing his or her own personal background.

**Conclusion**

It seems a lot has to do with the authenticity of the role rather than the authenticity of the person. Everything is based on expectations. You are authentic as a teacher if your actions concur with the expectations that pupils have of the profession of teaching, and that is that they can learn something.

Pedro de Bruyckere
Arteveldehogeschool University College Gent
Belgium

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New online guidance tool on quality assurance in vocational education and training

A new online tool offers national and regional policy makers guidance on how to approach quality assurance in vocational education and training.

The aim is to make vocational education and training more attractive across Europe by ensuring that courses respond to the needs of the labour market and today’s high quality standards.

The new online tool provides guidance on how to build and monitor a quality assurance system in vocational training. It is based on examples of different approaches from EU countries.

Across the European Union policy-makers and education providers agree that it is important to offer high-quality vocational education and training so as to make this option attractive for students and parents. Since the middle of the 1990s expert groups have been working on joint European guidelines on quality assurance in vocational education and training.

A shared understanding across Europe of the significance of quality and quality assurance for qualifications and education and training systems in general will create mutual trust and recognition and make it easier for Europeans to move between countries.

For those Member States that are building their system on a series of interdependent ‘building blocks’ the website gives clarity on what has already been achieved and what more could be done.

The tool has been developed by quality assurance experts from 33 European countries participating in the EQAVET network.

In 2009 the European Parliament and the Council backed the creation of a European quality assurance framework for vocational education and training (EQAVET). Under this voluntary scheme Member States have pledged to improve national quality assurance systems where appropriate, making best use of the European framework.

EQAVET is backed by a network of experts and one of the first results of this cooperation is the new online guidance tool.


THE LEARNING TEACHER MAGAZINE 2/2011 3
In the December issue I wrote about why the Finnish education system provides good results in every educational evaluation.

For years, it has no longer been an issue of getting to the top but to secure the high standards of basic education. Thus the Finnish Ministry of Education set a group to create quality criteria for basic education in order to support the high quality and diverse supplies of education and to secure the educational basic rights for children no matter where they live in Finland, what language they speak or how they are provided financially.

The context for the criteria includes four fields of quality of structures: Leadership, human resources, financial resources and evaluation.

It also includes seven criteria for the quality a student faces every day: Curriculum, teaching, the support of learning, growing and well-being, involvement, the co-operation between school and homes, the physical learning environment and the safety of the learning environment.

Acknowledging these criteria helps school staff, administration and decision-makers to recognize the shortcomings of action and how to improve it.

The Ministry of Education gave municipalities grants in order to plan what to do with these criteria. In Helsinki, the plan was to create a model of a well-functioning-school. I was chosen to participate in a group of ten principals, the leading school social worker and a school psychologist.

We approached the concept from different perspectives and tried to find out how to take advantage of Deming’s PDCA cycle (plan-do-check-act) in more than a hundred different schools in Helsinki. Somehow we always ended up with the same concepts: EFQM (formerly known as the European Foundation for Quality Management) as well as the action plan and annual report of each school.

So the Education Department of the City of Helsinki decided to begin the next school year with a new kind of action plan based on the EFQM and the Finnish quality criteria for basic education.

The main idea was to really plant the concept of a well-functioning-school at every level of school management from teachers to top leadership. We learned in a seminar organized by the Ministry that other cities approached the criteria from the bottom up (schools started to create their own quality cards) or from top down (the top leadership of their education department gave instructions to lower levels).

We truly hope that our approach will bring equal quality, standards, self-evaluation and urge for development of each and every school because that is how we can provide high quality education for all children despite their background or the neighbourhood they live in.

What does it mean in my school then? My school, with 300 students and a staff of 30 educational professionals has started to create the new action plan as a communal process: we have not only encouraged all the teachers to participate but also involved our students to both plan and evaluate our action.

The idea is to describe all the action in different areas of school as accurately as possible. This will enhance quality action in every classroom no matter who the teacher or the students are. We have listed all of our goals on one sheet and planned how we are going to evaluate our action.

At city level, creating a new kind of action plan in such a short time is a huge undertaking but it seems that the principals are well-motivated to do so: they believe that the model their colleagues have created really works in action as well.

How it will work, we will see next year. And then it will be time to check and act again.

Leena Pöntynen M.Ed
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The Importance of Teacher Reflection

As teachers, reflection on our practice allows us to develop a greater level of self awareness about the nature and impact of our own performance. The reflective practice of teachers is not a new concept. The idea of reflection in education first emerged in the writings of Dewey (1933), who suggested that there is always something new to be learned from each lesson and every working day.

Reflecting on our teaching practice in a critical way can lead to change within our classrooms because we use the fruits of reflection to challenge and reshape our actions. Reflective practice therefore guides us to be creative and constructive, initiating new and improved methodologies.

How do teachers reflect on their practice? In a recent study in Ireland, I asked teachers (n=340) if they reflected on their practice. 99% of teachers said that they did reflect and the majority reflected regularly and frequently.

However most reflection occurs at unplanned moments in the heads of teachers and is not visibly recorded:

I do it all in my head.
I always take my work home in my head.
I ask myself how things went and make conscious changes for next time.
I have a very good memory - don't need to write it down.

Only one quarter of the teachers said that they use a reflective journal or learning log to record the important events or interactions that occur in their working day but many of these teachers said that they did not use the journal to address problems or make changes in their practice.

A reflective journal can be an important professional tool for teachers to widen their understanding of the self in relation to their work as teachers. It would appear that there is a general lack of understanding about reflective journaling among teachers especially in relation to the possibilities for professional development that written reflections have to offer.

A further question in the area of reflective practice asked teachers if they thought that sharing written reflections with colleagues could help to improve their practice. Less than half of the teachers agreed that written reflections would improve practice, with a majority stating they were unsure of its benefits.

Overall, teachers appeared very unsure of what reflective practice entails and many of those who were familiar with it felt that they did not have enough time to adequately reflect on their work. Without adequate time for reflection and a deep understanding of what it entails, there is a limit to what teachers can learn.

Many teachers spoke about the reflective conversations they have with colleagues and found that conversations about practice enhanced their learning.

Professional conversations are much more than shop talk. They involve the co-construction of knowledge by the participants who focus on addressing the problems in their practice in the hope of improving their practice. Through critical conversations teachers provide horizontal support for each other.

When teachers collectively inquire into the epistemology of practice it encourages them to name the things that need attention and to frame the context in which they will attend to them. It is the process of problem setting (Schon, 1983). This process resonates with Dewey’s (1933) identification of ‘felt difficulty’ within practice where the normal flow of activity is disturbed and the routine way of doing things fails to solve the problem. It requires deliberate, conscious activity that leads to improved further action.

For many veteran teachers, conscious written reflections on practice are uncommon. Many younger teachers will have engaged in reflective practice at pre-service level but the question arises as to how many of these young teachers value the practice enough to continue with it throughout their teaching careers? Has its importance become embedded in their own theoretical assumptions about teaching?

Today, teachers are facing unprecedented changes in curriculum and instruction. They are often bombarded with policies and recommendations based on innovative educational studies.

The traditional teaching practices of teachers seem insufficient to meet the needs of today’s students who are expected to master rigorous content, learn how to learn, pursue productive employment, and compete in the global economy.

To prepare students for the future, new pedagogical approaches must be considered. Therefore teachers need to develop ways to record, articulate and share their reflections on their teaching more explicitly so that continuous sustained improvement in practice is realised in schools.

Jacinta McCarthy
Cork, Ireland
The European Children’s Travelling Language Library is a European Union funded education project. It is targeted at motivating children who have recently started to learn a foreign language through:

- Exposure to the rich heritage of European languages and cultures
- Motivation to learn languages
- Building a love of reading as the best form of autonomous lifelong learning
- Reinforcement of emerging literacy

Travelling libraries of the most beautifully illustrated children’s books in six European languages (English, Spanish, Turkish, Italian, Czech and Finnish) will travel from school to school across Europe. Each school keeps the library for a period and has to carry out a number of educational and collaborative activities before, during, and after the visit of the Library. Additionally, they place the results on the project website for use and viewing by other schools.

Activities include inter-comprehension, comprehension, creative expression, criticism, reflection, task-based learning, collaboration, and using languages within a social context. Both on the project website and traveling with the library itself will be teacher diaries and teacher guides.

Every school will be able to add a profile and message for the next schools in the library and the website as text and/or multimedia.

The target groups of students for the project are in their first year of learning a foreign language (in Europe this can start at age 6, as is the case in Italy). The diversity and need to learn should be reinforced at a level that young students can appreciate by introducing learning materials that are engaging for children.

The 36 books of the library (6 in each language) were chosen according to a set of criteria, in particular the need to show the different cultures from which the books originate and also the fact that the books are heavily illustrated.

This resulted in each country having at least one classic story of their culture like Don Quixote from Spain and a factual book like a Richard Scarry book in English. The rest are fiction. Illustrated books were chosen as this will help children decode the story of a book in a language that they do not understand and will be the basis of some tasks.

At the conclusion of the piloting, teachers have spoken about their overall experience and said (translated from Italian and Spanish):

"It is a remarkable education initiative! We need to be exposed to foreign languages! Our youth is going abroad for work more and more and it will be helpful for future citizens to have had these experiences at a young age, so that they may feel familiar with other cultural environments".

"I never thought that my pupils could be so attracted by foreign languages. I will certainly do more activities based on the EuroLib concepts".

"I am very surprised that the children were so attentive for so long. I have also seen some of my little students who usually have behavioural problems enjoying..."
Young Entrepreneurs

Young entrepreneurs - Because young people can make changes!
Young Entrepreneurs making it happen!
Young entrepreneurs building up community kitchens

Recently in Callao district in Lima, Peru, a group of youths committed to help their community to organize the renovation of the community dining hall so that low-income people in their area could afford to eat in the comfort of a well-loved and cared-for place.

This venture was embarked upon by students in the Educational Institution (E.I.) Fé y Alegria, La Salle. This idea was proposed by 13 year old students in 8th grade who had participated in Aflatoun classes for two years now.

The Aflatoun Programme is a programme that balances Social and Financial education for children and youth aged 6-18 years old and is being implemented in 78 countries around the world.

The programme is comprised by five core elements that are the base of the programme activities. The elements are: 1) Personal and Financial Education, 2) Rights and Responsibilities, 3) Saving and Spending, 4) Planning and Budgeting and finally 5) Social and Financial Enterprise.

Having learned the importance of these elements, 90 students of E.I. have developed a Social Enterprise directly related to their right to food and their responsibilities to their community and those who help provide food.

The students decided to support a popular local community dining hall, the María Luisa Cuculiza close to their school. It is a place where impoverished people have their meals and many children of the school also go there to eat. The motivation for this project came from the wish to provide and address the needs of so many, including the students themselves.

It was an opportunity to help many families by providing them with a better place to receive their food.

The students decided to use their own skills to help improve the dining hall’s physical condition - furniture repairs, chef attire and hostess’ towels and linens. To do this, they needed to obtain wood and fabric, so the students approached various companies to ask for donations. These companies agreed with the Aflatoun students and supported their effort to improve Maria Luisa Cuculiza.

The students then organized themselves into groups to tackle the improve-ments. Some students already had carpentry skills, so they took charge of repairing wooden furniture. Other students knew how to sew, so they sewed aprons, chef hats and tea towels for the dining hall hostesses.

On the first day of work in the dining hall, the students were met with a stark reality. They found the hall was in worse condition than they originally thought, but this did not hamper their plans. They were determined to renew Maria Luisa Cuculiza. They began cleaning, and extended this work to the undergrowth of the garden and of the interior court. They leveled the land and turned it into a garden.

During the second day they finished cleaning and began the remaining repairs that they identified the previous day - fixing the walls and wooden door, as well as making a new serving table. They also painted the exterior and interior walls with paint that the dining hall managers already had.

With the Aflatoun students’ ambitions, cooperation and organisation, many aspects of the dining hall positively changed. This place is better equipped to receive the community.

The community is enjoying the improved atmosphere, and the managers and owners of Maria Luisa Cuculiza could not be happier, expressing their gratitude and continuing to provide the community with nourishment and love.

Ana Rodrigues
European Programme Manager for Aflatoun
Child social and financial education
www.aflatoun.org

Contact the project at:
joel_josephson@kindersite.org
The Challenge of Teaching in a Rural Area

I teach in a small rural school on the outskirts of Belfast in Northern Ireland. It is a four teacher primary school with only 65 pupils.

There are many positives about teaching in such a close knit and intimate environment and I am lucky enough to really love my job and the children I teach. I am also in a very unique position as my mother teaches in the same school! This again is something I cherish and I know as she approaches the end of her teaching career, I will greatly miss her presence and expertise about the school.

The pros of my school would be the bond we are able to have with the children we teach. There are seven classes in our school, but only four classrooms and four teachers. The infant teacher (my mother) teaches a composite class of Year 1 and Year 2.

The children are in this classroom for two full academic years, with the same teacher. From there they continue into Key Stage One. I teach this class of Year 3 and Year 4. They then move into Year 5 and for this year alone they are taught as a single year group. The Principal teaches this class and manages the school. The final phase is Year 6 and Year 7, taught by the same teacher. Teaching the children for two years allows us the privilege of building a good pupil teacher relationship and a fuller understanding of the unique personalities of the children in our care.

I often come across teachers in larger schools that look upon my job as an easy alternative. Yes, I may have a smaller class, but within that class there is a broader range of abilities. The children who struggle in Year 3 are so far removed from those who excel in Year 4 and I have to account for this in my coursework.

Paper work is also a drawback of mine. I have taught in bigger schools, with four or six classes in the one year group. During planning the teachers get together and share the plans, utilising each other’s expertise. In our school we get double the work. I must produce plans for both Year 3 and Year 4 separately. Every six weeks I have to hand in Numeracy and Literacy plans for each class as a separate entity.

Along with planning, the management of time within the classroom is paramount to success. My time is constantly being divided between the two classes and the groups within those classes. I need to give my Year 3 work to continue while I teach the Year 4 class and vice versa. It is a constant juggling game. Our classroom assistant doubles up as cleaner, building supervisor and lunchtime supervisor. If she takes sick we pick up the extra responsibilities.

We are very lucky in our school to have an Interactive Whiteboard in each classroom and I find this an invaluable teaching tool. So much of our society is interactive and the children are often more knowledgeable and “computer literate” than their teachers.

It is very important to keep abreast of new and upcoming technologies and to integrate them into daily teaching as much as possible.

We find the struggle nowadays is to keep up with developing technologies, but not to allow the basic Literacy and Numeracy skills to suffer as a result. Communication is very much a visual thing. Children can manoeuvre their way round a PC or Nintendo DS by simply recognising symbols and icons.

They do not have to be able to read words to excel in this area. But the underlying message is that although there are many positives about advancing technologies and they are essential and important, the basic approach is also necessary and invaluable.

The world we are teaching in is constantly evolving. We need to keep moving with the times and adjusting our practices to keep up. But we also need to remember the value of the core basic skills of Literacy and Numeracy and to not allow these to be a casualty of the changing times.

Marie-Claire Canavan, Belfast, Northern Ireland

The UNESCO ASPnet for schools and training institutions

Founded in 1953, the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet), commonly referred to as UNESCO Associated Schools, is a global network of more than 9000 educational institutions in 180 countries.

Member institutions—ranging from pre-schools, primary, secondary and vocational schools to teacher training institutions—work in support of international understanding, peace, intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and quality education in practice.

By encouraging close links and common projects between schools from different countries and continents, ASPnet contributes to the function of UNESCO as a catalyst for international cooperation.

They are major experimental projects at the regional, interregional or international levels. By their very scope and duration, they enable acquired knowledge and experience to be passed on through training activities for teachers; Youth fora for students and teachers; production of teaching manuals; dissemination of good practices; and eventual incorporation of these into school curricula.

Some of the major ‘flagship projects’ are:
* World Heritage Education
* Baltic Sea Project
* Western Mediterranean Sea
* Sandwatch Project
* Great Volga River Route
* Mondialogo School Contest
* Water Education in Arab States
* Blue Danube River

Through this UN network your pre-school, school or other educational institution has an opportunity to establish contact with sister institutions throughout the world for different types of projects and cooperation.

Sustainability Aspects in Education in Nepal

In Nepal, the history of the development of formal education dates back to the 1940s; a decade which illuminated the minds of people with political liberalism. Hence, the dark period of 104 years of Rana regime ended in 1951.

Since then there have been significant efforts made by governments and stakeholders in education. Government has been investing large amounts of money in public education each year and equally promoting private education institutions. But, expected standards of services of education have not been observed. The implementation of plans has not been as smooth as expected.

NGOs and Professional Bodies of Nepal have been addressing these issues since the 1990s. The aim for national and global education is ‘sustainable education’. Nepal is still working on promoting access to formal education for all, while other parts of the world are putting the focus on secondary issues of education.

The world has begun to work towards sustainable aspects of education, and Nepal is also pursuing this path. Education which promotes economic development with ecological balance, global integrity and sustainability of these areas is necessary today.

Education itself should be a part of ‘social security’. This aspect of social security should be accessible for all without any circumstances, and also provide scope for development.

As an effort from students’ NGO (World-wide Nepalese Students’ Organisation - Nepal), an interactive session on the topic “Education and Sustainable Development: Nepalese and Global Discourses” was held at WNSO Nepal Central Office, Kamalpokhari-Dillibajar, Kathmandu on the 21st May 2011.

Participants from various backgrounds (teaching, engineering, leadership, ICTs, Banking, Uni Students, Government Officials) wished to serve the Nepalese Education sector more with a focus on sustainability.

Participants decided to conduct Leadership Sessions to train educators in ICT and to conduct a National Conference on “Education for Sustainable Development” in late 2011 / late 2012.

A decision was also made to hold a stakeholders’ meeting in June 2011 for preparing and implementing these plans.

Dipesh Dulal
Nepalese Teacher Network for Sustainable Education:
http://www.nepaleseteacher.org
Engaging Parents in Children’s Learning
- A ‘Novel’ Approach

Book fever hit the community of Mahon in Cork, Ireland in October 2010 as a new literacy project ‘One Week, One Book, One Mahon’ was launched.

The aim of the project was to get as many people as possible in Mahon, across the generations, to read the same book at the same time and encourage discussion on the book in the school and the community.

The project was organised by the Home School Community Liaison Coordinators in the area to promote the benefits of reading for pleasure and to encourage parents to take an active part in improving the literacy of their children.

The response to the project was phenomenal. One thousand copies of ‘The Butterfly Lion’ by Michael Morpurgo were distributed in the community over a four week period. Pupils, parents and grandparents from the five schools in the area, together with community groups read the book and engaged in related activities.

For some parents this was their first time reading a novel and parents with literacy difficulties were supported with audio versions of the book. Wrist bands were awarded to all who had read the book providing a physical stimulus for discussion on the book in the community. The project culminated in a series of activities, including a table quiz, an art exhibition and book review competitions.

A review undertaken with all participants in the projects revealed very encouraging outcomes. Literacy became a topic of conversation in both home and community. Children were motivated to look for other books to read by the same author.

Parents came together to discuss the book which led to general discussions on ways to promote literacy in the home and the formation of a book club. Parental skills in story telling were developed by observing a professional storyteller at work in the primary schools.

Teaching staff reported an increased interest in reading by children in the school and greater support for literacy in the home. The project directly increased the number of books in the home as each child was given their own copy, with a personalised book mark. Parents subsequently purchased more books for their children.

This project provides just one example of the vital role of the home school community liaison coordinator in relation to enabling parents and communities to support children’s literacy development.
The HSCL scheme was introduced to Scoil na Croise Naofa, in Mahon, in 1995 and the role of parents as prime educators is now central to the whole school approach to education at the school. This is evident in the way parents are involved in the life of the school.

Parental education and personal development is fostered through the provision of courses and classes in the parents' room. Childcare facilities are provided. Parents play an active, meaningful role in policy formation.

Several initiatives have been developed to raise the awareness of parents of their ability to help their child and to assist them in developing the relevant skills.

At the beginning of the school year, teachers hold a general meeting with parents. This forum provides teachers with an opportunity to discuss with parents how they can support their child’s learning at home and to address their concerns.

A toy library provides parents with educational toys, books and jigsaws to use in the home. A family literacy project delivered by a speech therapist supports language development in the home. Parents are trained to work in the classroom in such areas as art and crafts, maths for fun, reading, literacy games, cookery and science for fun.

A 'Write a Book' project encourages literacy in the home, using a class mascot as a stimulus.

The high visibility of parents at Scoil na Croise Naofa is indicative of the positive relations between home and school and the warm, welcoming attitude toward parents which permeates the school.

By helping parents experience at first hand the working of our school, we strive to empower parents to engage successfully in the learning process of their children.

This vision is embodied in our school motto ‘We welcome, We encourage, We learn’.

Dorothy Keane,
Home School Community Liaison Coordinator,
Scoil na Croise Naofa, Mahon, Cork, Ireland
Amsterdam has a new, demand driven, model which stimulates schools to develop long term plans for cultural education. The model is an answer to the changing cultural make up of the city and its school population.

Compared to other EU countries, the Netherlands has few governmental rules concerning arts education in primary schools. The 2007-2008 Eurydice survey “Arts and Cultural Education at School in Europe” that gathered data on arts lessons in 31 European states confirmed this. “In most states, the Ministry of Education decided on policy. The Netherlands are the sole exception to this with the many diverse schools having a lot of freedom to develop their own curriculum.”

At the same time the Dutch government puts much emphasis on cultural education. The government provides structural national funding for cultural education and all cities have municipal arts education centers that provide schools with subsidized arts classes and performances.

By 2004 the governmental focus was shifting to long term partnerships between schools and art institutions or professionals and to social effects of culture.

Cultural education provides an insight into the arts and into the material culture but also provides social cohesion, citizenship and integration, supports the social function of the school and stimulates the development of individual expression and self-confidence.

The city of Amsterdam strongly questioned whether the municipal arts education centre was adapting to the changing demands of the city’s population.

Of the 57,000 primary school students, 65% has migrant roots, and of the 37,000 secondary school students and the 3,600 special needs students, 60% has migrant roots.

To meet the needs of schools, cultural education should be demand driven and no longer supply based. This would be the best strategy for turning schools into places where young people are challenged to develop their own skills.

In 2005 the new model to stimulate cultural education was in place. Extra funds were given directly to schools for cultural education through an internet debit account and funding for new projects was provided through the Amsterdam funds for the Art.

Mocca, a small independent organization, was set up by the City of Amsterdam and for a smaller part by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Mocca provides free support to schools and art educators in formulating and implementing long term plans for cultural education, based on the needs of their students.

Mocca produces no cultural educational projects but provides an overview of what the city of Amsterdam has to offer in the field of cultural education.

The Amsterdam model gives schools the opportunity to become leaders in their...
projects with cultural institutions and not just consumers of ready made projects. In the spring of 2006 Mocca began to contact schools and arts educators. Within 4 years after the start of this new model, 95% of all schools use the services of Mocca. 70% of the total of 340 schools, primary and secondary, have a written policy on cultural education, without pressure from the city government.

Peggy G. Brandon, director
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www.cultuurkaartamsterdam.nl

Europe’s cultural heritage takes centre stage at EU Prize Award ceremony

Twenty seven winners of the prestigious 2011 European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards were presented with their prizes on 10 June 2011 during a ceremony at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam in the presence of Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, and Plácido Domingo, the world-renowned tenor and president of Europa Nostra.

Out of the 27 winning projects, six were named as ‘Grand Prix’ laureates at the ceremony as 2011’s most outstanding heritage achievements. The final choice was made by juries composed of independent experts from across Europe.

The ceremony was attended by an audience of some 1500 people including H.R.H. Princess Margriet of The Netherlands.

Exemplary heritage achievements in Europe were awarded in four categories: conservation, research, dedicated service by individuals or groups and education, training and awareness-raising. The standard of the works is always outstanding and competition is strong.

The Foundation, Europa Nostra was selected in 2007 on the basis of an open call for proposals as part of the “Special action” of the Culture Programme. Europa Nostra is in charge of organising the selection and the award ceremony of the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage.

The awards are supported by the Culture programme of the European Union, which has invested €26 million in co-financing heritage projects since 2007.

More time for teaching and learning

The Finnish SANOMA editors multinational, ordered international research on the use of digital learning materials, practice problems and teaching wishes. This research was carried out by Malmberg editors, part of Sanoma. Research organisation ‘The Bridge’ interviewed 7830 teachers and almost 1000 heads of school in Hungary, Belgium, Poland, the UK, Finland and Holland.

Results showed a difference between teachers and heads of school. While teachers emphasise time for individual learners as most important, heads of school are more keen on better results of individual learners. Teachers would like to reduce time spent on administrative work and non-teaching tasks. In Holland almost 80% of teachers support this idea, while in Finland it is only 20%.

Teachers in the UK are the ones who would most like to reduce the tasks which are not related to teaching (some 70%). The Netherlands are second in this.

Teachers in French speaking Belgium and England produce most of the teaching materials themselves, while Finnish and Dutch teachers rely on the products of the educational companies. (April 2011)

Why is education not educating?

According to the British sociologist Frank Furedi (University of Kent) education is in a deep crisis. In his essay “Wasted: Why Education Isn’t Educating” (February 2011) he mentions several confusions: knowledge and information, teaching and learning, (intellectual) authority and abuse of power.

What he is describing is not new. Over the last ten to twenty years we heard this analysis more than once. It is about what we should learn (and teach) in schools but are not learning.

Why is the teacher not really teaching and the pupils only asking what they could find out for themselves?

Children must have fun in schools and fun means a positive attitude for learning. Furedi doubts if any of what we are doing is working. He thinks all these efforts are spoiling children and costing huge amounts of energy and money. School has become a place for social engineering.

The result is a curriculum with vague values (respect, responsibility etc.) with an absence of subjects and their content. It is a way of meeting what society would like to see; what education should be, in their opinion.

Nobody values the real essence of education, what its core business is: transfer of knowledge and understandings. Everyone is using education for their own goals. This is the result of hundreds, thousands of heart-wrenching good intentions which together have become problematic.

Children learning to be financially literate

From June 6th to 9th Aflatoun organized its annual international meeting, discussing the results so far and presenting its plans for the coming 5 years. Aflatoun is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) focusing on ‘financial literacy’ of children.

Three years ago HRH Princess Maxima of the Netherlands launched the programme which runs parallel to her micro-credit initiatives for the third world. The programme is now running in 78 countries and has 1 million children involved in the programme which is in operation in 8434 schools. The program has its origins in India, but is now based in The Netherlands.

The programme is designed as a flexible project for schools on social and financial education. Children (age 6-18) learn about financial independence and how to cope with personal and group savings and at the same time how to take care of e.g. the environment (social and physical).

Sustainability is an important part of the programme. Aflatoun has a big network of NGO’s which incorporate the Aflatoun programme within their own regular work.

The ambitions are high. In five years time some 10 million children will be familiar with Aflatoun. Europe will become one of the focus areas. With sustainability in mind, teacher training institutions must become the agents for Aflatoun and the in-service training provided by Aflatoun itself will also promote its popularity (www. aflatoun.org)

35,000 registered users on elearningeuropa.info

In mid May 2011 elearningeuropa.info, the European reference portal on education and technology, launched its new Internet platform. It is designed and built user-centered and it contains participatory tools to communicate, share and discuss.

The European Commission initiated elearningeuropa.info nine years ago, to support the transformation of education through technology. Available in 21 languages, it has now become a key forum for the generation and presentation of ideas. elearningeuropa.info has more than 35,000 registered users with an average of 16,000 monthly visits. Thanks to this large user base the portal provides great opportunities for research and exchange of ideas and information amongst researchers, practitioners, students and policy makers across Europe.

Users are able to create communities and working groups around themes and topics of interest and use these privileged spaces to display their content to a wider audience. The first communities are up and running with discussions and insight into Language Learning and Social Media; Open Education virtual worlds and gaming.

Join to explore them and share your experience.

Visit at: www.elearningeuropa.info
Contact: contact@elearningeuropa.info

Short News
Lifelong learning

The western society expects everyone to keep developing and gaining new knowledge and skills throughout life. The individual is daily faced with requirements from society and global aspects such as adaptability and flexibility make lifelong learning a necessity.

The concept of lifelong learning is learning used in a broader perspective than the general understanding of schooling, My latest project is about the elderly people in the Danish society, their IT-skills and lifelong learning.

The Technological Institute in Denmark conducted a study on the Danish citizens IT-skills, and it was found that 40% of all Danish citizens have poor or no IT-skills. This is classified as a social problem because many of the public services are computer dependent, and this debate is the reason for the emerged IT-cafe nethood.

These nethoods were originally for younger people with an ethnic background other than Danish. However they did not use these nethoods because they did not consider themselves as having poor IT-skills. This is the reason why almost every nethood closed except for one in Farum Midpunkt which changed its name into IT for @lle, and in this way the IT-cafe appealed to everybody.

The elderly people became very excited and grateful for this change because it meant that there was room for them too.

Elderly citizens get lost in the technological society

In this project we are inspired by critical psychology and therefore we have a situational understanding of learning. IT for @lle is a community of practice where knowledge is generated through participation in practice. Humans are created, changed and reproduced through participation in practice.

There is a discourse about IT and technological progress as being a good thing. IT-skills are necessary in order to keep up with development of society. Society can loose many citizens in this process especially the elderly, who can find it difficult to participate in society on an equal footing with other citizens.

The individual citizen must now gather information and communicate with several service agencies through the computer and IT for @lle is a relevant opportunity. IT for @lle upgrades each citizen’s IT-skills. The form of teaching is based on the participant’s specific problems which are considered to be valuable for both the volunteers and the participants. The participants can get exactly the help they need and the volunteers like the unpredictability of the work.

Even though the teaching is based on the specific problems, they also have courses in the evening about Nem ID, facebook etc. The participants use their own computers because it is easier to get help with their specific problems and they can use the skills they get in other contexts and situations. The volunteers have different skills which is an advantage because then they have an opportunity to help more at one time.

Learning is not just about change, but whether the learning situation is useful in other contexts. Through IT for @lle the participants are given increased opportunities to participate in society and develop the skills which are required for today’s world.

Simone Tüxen simonetux@ofir.dk

Parents spend several billion euros a year on private tuition for their children, says EU report

More than 50% of school pupils receive private tuition in some EU countries, according to a new report published by the European Commission. The report, which is the first to look at the issue across the EU, shows that parents are spending several billion euros a year to supplement their children’s education.

Tutoring is widespread in southern European countries such as Greece (spending estimated at more than €950 million per year, which is equivalent to 20% of government expenditure on primary and secondary education), Spain (€450 million), Italy (€420 million) and Cyprus (€111 million), but much less popular in northern Member States such as Sweden and Finland, where schools appear to largely satisfy expectations.

The scale of tutoring has increased in France (€2.2 billion per year and growing at an estimated 10% a year), Germany (up to €1.5 billion), and Austria (€126 million). There are also indications of significant increases in the UK and Belgium. The decline in the purchasing power of teachers’ salaries has been a major factor in driving the expansion of private tutoring in Eastern European countries. Spending in Romania, for example, is estimated at €300 million per annum.

Demand for private tutoring principally comes from high-achievers and is fuelled by pressure on youngsters to do well in exams and by ‘social competition’. The report points out that private tutoring reflects - and exacerbates - social inequalities. Private tutoring is much less about pupils who are in real need of support and much more about maintaining the competitive advantages of the already successful and privileged, it says.

Financial cutbacks have also reduced the extent to which educational institutions can provide individual learning support within school.

The report suggests that private tuition can restrict children’s leisure time in a way that is psychologically and educationally undesirable.

The report, which was prepared for the Commission by the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training, is available at:
http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports (key messages also available in French and German).

People put things in categories - it is something we all do as it allows us to make sense of large and complex data sets. We do it with cars; we do it with animals; we do it with books; we do it with anything that has an area of commonality.

We even do it to other human beings and once we’ve categorised people we feel that we have a good idea of what they are like - we base so much of our future treatment of people on the categories we assign them to.

Think about the national stereotypes we apply - the English are roast beef eaters who stand in queues, the Germans have no sense of humour and eat sausages whilst wearing leather trousers and slapping their legs to seriously uncool music. (I can say both of these as I’m half English and half German).

So just think about the categorisation of children that is so common and how it affects the way many people interact with the kids. ‘Oh, she is a clever girl and a good girl. She always does her work and it is very neat and tidy.’ ‘Oh he is a pain in the neck. He always argues, never gets it and doesn’t work hard.’

I think most people have done this in their teaching career at some level and the object of this piece is to try to show how a lack of flexibility in our interactions (or a superb level of rigidity of approach, to give a different viewpoint) can actually create and develop the special needs label in some children.

We all know about visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles. To a degree they have been found to be poor indicators of learning ability and inaccurate labels for learning styles as most people use different learning styles in different situations. There does seem to be some truth and accuracy though in the view that we perceive the world in a way that favours one or the other modalities, usually with a significant use of one of the others e.g. visual as the primary modality with significant auditory input or kinaesthetic with secondary visual.

It is up to us as teachers to have the flexibility in approach and the sensory acuity to work with the kids’ perceptions of the world and thus allow them to build learning experiences in a way that is meaningful for them and that truly gives them the ability to interact with the world.

In fact we need to reject the concept of a child having special educational needs a lot of the time and investigate offering them learning in a way that they understand and can relate to, not offer what we offer and if they don’t ‘get it’ call them special needs and move on to more fertile learning pastures.

A few years ago I had a 15 year old young man called Johnny sent to my unit for work experience. In the notes he was described as pleasant but not the brightest child. He was in all bottom level classes and was not expected to gain any meaningful qualifications at age 16.

I have always taken the attitude that I do not write off kids until they prove to me that they deserve it – and it takes a lot of proving. Talking to Johnny I felt he was a lovely boy. He had an impish sense of humour, a beautiful smile and there was something about him that made it clear he was not performing as he could.

He had been socialised into believing his special needs status and was heading to a low level of life performance as a willing partner. I desperately wanted to wake him up to his awesome capabilities.

The first thing we did was to get him to do the Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) Training courses run by Promethean at the time. These were at three levels; basic, advanced and trainer. We set him the basic course to do and he duly came in after about an hour with it done - all self-directed learning.

This was way faster than any teacher had done it. We were pleased so set him the advanced. This took a day or so but he duly returned and was judged as being of the advanced standard. There was only one thing to do - set him the trainer course. This is normally only for advanced teachers so they can teach other teachers. It was duly completed and sent to the head of training at Promethean to be marked.

Sure enough Jonny passed with flying colours and was officially the joint highest IWB user in the school district. This was all done by him, with a bit of help from us but no formal teaching. My question then is ‘How can he be special needs when he can achieve high levels of learning faster than most teachers and without help?”

Later in the week we were supposed to be teaching a group of trainee teachers at Oxford University how to use IWBs via video-conferencing. We decided to get Johnny to do it. He was very nervous as he was introduced to the teachers (we clearly told them that he had been classified as having special needs) and their looks of scepticism didn’t exactly help his nerves.

He plainly wanted to be somewhere else. I was really annoyed at them - polite but unable to see how a child with special needs could teach them anything. We handed over to Johnny who asked them a quick opening question, fully expecting a knowledgeable response from them.

When they looked blankly back at him you could see a light come on in his eyes as, possibly for the first time in his life, he knew that he knew more about a subject than the teachers. He immediately and visibly grew in confidence and spent an hour training them in the sophisticated use of IWBs.

The session ended with the teachers applauding enthusiastically and the head of department thanking Johnny for being such a skilled teacher. This change took less than a week to achieve.

Johnny moved on to sixth form with few qualifications but within two years had qualified in several subjects at higher level, including as an ICT technician.

I hope this story will encourage teachers to continue to use the broadest range of tools and techniques with all their students, and to use as much (maybe even more) creativity in their approach to teaching with students with special needs as they do with their mainstream kids.

Many teachers are guilty of using the label ‘special needs’ to reduce the variety of experiences and quality of teaching they employ with these kids. This is, I feel, a result of expectation and incultation of historical attitudes and by overcoming these attitudes it is much more likely that both the kids and the teachers will attain better outcomes.

Steve Kirby, the UK, stekirby@me.com
The theme of next year’s conference will highlight the matter of excellence and mastery in teaching and learning. Our ambition is that the conference programme will expose theory, research and best practice that produce and demonstrate effective elements of teaching and learning, successful creation of knowledge and understanding, but also what - in a wider, deeper sense beyond knowledge and skills - can be expressed as educational and professional ‘wisdom’.

Within the topic of the conference, thematically the programme will embed and relate to Education for lifelong learning, Education for sustainable development (ESD) and Education for all. Contributions should address one or more of these perspectives.

The topics will be portrayed by internationally recognized, high profile experts in the thematic area, followed by seminars and parallel sessions of lectures and workshops that go more in depth and are led by practitioners and researchers.

The official working language of the conference will be English.

A Call for papers and presentations is available on the conference website www.learningteacher.eu/nice-conference-2012 (where conference information will be posted in full after summer).

The 8th International Conference in Nice, France on 10-12 May 2012
Call for papers and presentations

The Learning Teacher Network’s 8th International Conference, with the title ‘Creating Knowledge and Wisdom in Education and Training’, will be held on 10-12 May 2012 in the elegant, high quality environment at the four star Boscolo Hotel Plaza in Nice, France.

School leaders and teachers need to create school, staffroom, and classroom environments where error is welcomed as a learning opportunity, where discarding incorrect knowledge and understandings is welcomed, and where participants can feel safe to learn, re-learn, and explore knowledge and understanding.

All learning journeys go from being a beginner towards becoming a master.

The conference theme
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The official working language of the conference will be English.

A Call for presentations in order to form the conference programme

In order to form the programme, hereby we invite to proposals for presentations (workshops, lectures, open sessions, or paper presentations) for the Nice Conference 2012 (“the Call for presentations”).

We welcome contributions and proposals for conference sessions from professionals in education and training, both within and outside the network.

Alike previous conferences, we hope to see a large number of presenters from Europe and beyond. Many colleagues’ experiences and knowledge, and their willingness to share this with a European and international audience, will be most important and will contribute to the richness of the conference.

We look forward to welcoming many fine contributions for conference sessions.

The Call for papers and presentations is available on the conference website www.learningteacher.eu/nice-conference-2012 (where conference information will be posted in full after summer).

Proposals

Hereby we invite to proposals for presentations (workshops, open sessions, or paper presentations) for the Nice Conference 2012. Proposals are kindly to be submitted in electronic format to the e-mail address conference@learningteacher.eu and by using the form called “File Card for Contributions”.

The deadline for submitting your proposal for a presentation:
Monday August 15th, 2011

THE LEARNING TEACHER MAGAZINE 2/2011 17
EU education report on the achievement of targets

EU countries have improved their education systems in key areas over the past decade but they have achieved only one out of five benchmarks set for 2010, the European Commission’s new progress report on education and training reveals.

The EU has succeeded in its target to increase the number of maths, science and technology graduates, with a 37% rise since 2000 - easily outstripping the target of 15%.

Significant, but insufficient, progress was made in reducing the school drop-out rate, increasing the number of pupils completing upper secondary education, improving reading literacy skills and increasing the share of adults participating in education or training.

Key results:
- 2010 benchmarks: EU countries have made progress but only achieved the target on the number of graduates in maths, science and technology.
- Participation and attainment: since 2000, overall participation in education has increased as well as the qualification levels of adults. The share of children in pre-primary education has risen as well.
- Gender gaps remain significant both in performance and in choice of subjects. For instance, girls outperform boys in reading, and boys account for most early school leavers. Men outnumber women among graduates in maths, science and technology subjects.

A detailed breakdown of the figures for each country is available. The Europe 2020 jobs and growth strategy retains the target of reducing the school drop-out rate to under 10%, as well as increasing the share of graduates to at least 40%.


Welcome as network member

A platform for educational progress
The Learning Teacher Network is an international, educational and non-profit network and association.

As an international platform the network unites professionals in education in the ambition of sharing and creating frontline teaching and learning in order to develop education and training.

Trust, respect and fun
One main characteristic of the network is the welcoming and excellent atmosphere when people communicate and meet. The guiding words that illustrate the network are “trust, respect and fun”.

All professionals in education and training are welcome
The network embraces practitioners in school, trainers, researchers and other educational experts within the whole range of education from pre-school to universities.

The good atmosphere and the composition make the network unique. Membership is open to anyone who supports the objectives of the network.

Mission
The Learning Teacher Network embraces
* Education for all
* Education for lifelong learning
* Education for sustainable development (ESD)

Membership
You and/or your institution are warmly welcome to become a member of the Learning Teacher Network.

Application for membership can be made on-line on the network website or by filling in and returning to us the registration form.

www.learningteacher.eu

The next issue of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in October. Articles may be submitted no later than September 15th 2011.
Project-oriented teaching of pupils at Gymnasium in Smorgon, Belarus

Since 2000 Gymnasium N4 has been working on conditions of development. Seven innovatory projects were realised with four of them on the republican level under the auspice of the Ministry of Education.

From 2000 to 2006 we implemented the republican innovatory project: “Teaching human rights: International humanitarian law at school”. During the implementation of the project we got in touch with Vienna Business school, UK municipal school in Nottingham and the European Gymnasium in Frankfurt am Main and we shared our way of teaching: promoting children and human rights at school and in society.

A very exciting project with German Gymnasium was “Holocaust in Germany and Belarus”. It was financially supported by German funds and the city’s educational department. We exchanged our teams of teachers and students just to share our research with other schools, media and local government authorities in Frankfurt am Main and we met each other later in Smorgon, Belarus.

At the end of the project we carried out a scientific practical conference for both teams in Smorgon and invited representatives from all educational bodies from the Grodno region (one out of six in Belarus).

A team of students won the first place in the UNESCO ASP Mondialogo school contest in Belarus and received an invitation from UNESCO to attend the UNESCO Award Conference in Rome in 2006 in cooperation with a twin team from a Gymnasium from San Paulo, Brazil.

This team comprised of students and tutor of the project “Cultural Bridge :Belarus-Brazil”. Mr.Vladimir Kalinin (head of SMORGON information center on children and human rights education at this Gymnasium N4) got UNESCO Certificates of Recognition and 8th place in the world among 127 countries participating in the UNESCO competition.

We teach students how to use ICT and integrate new knowledge and skills into school curriculum and lessons. Our students got second place with “My Hero” project in the USA ICT project for secondary schools because we made a film dedicated to an active and participative approach to teaching human rights at school.

We are trying to keep in touch with all our partners even after the end of our common projects. So, in September 2010 ‘Teacher of the Year’ from Vienna Business school, Mrs. Susanne Pratcher, EU ICT co-ordinator for Austrian schools, visited our Gymnasium because of our invitation.

During round table discussions, seminars and open classes in English for teachers and students and local school administrations we shared our experiences and good practices in teaching English as a foreign language and in project oriented work at schools in EU.

Since 2002 Gymnasium has participated in the republican project : “Complex usage of information technologies” and since 2006 we took part in the new project: “Intranet Network: distance teaching as a means of further computerisation of the district educational system”.

Our local education department supplied us with all necessary facilities and we got 60 PC’s and united them into one local network. Two high speed exits are attached into the district Intranet system network and we have free speed Internet access for teachers and students.

ICT skills are widely applied in the teaching process due to mobile set-class, an interactive board and two interactive attachments. 96% of teachers use informational resources in their work with students.

We have some experiences in distance learning at EU Universities for instance in Lund University, Sweden. Five of our students finished the distance course on sustainable development and ecological education and received Certificates of Recognition from Lund University.

In 2007-2009 the new republican experiment: “Influence of technology in forming the key competencies of students and professional competence of teachers by means of project activity” was realised.

In 2009 a national seminar for headmasters of Belarus Gymnasiums and Lyceums from all over the Grodno region took place in Smorgon in cooperation with members of the National Coordinating Council on Computerisation. At the end of the seminar a resource centre for ICT was founded in the gymnasium, also available for all other local schools for secondary education.

The administration team of the Gymnasium in cooperation with teachers and students is ready to continue innovatory activities and project oriented work as a tool for teaching in the 21st century.

Head Mistress of Gymnasium N4
Ms. Iryna Dureiko
Smorgon, Belarus

Note: Gymnasium = Academic secondary school

The Learning Teacher Network on facebook
www.facebook/learningteachernetwork
WELCOME TO THE 8th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
Creating Knowledge and Wisdom in Education and Training

Nice, France
10-12 May 2012

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