Knowledge and Wisdom

Educational Mentorship
Gifted students
Live animals in the classroom

Let Me Learn
To be or not to be curious?
Simulation games
Scientists and reflective practitioners

Knowledge about daily practice and transfer of this knowledge into action has the potential to improve teachers’ daily teaching practice.

During our annual conference many examples of good practice based on investigations and research were presented. But the reality is that a majority of teachers don’t have time to do this kind of research. Yet, there are several ways to improve our daily practice.

Educational researchers (scientists) can provide a lot of knowledge about our daily work and the teacher her/himself can spend some moments, some minutes, some beneficial time reflecting on what (s) he is doing or to make an action plan.

Each of these ways presents challenges: the translation of the scientific work into daily practice is a big problem: how are the results of the research applied to daily practice and who is responsible for this task? Additionally the practitioner lacks time or a setting in which s/he is invited to reflect on daily practice.

The Learning Teacher annual Conference showed that both scientists and practitioners can become productive through strategic collaboration. However, as teachers are practitioners and very focused on their daily work it is sometimes a question of finding the courage to take advantage of an opportunity like the conference and push oneself into a situation of reflection; reflection on the knowledge gained during the conference days and about which, one was enthusiastic right at that moment.

Providing opportunities for reflection can be helpful for colleagues to gain new insights into their practice. And very often wisdom will follow.

Gerard de Kruif
Editor
Have you ever wondered why some people take on a challenge in one way, whereas others might do something completely different? It’s all to do with how each one of us processes information and uses a combination of learning patterns as our minds select preferred ways of making sense of the world around us.

The Let Me Learn process is an advanced learning system which allows you to understand how you and your students learn best and therefore how you, and they, can make the most of learning opportunities, benefit more from learning conversations and become better at working and learning collaboratively.

At the heart of the Let Me Learn process are two key concepts.

Firstly, there are our learning patterns, ‘Sequential’, ‘Precise’, ‘Technical’ and Confluent and these affect the ways in which we subconsciously choose to learn.

These can be analysed by completing the ‘Learning Connections Inventory’ which audits our learning patterns and shows us which of them we tend to ‘use first’ when processing information; which patterns we ‘use as and when we need to’ when processing information and which patterns we ‘avoid’ using if we possibly can.

For example, if you mainly choose the ‘Sequential Pattern’, this indicates that you want:
- Clear directions
- Step-by-step directions
- Time to do work neatly

Whereas if you mainly choose the ‘Precise Pattern’, this would indicate that you want to:
- Receive thorough explanations
- Ask a lot of questions
- Answer questions
- Be accurate and correct
- Analyse test results
- Have written documentation

Alternatively you might choose the ‘Technical Pattern’, in which case you:
- Look for relevance and practicality
- Don’t use a lot of words
- Believe you can fix things
- Prefer to work by yourself

However, if you mainly choose, the ‘Confluent Pattern’, this indicates that you:
- Thrive on generating new ideas
- Use imagination to a high degree
- Seek risk-taking opportunities
- Do not fear failure but see it as an opportunity to learn and grow.

We do not choose one pattern rather than another but we use a combination of patterns and it is this which each of us uses to ‘make sense’ of the world around us which can help us to better understand ourselves, and one another, as learners.

Secondly, Let Me Learn helps us to understand our metacognitive processes not only when we are learning for example, in the classroom, but also informally and when engaged in conversations with others, and with ourselves.

In fact it is the inner conversations we all have with ourselves which most influence our actions and how we see ourselves as learners.

Through deepening understanding of how we each use our metacognitive processes, we can gain an improved self-image and self-esteem and a more accurate self-concept leading towards higher levels of belief in ourselves to achieve.

By increasing knowledge and understanding of ourselves as learners we can take greater strategic responsibility for our learning whether working independently or in collaboration with others in small groups or as part of a larger team.

Similarly, by knowing learners in the classroom in this way we can also make better use of the resources at our disposal to plan more meaningful learning experiences. We can also encourage learners to share in the learning process by taking greater responsibility for their own learning.

For further information about Let Me Learn and the Learning Connections Inventory, please contact Steve Hall, Staffordshire University, UK at s.j.hall@staffs.ac.uk or visit the Let Me Learn website www.letmelearn.org
Anniversary Publication:  
Ten years with the network

In 2012 the Learning Teacher Network celebrates its 10th anniversary since the founding of the network. The journey from a Comenius 3 Network from 2003 to 2006 to a sustained, non-profit and membership based network and association is depicted in a new Anniversary publication produced by the network.

28 colour pages of texts and photos  
The Anniversary booklet, titled “Trust Respect Fun - Ten years with the network”, is a first class, colour printed publication with 28 pages of text and photos.

In an attractive way the publication portrays the developments and highlights of the network during the ten years of existence. In addition, the publication describes what makes the network both unique and highly inspiring to many colleagues.

An overview of the life of the network  
The ambition is that this booklet shall be widely disseminated. For the first time an overview of the history of the network has been depicted. And, for the first time a more comprehensive product for information and promotion is available.

Orders  
The new publication can be ordered online and purchased from www.learningteacher.eu

Network members receive the booklet for free as included in the membership.

Available in printed format only  
The publication is and will be available in printed format only (in other words, no electronic version). The publication deserves to be held in the hand.

Some examples of content

Available in printed format only, the Anniversary publication can be ordered from the network website www.learningteacher.eu
To be or not to be curious?

In Karlstad, Sweden a current project reaches all children in public preschools and schools. The main purpose of the project is to make a model of the systematic work and development of school science and technology. According to the curricula, everything school does must also have a gender perspective and therefore the gender pedagogues are linked to the project.

Systematic work of science and technology in Karlstad
Children and Youth Administration in the municipality of Karlstad has decided to conduct a school development project for 3.5 years with a focus on Science and Technology. The project is funded by the Ljungberg trust.

The municipal primary schools of Karlstad need to improve the skills of students and teachers in science and technology and review the possibility of working in a more exploratory and experimental way.

The school Development Project "Science and Technology in Karlstad" developed a model of how to work with science and technology and of how to develop a more concrete approach to other key development areas such as gender equality, and sustainable development with the help of the NTA.

Teachers for change - To visualize and challenge conceptions of gender
Up to 14 years of age, girls and boys are equally interested in science. Then girls lose interest, but boys keep it up. Why? Maybe it’s because boys are encouraged to play with toys like Lego and construction from an early age, and get a lead over girls?

Girls are often punished twice. If they follow the teachers’ instructions and wait for their turn, they are considered passive and lack initiative. If they on the other hand don’t obey the instructions they are badly behaved.

Boys are not expected to follow instruction or wait, they are instead considered creative, innovative and active.

In mixed groups of boys and girls, the tendency is that boys will take control and lead, and girls might not have the courage or position to oppose and show off. Having smaller groups reduces this from happening.

Boys are brought up to compete. If you use competitions as a pedagogical method the boys would benefit great from it. Boys need to learn how to cooperate and how to benefit from it.

Find female role models! Visual images are important. A picture of Marie Curie in the classroom could be enough for a girl to believe that she can be a scientist.

Teachers in Sweden are over all very much aware that gender equality is to be considered in the classroom, but still there seems to be a large gap between being aware of gender equality and changing one’s own behavior in relation to it. Gender awareness has to be directed towards the teachers themselves, the teaching, the students and science itself.

Science and technology for all
NTA (Science and Technology for all) offers preschool, primary and secondary school a concept of school improvement. It is primarily focused on biology, physics, chemistry, technology and mathematics, but experience shows interdisciplinary effects and provides an approach to local development.

It rests on five pillars for school improvement and learning in science and technology:

- a query-based, inquiry skills education with the experiment as a base
- access to well-adapted experimental materials in combination with well-adapted pupil and teacher guides
- continuous professional development and education of teachers
- continuous assessment of student learning (formative assessment)
- collaboration between schools, municipalities, businesses and colleges/universities.

The themes of NTA provide suggestions for working and work materials with detailed tutorials, based on the students making their own investigations, collecting empirical data, discussing and documenting their work and results.

There is continuity within and between themes and curriculum.

Support is provided to teachers helping them to understand why you do things in a certain way and to help teachers to support the children in asking questions and daring to ask questions.

Teachers and students are provided with insights that enable them to choose appropriate methods and enquire into their own issues.

Opportunities are created for students to work with problems that are anchored in their everyday lives.

www.karlstad.se/Laboratoriet

Patrik Backman, project manager
patrik.backman@karlstad.se

Marianne Nilsson, gender equality pedagogue
marianne.nilsson@karlstad.se
C. J is a distractible 3-year old boy with problems of fleeting attention, avoidance behaviors, auditory processing and motor weaknesses. After attending the music class, he made some changes. According to the teacher, his cognitive ability in the first few sessions was not good. He had some trouble paying attention during the beginning session. “...C. J. was distracted during the entire session...” (10/5/2010). His musical ability was also in need of improvement. “C. J. was confused by the changing tempo of the music but had fun with the faster tempo.” (10/12/2010).

During the most recent session he attended, C. J. showed improvement with both his social ability and musical development. “He was willing to hold children’s hands.” (1/26/2011). “He jumped along with the music...” (2/11/2011).

It is important to note individual differences among the children, especially teaching children with special needs. It is very important for a teacher to set out targets prior to teaching in order for teaching to be effective.

Learning music not only improves children’s creativity but also cultivates many skills that will continue to be useful to your children throughout their lives.

A brief list follows describing the activities that elicited positive responses from the children with special needs based on the author’s research teaching.

**Singing Activity**
Singing activities in a musical environment enrich and support cognition and therefore language development. Since singing is as natural as talking for most children, they learn to sing just as they learn to talk - by imitating other people.

Singing activities support children’s need to socialize and play and also improve speech and language skills: vocalization, verbalization, articulation, language expression and reception, rhythm, and breath control.

Action songs, such as: **Hello Song, Attendance Song, Goodbye Song,** are a very good way to practice social gestures in a motivating environment where song lyrics can provide instructions and the rhythm and beat of the music can provide timing and structure to the movements.

Social development requires awareness of self and others. This can be translated in singing activities through vocalizing in order to increase awareness of one’s own musical contributions or other’s musical contributions.

Singing activities, such as **Call and Respond** also provide a motivating environment to facilitate attending to a small group or single communication partner. Children develop an understanding of cause and effect, initiate interaction, and indicate “yes” or “no” by gestures, such as: nodding or shaking head. Songs that use lyrics linked with memorable melodies can facilitate and motivate children to learn objective concepts.

**Playing Instruments**
Playing instruments improves gross and fine motor skills: coordination, balance, dexterity, range of motion, strength, as well as social skills - participation, self-esteem, and cooperation by the ways children hold and play the instruments.

Instrument playing, such as cabasa and ocean drum, provides a useful way for the children who are very sensory defensive to touch. The cabasa offers a cool, metallic feeling. The ocean drum has a gentle vibration that permeates through the smooth surface of the drum head as the drum is tilted slowly from side to side.

**Movement activities**
Movement activities facilitate gross motor skills: mobility, agility, balance, coordination, as well as respiration patterns and muscular relaxation.

Moving to music with contrastive elements, such as: high and low, slow and fast, loud and soft, stop and go, long and short etc. helps children understand these concepts by doing.

Playing games with sounds, singing
songs and chanting as well as moving around and dancing to music can all help children to practice specific language skills, develop cognitive and social development.

Music and rhythm games can help children learn and retain information and skills. Children with typical abilities build motor skills through musical games.

**Listening to music:**
Listening to music puts children at ease, so that progress in social interactions follow.

Listening to music enables children with special needs, such as cerebral palsy to promote music as an effective tool for language development and communication skills, expressing feelings and developing a sense of rhythm.

Most children diagnosed with autism or Asperger’s lack the social skills that will fully involve them in play and other social situations. Listening to music can be very beneficial for them.

Liza Lee, EdD, Associate Professor
liza.lylee@gmail.com
168, Gifeng East Road
Wufeng District
Taichung City
Taiwan, 413

THE LEARNING TEACHER MAGAZINE 2/2012 7
Discovering fractions... with understanding!

Children’s informal ideas about fractional quantities appear much earlier than the formal learning of fractions in school.

The quotient interpretation of fractions is more suitable to build on children’s informal knowledge of fractions because this interpretation relies on the idea of fair sharing, in which children can easily use procedures such as one-to-one correspondence.

In quotient interpretation, \( \frac{2}{4} \) means that 2 items were shared among 4 people. Furthermore, it should be noted that in quotient interpretation a fraction can have two meanings: it represents the division and also the amount that each recipient receives.

For example, the fraction \( \frac{2}{4} \) can represent two chocolate bars shared among four children and also can represent the part of the chocolate bar that each child receives. Figure 1 shows the child’s two solutions when asked: “What fraction represents the amount of chocolate bar that each child will get when they share it fairly?”; “How do you read this fraction?”; “Can you show us how they would accomplish the sharing?”.

The child gave a written answer saying “This fraction is two-sixths” and then used drawing to support his/her explanation. Figure 1 presents a child solution solving an equivalence task in which the child was asked to draw the children in the yellow table knowing that all the children of both tables would eat the same amount of pizza after sharing it fairly.

During their explanations frequently children drew pictures to support their ideas. Figure 2 is an example of children’s solutions when they were asked “Who eats more pizza, each boy or each girl? Why?”. The children gave written answers and used drawing to present their explanations.

In this example (see Figure 2) the child explains that “Each girl eats more, girls eat \( \frac{1}{2} \) (one-half) and each boy eats one-third”.

In the next four sessions children explored ordering of fractions and symbolic representation, verifying their solutions and explaining their solutions in a written way. In these sessions children successfully compared fractions such as \( \frac{1}{2} \) and \( \frac{1}{3} \), and \( \frac{2}{4} \) and \( \frac{2}{6} \).

In the last three sessions children explored ordering and equivalence fraction problems. Figure 3 presents a child solution solving an equivalence problem involving \( \frac{1}{4} \) and \( \frac{2}{8} \).

Figure 3: A child’s solution solving an equivalence problem involving \( \frac{1}{4} \) and \( \frac{2}{8} \).

Dr. Ema Mamede & Dr. Manuela Oliveira
CIEC, Institute of Education
University of Minho
Campus de Gualtar
2710-057 Braga
Portugal
E-mail: emamede@ie.uminho.pt
Educational Mentorship

Have you ever had a situation arise in your classroom and have had to make an educational decision when suddenly you realize... "I never learned about this in my classes and textbooks!"

It is not unusual for such situations to occur. So, what resources are available for a new teacher to assist in such a situation? The role of the Educational Mentor will be presented as an alternative resource to provide support, staff development and on-going expertise to develop educators' pedagogical skills.

The role of the Educational Mentor is to provide sustainable development and capacity building to educators to promote the development of best practices for use in classrooms.

The concept of having a full time staff position in the school as an Educational Mentor is a promising role which is found to not only promote the development of best practices for teaching but to sustain the learning of these skills in the natural classroom environment rather than in more traditional approaches using university classes or inservice sessions.

The creation of this position actually provides the opportunity to assist the teacher in the awareness, learning, application and evaluation of best practices in their classroom environment.

The identification and hiring of educators who can be Educational Mentors is critical. These attributes include a history of documented expertise as a proficient educator, the ability to be a consultant to colleagues in the school environment, the ability to diagnose strengths and needs of a teacher, and the ability to create individual plans to develop the skills of the educator.

Therefore, the Educational Mentor candidate not only needs to have demonstrated proficiency as an educator but also needs to be able to develop working relationships with educational peers to model, educate, assess and provide continued application of pedagogical skills.

The role of the Educational Mentor needs to be fully developed and explained. The role is not intended to be evaluative. There is a specific distinction between the role of the administrator (principal/head master) who is responsible for the evaluation and supervision of staff and the role of the Educational Mentor whose role is to provide support and expertise to the development of pedagogical skills to their peers.

It is critical that all those in the school are aware of the different roles and adhere to such. The administrator may ask the Educational Mentor to provide assistance for the development of skills. A teacher may ask the Educational Mentor to assist in the development of skills as a professional development option.

There is a confidential relationship between the mentor and the mentee which is critical to assure the success of the stakeholders involved.

In summary, the developing role as an Educational Mentor can significantly increase the pedagogical skills of the teachers in a school in an on-going, natural manner and can have a major impact on teacher performance and student achievement.

Ann Morrison Clement, Ph.D. and Annie Morrison, M.A. Colorado, USA almclment@comcast.net aclement@vail.net
Creating knowledge and wisdom
- the 8th International Conference, Nice France, May 2012

Framed by sunshine, lovely weather and the blue Mediterranean Sea, the network’s 8th International Conference was held at the four-star B4 Boscolo Hotel Plaza in Nice, France on 10-12 May 2012.

126 participants from 21 countries - from all Europe, the USA and Nepal - came to attend the event and to enjoy Nice.

The conference was titled ‘Creating Knowledge and Wisdom in Education and Training’. Four keynote speakers and 22 parallel workshop sessions, led by practitioners and researchers, highlighted and penetrated different aspects of the topic of excellence and mastery in education.

The conference exposed key elements of - and best practice in - the creation of both knowledge and what can be expressed as educational and professional ‘wisdom’.

As keynote speaker and one of the world’s most pre-eminent thinkers, Dr. Edward de Bono gave a speech on creativity, thinking and wisdom. Creative Thinking is a valuable resource, which is becoming ever-increasingly important if we are to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by our fast-changing world.

Dr. de Bono, the inventor of Lateral Thinking, shared how to explore new and better ways of thinking and extend your repertoire of creative thinking skills and strategies. His phrase “Excellent but not enough” (“ebne”) was much talked about after the presentation.

Prof. Ursula M. Staudinger underlined that more wisdom is possible and depicted empirical evidence for the successful facilitation of wisdom and consequences for teaching practices, while Prof. Joan Freeman described 35 years of research on gifted children and what happens when they grow up. Prof. Harm Paschen portrayed pedagogical relations between knowledge domains, wisdom, and their modern integral cultivation (Bildung).

Linking policy and practice, Mr. Brian Holmes from the European Commission’s Agency EACEA outlined the Commission’s response to the challenges facing education and explained the coming education programme ‘Erasmus for All’.
The closing of the conference included a mind-thrilling “fishbowl” session on thinking, knowledge and wisdom, where the keynote speakers reflected on and discussed questions raised by delegates under the theme “What makes knowledge turn into wisdom in daily practice?”

Regarding the content and focus of the presentations at workshops and lectures we refer to comprehensive information given in the conference brochure and on the network website.

In addition to the rich content of the conference, the participants appreciated the open and welcoming ‘climate’ at the conference. As both witnessed by many comments during the event and in the conference feedback, the days in Nice provided a great time for learning and reflections, socialising and having a good time together, networking and getting to know new interesting colleagues, but also for many delegates the joy of meeting ‘old’ friends again.

Lunches were served at the top terrace of the hotel with a stunning view of the bay. One of the evening dinners was held at a restaurant on the beach. Needless to say, being so close to the sea by the Promenade des Anglais - and the setting with sunshine, blue sea, blue sky, and Côte d’Azur mood - contributed to a highly successful conference.

The positive feedback on the content, ‘climate’ and setting of the conference was overwhelming.

Furthermore, the conference celebrated ten years with the network. A film with highlights from the ten years was shown and the new Anniversary publication was presented for the first time.

In his conference opening words the network coordinator Mr. Magnus Persson depicted three challenges and tasks for the network in the coming years:

• the importance to address youth and include youth perspectives in education and training;
• a strengthened focus on education for sustainable development; and,
• new opportunities and missions for the network in the coming EU programme ‘Erasmus for All’.

Simulation games in teaching ecology

Ecological simulation games are modern educational tools in the area of sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management. Each game is based on copyright, an innovative idea and an interesting proposal on environmental education.

The plot shows the simplified reality, in which participants play roles similar to those prevailing in the real world, for example, assuming the role of business owners involved in the transport and reception of waste, the staff of the environmental or eco-home residents.

During training, participants acquire practical knowledge of how to take proper action itself in the real world and can see long-term effects of their actions. Erroneous decisions or behavior are jointly analyzed and subject to adjustment.

The basic advantages of ecological simulation games include a faster and more efficient way for participants to acquire knowledge, not just by sitting on the train and prescribing information of the array, but through participation in practical exercises.

Participation in our workshops also supports a range of interactive activities in cooperation with other participants, as well as the use of the natural rivalry between two groups having the same goals. This increases the energy of the training participants, which can be spent on the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills.

Private Salesian High School organized workshops within the School of Climate. The class used a new method of education: simulation game. During the lesson, the students divided into groups and assumed roles of representatives of countries and continents, who fought to reduce carbon emissions. The aim of the game was to identify the cause of the difficulties in reducing CO2 emissions, understanding the role of cooperation and confidence in solving the problem of reducing CO2 emissions and experience the negative effects of the lack of decisive action to reduce CO2 emissions.

Simulation "Negotiations on the climate" in practice, shows the problem of shared responsibility for the common good to shift responsibility to others and the reluctance of some countries to take action to reduce CO2 emissions. In the discussion we show that this mechanism operates not only at the level of national governments but also individuals. In the course of the game there was an atmosphere of positive motivation and tension.

The possible repetition of the passage of the game, led to the desire of students to get new messages, and fix errors in previous rounds of the game. This is the method of science, which is relatively simple and lightweight and yet very effective. Simulation games are both imitation and reality mapping, involving acting out certain roles according to the rules governing them in the real world. It can be concluded that simulation games are fun "pretend" that is designed to exercise the most effective response. This type of game includes the social characteristics of both simulation and educational games. Educational games used in education are faced with growing interest and appreciation in schools.

Their obvious advantages are: increasing the effectiveness of the learning process, influencing the formation of appropriate attitudes and enabling the use of acquired knowledge and practice skills. They are a very attractive form of teaching for students, providing them with pleasant experiences and awakening in them positive motivation to learn through collaborative and individual work projects.

Magdalena Szewczyk, Ph.D
Private Salesian High School
Wroclaw, Poland
magda.szewczyk@slo-wroc.pl
STEVE JOBS schools open in the Netherlands

After the summer holidays of 2013 a group in The Netherlands intend to launch two Steve Jobsschools. The initiative came from a polls constructor, an education scientist, a teacher and the director of a Digi-school. They all are dissatisfied with the integration of ICT and the lack of knowledge about the introduction if ICT into regular education. The intended school will be open from 08.15 until 18.30.

There will be no classrooms, no centralised teaching, except for presentations from the children, excursions, music, drama, playing etc. All ages are integrated. Teachers will be coaches. Tablets, smartphones and so on are always available.

And all this is based on the idea that each child is learning in a different way and that learning has nothing to do with the year of birth. However, there is the danger of focusing solely on ICT and technology.

The founders of the new schools don’t agree with that as they claim that the use of new technologies enhances creativity in pupils. iPads have the potential to meet the creative needs of children and improve their speed and level of learning.

One month after the initiative, several schools prepared a publication in the magazine of one of the teacher unions. They stated they are already Steve Jobsschools. (Onderwijsblad, vol 16, nr 9). Their name in English is ‘Stars school’.

These (six) schools are spread all over the country. These schools admit that investments in computers is not the only way to improve education and has little effect on learning results, as American and Dutch research has proved.

EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD)

The EU and China have been closely cooperating in the last few years on education & training, culture, multilingualism and, from 2011, youth policy. At the fourteenth EU-China Summit held in Beijing on 14 February 2012, leaders of the two sides agreed to establish the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD).

The EU-China HPPD, the third pillar of EU-China relations, will complement the two existing pillars – the High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the High Level Strategic Dialogue.

The HPPD will be the overarching mechanism, which will accommodate all EU-China joint initiatives in the field of people to people exchange.

On 18 April 2012 the EU and China held in Brussels the first round of the HPPD. On that occasion Commissioner Vassiliou and State Councillor Liu Yandong signed an HPPD Joint Declaration and endorsed a document with follow-up actions.

A number of follow-up actions have already been identified. China and the EU will expand the opportunities for mobility in education, and increase the number of exchanges between students and scholars, particularly in higher education.

The two sides will work together to improve the mutual recognition of academic qualifications. To promote language-learning, China and the EU will jointly organise a major conference on multilingualism at the end of the year.

The two sides will work together to improve the mutual recognition of academic qualifications. To promote language-learning, China and the EU will jointly organise a major conference on multilingualism at the end of the year.

The founders of the new schools don’t agree with that as they claim that the use of new technologies enhances creativity in pupils. iPads have the potential to meet the creative needs of children and improve their speed and level of learning.

One month after the initiative, several schools prepared a publication in the magazine of one of the teacher unions. They stated they are already Steve Jobsschools. (Onderwijsblad, vol 16, nr 9). Their name in English is ‘Stars school’.

These (six) schools are spread all over the country. These schools admit that investments in computers is not the only way to improve education and has little effect on learning results, as American and Dutch research has proved.

Read more on http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/china_en.htm
The social-constructivist theory of learning assumes that students construct their knowledge by making sense of their experiences. This view includes that students are actively involved in their own learning. They form mental models through social negotiation as reasoning, arguing, critical thinking, reflecting and keeping up conversations about a certain issue until their ideas correspond to the external reality. To facilitate students’ knowledge construction a learning realistic, complex and relevant learning environment is conditional.

Recently third year students of the School of Education (Leeuwarden) of Stenden University in The Netherlands presented their outcome of their meaningful activities during nine weeks in such a learning environment.

Their case started with a letter from a so called educational publisher who invites them to design a game suitable to be played by a team of a primary school-teachers which results in all teachers knowing the state of the art on the NCLB-policy).

In problem based learning sessions students collaborated in groups on the authentic and realistic problem in order to acquire the knowledge and skills needed in NCLB policy in primary schools. NCLB is a complex issue in which not only pedagogical approaches and procedures need investigation, it also refers to students values and personal opinions.

The students started their learning process by discussing the meaning of the words in the letter to make sure they all have the same perception. After an overall investigation on the issue of NCLB they set goals and design a plan of how to reach these goals. In fact the real work starts at this point.

Through intensive dialogues with various professionals involved in the matter students gather information and construct their knowledge.

Students also discuss the values of NCLB and their contributions in the future. Some of the students get information from the primary schools of their teacher training practice. They find out how NCLB policy is executed, which materials are used, which knowledge and expertise is needed and how external expertise can be arranged. Other students investigate the government policy on the NCLB-policy.

Students also collect action-plans on the level of an individual child as well as on the level of groups. After a couple of weeks the students have pieces of knowledge and skills concerning the NCLB-policy. Through reasoning and discussions their conceptions gradually begin to correspond with the reality of NCLB policy.

Then they design a game in which the information, skills and knowledge will be acquired by the game players. The particular group of students in the picture has chosen a question and answer model.

By designing questions and suitable answers they restructure the theory and the information again. The rules of the game are set in a manual. On completion of the project students stated that they had acquired the knowledge and skills of NCLB in an effective and efficient way and at least one primary school team enjoyed playing the game.

*) National Centre for Encouraging Reading

Yttje Cnossen
Stenden School of Education
Leeuwarden. The Netherlands
yttje.cnossen@stenden.com
The United Nations Rio+20 Conference

At the Rio+20 Conference, world leaders, along with thousands of participants from governments, the private sector, NGOs and other groups, will come together to shape how we can reduce poverty, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection on an ever more crowded planet to get to the future we want.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) is being organized in pursuance of General Assembly Resolution 64/236 (A/RES/64/236), and will take place in Brazil on 20-22 June 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.

The Rio+20 Conference It is envisaged as a Conference at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government or other representatives. The Conference will result in a focused political document.

Themes of the Conference
The conference will focus on two themes: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development.

Seven priority areas
The preparations for Rio+20 have highlighted seven areas which need priority attention.

1. Jobs
Economic recession has taken a toll on both the quantity and quality of jobs. For the 190 million unemployed, and for over 500 million job seekers over the next 10 years, labour markets are vital not only for the production and generation of wealth, but equally for its distribution.

2. Energy
Energy is central to nearly every major challenge and opportunity the world faces today. Be it for jobs, security, climate change, food production or increasing incomes, access to energy for all is essential. Sustainable energy is needed for strengthening economies, protecting ecosystems and achieving equity. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is leading a Sustainable Energy for All initiative to ensure universal access to modern energy services, improve efficiency and increase use of renewable sources.

3. Cities
Cities are hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, productivity, social development and much more. At their best, cities have enabled people to advance socially and economically. However, many challenges exist to maintaining cities in a way that continues to create jobs and prosperity while not strangling land and resources.

4. Food
It is time to rethink how we grow, share and consume our food.

5. Water
Clean, accessible water for all is an essential part of the world we want to live in. There is sufficient fresh water on the planet to achieve this dream. But due to bad economics or poor infrastructure, every year millions of people, most of them children, die from diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene.

6. Oceans
The world’s oceans - their temperature, chemistry, currents and life - drive global systems that make the Earth habitable for humankind. Our rainwater, drinking water, weather, climate, coastlines, much of our food, and even the oxygen in the air we breathe, have all ultimately provided and regulated by the sea.

7. Disasters
Disasters caused by earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes, tsunamis and more can have devastating impacts on people, environments and economies. But resilience -- the ability of people and places to withstand these impacts and recover quickly -- remains possible. Smart choices help us recover from disasters, while poor choices make us more vulnerable.

What will happen at Rio+20?
Governments are expected to adopt clear and focused practical measures for implementing sustainable development, based on the many examples of success we have seen over the last 20 years.

What is sustainable development?
Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Seen as the guiding principle for long-term global development, sustainable development consists of three pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection.

Read more on www.unccd2012.org/rio20/about.html
The situation of gifted students in Poland - chosen research results

In this research ‘educational support of development of the gifted student’ was understood as exerting intentional and unintentional influence, through teaching activities that enhance abilities and results.

These activities promote factors that both stimulate and facilitate this development as well as suppressing those factors that threaten its development. Gifted students, the basic subject of the research study, were studied at both social (including institutional) and individual levels.

The research was carried out between 2008 and 2010 and employed triangulation, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. It was implemented at three basic stages:

1. case study research (carried out in selected schools in the Silesian Voivodeship, whose work with the gifted student was studied),
2. survey research (carried out among teachers),
3. biographical research (focusing on gifted students’ educational experiences).

Research results show that family, school, peer group as well as self-educational activity play an extraordinary role in the individual’s development. These influences overlap with the individual’s age-related needs and the expectations from the wider social and cultural environment in which he or she functions.

The school case studies research conducted at the first stage led to polarised conclusions arising from document analysis, on the one hand, and interviews on the other hand. The documents outlined a number of activities undertaken at schools with respect to students showing additional potential. However, interviews carried out with school counsellors revealed many imperfections and tensions in the school environment in the area of work with the gifted student.

Most visible were tensions regarding obligations and habits as well as tensions between collective and individual experience. Statements made by the interviewees indicated that the ‘sensible actions’ recorded in the documents often contrasted with numerous examples of inappropriate or even negative situations that occur at school. They included:

- incorrect methods used by teachers in communication with gifted students,
- ineffective methods of organisation of the process of education
- lack of multi-level coordinated action (coordinating collaboration between parents, the class tutor, the school counsellor and the student)

The research also indicated that collaboration between school and psychological and counselling centres was problematic, or fulfilled only minimally the requirements of educational law. The research carried out at the first and second stages revealed significant problems in the schools connected with inappropriate collaboration with the gifted student’s family.

This seems especially serious in the case of students coming from family environments characterised by neglect or the threat of marginalisation. The analyses of the biographical research, based on transcriptions of the narratives of gifted individuals, made distinctions between subjective and situational, as well as social and cultural factors determining support of gifted students’ development. The subjective intrapersonal factors included: personal competences, self-assessment, self-knowledge, ability to cope with failure and ability to plan or manage one’s own development.

During the research, situational and socio-cultural factors that promote development were stressed by the subjects. They included the atmosphere of the family home; parental attitude; the first, early-school educational experiences; significant people (coaches, teachers); significant educational events; and the atmosphere in the respondent’s peer group.

These factors occurred at social, institutional, group, peer and individual levels. During the third stage of the research, the author managed to capture the role of developmental crises connected with setbacks and failures. Such experiences involved strong, negative emotions relating to the students’ abilities. If further development was to follow, it turned out to be important whether and how an individual coped with experiencing these crises. It appeared to be important to acquire new competence in the reduction or elimination of these tensions.

The results also showed the role and the indispensability of the “10-year rule” (10,000 hours of practice in the area of talent). Systematic practice and hard work are factors determining the development of abilities. The behavioural patterns revealed in the transcribed narratives revealed that the actions and activity of individuals in a given area of special talent were the key category in the model of their support.

A significant majority of the subjects participated in various forms of additional, non-school stimulation of their talents. This was particularly noticeable in individuals with talents related to sport, music, visual arts and dancing. The results of the third stage of the author’s research indicate that non-school educational institutions, which have had a number of financial difficulties in Poland in recent years, play a highly significant role in supporting gifted students.

In the narratives of gifted students included in the study they often are identified as the only place where their abilities and talents develop.

Dr Beata Dytryk
University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland
beata.dyryda@us.edu.pl
1001 Inventions
- the enduring legacy of Muslim civilisation in our world

Muslim civilisation stretched from Spain to China. From the 7th century onwards, men and women of different faiths and cultures built on knowledge from ancient civilisations, making breakthroughs that have left their mark on our world.

To be strongly recommended, the “1001 Inventions” is a leading and award-winning international science and cultural heritage brand reaching over 50 million people and supported by many world leaders.

In 2010 an education film was awarded a range of global Gold Awards.

This amazing and most interesting initiative includes educational programmes, blockbuster exhibitions, award-winning films, books and international productions. The “1001 Inventions” interactive and stunning exhibition opens in Washington DC in August 2012. The previous years’ exhibition had over 2 million visitors in New York, London, Los Angeles, Istanbul and Abu Dhabi.

Also the website is comprehensive and very informative. Be sure not to miss this initiative and learning experience. Learn more on their website http://www.1001inventions.com/ and an informative trailer on www.youtube.com/watch?v=97c69Q4_cwl

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 front-line 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 September. Articles may be submitted no later than August 15th 2012.
When a live animal is used in the classroom one should not talk about the animal but engage with the animal to experience it in an interactive way. Not all animals can be used in the classroom.

Visiting animals should be robust and resistant to noise and children. Rats, rabbits, chickens or snakes can be a good choice. Also invertebrates can be used but need another classroom set up.

The animal is a guest in the classroom and we are responsible for its wellbeing. Do not choose animals that are: too big, dangerous, uninteresting, easily frightened or not interesting for children.

The structure of a lesson with a live animal is not much different than that of other lessons and the structure here loosely follows the 5E instructional model of engage, explore, explain, experience and evaluate.

**Engage.**

The lesson starts without an animal present in the classroom. During the introduction it will be announced that you will be working with a live animal and rules are communicated. These rules must resolutely be maintained. The animal is a guest in the classroom and the welfare of the animal comes first.

In the introduction, the existing knowledge of the children is activated. It is useful to have the preconceptions written down or drawn in advance.

A convenient classroom arrangement is a number of tables in the middle of the room and a U-shape of tables around it. The table in the centre should be made more attractive to the animal with a cloth, hiding places and branches, preferably made together with the children.

Another focus in the introduction is the removal of fear. Many people are afraid of snakes or spiders but fear of chickens or even rabbits is common too. It is a new situation in the classroom, so the children (or adults) are frightened of the unknown. They want to know what to expect.

Not all fear can be taken away but explaining what is going to happen takes away most fear. If a child in the classroom is still very afraid, have them sit in the back of the classroom as far as possible from the animal and near the door or the child can stand in the corridor.

Make sure that the child knows that when it leaves the classroom it cannot come back and the door will be closed. For the welfare of the animal and children it is important to ensure that rules are complied with.

**Exploration and experience**

During this phase the animal enters the classroom. It is not the aim of the lesson to explain much, this hampers the experience and exploration of the children. During the exploration and experience phase, the children explore and experience the animal in a structured way.

This structure can be given by work sheets or by a dialog between child and teacher. In the latter case the teacher continuously challenges children to ask questions that can be answered by either the animal’s behaviour or by the observations of the pupils. A worksheet of pictures with behaviour like sniffing, grooming or scratching can be used to help children recognize different kinds of behaviour.

Asking questions that requires children to formulate their emotions can stimulate the nature experience like: What do you think the animal feels like? And then have the child feel it! Does it feel nice or not? What does is feel like? At the end of this phase an opportunity to touch, feel, cuddle or pet the animal should be given.

**Evaluate**

When it is time to finish the lesson it is best to evaluate without the animal being present. During the evaluation the observations are discussed and the emotions children experienced during the lesson are made explicit and coupled to the experience. Genuine love can be felt toward an animal although affection is more common. But whatever the emotions the children experienced, it will be a lesson they remember as a valuable school time experience.

Mart M. Ottenheim
University of Applied Sciences Leiden, The Netherlands

Share new learning
www.learningteacher.eu

European Gold Award 2009

the Learning Teacher Network