My first job(s)

A long time ago, I started as a primary school teacher in a small town close to Amsterdam at the end of the 60s and beginning of the 70s.

What a time! This school had parallel classrooms (two classes with the same age range). My colleague and I were collaborating together on a regular basis and became, we thought, very creative.

We were young and enthusiastic and made engines to show children how air was working when an aeroplane was taking off in the air (with a vacuum cleaner and confetti), making ‘drawing’ attractive for boys and girls - it worked! We took bicycles apart and had boys AND girls in working groups to reconstruct several parts again; what dirty work, but what fun!

This is one side. The other side of the coin was that the Head of School had more and more reservations and in three years he managed to discourage us. Both of us left...

A second position was even more of a disillusion. According to the Head of School, the information on the blackboard (at that time) was too negative regarding some countries during the teaching of geography. There were spies in the school!

Then there was a period of being an itinerant teacher going from school to school (a hard, very hard job). I was not the only one. Mentors did not exist at that time, neither was there any discussion together with the Head of School. Either you were able to teach or not and then the job ended.

Sometimes I have the feeling times have not changed. Is there any support for the new teacher? No. Does anyone ask why or how they can help you? Do you feel you can manage the class?

But also there is the opposite: sometimes in some countries, in some schools, through enlightened mentors and school managers, times have really changed. Often, schools have very good intentions but it is not working out: wrong mentor, too little time, too much of.... but she/he is graduated....
El Salvador is close to reaching universal access to basic education. However, many of its children leave primary school without the reading skills needed to continue their education and reach their full potential. The quality of primary schools is low and many children drop out of primary school, and most do not attain even a minimal level of language proficiency.

In national standardized tests, only one-third of third-graders perform as expected in reading, with rural students trailing behind their urban peers. Standardized testing of high school students confirms that when poor reading skills are not addressed early, later achievement suffers. This contributes to their vulnerability and their involvement in risky activities to survive. This is the situation of a school in a neighbourhood of Sonsonate, the ninth largest city in El Salvador with some 60,000 inhabitants.

Located on El Salvador’s Pacific coast, the province of Sonsonate is strategic territory for drug traffickers. Its main port, Acajutla, is a crucial hub for drug shipments, and its proximity to Guatemala ensures quick ground transfer to Mexico. Sonsonate, in western El Salvador, has the highest murder rate in the country. Located on a strategic drug route to Guatemala, the province is infested with local gangs, who may be developing ties to Mexican traffickers.

Drop-out children and early school-leavers are at more risk of becoming involved with these gangs as a survival strategy. Students’ vulnerability results from living in households with a single parent, or under the responsibility of relatives since many parents have migrated. Children/adolescents come from broken homes where there is child abuse. For many of these various reasons children spend time alone and without the parental closeness that contributes to a nurturing learning environment.

What to do to respond to this at-risk students environment?

A local school in a low income neighbourhood in Sonsonate is responding to the many challenges students experience by improving their reading skills. The language teacher was engaged in a campaign to create the school library. The library was the result of his resource mobilization effort. He engaged the community stakeholders - other teachers, parents, and students. The library has become an attractive and fun learning place for children to learn. In this library:

- Creating a community of reading, where young people can carry out a variety of game-educational reading such as reading aloud, story-telling (Monday and Friday), paired reading (Tuesday and Thursday), and book clubs (Wednesday). These activities motivate young students to read and to develop analytical and critical skills as well as literary aptitudes.
- All teachers can encourage their students to research and therefore to enhance reading comprehension. Reading is not just in the language classes but an opportunity for the whole school to participate.
- Students take a major role in managing the library. Engaging youth in these activities is an opportunity to learn new skills and involve them in activities which keep them out of the streets and do not expose them to gang-involvement risk.
- Parents are trained to use the library and how to read with their children. Their engagement is improving children’s performance. Parents also benefit from improved reading comprehension.
- The library has hosted grandparents who narrate legends and myths of the community themselves.
- The community uses the library not only to check out books but has become a meeting place and contributes to building social capital. The library has become a ‘familiar’ place where children/youth can find mentors and other community adults and peers to spend more time in a nurturing environment.

El Salvador has been implementing a new system called Inclusive School Full Time (Escuela Inclusiva de Tiempo Pleno) which increased the school day from five to eight hours. The system also promotes closer ties between the school and the community. The new library is an example of how to support and respond to the new systems and with creative ways to engage students.

Completing primary school with strong reading skills contributes to reducing absenteeism and desertion, and increasing academic performance. Children are more likely to continue and complete high school. Investing in their education is the best way to reduce their involvement in at-risk experiences.

Lic. Mario García Quintanilla
Awarded a SEED (Scholarships for Education and Economic Development)
El Salvador
Email: profes.sor.37@hotmail.com

Gloria Almeyda
Scholarships for Education & Economic Development - SEED
Senior Program Coordinator
Center for Intercultural Education & Development - CIED
Georgetown University, Washington USA
http://cied.georgetown.edu
The Learning Teacher Network’s 10th International Conference will be held at the five star Sheraton Zagreb Hotel in Zagreb, Croatia on April 16-18, 2015. The title of the conference will be ‘Innovation for Development in Learning and Sustainability’.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The conference will contribute to the exploration of these perspectives.

The conference venue

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

www.hotel-sheratonzagreb.com/

Invitation to proposals for presentations

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

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

The deadline for submitting your proposal for a presentation:

Monday 30th June, 2014
Implementing European Citizenship in the EFL Curriculum

Abstract

This article is meant to provide teachers with useful information and tips related to integrating European citizenship in the EFL curriculum in order to help their students acquire a set of skills that will enable them to become well-informed, competent and responsible European citizens who respect and value cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Thus, they will be able to act in order to make Europe a more equitable and sustainable place.

European Citizenship and the EFL Curriculum

Since there is a certain amount of flexibility in choice of content in the EFL classes, teachers can select those teaching and learning materials and strategies that can provide students with opportunities to explore European citizenship and connect it to their lives.

Diversity, human rights, democracy, human dignity, equality, justice, tolerance, solidarity and peace are at the heart of education for European citizenship and the real challenge for teachers is to make these abstract concepts accessible to their students.

Apart from certain freedoms and rights (included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union) teachers need to teach their students that a European citizen has a lot of duties and responsibilities, such as: to show respect for the human rights and the European cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, as well as tolerance and solidarity and to be always well-informed and willing to get involved in local community projects aimed at enhancing the common good.

Helping students get familiar with their rights and responsibilities as European citizens needs to be reinforced within almost all school subjects and grades.

Here is a list of engaging activities that can be successfully integrated into the EFL classes in order to foster European citizenship in students. However, the prerequisite for taking part in the following activities is a good command of English (intermediate - advanced).

Good digital skills are also necessary for some of these activities.

1. Get your students involved in bilateral or multilateral school partnerships focused on European citizenship within the Erasmus+ Programme (funded by the European Commission). These partnerships provide students with the opportunity to meet their European peers and experience the diversity in Europe.

2. Organise information visits to the European institutions in order to provide your students with the opportunity to talk to people who work for the European Union and get familiar with important facts about the EU, such as: the history of the EU, the EU institutions and the decision-making process, the EU achievements etc. Besides, they can see with their own eyes how the European cooperation works.

3. Invite important members of your local/wider community or people who work for the European institutions to share their knowledge of the European Union as well as the European opportunities (provided by the EU Programmes) that have contributed to their professional and personal development. Then, have your students make a bulletin board explaining what they have learned.

4. Have your students read about famous Europeans (such as: founding fathers of the European Union, scientists, writers, painters and composers) and create a multimedia presentation about them.

5. Have your students read newspaper articles focused on EU topics or official documents from the EU institutions and then debate on them.

6. Have your students read about their fundamental rights in the European Union, take photos in their community and then make a poster entitled “European Citizens’ Rights and Freedoms”.

7. Have your students create a video on “Life in Europe” together with their peers from other European schools in order to get familiar with the European cultural diversity.

8. Have your students participate in chat sessions with European experts and encourage them to have their say on European issues.

9. After researching ten achievements of the European Union, ask your students to create a multimedia presentation about them.

10. Encourage your students to volunteer in community service projects, such as planting trees, recycling, picking up litter, fundraising for children in need etc. and write newsletter articles about their good deeds.

Acquiring a variety of skills

All these activities aim to make students more aware of the European Union and the importance of learning English as well as other foreign languages. Besides, students will acquire an increased sense of belonging to the European Union.

As regards the knowledge-based objectives related to the above-mentioned activities, students will be able to explain in their own words how EU decisions are made (functioning of the EU institutions), to sum up ten achievements of the European Union as well as their rights/freedoms and responsibilities as European citizens, to speak about famous Europeans etc.

Moreover, participating in these activities students will acquire democratic skills, such as cooperating, expressing their own opinion on the future of Europe, listening to each other, making compromises etc. They will also overcome their fear to speak English and will become more motivated to learn more languages.

In addition to this, they will learn to respect and value cultural diversity. Thus, they will be more likely to become responsible and active European citizens not only in their local community, but also in the European one.

Andreea Silter
EFL teacher
Bucharest, Romania
andreesil@yahoo.co.uk
Learning by the Santa Maria Spaceship project

This project was done as a part of a Come-nius School Partnership among three schools in Croatia, Poland and Sweden from 2010 to 2013 with students aged 12-16 years. All in all, the partnership involved around 150 students and 15 teachers, but the concept can be done both in large and small scale.

The project was about developing, testing and implementing an innovative approach of learning focusing on cross-curriculum teaching that is inquiry based focusing on sustainability issues. In order to create a real education for sustainable development we felt a need to raise the students’ awareness and understanding of cultural differences.

In order to be successful in intercultural cooperation, one must have experience and understanding about the core of the culture, your partners’ as well as your own. The core of the culture is the deep values and moral of the culture and it explains why people sometimes do things in another way than one is used to.

To learn and get understanding of this and to develop you cultural empathy, there is only one way - it is by face to face cooperation with partners from other cultures!

The topic of our project was the imaginary spaceship - Santa Maria. It set off for a long journey and our students’ task was to equip it and organize life onboard. Since the spaceship was about to be isolated and self-supported for generations, there were various problems to tackle. Our task is inspired by a task presented by Wolfgang Brunner in the book Solvagnen (Brunner 1996).

Our project task was highly focused on students’ involvement in the form of inquiry-based learning. There were twelve problem areas connected with equipping the spaceship.

For each problem area the students got a tutorial in the form of a checklist with more specific questions, to help them to narrow the problems. Still, the questions to the problems were open ended with not just one correct answer.

The twelve areas we focused on can be described with these twelve questions:

- How is the crew going to be put together?
- What languages shall be used among the crew?
- How is the ship going to be governed?
- How will there be enough food, oxygen and fresh water for everybody?
- What religions and values will be allowed on board?
- What economic system will there be on the ship?
- What will the laws and rules be like?
- What shall the crew do in their leisure time?
- How will new technologies like intelligent robots and Genetic engineering be used?
- What kind educational system will be used?
- How will health care work?
- What kind of social structures will be allowed on Santa Maria?

The students first came up with solutions separately in each country and typically there was a group of 10-15 students who worked with the tutorial to a specific problem in an inquiry based matter with teachers acting more as mediators and facilita-
The group appointed a few students to prepare a presentation of their proposed solutions to the problem and a few other students were appointed to conduct negotiations with representatives from partner countries at the upcoming exchange.

Regarding almost all of the issues of sustainability, it turned out that young people from different parts of Europe had basically similar beliefs and values. Some of the problem areas, however, created a little more debate than others, such as democracy, religion and social issues such as gay people’s rights.

At the negotiations, and during the student exchanges as a whole that also contained other activities apart from negotiations, the participants got an understanding of the cores of cultures and developed their cultural empathy as well as their action competences.

It was truly rewarding for teachers to see that this partnership actually changed several students’ way of looking at life and the world around us.

Having the students to discuss and debate about different aspects of sustainability in a fictional environment like a spaceship or a desert island may be an old didactical trick, but still it’s very productive and efficient. The students become more open-minded and their work is more creative and solution-oriented this way.

The fact that we had students from three different countries, with different cultural backgrounds, working together with the ultimate goal to come up with a common solution to the problems, gave this project an extra dimension. Maybe it’s not always possible to have the students to meet in person like during this project, but sustainability is a global issue and therefore the international contacts are a vital part of ESD.

If you want to know more about the structure and content of the Spaceship Santa Maria-project visit the partnerships site in European Shared Treasure: detail.php?id_project_base=2011-1-PL1-COM06-19371

References:

Stefan Nilsson, Christian Rydberg and Elvin Smajic at Kungsgårdsskolan in Ängelholm, Sweden
Anita Lasic at Osnovna škola don Mihovila Pavlinovića in Podgora, Croatia.
Contact: christian.rydberg@engelholm.se
Encouragement: a sustainable value in education

A fundamental topic in Adlerian psychology is encouragement. Teachers using encouragement have a belief in the strengths of each child and apply encouraging methods in their classrooms. It is a sustainable contribution in developing cooperative behaviour.

Society and schools
It seems we are very concerned about raising children in our society today. The silver line could be: how do we teach children to behave in a positive, democratic way?

What are the beliefs of a teacher about influencing the relationships in his class? We all have influence on the quality of a relationship; in a positive or a negative way.

We assume teachers prefer to have a positive effect on children’s behaviour, because it may lead to persons who know how to behave and to achieve better results in schools.

Do we know what to do to achieve this?

In the first half of the last century, Adler and Dreikurs were of the opinion that different ideas about raising children were necessary. This was based upon their conviction that society was changing from autocracy towards democracy. And democracy is based upon the idea of living together for the benefit of all. That is something we need to develop and education has a task in contributing to sustainable, democratic relations.

Encouragement
In Adlerian theory and practice encouragement is seen as an important power that contributes to a positive and useful cooperation. Children want to have a feeling of belonging; they want to count and contribute on a base of equality. Adler and Dreikurs see activating social feeling as encouragement.

A courageous person:
looks at situations in relation to possible actions and solutions
reflects on the consequences of certain actions
trusts his ability to handle a situation
considers mistakes not as personal failures.

Courage is a belief in yourself and a belief in your own ability to cope in situations with a focus to serve the whole.

Encouraging teachers have faith in children. A discouraged teacher cannot encourage a student. Encouragement is an attitude and an act: you do something.

Edith Neisser (Dinkmeyer, Dreikurs, Encouraging children to learn, 1963) provides characteristics of an encouraging attitude:

You are the person who can do it.
It is all right to try.
Provide plenty of opportunities for successful achievement.
Do not set standards so high that children are constantly falling short.
Be pleased with a reasonably good attempt.
Show confidence in their ability to become competent
Accept children as they are.
Guarantee certain rights and privileges.

Children who feel at home, who have a feeling of belonging develop socially appropriate behavior and responsibility.

Having an encouraging way in treating children includes you avoiding being discouraging.

A feature of discouragement is that the child has no faith in his ability and does not see opportunities. Discouraged children show misbehaviour, because they do not see how to contribute in a positive way. Examples of discouragement are:

How much better it could have been

Criticism, punishment,
Emphasizing mistakes
Rewards and praising
Using double standards
Coercion

Also the language we use is of importance and we do speak a lot in education. So it is important to realize what message we will make clear and how we say it. A few suggestions for an encouraging language:

Say something about what the child has done or does
Be specific and objective
Avoid using the word “try” and “but”
Finish encouraging remarks as a statement
Do not undermine the encouraging comment
Do not compare to other children

The use of encouraging language has a big effect in teaching and at home. Therefore we teach encouragement to our children with at least the same effort as we teach them to read.

They will profit from it for the rest of their life.

Theo Joosten
Willy Hoekstra
The authors are board members of NWIP www.individualpsychology.nl
ICASSI www.icassi.net
Contact address: tjoosten@planet.nl
Challenging students
-Science for teacher students

Teacher students from Limburg Catholic University College, Belgium, Department for Teacher Training, joining a special route for technics, can opt for several projects. Within these projects they are challenged to create their own solutions for problems.

Starting with a description of a problem, they will first look for relevant information, will investigate materials, will execute experiments using instruments and tools and in the end will design and make constructions.

On the one side, one of the goals is to have them independently widen and deepen their knowledge, skills and attitudes and on the other hand they have to translate this knowledge, skills and attitudes into practice in schools. The approach of the target group in the schools has to be built upon a pedagogical and didactical correct theory.

In this way teacher students design their own teaching materials and exercises for pupils age 12 to 14. Hereafter an example of this: a 'steam mobile'.

The 'Steam Mobile'
Science and technique starts from a problem: "Conversion of steam to motion". Developing a didactic method and didactic material to handle this problem in classes with pupils of different levels:

- How do you approach this problem
  - Experimental, establishing law of physics
  - Investigation of appropriate materials
  - Research into the technical systems
  - Realization of a steam mobile
- Development for different levels of education: Primary, Secondary

Practical part
The 'steam mobile'
Practical workshop in creating teaching materials for students and pupils.

Clarify the approach and the implementation of the relevant teaching materials in education (from primary to secondary).

The product fits perfectly in the subject matter of energy conversions (science - technique).

Heat is converted into steam, the steam provides a rotating movement.

The technical solution converts thermal energy into movement energy.

Small adjustments in the construction can cause a rotating motion (e.g. powering a table decoration) or just a rectilinear motion (e.g. a boat).

The project is ideal as an 'open task': the pupils can, to a certain degree, choose their own goal. Moreover, it is possible in cooperation with other courses to give it an own unique finishing touch and at the same time it can trigger interdisciplinary creativity.

**Justification in Teacher Training**
Implementation of this didactical material in the classroom (Teacher training ‘Technics’).

- Realization: didactical material ‘the steam mobile’ (basic skills)
- How to use this didactical material in the classroom (primary/secondary education)
- Collecting and acquire the necessary background of technology and science
- Research of the parts, needed to achieve the project
- Development of the project book and workbook for the pupils, consider the ratio between the three dimensions: basic skills (50%), understanding and justifying the topics (50%)
- Make didactic films to support the realization
- With these kinds of projects we urge the students to develop a didactic learning track, at the level of the target group.

Other possibilities
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciMLybJWMhA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0Kb-FXVFo

Ann Emonds - Ivo Jansen
Katholieke Hogeschool Limburg
Belgium
Ivo.Jansen@khlim.be
FITme for Europe
- a European project

Today’s technical world offers short cuts for Europeans but mostly for its youth who can adapt to the changes better. But, it also brings sedentary habits which increase the risks from cancer to depression. The state of the mental and physical health of the young is a concern of Europe as ‘prosperity’ is linked to the awareness levels of ‘healthy life’.

FITme aims to make students aware of their fitness conditions, inquire about different ways of living a ‘fit’ life. It brings six schools from Belgium, Turkey, Italy, Austria, Portugal and the coordinator, Germany, together to find methods to tackle the daily inactivity by covering tasks to improve physical and psychological well-being in a variety of contexts.

Students from all countries meet in every country for five days to work on the project idea, explore the country and learn about different European cultures. They communicate in English and improve their language skills significantly.

Friendships across Europe are built which often last well beyond the meetings and help to overcome prejudices. Skype, e-Mail, and Facebook help students to stay in touch and work on project ideas.

FITme devices involve activities like logo competition, FITme sports bag design, EUROFIT condition tests, nutrition diaries, questionnaires and critical research on local health trends of movement (TRX, Zumba, meditation).

There are also presentations, workshops, links with regional universities, development of chair exercises for smart phones/PC applications, observation visits to companies/local insurances, survival dictionaries for foreign country visits, comparative reports, FITme Good Practices Booklet and events involving parents culminating in a joint European Health Day.

The FITme project provides the students with the opportunity of attending a project course on health where they are invited to get involved in reflective sessions after the completion of self-awareness forms, search for the trends in movement and the mental health field of their coun-

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The Learning Teacher Magazine 2/2014
try and learning, teaching and practising those of their project partners. This will enable them to see alternative active habits they can adopt and use all their lives to be healthier in fitness and psychology.

Learning about the different school health plans, company policies as well as insurance policies will help them to understand the security implications of partner countries and be more mobile in their future education or work careers.

The project also makes use of the fitness/condition tests and reflective diaries for students to be able to understand their current health condition and compare with their friends in other parts of Europe, learning and helping each other.

In order for them to critically understand security issues under respective country health policies and standards, each partner is required to manage a minimum of ten company observation visits and another five insurance company visits. The reports and information gathered will be collected and compared among the partners, creating an invaluable re-usable resource on school security systems and how it is handled by partners.

As the students and teachers really enjoy the meetings and activities, they change their attitude towards health significantly with it being easy and pleasurable. FitMe for fun!

Martina Beckmann
beckmann@ksbk.de
www.ksbk.de
"U-Knight-Europe"
- a star marked project using history as a tool reaching for a brighter future

The original ideas issued from the projects of Polish coordinator Katarzyna Olczak attracted eager teachers and headmasters from all over Europe from the very first beginning of our adventure. The idea was to dive into the exciting history of medieval Europe and bring up the best and most exciting features of that period of time.

Knighthood was the nucleus in this project or should I say the root system of what gradually developed into an impressive and beautiful tree with its many branches.

During preparatory visits the original ideas were fertilized by the other nine partners and together we could discover more and more facets of the original idea.

One reason for the success of the project is without doubt the excitement all children experience learning about knights and knighthood. This is true as much for girls as for boys. But behind those glittering knights with their armour and swords we found many more themes that were there waiting to be discovered.

We learned that to live as a knight was so much more than to be a brave warrior. There were Knights’ codes, a code of honour which had to be upheld by the knights. What could be more important in a Europe struggling in many ways than to highlight values like loyalty, truthfulness, protecting the poor, helping the weak, and so on. These are values worthy of being brought to the forefront again in the 21st century.

Our theme also invited discussions about equality between rich and poor, different groups of population and also between men and women. We learned about female knights, but also about the importance for any real knight to respect, serve and honour the women in the society.

We also used our theme to encourage the pupils to do voluntary work, to help their parents at home or to reach out to elderly or disadvantaged in the society. We learned about art and culture is also an important dimension to which I want to draw attention. We made art exhibitions, dramas and musical performances. We learned about medieval culture and dance and we also learned ourselves how to enjoy medieval dances. What we learned and experienced were later on used to enhance appreciation of music, culture and dance in all its aspects - both medieval and modern.

The youth of today often spend a lot of time in front of their computers, smartphones and such. Thanks to the theme of our project, we found ample possibilities to enhance physical enjoyment. It was fun for the pupils to learn the technique of sword fighting for instance. They also understood the importance of physical exercise and to ensure good nutrition by eating healthy food.

I have yet not even mentioned the aspect of the project that brought most joy and excitement: relations and friendships throughout Europe! During the project both teachers and pupils became friends for life. It was a real "U-(K)nite-Europe" project that brought joy and excitement to the lives of all participants!

Tore Jungerstam, Headmaster
Bäckby skola, Pedersöre, Finland
tore.jungerstam@pedersore.fi
The Art of Being Authentic

In our increasingly virtual world, there is a lack of authenticity (authenticity meaning something that is genuine, pure, not second-hand) in many areas of life and school is no exception, given that with technology we can hide even better our true personalities and insecurities.

Unfortunately, most of the time, we as teachers tend to hide our true feelings and ideas, due to our need for social approval, the desire to be accepted, to maintain a positive image towards others and the need to respect political correctness. The same goes for students in order to please their teachers and colleagues.

All this means that authenticity is often forgotten in real life, highlighted by the increasing need for writing and reading online. At the same time we are willing to expose ourselves and our life on facebook. We have forgotten how to speak and how to listen to others when face to face. We have no time to waste, despite the time lost face to face with computers and mobile devices.

We have crossed too quickly the line from books to computers and, if in the past both students and teachers were not stimulated to express and discuss their ideas and points of view, nowadays we tend to express ourselves online, as if there were no voices at all - only digital words. In a world where communication is far reaching, sometimes we do not have anyone to hear us.

Even if our educational documents stress the importance of promoting dialogue in the classroom and active methods of reflection and participation at school, there is a long way to go to put that in practice.

Many teachers feel too inhibited to create practical and more participatory lessons in accordance with pupils' interests and feelings, not only because of the social and cultural climate but also during their initial teacher training practices. Most of the present teacher-trainers were trained themselves to repeat the learning process consisting of nothing more than the transmission of the contents, not the reflection about the contents, whatever it may be. Eveven if the new dialogical and reflexive pedagogy is learnt in theory, most of the time there is no relation to the practice and once in school, the new teachers tend to reproduce the methodologies and the same attitude that they are used to all along during their courses. This is now with the complicity of the machine.

One of the most important ways to encourage dialogue in the classroom among students is to develop that range of skills among teachers, especially the art of listening. In that sense, firstly we have to prepare the new teachers for listening, which is not easy and requires a specific practice and a preparation based in dialogical methods, in order to promote critical thinking.

So, unless the teachers have been trained by an identical model as will complement the expected practice in their classrooms, the whole preparation will be useless. One cannot make something that is not familiar. If we want the teachers to encourage the students to express their beliefs and ideas and to reflect on the world in which they live, we have to prepare them in the same way.

This requires personal authenticity in education, not a mere transmission of ideas already approved by leaders or institutional powers.

So, the challenge is to balance the power of the new technology and resources with authentic face to face communication. This cannot be underestimated, if we want to encourage the growth of real people instead of the appearance of human robots.

Maria Luísa Abreu
Lisbon, Portugal

The coming UN/UNESCO Global Action Programme for ESD


The proposed Global Action Programme focuses on five priority action areas in order to enable strategic focus and stakeholder commitment:

- Policy support: Integrate ESD into international and national policies in education and sustainable development.
- Whole-institution approaches: Promote whole-institution approaches to ESD at all levels and in all settings.
- Educators: Strengthen the capacity of educators, trainers and other change agents to become learning facilitators for ESD.
- Youth: Support youth in their role as change agents for sustainable development through ESD.
- Local communities: Accelerate the search for sustainable development solutions at the local level through ESD.

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April 2013 was the month that started with some awesome communications from the teachers in India and Sri Lanka. I was aware that those teachers got my email address through the British Council and they needed to work with our school to complete number of successful collaborative projects that enhance global education within their existing curricular framework. I promised them to be part of such projects and acknowledged that they were part of British Council - International School Award (ISA).

Later that month, British Council - Nepal also called applications for Nepalese schools (who are doing global exchanges) for an International School Award. In May 2013, I applied on behalf of the school where I work and got selected for this competition in June 2013. Selected schools had to attend ISA Orientation workshop in Kathmandu.

The workshop guided the selected 21 schools towards achieving ISA and set some criteria for it. What I liked the most was - the competition was not among selected 21 schools but was against the challenges that would come across while planning, implementing and reviewing the ISA projects. We got the opportunity to visit a school who won an ISA in 2013.

We had to complete 8 mandatory projects and ultimately planned 10. Other teachers had been supportive and cooperative to 'ISA Projects' that made me more enthusiastic. The planned projects would have three basic dimensions and some other essential criteria: collaboration, curriculum, international partners (3 basic dimensions), wider school-parents-community involvement, use of ICT, online teacher development training, recognition from local educational authority, online projects, institutional school-community school partnership, local curriculum and more (essential criteria).

Since then, we have been on the ISA journey and I have some experiences related to the global school projects that are almost very necessary to share!

A country where teacher recruitment happens once-in-a-lifetime and has many schools with less facilities, the competent faculties and teachers are always in shortage whether it is for 'education for global citizenship' approaches or for contemporary approaches. Almost 95 per cent of the ISA Coordinators from the selected Nepalese schools were male. Even in those schools where ISA projects had been launched, female teachers were (informally) reported to be passive stakeholders.

This situation was the opposite in the case of schools from the UK, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon and other countries who came across us. I am not sure about the ground cause for this. However, it could be very urgent that Nepalese female professional teachers should be more empowered.

Considering certain constraints that came across the cross curricular projects, we have now learned that projects should be democratically decided so that both schools take ownership of the projects; after all, pupils will benefit and they will become global citizens as expected. If a teacher shows evidence of what their students learned from their partner school, then the partner school will be much encouraged to keep the link on regardless of the visit funds. They will even be able to deal with constraints like the lack of an ICT facility. These school link psychologies should be well understood.

While this article will be published, we will already have been with the result and I will write a blog in the website www.nepalseteacher.org on the result as well.
Classroom Practices: Honoring Students’ Religious Beliefs and Non-Beliefs

It is a settled precept of law in America that neither the United States Congress nor the individual states can make laws or policies that establish religion or that prohibit the free exercise thereof (Engel v. Vitale, 1962). Moreover, the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution has erected a wall of separation between Church and State in America (Everson v. Board of Education, 1948).

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education published guidelines regarding the establishment of religion in public schools based in part upon those legal precedents. Those statements of guidance included language that students are free to express their religious beliefs in course assignments and to have their work graded by ordinary academic standards, and schools may excuse students from class to remove a significant burden on the exercise of their religious beliefs (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2006).

Many of the guidelines promulgated by the USDE were first articulated in a statement of principles issued by then United States Secretary of Education Richard Riley in 1995 and updated by him in 1998 (Riley, 1998). In the context of setting forth those principles, Secretary Riley stated that, “[s]chools may not forbid students acting on their own from expressing their personal religious views or beliefs solely because they are of a religious nature...nor may they coerce participation in religious activity.” (Riley, p. 2) Those activities include classroom assignments that conflict with students’ religious beliefs or non-beliefs.

Three implications for classroom instruction can be drawn from those legal precedents and policy guidelines which could arguably be viewed as best practices for teachers both in the United States and in Europe. First of all, students should be afforded the opportunity to express their religious beliefs or non-beliefs, whatever those may be, and to have their work graded on the merits of the assignment. For example, students may choose to respond to a writing prompt about their family, their faith, or their community with expressions of their personal religious beliefs or non-beliefs. The only caveat is that the student’s work should fulfill the purpose of the assignment.

Conversely, students should also be allowed to opt out of any assignment to which the student, or his or her parents or guardians, voices an objection based on their religious beliefs, or the lack thereof. A student, therefore, might reasonably object to participation in a Christmas play or an assignment about what Christmas means to them. Any such objection could be resolved in the student’s favor by allowing completion of an alternate assignment at the same or similar levels of rigor and relevance. Finally, the practice of teaching about religion should be confined to discussions in the context of teaching about various belief systems and religious practices around the world, perhaps in social studies or literature classes. In the context of such instruction, teachers should refrain from making comments or expressing opinions which endorse a particular religious belief or non-belief.

References

Tom A. Bennett, Ed.D tabennet@uark.edu
School Support Capacity Builder
Arkansas Leadership Academy
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR, USA

Write a Science Opera (WASO)

Write a Science Opera (WASO) is a creative professional development approach to science and art education in which pupils of different ages, supported by teachers, opera artists and scientists, are the creators of an educational performance. WASO is an application of the widespread Write an Opera method, which has been successfully implemented in many countries during the past three decades. WASO integrates science education into the original method by involving scientists who lead an inquiry-based creative process demonstrating common impulses shared by science and the arts.

The WASO concept was developed at Stord/Haugesund University College (Norway), based on researchers’ meetings with RESEO as well as the Royal Opera House (London)’s Education department. Future development: Five WASO projects have so far been realized in Norwegian schools (6th grade to high school), in collaboration with the Universities of Stavanger and Bergen, Bergen National Opera, Stord Haugesund University College, Kverner Stord and the VeitVite Science Center.

These projects’ scientific themes have included, among others, the Northern Lights, Energy, Marine Life, Gravity and more. In the framework of the EU Comenius Multilateral project CREAT-IT, seminars for teachers as well as complete WASO projects will be realized in Norway as well as Greece, Belgium, UK, Serbia and Italy.

The first WASO training course for teachers, scientists, artists and others will take place at Stord, Norway (3-9 of August, 2014): http://www.creatit-project.eu/news/191

For further information about participation in the WASO course or how to realize a WASO project in your country/school/university, please contact Oded Ben-Horin at oded.ben@hsh.no
Write a Science Opera (WASO): www.hsh.no/waso
Wake up call for Teacher Professional Development in Nigeria

Following an announcement by the World Bank in March 2013 to approve $450m towards boosting employment opportunities for young people and improving the quality of education for millions of school children in the West African country, the focus has shifted to the professional development of the Nigeria teacher.

The need for good quality education arose because of certain weaknesses in the provision of education at all levels in Nigeria evidenced by the fragmented decision making process, unclear management roles, inequitable access, poor planning and management, and largely inadequate funding.

Though education at all levels is managed by the Federal and State governments, schools continued to suffer from a poorly managed system with inadequate or no attention to teacher professional development impacting on the quality of education to learners.

Teacher Training provision became an area of focus for these private providers as a strategy to boost the quality of their provision which in comparison to the state and federal provision is much better in terms of small class sizes, provision of good accommodation, higher and regularly paid teacher salaries, provision of transportation facilities for school children, trips and excursions and finally the impact of professional development.

The long-term impact of the training on the Nigerian socio-political scene is expected to create more awareness among young people by reducing marginalization and isolation which are experienced by certain groups of people. Further to this, is the creation of a skilled, collaborative, confident and motivated workforce who thrive in a positive and inclusive society.

Teachers, subsequent to the training, are expected to also improve in pedagogical practice and ultimately dispel ignorance and prejudice.

The programme was previously delivered in 2013 to about 200 teachers in the private sector with very good and positive feedback; in fact with a call to deliver to more schools but on reflection, it appeared that public schools were isolated from the same programme which they could also benefit from.

The decision was to offer the training cost-free to interested public schools. Two schools acquiesced with confirmed dates. One is a prestigious and renowned choice school for boys, set up by the missionaries in 1909, now managed and controlled by the Federal government. King’s College located on Lagos Island and a Lagos state managed junior school, Oregun Junior High School, located in the capital city, Ikeja both in Lagos State. At King’s College, 122 teachers partook of the training with a few invited from Queen’s College and two other Unity schools.

The objective of the training broadly was to improve pedagogical practice and enrich the learning experience through concepts of equality and diversity, an apt theme in the diverse and multi-ethnic population of Nigeria. Strategies to enhance teaching techniques were explored and a strong awareness of diversity in learners to inform teaching methods was raised.

There was the emphasis to shift from knowledge and drilling of concepts to the development of the intellect through knowledge application, relevance of the curriculum to life and the incorporation of new global and technological developments. All trainees enjoyed, participated in the activities, discussed and felt that all objectives were achieved as thoroughly evidenced in the feedback form.

The private sector schools were also quite receptive of the efforts towards professional development. The programme was delivered but adapted to reflect the slightly higher socio-economic status of the students in the schools. Teachers were well prepared with mobile devices and laptops for note taking.

A rigorous question and answer session indicated higher levels of teacher commitment, appreciation and a real passion for the job. Accommodation was of a slightly higher standard with the provision of resources. One private school had very beautiful, cozy and stimulating room for Nursery children with extremely good teaching materials. It was a revealing experience that standards are indeed rising amidst the competition within the private sector.

Despite my efforts at training 243 teachers, efforts need to be geared nationally to improve education equality both within the state and public sectors to develop teachers through the establishment of systems to provide, record and monitor not just the professional development but also the effectiveness of such provision.

It would be in the best interest of teachers of good practice to further develop their skill-set by providing possibly through voluntary efforts to train and develop teachers in developing countries for whom such provision might be lacking. It calls for huge dedication, passion and funding with a guaranteed sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

An annual visit to Nigeria to provide the training is now established to achieve the desired effect of quality pedagogical practices among state and private employed teachers.

JOYCE ELEMSON
joyceelemson111@btinternet.com
http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P148593
http://lagosekoproject.org/
I work at an upper secondary school called Nobelgymnasiet in Sweden and we offer different vocationally-oriented programmes. There are about 1,000 pupils studying at our school and I teach mathematics and science studies.

In 2013 I took a course at the university called “Education and Learning for Sustainable Development” and I also participated in the Lisbon Conference in September 2013 arranged by the Learning Teacher Network. I have been working with sustainable development in different projects during the last ten years. I would like to introduce you to four of these projects which have been successful.

Environment and Energy
This is the largest project that I have implemented. We started planning a year in advance in order to adjust the schedule for both science studies and social studies to the same positions and thus making it possible to work together with two classes and two teachers.

The goal was to get the pupils aware of the fact that the way of lifestyle makes a difference for the future. We would like to work in the direction of the UN's and the UNESCO's decision of the decade for sustainable development in a social, environmental and economic perspective. In the curriculum for upper secondary school in Sweden it says that all subjects should teach for sustainable development. A sustainable perspective as well as an entrepreneurial approach should permeate all subjects in school. It is also important to teach in an interdisciplinary way.

We started with two classes of about 50 students, in the assembly hall of our school where we introduced the subject and discussed the benefits of a climate change. One of the teachers described the benefits of higher average temperature in a social, environmental and economic perspective. In the curriculum for upper secondary school in Sweden it says that all subjects should teach for sustainable development. A sustainable perspective as well as an entrepreneurial approach should permeate all subjects in school. It is also important to teach in an interdisciplinary way.

The next lesson we showed the film “Day After Tomorrow” and the students reflected on the importance of the effects of the climate changes. After studying more facts of the climate changes we invited some politicians who told us what they thought about the climate changes and how they planned for and acted in environmental issues.

We also invited the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. A representative from the environment department of the municipality told us about recycling and another representative from the building department of the municipality gave an account of how the climate changes affect the planning of the city.

The students in the Building and Construction Programme mostly appreciated the fact that the way of lifestyle makes a difference for the future. We would like to work in the direction of the UN's and the UNESCO's decision of the decade for sustainable development in a social, environmental and economic perspective. In the curriculum for upper secondary school in Sweden it says that all subjects should teach for sustainable development. A sustainable perspective as well as an entrepreneurial approach should permeate all subjects in school. It is also important to teach in an interdisciplinary way.

We presented a plan where glaciers, animals adapted to new environments and another representative from the building department of the municipality gave an account of how the climate changes affect the planning of the city.

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The students in the Building and Construction Programme mostly appreciated an enthusiastic entrepreneur in the construction industry who was describing how it is possible to build energy efficient houses today. Furthermore we visited the university where a group of researchers described the climate changes and how they affect us. In addition we visited an electricity supplier who talked about energy production.

Simultaneously we also did laboratory work and exercises in the classroom. The students signed an environmental contract in which they decided on an action they would take for reducing their energy use. When the students had acquired sufficient information, they had a case to solve as an examination task.

When finally the entire project was finished we cooked some climate smart food together. The students were divided into groups where some laid the table, some cooked the food and others prepared some entertainment.

Home Decoration - Recycling
This basic project I have worked with in different programmes such as the Child and Recreation Programme and the Handicraft Programme. The aim was to learn about the environmental goals and reflect upon our lifestyle and finding ways for recycling.

At the Handicraft Programme with Home Decoration as the vocational outcome I worked with the social studies teacher. At the beginning of the term, we visited a Home Decoration fair in Stockholm where we got a lot of ideas together with the students.

We introduced the project by presenting the students with pieces of a jigsaw with the definition of sustainable development according to the Brundtland Commission. “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The

The next issue of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in September. Articles may be submitted no later than August 15th 2014.
Agenda 21 was also discussed as well as the environmental goals for Sweden. We continued by watching some short films about famous industrial designers, for example Sigvard Bernadotte.

For the next lesson, we visited the museum and the exhibition from the 1950s in which the students particularly concentrated on the material and the form. We then discussed the similarities and differences between material and design then and now.

Another part of the project was to visit the recycling department of the municipality called Solareturen. There we had a guided tour and it was explained to us how our things are taken care of at various stages. The students then were challenged to pick out things from the recycling shop and figure out how they could remake the things, giving them a new function. They had access to different tools, paint etc. We then came back on another occasion and finished the things.

Later on each student presented their ideas and how they had worked. In school we later made an exhibition in the school library with the recycled things.

Climate Party
In connection with our theme about environment and energy I wanted to make something interesting and fun together with the students. I asked them to bring party clothes and sunglasses for the next lesson.

I prepared with music and a slide show on the computer together with some party things and vegetables with dips. I had also dressed up with a party hat and sun glasses when I opened the classroom door and welcomed every student giving them an entrance ticket with a word on. On the ticket I had written concepts we had worked with e.g. greenhouse effect, methane, wind energy principle, Freon, fossil fuels, carbon dioxide etc.

All those concepts were highlighted as important to learn according to our syllabus for science studies. I had also brought some party clothes to borrow for those students who did not bring anything.

When everybody had arrived, they were encouraged to mingle and talk to each other about the concepts on their tickets. If they did not know so much about their concept they could ask others about it to find out more. I also mingled and helped those students who were not participating. The aim was to learn from each other about the concepts.

In this class I had no access to the science classroom but I had arranged different stations where they could test how their sun glasses worked against the UV light. They also tested the sun protection factor of the sun blockers. We also studied security customization of passports, credit cards and money by using UV light.

As a conclusion, I asked who had the words non-renewable energy sources and asked for an explanation of the concept. From there we were able to proceed with the concept of fossil fuels, carbon dioxide, greenhouse gases, greenhouse effect etc. In this way we managed to summarize and show the relationship between all these concepts.

Environment Sport
On one occasion I arranged a mini project together with the PE teacher at our school in connection with studying environment and energy in science. We then visited a sports centre in town where the students played floor ball. The students studied in the Building and Construction Programme and I had invited the person who was responsible for the construction of the sports centre.

He told us about the whole construction process and showed us how the building got hot water for the showers. By looking at the meters we could see how much electricity the solar panels produced. We inspected the roof of the building with 50 students who studied the solar collectors and the solar panels there. It was a memorable experience for both the students and the teacher.

Obviously it is possible to find many different ways of studying for sustainable development and the effects of our modern lifestyle.

My intention for the future is to start a project with my students where they will be able to discuss issues concerning sustainable environment with the youth from another country.

Carina Holm
Nobelgymnasiet, Karlstad, Sweden
carina.holm@karlstad.se
Call for papers and presentations for the 10th International Conference
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