Inquiry based learning

Empower the learning processes

Exploring pathways to literacy

Crisis and the future

These days Europe is again in crisis and again it is a financial crisis. Europe is daily news, especially when it comes to outbalanced and wise decisions of the Commission and separate countries.

In several respects education is (again) very important for the future of Europe and for the position of Europe in the world. The lifelong learning strategy is one of the strategies of the Commission to integrate Europeans more and more in their own Europe. While discussions are going on about the need for more integration of the countries in Europe,

It is imperative that we all realise that we need Europe and that we are Europeans. It is for this that e.g. exchange programmes are important to learn to know each other, from pre-school up to university. Sometimes people think that if Europe is becoming more and more important, then national identity will be at risk.

That is short sighted. As long as there is education, national and regional cultures will exist and survive. Cultures are vivid concepts: they embed new phenomena and they evolve. Schools are the places where we see this happen. And as long as schools have a policy of inclusion we will see that cultures and people have a future. To learn the dynamics of a culture it is necessary to become familiar with that culture.

The European commission is spending much money on exchange and is encouraging education to take part in exchanges. The network and the magazine both are results and promoters of this.

Gerard de Kruif
Editor

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ISSN 2000-2610
Science education at the International Polar Foundation
- From climate change to sustainable actions

Science surrounding climate change is complex and contradictory. Through media reports and the internet, facts and fiction often overlap, creating confusion, scepticism and often apathy.

Coupled with a declining number of young people choosing to pursue careers in science, a disconnection is becoming apparent in society, where the understanding of the issues surrounding climate change are not fully understood.

Research in the Arctic and Antarctic provides climate information from the past and present and helps scientists to predict future changes. Over many years polar research has shown that the Poles need to be seen in the context of global connectivity.

The consequences of climate change appear sooner and more dramatically in the Polar Regions and scientists generally agree that a tipping point is being reached. Polar Regions received a lot of attention during the International Polar Year 2007-2008 (IPY), by way of a large scientific programme focused on the Arctic and the Antarctic from March 2007 to March 2009. This was an integrated Education & Outreach programme aimed at leaving a legacy for the future of science and a broader environmental literacy.

A partner in the 2007-2008 IPY, the IPF took part in various activities and participated in several initiatives. IPF co-organised the PolarTeacher conference and presented five of its classroom activities and four of its projects in the Polar Resource Book, meant for teachers. Because of its leadership role, the IPF has now been invited to convene a session at the final IPY conference taking place in Montréal in 2012.

The educational programs from the IPF highlight polar research and its contribution to the better understanding of climate change. With the ethos of "Educate to Understand, Understand to Act", the IPF believes that only by creating an atmosphere of understanding and thinking based on facts, and teaching young people to question and make decisions not only based on emotions but on scientific facts, will the issues surrounding climate change be properly tackled.

One of IPF’s main non-formal educational projects is its science education centre Class Zero Emission, housed in Brussels. By playing, voting, investigating, presenting and discussing the Belgian young people learn in an informal environment more about climate change, polar science & exploration, sustainable energy and the renewable technology of the “zero emission” Princess Elisabeth Antarctic station. By performing experiments, covering different science topics (physics, geography, biology, chemistry), students discover the interdisciplinary character and key aspects of polar and climate research.

A key asset of the CZE programme is first and foremost the direct human contact. Sessions in the Centre are facilitated by trained science educators, which allow the possibility of adapting to the different ages and comprehension levels. Direct interaction with polar researchers enable educators to gain first-hand practical experience of research and to place scientific issues in their wider social and citizenship context, hence bringing science to the lives of young people.

The availability of free online resources on IPF’s website ‘www.educapoles.org’, for teachers across the globe to elaborate the earlier mentioned subjects further in the classroom, proved to be an added value. The website exists in three languages: English, French and Dutch.

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The International Polar Year (IPY) Conference From Knowledge to Action is taking place in Montreal, Canada April 22-27, 2012 and will be one of the largest and most important scientific conferences for polar science and climate change, impacts and adaptation.

Occurring at a pivotal time for the environment of our planet, the IPY Conference 2012 draws international attention to the Polar Regions, global change, and related environmental, social and economic issues.

The IPY 2012 Conference will contribute to the translation of new polar scientific findings into an evidence-based agenda for action.
Ways to gain lifelong interest in science

In recent years, an increasingly intensive, genuine educational partnership has developed between schools and school-external educational institutions, from which both parties profit.

Science Centers exist in various shapes and forms, but they are always connected with a very special type of learning: individual, interactive phenomenon-oriented, hands-on. Children’s groups and school classes have long been the most important target group of these institutions and they represent 60 to 80 percent of all visitors, because to this day Science Centers can be understood as educational institutions and as partners for schools (see: http://www.science-center-net.at).

In these settings, special impulses for investigatory, direct contact with the world can be generated. Their great potential lies in the fact that they are in line with the current requirements of the education system and purposefully support formal education. With this approach, a clear development can be ascertained: the offers of the Science Center facilities have more and more connections with teaching plans.

Increasingly, teacher training is offered and lesson material developed. In addition to self-regulated learning, workshops offer a systematic, targeted observation of scientific topics, without neglecting the fundamental principles of the Science Center philosophy – hands-on, individualising, discovery-based learning.

Benefits of new approaches in the cooperation of science centers and schools

In the Austria-wide project “Forschend Lernen” (“Learning by Research”), carried out by partners of the Science Center network together with secondary schools opportunities and success factors of these kinds of cooperation were raised.

As educational partners, the Science Center facilities can contribute a range of special resources: innovative approaches to teaching, special exhibits and productions as well as staff and material resources that schools generally do not have. This is accompanied by a new self-conception of the role of Science Center institutions.

In their work, they depart from “prepared” subject matter and transgress to processual support of the learning experience. The objective is increased contact between individual actors and the expansion of the areas of activity.

The competence the teachers flows into the work of the Science Centers, whose employees also shape lesson units in the classroom. The expectations for extracurricular learning are high – not least due to the results of related studies: with this type of learning, pupils are said to develop interests more quickly and to use the acquired knowledge over a longer period.

However, the question of whether the intended learning objectives and effects are really achieved is dependent on many
factors: besides the didactic quality of the offers, it is above all decisive to what extent an integration of extra-curricular learning is successful in lessons.

Perspectives
In previous experience and studies, it became apparent that the cooperation of Science Centers and schools can enrich the educational landscape of the future. Science Center workshops stimulate learning processes that are connected with a large amount of ingenuity and creativity.

The elements for developing interest as well as long-term consolidation of the learning process are revealed. In any case, new impulses are generated for elementary science teaching.

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Teachers’ starting salaries not attractive, says report

In almost all European countries, gross basic salaries for teachers entering the profession are lower than national GDP per capita - and their pay will not even double over the course of their working lifetime, except in a handful of Member States.

These are the main findings of a report which compares the salaries of public-sector teachers and school heads in 27 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey. The data, based on the 2009/10 school year, covers pre-primary to upper secondary education.

Where figures are available, and taking both salary levels and allowances into account, the best paid teachers in the European Union are in Luxembourg, Denmark and Austria. The least well-paid are in Bulgaria and Romania.

Six million teachers are currently employed in the Member States. The report, compiled by the Commission’s Eurydice network, was published to coincide with World Teachers’ Day (5 October).

The report shows that at the beginning of their careers, teachers’ gross basic salaries are lower than national GDP per capita in all countries with the exception of Germany, Spain and Portugal.

Only in three countries (Cyprus, Portugal and Romania) it is possible for teachers to double their basic salaries in the course of their career. However, even in these countries, it takes more than 20 years to progress to the top salary scale.

A wide range of allowances are available in most European countries, in addition to basic salaries, but only half of the countries award specific allowances for further professional qualification and excellence in teaching.

Actual teacher salaries, including additions, are close to the top of the pay scale in many countries. This is due to an ageing teacher population and the allowances that teachers may receive.

In general, teachers in Europe maintained their purchasing power in 2009 and the economic crisis had an impact on their salaries in only a few countries in 2010 (Ireland, Greece, Spain, Latvia and Romania). During the same period, the Netherlands and Poland increased teachers’ salaries.
Albania - a small mountainous country bordered by the Adriatic Sea to its west coast, Montenegro to the north west, Greece to the south, Macedonia on its eastern border and Kosova to the north east - is slowly emerging from more than forty years of a communist dictatorship.

Before the rule of Enver Hoxha, Albania’s population was largely illiterate but a positive of the isolation and harsh times was the introduction of an education system that gave children the possibility to read and to be the literate adults of today.

Mandatory Education
Following the downfall of the communist regime in 1990, the centrally controlled education and health systems began to crumble with schools, kindergartens and crèches closed due to the migration of skilled staff to the central areas of the country and the migration of families and children from the rural and mountainous regions of the north east.

What was left was poorly maintained buildings, demoralised and ill-equipped teachers, a lack of educational resources and a rote system of learning that does little to develop enquiring minds, analytical skills or young people actively engaged in learning.

Much has been done recently to improve the school buildings, but they still lack resources and the teachers lack professional development or the motivation to meet the needs of their pupils. Teachers are trained in universities or pedagogical colleges.

Many students chose to become teachers as it is seen as the easiest degree to obtain, which does not always lead to a highly motivated or quality teacher or a desire to ensure that school is a place of learning and the development of knowledge but rather a process that needs to be endured.

Funding mandatory education is divided between the central government who through the Ministry of Education and Science funds teachers and educators’ salaries, the local governments’ provide the premises for the schools and parents are asked to contribute by purchasing the school books for their child and/or for the cleaning staff and other services.

Recently the Ministry of Education and Science provided every school with computers to improve the teaching of IT skills, but many of the schools in the north east of the country do not have electricity; teachers are not qualified or trained to teach IT and the children remain without some of today’s essential skills.

Water, an essential and basic requirement for life and for health, is absent in the majority of schools in the rural areas, so pupils spend 4 to 5 hours per day with no toilets and no hand washing facilities. Science classes are absent of the usual practical elements or experiments that demonstrate the aspects of this ‘natural and
physical' subject and sports education is less than rudimentary with no equipment or sports fields.

Children are expected to learn from their teachers but are not expected to be active participants in the learning and exploration process. Classrooms are devoid of materials or children’s work; children sit on old benches and desks often in freezing conditions. Parents’ input is minimal and is not seen by most teachers as a requirement to the learning and development of knowledge process.

In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Science began its strategy to reduce the level of school drop-outs to zero by 2014. The main reasons for school drop-out are girls reaching puberty, engagement of girls and therefore no longer ‘allowed’ to associate with other boys, economics of the family and the need for the child to work, the long distance from home to school and lack of transport, children with disabilities and more importantly the attitude to education of the families.

A large proportion of rural families do not value or see any value in their children being educated as the education system does not ensure employment or employable skills. Schools are supposed to decrease the number of children who drop-out of school, but most do not have a social worker or psychologist, (despite legislation that decrees all schools should provide these services) to follow up the children and work with the families to resolve their situations.

Partnerë për Fëmijët, (Partners for Children) a not-for-profit Albanian NGO has been working in the remote north east districts of Diber, Kukes and Tropoje since 2003 to improve the situation of children living in the isolated mountainous villages and in 2008 and in 2009 implemented two projects funded by the European Union to reduce the numbers of children dropping out of school and work to reintegrate them back into education.

Teachers were trained to work with families where their children had been removed from school and to assess the reasons behind the removal and then to set a course of action to re-integrate the child back through school activities, 25-week educational support classes, provision of school books, peer support and additional teacher coaching.

Awareness raising events were conducted with parents, teachers, pupils and local government representatives to raise the awareness on the importance of education for all children. The projects succeeded in returning many of the pupils back into school and the children were pleased with the intervention so that they could complete their education. Teachers also appreciated the role their colleagues took and saw it as worthwhile, but in most schools it has not been continued due to the lack of funds to pay for a social worker or school psychologist.

Children with disabilities and children of the Roma ethnic group fare worse despite equal rights to access education as any other child in Albania. Several children’s NGOs are spearheading the process of literacy classes for Roma children and working with individual schools to integrate them and support their ongoing education.

The government has amended legislation so that even if a Roma child does not have a birth certificate they can be enrolled into school and poor Roma families are entitled to free school books for their children thus improving the access to education of this marginalised group.

Children with physical and learning disabilities are not as yet treated with equal opportunities and most remain at home, isolated, uneducated and without the opportunities to socialise and have friends.

Slowly Albania is changing its mandatory education provision, but it still has a long way to go before it offers equal opportunities to all children in the country whether in the urban or rural areas. Teacher training, motivation and promotion opportunities for teachers and school directors need to be reviewed and the purpose and expectations of education need to have a higher value and profile within the country and its people.

Currently Partnerë për Fëmijët supports, advises and trains 55 Gardens of Mothers and Children Centres in Diber, Has, Kukes and Tropoje Districts in north east Albania.

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The 8th International Conference in Nice, France on 10-12 May 2012
The conference programme published

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

The Nice Conference will be a unique venue for rich learning, sharing of knowledge and experience, networking, enjoying - and a truly international event.

The conference programme is composed of 25 sessions with more than 35 presenters from 14 countries, who will contribute with their knowledge and experience in presentations at high quality workshops and lectures.

In addition, we are delighted to welcome six distinguished, internationally recognized keynote and plenary speakers to the network’s 8th International Conference:

* Dr. Edward de Bono (Malta), regarded by many as the leading authority in the field of creative thinking, innovation and the direct teaching of thinking as a skill. He is equally renowned for his development of the Six Thinking Hats® technique and is the originator of the concept of Lateral Thinking;

* Prof. Ursula Staudinger (Germany), Vice President of Jacobs University Bremen and Founding Dean of the Jacobs Center on Lifelong Learning and Institutional Development;

* Prof. Joan Freeman (England UK), Founding President of the European Council for High Ability (ECHA);

* Mr Brian Holmes (the EU), Head of the European Commission’s EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency) which manages parts of the EU’s programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning Programme ( LLP);

* Prof. Charles Hopkins (Canada), United Nations University (UNU) Chair on Education for Sustainable Development, developing Regional Centers of Expertise in (ESD) globally.

* Prof.em. Harm Paschen (Germany), professor of Systematics of Educational Science at Bielefeld University.

Registration for the conference
Hereby we invite teachers, leaders, trainers, researchers, and policymakers in education and training to the Nice Conference 2012. The registration period is now open.
Registration can be made either on-line on www.learningteacher.eu/nice-conference-registration or by submitting the hard copy registration form by e-mail or fax.

An “early bird”, lower conference fee applies when registering before 1st December 2011.
Build understanding for and empower one’s own learning processes

In a constructive learning environment the dialogue between teacher and student is in focus. The teacher ought to elucidate the student’s learning goals and converse about where the student is in her/his learning process.

To make this possible the teacher has to, in the pedagogical planning of a new area, formulate a number of intermediate, concrete goals based on the curriculum goals. It is important that the students already at the beginning of a lesson or exercise are aware of the goals and the evaluation criteria of the working area.

The goals ought to be clear and conceivably formulated so that the students have the ability to understand them. Even if the teacher has made clear goals it is not unusual for the students to not initially understand the meaning, which quite likely is due to the fact that the goals describe skills and knowledge not yet mastered by the students.

It is important that the goals remain through the whole working process since it can help the students to focus on the most central part of their work.

Also the goals can be used as a tool in a dialogue between teacher and student concerning where in the learning process the student is. Research has proven that students with a good comprehension of their own learning processes are better performers. However this is nothing they can do naturally, instead they need training under guidance from a teacher.

One prerequisite of coming to know one’s own learning processes is the ability to assess the work, understanding what characterises a good text. In that way they learn to pay attention to the text’s good qualities. Nevertheless we want to emphasise the importance of the teacher giving the students advice and guidance during the process as well as giving them good examples to compare with.

In dialogue with the teacher and peers, the students can learn to recognise patterns and specific features in different texts. When the students have learned to recognize aspects of quality it is easier for them to assess each other’s texts. For several reasons peer assessment is useful; it could be easier to receive criticism from a peer than from the teacher, students could express themselves in a more comprehensible way and the student’s consciousness around their learning increases.

To increase students’ comprehension and their responsibility for their own learning processes many Swedish schools have started to use personal development dialogues directed by the students.

The aim of the personal development dialogues is to assemble students, caregivers and teachers each term to discuss students’ development both educationally and socially. Traditionally, the dialogue is lead by the teacher. When that responsibility is transferred to the students their ability to reflect on their own learning increases. This happens because they have to talk about and discuss their own development of knowledge in a structural way with their caregivers.

At the beginning of the dialogue the student and the caregivers meet on their own. The student talks about his or her strengths and development areas, with constant support of concrete examples and the caregivers are encouraged to ask and make comments.

When this part is done, the teacher will participate. Then the caregivers have the opportunity to ask questions and the teacher can talk about important aspects of the student’s learning processes.

In conclusion a development plan with a number of intermediate aims is formulated. The aims should help the student to reach the curriculum goals. They are expressed as 3-6 intermediate goals and they will be given priority, until the next development dialogue.

For the goals to be in focus in the daily work they should to be easily accessible for both the students and the teacher. A suggestion can be to attach them to students’ desks. In that way, the student and the teacher can, in a natural way, regularly discuss the procedure of the work, question if the goals are still suitable or if new goals are necessary and establish whether or not the student is getting enough support.

The learning communication between teacher and student is an important tool to support the students’ development. The teacher’s task is to raise awareness of and challenge students’ conceptions and knowledge, which will increase their comprehension of and influence over their own learning processes, and in the end also enhance their ability to take responsibility for them.

The teacher needs to be aware of his/her own significance and likewise understand the importance of involving the students in their own learning processes. This implies that the role of the teacher is changing depending on the students’ needs and prerequisites in relation to the curriculum goals.

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For a one week period during the summer holidays, thirty-six children from Holy Cross Primary School in Mahon, Cork, Ireland explored literacy, comprehension, word attack, reading and thinking skills, through a project-based approach with an emphasis based on arts activities.

Holy Cross Primary School which is a DEIS Band 1 school (Delivering Equality in Schools) was one of the lucky schools chosen to undertake the ‘Exploring Pathways to Literacy’ project. The initiative sought to assist pupils experiencing social or academic difficulties in literacy who would benefit from a literacy-focused summer camp in DEIS Band 1 schools.

The initiative used a project based approach which emphasised fun learning through activities such as drama, music and dance and accommodated learning goals associated with reading, literacy and thinking skills. A project team leader and three teachers were assigned to the project. Each teacher undertook a specific arts subject and planned a programme of work with literacy targets being a central element to their planning.

The initiative has increased pupil interest and motivation in acquiring basic literacy skills through exploring pathways to learning which reflect each child’s needs and intelligences. The initiative builds bridges to learning by providing children with experiences which develop self esteem, motivation, imagination, concentration and self-evaluation.

These characteristics are key factors in promoting positive attitudes to learning. Through the activities of the summer camp, we celebrated individual difference and individuality and encouraged risk-taking, decision-making and independence. In addition, a central element to our camp was building partnerships in education and parents were very much involved in the camp.

Visits from ‘Animal Magic’ and a local story teller along with cookery lessons, a trip to the local library and a drumming workshop were some of the activities planned to create valuable learning experiences for the children. Co-operative games with literacy targets were also very successful. They promoted active learning and problem solving skills in a fun way. (Tara Brosnan, Team Leader)

Structured literacy sessions
The Literacy element of the camp needed to be intensive to ensure maximum exposure to literacy for these children and to ensure future access to this funded resource. It was essential to create an enjoyable atmosphere, ensuring intensive goals and a rigid structure. As the children were attending a ‘Summer Camp’, this session was viewed as the most difficult due to its academic base.

As the ‘First Steps Reading facilitator’ on staff I provided a daily intensive literacy hour for the three groups- Juniors, aged 5-7 years, Middle, aged 8-10 years and Seniors, aged 10-12 years. I based the structure of the lesson plan on our school’s early intervention programme and tailored each lesson to ensure that it was rich in literacy development, challenging and enjoyable.

The lessons were broken into five elements; Oral Language, Phonics, Pho-
The Visual Arts
We explored the possibilities of creating a coalition of the visual arts with literacy to work toward meaningful integrated learning experiences. We found that bringing together visual arts and literacy in the form of poetry or story was a great way to engage our students meaningfully. The dynamic relationship between art and writing, the language of pictures and the language of words cannot be underestimated. The visual arts literacy programme was transformed by the hands-on visual processes fostered by the integrated approach. We wanted to inspire our students to create deep, rich, expressive works in visual arts.

Students were given the opportunity to use their knowledge of the elements of artistic design and techniques as well as use descriptive words to analyse art works of others. They explored the visual arts in a way that stimulated their own creativity. They applied their learning to create their own pictures and poetry.

Linking literacy to the visual arts resulted in learning that is inextricably linked to the technical and the profound, thanks to the synergy of the art and literacy experience.

(M. Brosnan & Debra O’Donovan, Visual Arts co-ordinator)

Music and drama
Our Literacy Summer Camp was a very creative affair! I worked with the children on developing their musical and dramatic skills. We threw ourselves into every kind of game imaginable and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves in the process! We stretched our imaginations as we stepped in and out of role of so many of the characters from the stories, poems and even songs we came across in our small groups. It was wonderful to be able to explore all of these characters and situations, as it revealed many personality traits and creative talents which most of us had not seen before.

As the week progressed, the children grew more confident and didn’t hold back from any challenge. This was a true reflection of the atmosphere that was present all week. The children not only composed their own percussion arrangements, but also learned how to record these arrangements as symbol notation so that they could be read and performed again in the future!

On the last day of the camp, we invited parents to come and see some of the wonderful skills that had been nurtured throughout the week. To see these children standing in front of a hall full of people, and performing with a confidence that you would rarely see in a person three times their age, was absolutely uplifting!

They sang songs like ‘Eye of the Tiger’, performed poems, action songs and even a rap that would put Jay-Z to shame! These children were reading and writing without even realising it but they were also enjoying doing it, which, I believe is one of the most important ways we can encourage literacy (Claire Crowley, Music & Drama co-ordinator).

Tara Brosnan, Sarah Coughlan, Claire Crowley and Debra O’Donovan
Holy Cross Primary School in Mahon, Cork, Ireland
How do young people in Slovenia prepare themselves for their citizenship application?

- Presentation of the project “Active citizen”

Active citizenship is now more important than ever. Human activity is focused on general social benefit, while in the exercise of personal interests. Active citizenship is not simple to learn, but it has to be methodologically imparted to us. It is, therefore, very important that you begin to develop it at an early age.

The School Centre Ptuj in Slovenia is a consortium partner in the project »Active citizen« which is aimed to empower young people in active citizenship. It trains and educates young people for effective participation in public, political and general social events. It is very important that young people acquire skills and values to be able to understand their responsibility towards society.

In this way, it brings together young people to integrate and participate in various youth organizations. They learn to respect the interests, views and arguments of the others, learn about the democratic principles of human relationships, learn about the basic human rights, understand concepts such as globalization, multiculturalism, Europeanization...

The project is carried out at four levels. The first level took place in information and advisory activities, which included youth in the project to provide necessary information relating to their participation in society.

The second level is the education of young people through the transfer of talent across so-called multiplication factors – peer youth workers.

The third level is the participation of young people in social processes. To this end, we prepare competitions, the youth gather suggestions for improving their position in the local environment and, in general, young people participate in theatre performances, lectures and round tables, which reflect their views on their role in society.

The fourth level is represented by regional and national youth gatherings and conferences.

The project is also thematically divided into four dimensions of active citizenship of the European Union strategy for young people, such as the year 2009 - year of the European dimension of active citizenship, year 2010 - year of political and legal dimensions of active citizenship, year 2011 - year of socio-economic dimensions of active citizenship and the year 2012 - year of the cultural dimension of active citizenship.

The operation is partly financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund, the development priority »Development of Human Resources and Lifelong Learning«, the priority directions »Improving the Quality and Effectiveness of Education and Training«.

All project activities are located at: http://aktivendrzavljan.si/

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Matto: "Inspiration exists, but has to find us working" (Picasso)

It is obvious that we are leaving in a global world. The priorities should be at heart of Europe 2020 are smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. These priorities are mutually reinforcing; they offer a vision of Europe’s social market economy for the 21st century.

While it is not easy to anticipate the new professions of the next decade, it is possible to foresee the new skills. By 2020 the medium and high skills will be valued on the competency market.

Europe 2020. A passion for learning
To address current and future imbalance, we must:
1. model labour supply and demand for different job families;
2. turn the "brain drain" into "brain gain", get students and professionals back home to apply best practices learnt abroad;
3. boost the skills level of the current and future workforce;
4. create a Lifelong Learning culture;
5. redefine countries as employer of talent.

Learning culture
To build a learning society we must stimulate a learning culture and encourage people to found their success on learning.

* With ITOL Central Eastern Europe, we strive to create a constant learning environment that embraces positive challenge, where people can communicate and collaborate, where people think differently.
* We value each other contribution, the new ways of looking at opportunities
* We guide the learning communities throughout a strong sense of urgency, a culture based on learning that leverage talent.
* Together with the organizations we build the future capability and a shared future.

Learn. Unlearn. Relearn
People learn, unlearn and relearn. We guide and support them on knowledge, self and values discovery way. ITOL has generated an international Learning & Development professionals’ network, and creates an environment dedicated to change and learning.

Our vision for the CEE Europe is to:
* Create, before 2020, an informational system which it is able to captures the dynamic of LLL ant to feed the balance between offer and demand on the competency market;
* Encourage the information and best practice exchange throughout the public, volunteer and private sector;
* Facilitate the access to getting financial support as vouchers for career investment, government support and fiscal incentives for sponsor organizations.

All these measures will contribute to the beneficial changes in the Lifelong Learning landscape. Main objective of any social project should be to encourage Lifelong Learning!

2012. The year of the Lifelong Learning
Our learning projects in 2012 will be dedicated to a culture of lifelong learning:
* March 2012. ITOL Directory is the interface of our think tank with the audience interested in Lifelong Learning; passionate about learning. We would like to be sure that the very next move will be validated after the tenth one, the winning one. We are interested on the medium term effects and consequences.
* April 2012. Learning & Development Summit (3rd edition), Bucharest
* May 2012. INOVATE - The workshop is dedicated to integrate policies in our region, so participants from Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Hungary are our focus.

Applicants from all EU countries are invited to apply. In addition, participants from the host country, Romania, are also welcomed to apply and participate, but they cannot receive financial support.

Main topics:
* EU 2020 Strategy for Education
* Policymaking in education
* European Credit System - frameworks of credit transfer
* Policies for recognizing non-formal and informal learning

We are ready to stimulate the learning culture and to create a learning society. Together with the organizations we can build the future capability and a shared future!

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Eurydice: Modernisation of higher education in Europe

On the website http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php you will find comparative thematic studies on various aspects of education systems that mainly rely on descriptive and qualitative data backed up by quantitative data (Eurostat, OECD, IEA surveys).

Thematic studies published in 2011 are:
* Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and the Social Dimension 2011
* Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices
* Adults in Formal Education: Policies and Practices in Europe
* Grade Retention during Compulsory Education in Europe: Regulations and Statistics

These reports can be downloaded from the website in pdf versions in different languages.
Is Google replacing our memory?

That is the question considered by North-American researchers who published their research conclusions in Science this summer.

Their hypothesis is, that the Internet is more and more taking over our power to remember. We do remember, but it is more the place where we found the information rather than the information itself that we remember. So, the Internet is more and more becoming an external memory. What does that mean?

Not so much, when you consider the fact that people have always been looking for ways to make remembering easier: writing, the printing of books, calculation machines etc.

However there is a big (new) risk they say. It is the risk of standardizing and standardized information and lifestyles (social media) and creating a kind of proletariat of consumers of knowledge: all consuming the same knowledge.

The aim of this external memory, they say, is profit and profit maximisation. Though books and films do similarly, the worldwide web is doing this on a very large scale.

In fact the search engines are also remembering what I am interested in and in that way they can manipulate my knowledge. In this way Google is also deciding the ‘what’ of my knowledge.

In the conclusion of the research article the researchers inform us that we have to ensure that learners become independent and critical thinkers. We must start with ourselves using search engines as just one information source out of many thus ensuring our independence in our search for knowledge.

Building Learning Power Comes to The Netherlands

The consultants from Lumius (Stenden University), long-standing members of the TLN, are working with The Learning Organisation in Bristol (UK) to offer Building Learning Power to schools across the north of The Netherlands.

Building Learning Power will feature more in the December Magazine. In the meantime, here is a short description.

Building Learning Power is about helping young people to become better learners, both in school and outside.

It is about creating a culture in classrooms – and in the school more widely - that systematically cultivates habits and attitudes that enable young people to face difficulty and uncertainty calmly, confidently and creatively.

Students who are more confident of their own learning ability learn faster and learn better. They concentrate more, think harder and find learning more enjoyable. They do better in their tests and external examinations. And they are easier and more satisfying to teach.

Building Learning Power better prepares youngsters for an uncertain future. Today’s schools need to educate not just for exam results but for lifelong learning. To thrive in the 21st century, it is not enough to leave school with a clutch of examination certificates.

Pupils/students need to have learned how to be tenacious and resourceful, imaginative and logical, self-disciplined and self-aware, collaborative and inquisitive.

... and so on.

If you would like to know more about BLP, contact Anton de Vries anton.g.a.de.vries@stenden.com

Boys are not girls

This could be the title of a book or a television programme on the differences in learning by boys and girls. Teachers know that the differences are obvious, but the problem is that so many know how to cope with these learning differences.

Already for many years professionals in several European countries and the US and Australia are familiar with the reality that boys are underachieving in schools.

There are more boys leaving school with lesser qualifications than girls. But there is more: it is also the behaviour associated with the boys’ way of learning that irritates teachers and females in the classroom.

The solving of the problem is in a certain way a complicated one, as nobody wants to go back to the time when there were separate schools for boys and for girls.

We live in a gender mixed society and children have to learn to cope with that phenomena and learn from each other. And we have to accept the reality that at least in primary education in Europe the majority of teachers are females.

After two years of discussions in The Netherlands a specialized center is now established to support schools to cope with these learning differences.

Subjects like pedagogy, education, and youth care, neuro- and development psychology are brought together to consider a holistic approach.

Tasks of the center are:

- awareness of and feeling for sex differences in development and development speed, regarding the talents and interests of boys and girls.
- development of learning methodologies for boys and girls.
- re-designing the learning environment considering the need for boys to experiment and have the freedom of physical movement.

Results will be disseminated by a digital platform (Facebook), training, lectures, workshops, good practices etc.
Herrhagsskolan in Karlstad, Sweden, the Oslo Montessoriskole in Norway and Kinnaird Primary School in Falkirk, Scotland have just completed the first year of a two year Comenius funded partnership project with the theme Storyline.

We have used the Storyline method in our teaching for some years. Storyline is a pedagogical strategy for active learning created in Scotland about 30 years ago. The teacher decides the framework of a story; the theme, the start, checkpoints and what the aims are. The learners influence the way to the aims through their choices and decisions.

Framework theme example: The Family, The Zoo, The Eco Friendly Community. Working with Storyline means that teachers and learners work together with a story. The foundation is based on a certain place, a certain time and characters that the learners create.

Through key questions the learners are encouraged to construct their own models of what is being studied. Key questions examples; What do you think... How do you want to... How can we decide... How can you find out more about...

Key questions create context through the story and inspire to new knowledge through a wide range of learning activities. The learners test their hypotheses by discussions and research. Throughout the work there is a range of possibilities for cooperation and democracy training among the learners.

Working with Storyline integrates several subjects and aims in our Curriculum. The central ingredients of Storyline are learners activity, influence, cooperation, subject integration, democracy training and creativity.

You can find out more about Storyline on: www.storyline-scotland.com, www.storyline.org

The initial meeting of the project group took place in Karlstad, Sweden in September 2010. The visit included “getting to know each other” activities. Time was spent in classrooms, we explained the Swedish Education System, we shared examples of earlier experiences with Storyline work and we planned our first mutual Storyline project.

Our first joint project was the creation of a TV-programme for fictional TV Europe. The learners were challenged to create a TV-programme showing their country’s culture for broadcast in another country.

The project group met in Scotland in March 2011. Again time was spent in classrooms and we learnt about the Scottish Education System. Completed programmes were viewed. We shared and compared our experiences of working. It was agreed that the project was very successful in all classes.

The learners appreciated and enjoyed the project. The learners had opportunities to learn and develop different skills, for example to cooperate, to make decisions together, to search for relevant information, to put together information, to act. Skills that are focused on in our Curriculum.

It was agreed that Bands on Tour would be the next mutual Storyline theme. In the meantime there have been contacts between the teachers and between the classes in the project. There have been several opportunities to learn about each other’s way of living.

Our next planning meeting will be held in Oslo in November 2011. We are all really looking forward to catching up with our international colleagues who are now firm friends and look forward to sharing again our experiences.

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After my practical training of 2 months as a Primary School teacher in South-Africa in 2008 and my graduation as pedagogue in 2011 I needed a new educational challenge.

My sister recommended me to postulate for the Comenius assistantship because she had a wonderful teaching experience in Granada due to this programme. I searched for extra information and contacted the national agency of my country.

They explained me that the Comenius Language Assistants programme is funded by the European Union to promote the teaching and learning skills of foreign languages and to strengthen the European dimension in the curriculum. This programme is part of Socrates, the Lifelong Learning Programme: education and training opportunities for all.

The deadline for the application was the 30th of January. I selected several countries, described my competences and set out the reasons for applying. This way the coordinators would have enough information to match me with a host school.

In the beginning of June I received the confirmation that I could start as an assistant in Slovenia.

My assistantship gives me the opportunity to see another teaching environment and to work in another educational system. It broadens my vision on educational, social and cultural aspects.

By comparing the aspects of teaching and pedagogy from Belgium (Flanders) and Slovenia I hope to obtain new views that I can use in my future career. My expectations are high because an assistantship is also more than just teaching. It’s important to integrate me in the school and also in the local community.

That isn’t always easy because I don’t speak Slovene, although I try to learn it and will take lessons in learning Slovene. My mentor brought me as an active basketball player in contact with the basketball club of Rogascha Slatina and last weekend I already played a tournament with them in Zadar (Croatia).

Leaving home for a longer time is not always easy. My Comenius assistantship started with a roller coaster of feelings. I must say that my mentor, the teachers and the pupils gave me a warm welcome. Rogaska Slatina will be my hometown for three months.

I will operate as teaching assistant for English and French, I will help children with special needs and support school projects. I hope to improve the language skills of the pupils and to increase their motivation to learn languages.

In my first week I had a guided tour in the school, I met the staff and teachers and I presented myself in several classes. I also gave some English exercises, sang English and French songs and talked about my country Belgium.

I’m convinced that a positive exchange of experiences and perceptions will happen.

If you are a student/teacher (who isn’t yet employed) and you are interested in a foreign experience, don’t hesitate to contact your Comenius agency, because a great experience is waiting for you.


Lisa Caenen
lisacaenen37@hotmail.com

Comenius assistantship in Slovenia
The Council of Europe’s Conclusions on Education for Sustainable Development

At the Council of the European Union meeting in Brussels on 18-19 November 2010, the Council adopted conclusions on education for sustainable development (ESD). These recommendations to the EU Member States are of significant importance.

**Emphasis**

The Council emphasised that

1. ESD has an important contribution to make to the successful implementation of both the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development and the new Europe 2020 Strategy.
2. The most important role for ESD is to equip individuals and groups with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to make conscious choices aimed at achieving and preserving a world which both they and future generations will deem fit to live and work in. Educational institutions, local communities, civil society and employers are all key players in developing and promoting such competences.
3. ESD fundamentally concerns the way we think about our complex world and the way we behave. It promotes values, principles and practices that help people to respond effectively and confidently to current and new challenges. It therefore has implications for education and training at all levels which may go beyond simply including sustainable development as another subject in the curriculum.
4. Sustainability can play an important role in national lifelong learning strategies and can be used as a tool to enhance quality at all levels of education and training.

**Take appropriate measures**

The Council expressed that the Member States should take appropriate measures at the relevant level of responsibility – local, regional or national – in order to encourage the further development and implementation of ESD and its integration into the education and training system at all levels, in non-formal and informal learning just as in formal learning. In particular, these measures may include:

(a) Ensuring that policy, regulatory, institutional and operational frameworks support ESD, and in particular that:
- ESD becomes a feature of national lifelong learning strategies aimed at citizens’ personal, social and professional development;
- ESD is, where appropriate, mainstreamed into curricula;
- interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches are developed and implemented at all levels of education to address the challenges of sustainability;
- a “whole-school” approach to ESD is actively promoted and supported, including by removing barriers to institutions which are pursuing the sustainable use of their resources.
(b) Equipping teachers, trainers, school staff and school leaders with the awareness, knowledge and competences required to promote and include the principles underlining ESD in their approaches to teaching and management, particularly by:
- raising awareness among teachers, trainers and school leaders at all levels of education and training of the importance of ESD, and of the benefits of using this as a particularly useful tool in promoting transversal key competences;
- ensuring that teachers and trainers are adequately equipped to teach complex issues linked to ESD, through initial education as well as in-service training, and providing them with appropriate and up-to-date tools and learning materials for ESD;
- encouraging multi- and inter-disciplinary cooperation between teachers in the same establishment to promote teaching and learning on cross-cutting ESD issues;
- promoting networking, including on-line networking, among teachers in different establishments to ensure the continued development of, and exchange of new ideas on, ESD;
- fostering cooperation with - and the greater participation of - parents, the local community and all the other relevant stakeholders.

**Recommendations to the Members States and the Commission**

The Council further expressed to support education for sustainable development and promote these Council conclusions by:

i) pursuing ESD within both the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and the Europe 2020 Strategy;
ii) promoting research on and knowledge of ESD, especially in areas where there is little experience or the evidence base is weak, such as VET and higher education;
iii) promoting networking between educational institutions on the issue of ESD, making optimum use of existing networks and strengthening cooperation on ESD at all levels by building partnerships, including by encouraging:
- national and cross-border cooperation among schools;
- partnerships between educational institutions, business and/or NGOs;
- networks of researchers of ESD;
iv) identifying and registering good practice in a compendium of ESD on the Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning (KSLLL) website;
v) addressing ESD issues among the priorities of the Lifelong Learning programme and other relevant existing or future programmes;
vii) making optimum use of the 2011 European Year of Volunteering with a view to focusing on education for sustainable development and partnerships between educational institutions, business and NGOs, as well as on strengthening the visibility of existing good practices in voluntary activities in this field;
vi) considering including ESD among the priority areas for the next cycle of the ‘ET2020’ strategic framework in education and training.

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The European Union at the United Nations

Did you know that the EU is the single largest financial contributor to the UN system?

The 27 EU Member States fund 38% of the UN’s regular budget, more than two-fifths of UN peacekeeping operations, and about one-half of all UN Member States' contributions to UN funds and programmes. The European Commission alone contributes more than $1.35 billion in support of UN external assistance programmes and projects.

The EU works with all UN bodies, agencies and programmes across virtually the entire range of UN activities, from development policy and peacebuilding to humanitarian assistance, environment, human rights, and culture.

As an observer within the UN, the EU has no vote as such but is party to more than 50 UN multilateral agreements and conventions as the only non-State participant. It has obtained a special “full participant” status in a number of important UN conferences.

Read more on www.europa.eu-un.org/
On You Tube you find the 6 min video ‘EU - managing a constantly changing world’

Recent EU priorities
On 10 June 2011 in Brussels were set the EU Priorities for the 66th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

These five areas were pointed out, which in turn in total include 44 items:

1. Promoting a stronger United Nations
2. International Peace and Security
3. Sustainable Development
4. Human Rights
5. Reform of the UN system


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.

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

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The next issue of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in December. Articles may be submitted no later than November 15th 2011.
This slogan has been chosen by ten partners from the euregion Meuse-Rhine as the baseline of all the actions to be undertaken in the framework of the Interreg-IV-A project, LinguaCluster

The common goal is to simplify the learning of the three local languages of that region, i.e. Dutch, French and German. Therefore a series of events will be organized and a lot of brand new materials for language learners as well as for language teachers will be created taking into account the cultural differences in communication of the three language communities. The variability will be guaranteed especially by means of a new website (www.linguacluster.org) to be launched in January 2012.

The main events we have to mention are a week-end for a capella singers with youngsters representing the three local languages, a week-end to be closed by a theatrical performance of a play created by the participants, a football tournament with linguistic mixed teams of nine players. These three events have had their successful trial in 2011 and will be organized again in 2012.

Class exchanges, i.e. real meetings as well as exchanges by means of e-communication including specific didactic follow-up, will be stimulated and financially supported. An exchange assistant will help to find a suitable partner. A series of short stories will be written for language sensitisation, an euregional languabook will be composed giving information about some 40 euregional linked themes that can interest the language learner-teacher.

Teachers having experienced the opportunities of the proximity of the foreign language community will put their suggestions and experience into a module for future teachers of neighbour languages.

A database of companies willing to receive trainees of secondary schools will increase the number of vocational traineeships in other language communities. A language needs survey has been performed revealing five jobs where language competence plays a key role. Specific multimedia e-material will be created for these, benefitting from authentic material as much as possible.

But the core of LinguaCluster will be a brand new website in four languages, Dutch, French, German and English, to be the meeting place of all EMR-inhabitants concerned by foreign language learning. A specialist team has paid special attention to the graphics of the site.

Teachers will find an exchange platform for learning materials, learners can use the forum to exchange messages to be corrected in a tandem setting. All materials mentioned above will be put at the website at everyone’s disposal for free. But the heart of the site will be a training place. It will offer some thousand language exercises for the levels A1-A2 of the CEF, and this for each of the three EMR-languages. Several hundred multimedia exercises aim at the specific communicative culture of the three language communities.

This material can be accessed in a training mode (giving access at every moment to a specific feedback), in a test mode (giving a final result before allowing access to the feedback) and choosing thematic or grammatical learning paths.

All exercises will be accessible in written form, orally or combined. The French part will be enriched by adding more than eight thousand exercises coming from the Flemish Olympiad of French (www.olyfran.org).

The test mode will allow the organization of language competitions at demand (for a school, a group of schools, a region, a country …). There are many varied ways to select exercises corresponding to every one’s specific needs: linguistic or cultural linked exercises, level of difficulty (in terms of the CEF), linguistic aspect, source language, target language, written or oral or both.

A selection of interesting websites with a short description will assist the search of adequate multimedia e-materials by the language coach. Users can evaluate these materials in order to help colleagues in the future to make a better selection in an easier way. Everyone organizing an open language event can have access to the news pages and can publish a teaser there to invite participants.

The humorous aspect of language teaching will be the focus of the language jitters chapter: here language teachers can share surprising translations and other humorous verbal mistakes or misunderstandings.

Although LinguaCluster is aimed particularly at at the euregion Meuse-Rhine, most of its activities and materials can be used in every language class searching variety, creativity, dynamism and up-to-date contents and methodological inspiration.

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WELCOME TO THE 8th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
Creating Knowledge and Wisdom in Education and Training

Nice, France
10-12 May 2012

The registration period has begun
Register with reduced conference fee before 1st December 2011

Full conference information on
www.learningteacher.eu/nice-conference-2012

Photo: View from the conference venue, the Boscolo Hotel Plaza