The Crisis - a Challenge for Change

Sometimes schools look like islands, where the outside world is not passing the front door. And in a way it must be like that. Schools must be safe places for children and teachers to have a place where they can engage in educational and pedagogical work.

However if we look more closely we will see that the true picture is quite different. All these (young) people are bringing their social, cultural, political baggage into school and are mixing it up with that of others. And sometimes the result is complimentary but often it is contradictory whether the exchange is between teacher and children or children and other children. When social, political and cultural assumptions meet in the staff rooms and the classrooms the result is either negative or positive.

And of course the four year on-going crisis in Europe is also entering our classrooms and staffrooms. People have their concerns about the crisis. And some say that this financial/economic, European crisis has also become a crisis of morality and thus for schools this is a crisis within pedagogy.

This means that schools urgently have to develop strategies for education that will be beneficial during and after the crisis: areas such as digitalisation of society, the role of morality in schools, the role of responsibility for ourselves and others and the consequences of that are just a few examples. The list is extensive. And children/pupils need to discuss these issues.

Our schools can provide them with a platform to discuss things in a democratic, open and positive way and provide the opportunity to create a future using a positive approach. This contrasts with the sometimes negative discussions in society where a crisis is seen as a threat instead of a challenge. Sharing open and positive questions with children and colleagues might be the beginning of a change for the better.

Gerard de Kruif
Editor

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The European Union’s commitment to effective multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core, is a central element of its external action.

This commitment is rooted in the conviction that to respond successfully to global crises, challenges and threats, the international community needs an efficient multilateral system, founded on universal rights and values.

Since the Treaty of Lisbon’s entry into force on 1 December 2009, the European Commission Delegation and EU Council Liaison Office have merged into the European Union Delegation, under the authority of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Catherine Ashton, who is also Vice-President of the Commission.

Ms. Ashton is assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS), whose staff comes from the relevant departments of the European Commission and General Secretariat of the Council and from the Diplomatic Services of EU Member States.

EU-UN Cooperation
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, as well as for example in the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF).

In 1991, the European Community was accepted as a full member of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the first time it had been recognised as a full voting member by a UN agency.

On 3 May 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/65/276 upgrading the status of the European Union’s participation in the United Nations. This resolution allows EU representatives to present common positions of the Union to the Assembly.

In addition, EU representatives have the right to make interventions during sessions and to be invited to participate in the general debate of the General Assembly. It also permits EU communications relating to the sessions and work of the Assembly to be circulated directly as documents of the Assembly.

EU representatives also have the right to present proposals and amendments agreed by EU Member States and to exercise the right of reply. However, they will not be able to challenge decisions of the Assembly’s presiding officer or have the right to vote or put forward candidates.

EU Coordination and Representation
Following the Lisbon Treaty, the EU Delegation to the UN has progressively assumed the role of the former rotating presidency, representing the EU in most areas of UN activity, when consensus has been reached among all EU member states.

Pursuant to article 34 of the Treaty on the European Union, “when the Union has defined a position on a subject which is on the United Nations Security Council agenda, those Member States which sit on the Security Council shall request that the High Representative be invited to present the Union’s position”.

The EU Delegation is also responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the EU common position, including the drafting of EU statements and the adoption of EU positions on Resolutions and other texts. These positions are generally established through EU coordination meetings. In all, some 1,300 EU meetings take place annually in New York. The EU Delegation plays an active role in defining EU positions, thereby contributing to the enhanced role of the EU at the UN.

The European Union is the single largest financial contributor to the United Nations system
Around the world, the subject matter of global education, environmental education, and education for sustainable development (ESD) is taught under a variety of names by many different kinds of educators. In Sweden, all teachers involved in formal education – whether they work with adult learners or children from the age of one – are offered professional development in ESD by the Swedish government through an initiative known as The Global School.

Seminars
Throughout the year, The Global School invites teachers to participate in seminars covering a wide range of topics within ESD, ranging from cultural tolerance to climate change to global trade and justice.

One example is an October 2011 seminar in which a group of 40 primary school teachers met experts in children’s rights, including a leading researcher on the topic and a specialist from a civil society organisation. This seminar was held at a museum and organised in collaboration with the museum’s education department, which ran workshops that the teachers could replicate in their own settings to raise awareness of children’s rights amongst young children.

The Global School experience shows that, above all, Swedish teachers appreciate learning by doing. The most popular seminars are those that enable teachers to try out a classroom application; whether it is a simulation, a game, a set of thought-provoking images, or other visual material, the seminar content must be useful in the classroom.

Local Authority Partnerships
Swedish schools are managed by local authorities, and The Global School provides support to these bodies in coordinating professional development in ESD for their teachers.

An example of such collaboration took place in the city of Haparanda in the spring of 2012, when the local authority worked closely with The Global School to tailor a series of seminars specifically for all teachers in the area’s school district. In this case, teachers were able to choose four workshops, each featuring directly applicable ESD teaching methods, and the two days of workshops began and ended with keynote lectures on global development issues.

While it is inevitable that some educators will remain unconvinced about the value of ESD, when a local authority is on board and willing to join in these kinds of partnerships, head teachers receive clear signals about the priority assigned to the subject matter, and their staff are given the professional development opportunities that make ESD happen in their classrooms.

The Global Journey
In Sweden, The Global School is perhaps best known for its educational journeys. Each Global Journey is a significant undertaking in which teams of three to five participants from an individual school or local authority join other teachers, head teachers, and education policy makers to form groups of 25 that get to travel to one of Sweden’s international development cooperation partner countries.

At the moment, The Global School organises trips to Bangladesh, China, Guatemala, and Uganda, and a journey to Bosnia and Herzegovina is under development. On the trips, participants get to see first-hand the various problems - and solutions - connected to sustainable development, whether they relate to the rights of indigenous people in Guatemala or to fresh water management in China. Living with host families for at least a week is always part of the learning experience.
of a Global Journey, allowing for informal interactions and in-depth discussions between participants and local communities.

The Swedish participants often report surprise at encountering as many similarities as differences when it comes to both developing quality education and finding sustainable solutions to local problems.

After every Global Journey, the participating school and/or local authority teams must work alongside other colleagues and their students to complete a review of the ESD activities within their own organisations.

Each team then writes an ESD strategy, which is amended through discussions with the larger travelling group in a process that is useful for sharing ideas and knowledge.

**ESD - a Valuable but Challenging Concept**

Education for sustainable development can bring together global education and environmental education to highlight the interconnectedness of global challenges. Sustainable development and ESD also are useful terms for uniting different groups, such as government, civil society organisations, and business, in a general direction.

Yet there are many who criticise the elasticity or broadness of the concept. Such critics worry that anyone can call almost anything sustainable development, thereby reaching a meaningless consensus from which no actual change will come. Whilst there might be potential problems arising from conceptual elasticity, a risk also exists that ESD could become overly moralising or dogmatic.

The application of ESD must involve a democratic and reflective process to be of value to all pupils.

An important part of the work of The Global School is to ensure that teachers have access to professional development of a high standard that takes account of potentially conflicting views about sustainability challenges and their solutions.
Becoming a Social Educator in Denmark involves 3½ years studying for a professional bachelor degree. The main subjects studied are pedagogy, psychology, anthropology and communication. Studies can also include arts, music, nature and multicultural education.

My first job having finished my degree was at a residential institution for adults with autism and mental retardation. Even though the job was fulfilling, I always felt, that the lives of the people living there, could have been easier, had they been taught simple life skills. They were children of the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s and were taught in a mindset completely different to that of today.

The skills they lacked are those I’m trying to teach to the students in my current job as a social educator at a school for children with autism.

The philosophy of the school leads towards a good, dignified, fun and active life, even after the children leave school. In order to keep attention on both the classical school subjects of Danish, Math, English and life skills, an equal number of teachers and social educators are employed and they all share responsibility and have an obligation to cooperate on an interdisciplinary level.

So what does the social educator do at school for autistic children?

In my opinion, the focus of the social educator, is a holistic one- caring for the child with a past, a present and a future.

The social educator must take into account:

• The child’s chronological age,
• The child’s mental age
• The child’s life perspective.

The child’s age: What does a child of this age normally do, are there some skills or interests that are age appropriate, are there emerging teenage issues, or is the child lonely in need of friends.

The mental age: Has this 8 year old child been treated as a 3-year old because of his mental capacities? The social educator needs to find the widest range of activities for that age group in order to keep the child interested and progressing.

The life perspective: What is important is that the child learns now, in order to live a teenage, youth and adult life, which is good, fun, dignified, fulfilling and active.

Both when teaching and when writing student plans, my long term perspective is the life perspective as described above.

If a child is interested in playing with kitchen toys, then I could for instance teach him/her how to do the dishes. If you can do the dishes, you can get a job in a kitchen and you can help keep your own home clean.

If the child is interested in doing the dishes, maybe I can teach him/her how to prepare their lunch, and then maybe he/she could get a job in the before mentioned kitchen preparing lunch for others and so forth.

The importance of these skills is not limited to doing the dishes or cooking lunch, but also to being self-reliant and independent. All qualities essential to live a dignified and fulfilling life must be nurtured by the social educator.

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What are social educators doing in the Danish primary and lower secondary schools?

Inclusion has for years been the mantra for the educational system in Denmark. It is a fact that too many pupils that have a normal IQ are being excluded from the common municipal schools and therefore have a challenging path through the educational system and subsequently as adults.

Pupils can be at risk of exclusion because of special needs or learning disabilities caused by for example by a difficult upbringing, an ADHD- or autism diagnosis or linguistic difficulties.

Excluded pupils are transferred to cost-intensive specialized schools where they socialise with other troubled children and therefore are further away from norms and values of everyday society.

Introducing social educators in the schools are one way to prevent exclusion of these pupils and this has proved to be a very successful method.

In their daily work a social educator focuses on certain pupils. The inclusive effort for these pupils has three perspectives:

- supporting the class teacher
- supporting the class
- supporting the pupil

The social educator assists the teacher for instance by handling most of the communication with the pupil’s parents. The task is to mediate the dialogue in the cross field between expectations from parents to teacher and vice versa – an area that can turn in to a battle field if not attended to.

Another important task is to be a partner for the teacher in all sorts of matters - the knowledge of the pupil’s specific challenges is used to produce compensating teaching resources, to help structuring the teaching considering the specials needs of certain pupils, and to divide the class into smaller groups with regards to learning styles etc.

The social educator assists the class by focusing on the social community. The effort here is both preventive and therapeutic. An example is establishing a girl’s group within the class - the girls meet with the social educator once a week to talk about interests, feelings and conflicts within the group. The aim of this effort is to create a strong tolerant class-community with the tools to solve problems as they occur.

The social educator assists the pupil by helping the pupil understand his or her distinctive challenges - what are my strengths and what are my difficulties?

The pupil is helped through the development of strategies enabling him/her to unscramble challenges into parts that are accessible – this applies to both academic and social tasks.

Another point of focus is creating smaller communities within the school - communities where the pupil is supported to develop relationships with other pupils with similar interests, challenges and perspectives on life.

Often pupils with special needs are aware of their otherness and feel lonely and insecure in the social field. A secure and supported community with a few others is as significant improvement in their quality of life.

Overall the goal is to make the inclusion of pupils with special needs as stress-free as possible for everyone - the teacher, the class and particularly the pupil.

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The Nifbe institute is a local research institution in Northern Germany. The institute is unique as it is connecting researchers with practitioners from the regional early childhood institutions. During 2010/11 we dealt with giftedness in the early years. The name of the project is “Talentnetzwerk Wedemark” (www.talentenetzwerk.de).

Support individual abilities
The main aim of this network is to support individual abilities and gifts in pre-school children by providing an in-service training for pre-school teachers as well as a supportive environment which includes experts, consultancy and non-formal education offers for children by addressing the different abilities (e.g. arts, hand crafts, sports, sciences, literature etc.) and allowing space to experience one’s own talents and strengths.

A challenge of the project was to include all children and to acknowledge all kinds of personal talents. So one of our main questions was: how to address and support the variety of gifts and talents in children without measurable targets.

During our sessions we reached the conclusion that our starting point should be to provide a safe and manifold environment for children with a wide enough range to address the multiple abilities and intelligences of children through an open and self-directed approach. Herewith we followed the line of child centered pedagogical traditions as e.g. Fröbel-pedagogy, Montessori-pedagogy or also Reggio-pedagogy.

To ensure an open professional attitude as well as faith in children’s development we agreed to strengthen a professional empathic awareness among the Kindergarten teachers and a consciousness that children “tell us” what and where their gifts are “by using more than 1000 languages”. (L. Malaguzzi, Reggio Emilia). To strengthen the professional empathic awareness for individual abilities in children, we focused on the following steps and started a communication process within the Kindergarten teams:

- Detect individual skills (based on Multiple Intelligences) in the team
- Reflect the professional activities for and with children and the provided environment on the range of Multiple Intelligences
- Plan little enrichment projects to widen the activity frame in the group and

All four photos with this article: © Nifbe, Germany
institution
- Start individual child observation in open play and other activities with reflection in the team

To fulfill the agreement for a more empathic child observation, we established little relaxing and brain connecting exercises for the Kindergarten teacher before they started an open child observation. I call this a well-established heart-mind connection. The teacher's intuition is important here.

Holistic view
It is a holistic view which allows the detection of single components e.g. in the child behavior and their connection with "the story" so that the whole picture can appear rather than single pieces of information standing alone.

Of course the professional knowledge base must be clear and complete but an observation with the intuitive part can be a real 'eye opener' regarding a holistic and empathetic view on children's needs and abilities.

Guiding questions
To be able to support individual talents the observation should focus on the authentic interests of the child. To observe authentic interests the following guiding questions for the observers proved to be helpful:

1. “Who are you?” (for knowing we need to get to know about each other and the biographical storyline)
2. “What can I find out about your special interests and likes in my observation?”
3. “Are there any hints of talent which I can discover in your behavior and acting?”
4. “What do my colleagues find?”

By developing a higher amount of self-awareness and heart-mind connectedness the observations results are more empathetic and by discussing the reflections of the team, the quality of communication about children improves.

Such an approach has the potential to ensure that the responses on the individual needs and abilities of Kindergarten children become more flexible and creative.

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Photo © Nifbe, Germany
The local agricultural vocational college Jules Rieffel (Pays de Loire) embraced the “school Agenda 21” process having trained its entire team. This process resulted in approximately one hundred actions, one of which was the implementation of a plan of young eco-leaders.

As part of the research and testing, initiated by AgroSupDijon, a more democratic way of governing sustainable development actions by the school was developed in order to put in place a plan of shared and reflective leadership with the active participation of young eco-leaders, pupils and students or apprentices aged between 16 and 22 years.

A school policy
The Jules Rieffel school chose to put in place sustainable development projects, not only as part of the curriculum and interdisciplinary group work, but also on the school and local environmental scale. The sustainable development process can be extended across all structures.
and activities of the school. The activity of eco-leaders is not limited only to the behavioral learning of « eco-gestures » and to the issues of sorting waste. These young people have a real and meaningful plan which helps them to become aware of their role in society and to prepare for the future with the support of adults eager to assist them.

**Permanent coordination of the plan**
This year the group of eco-leaders consists of about sixty youngsters chosen from 550. Each year, at the start of the new term, the coordinator responsible for supporting the sustainable development projects, carries out an awareness raising project by presenting the “school Agenda 21” process in each class for 15 to 60 minutes.

This makes it possible for youngsters to enroll voluntarily in the group of eco-leaders with full knowledge of the issues.

Training is then scheduled so that they can examine the problems of sustainable development and its implementation in the 21 Planner. In order to develop social relations between adults and youngsters, the sustainable development coordinator sees to it that each action has a “mixed” project group, made up of adults (teachers, trainers, welfare and technical staff) and young participants (pupils, students, apprentices, trainees).

In fact, from the educational team’s point of view, the learning of a group project process is equally if not even more important than the implementation of the actual project so as to encourage the vocational development of all involved, as they face new social issues.

**Project support**
The sustainable development coordinator formally supports all the sustainable development action plans at a weekly meeting with one project group or with all of the eco-leaders. Support for each eco-leader is tailored to individual needs so that their involvement in the plan is progressive and formative.

During the first year, the eco-leaders take part in meetings without getting involved in any particular project so that they can get to know the issues, the process and how the process works.

Then, they are encouraged to measure their scope of initiative before putting together an action plan. They are given support in formalizing the project before it is submitted for validation and approval by the sustainable development committee. They then carry out the project with the support of one or several adults.

Once their investment and capabilities have been recognized, they are encouraged to get involved in the school committees so that they can raise the problems of sustainable development.

The success of the plan put in place over the last 5 years is due to the enthusiasm of the youngsters. This innovative plan helps to change our conception of the educational action of the school, particularly due to the fact that the eco-leaders are represented on the School Committee and on the Board of Directors alongside elected student representatives.

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Multiple Intelligence and Cooperative Learning

In a previous article (The Learning Teacher Magazine 1/2012) we have described the eight intelligences in the theory of Howard Gardner’s ‘Multiple Intelligence’. You can work with these intelligences in different ways but I choose most of the time to use the link between Multiple Intelligence and Cooperative Learning.

Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject.

Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping team-mates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Students work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it.

Cooperative efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members:

1) gain from each other’s efforts (your success benefits me and my success benefits you).

2) recognise that all group members share a common fate (we all sink or swim together here).

3) know that one’s performance is mutually caused by oneself and one’s team members (we cannot do it without you).

4) feel proud and jointly celebrate when a group member is recognised for achievement (we all congratulate you on your accomplishment!).

Cooperative Learning involves structuring classes around small groups that work together in such a way that each group member’s success is dependent on the group’s success. There are different kinds of groups for different situations, but they all balance some key elements that distinguish cooperative learning from competitive or individualistic learning.

**Why use Cooperative Learning?**

Extensive research has compared cooperative learning with traditional classroom instruction using the same teachers, curriculum, and assessments.

Cooperative learning exercises can be as simple as a five minute in class exercise or as complex as a project which crosses class periods.

Cooperative learning can be used across a wide range of classroom settings ranging from small to large lecture, as well as in online classes.

Cooperative learning can be used in a variety of groups ranging from small to large lecture, as well as in online classes.

Connections between Cooperative Learning and Multiple Intelligences

Cooperative learning was founded in order to help teachers and students. No other researched educational innovation has ever demonstrated such broad and consistent positive effects on students.

When working cooperatively, students of all grades and content areas achieve more academically, acquire social skills, improve social relations including cross-race relations, feel better about themselves, and like school more.

Through cooperative learning, we provide a positive model in our classrooms of what our society ideally can be.

There are a number of valid ways to implement the theory of multiple intelligences, including creating MI learning centers, designing multiple intelligences lessons and theme units, and tailoring special learning programs to individuals in order to boost their weaker intelligences and/or deliver the curriculum through their stronger intelligences.

With Cooperative learning you take a different approach. You place emphasis on simple multiple intelligences instructional strategies which can be incorporated as part of any lesson. Simple, instructional strategies can be easily integrated into any lesson to release the power of cooperative learning and multiple intelligences.

For example, wanting to include cooperative learning during a review, a teacher may do a few rounds of ‘Numbered Heads Together’ or ‘Showdown’. Wishing to engage the visual/spatial intelligence, the teacher might use a ‘Mind Map’, or a ‘Visualization’, or ‘Guided Imagery’.

In cooperative learning you can identify distinct strategies for mastery (practice and review), higher-level thinking, sharing information, building communication skills, teambuilding, and class-building. For multiple intelligences, you can identify many strategies which engage and develop each of the eight intelligences.

Underlying our emphasis on simple instructional strategies for both cooperative learning and multiple intelligences is a simple belief.

When teachers are provided simple, effective, easy-to-learn, easy-to-use, instructional strategies, instruction and learning are dramatically improved.

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When I started teaching I was terrified. I found that I had bitten off far more than I had ever expected and that chewing was futile.

What I needed was an industrial food processor but I had no idea where to buy one or how to operate it. The only answer was taking each lesson, sometime part lesson (oh the hallowed three part lesson!) a chew at a time. In these first terrifying weeks I found myself counting down to the holidays, to the weekends, to the IN-SET Training days.

I was counting weeks at first, then days and then those days turned into lessons, especially the lessons with the class that I most dreaded. I kept on telling myself, “it’s okay, you can make it, there are only nine lessons left with the terrible year nines”. If you get through those nine hours and still nobody notices what a terrible job you are doing then maybe, just maybe you’ll pass your Newly Qualified Teacher year and be a fully-fledged teacher next year!

The thought exhilarated me. The thought emancipated me. There was nothing I wanted more! Urm, well, that depended. On some extra traumatic days, what I wanted the most was to pack it all in and bask in the minimum responsibility offered by the role of a shelf-stacker at the local superstore.

With much trepidation, anxiety and fervour I waited and chewed my little lesson chunks. And finally that magical day came, the day when to my shock, surprise, amazement and elation I, me, really!? was told that I had passed. Not only that but apparently there was some things I did really well and seemingly the progress that I had made was phenomenal! Mostly due to the fact, I imagine, that it was so unexpected and my starting point was so terribly low.

Teaching is the most rewarding and incredible experience that I have and have ever had in my life and I am so lucky and grateful that my school lets me do it every day! Teaching fulfils me, teaching completes me.

Teaching has taught me a huge amount, more than any other part of my life and I expect this to continue. Teaching has made me a better person and I hope that I will always continue to improve. I have many flaws and my students kindly help me with those! They also bring me to tears when they remind me that there is also a decent chunk of good in me.

I will never stop trying to improve my practice and my school. What the world partially knows and most often ignores is that school is not a production line. There is no such thing as ‘one-size-fits-all’ education. Children and young adults are not consumers but creative forces. We are here simply to give them the best tools possible so that they can create; create a future, create a new world—one that is made for them!

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The Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme (ECOP) is a multi-year thematic programme under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (MEYS), within which it is possible to draw financial means from the European Social Fund (ESF), one of the structural funds of the European Union (EU), in the programming period 2007 – 2013.

The ECOP focuses on the area of the development of human resources through education in all its various forms with an emphasis on the comprehensive system of lifelong learning, creation of an appropriate environment for research, development and innovative activities and stimulation for cooperation among the entities involved.

One of the activities which ECOP supports is initial education as well as the following areas:
1.1 Increasing quality in education
1.2 Equal opportunities for children and pupils, including the children and pupils with special educational needs
1.3 Further Education for the employees of schools and school facilities

Our school decided to support foreign languages, numeracy and reading literacy, science and information and communication technologies.

The money we received was used for individualisation and innovation of the teaching process. It means we can divide classes into smaller groups and teachers are supported to innovate their teaching, to use and to implement modern technologies, to prepare additional materials or to organize special projects developing pupils’ key competences.

One of the most successful projects which we organised last school year was The Day of the Earth.

*Who is coming from the bush? Hurry up, hurry up, who knows it?*

This is the song from the TV bedtime story about bears which is a very favourite story among children. They were able to meet the author of these stories, the person who loves animals and plants, Mr. Václav Chaloupek. He talked about the animals which he looked after and filmed TV bedtime stories and documents. He showed pictures of foxes, wolves, bears, badges, otters and hedgehogs.

Some of his stories were funny and some of them were sad. The children enjoyed it very much. During the second part of the discussion Mr. Chaloupek concentrated on nature conservation. At the end of the talk he showed young foxes and their feeding habits.

The next day we carried on with our projects. Younger pupils drew and painted pictures and posters. They solved crossword words and puzzles with the topic of the
protection of nature and played eco games. Older children looked up information about batteries, history, production and recycling. They prepared presentations about the global and environmental problems. All materials were used for the exhibition. After finishing these tasks older pupils participated in the lecture of Mr. Pivokonsky. The topic was water, its resources and pollution. In the afternoon we worked outside. Younger pupils picked up waste around the school and older pupils in the village. We cooperated with the municipality. During this activity we gathered 20 bags of waste. It was very useful and motivating for the children. These ideas are wonderful and we have to support them, but all of us know that we should protect the earth not only in April, but for the whole year round. It is necessary to wake up the world. Be a friend of the Earth, don’t pollute its air and waters, and save its wildlife.

Further information: (www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/education-for-competitiveness-operational-programme-period?lang=2)

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In Tarnowskie Gory, Poland Preschooler’s European Language Academy” project is realized in the Future Nonpublic Language Kindergarten within the European Social Fund.

The aim of the project is to work out a complex training module taking into account the age and potential of 3 to 5-year-olds and their parents. Innovations include the introduction of bilingual preschool education, everyday contact with the language and a drama-based method of work.

Our mission is to support a child in their individual development, to treat them as a partner and to show the direction in which the development can and should go. To reach an optimum level of development, all the educative activity of teachers focuses on using creative activating methods when working with children. The main method we use is drama.

Drama is an interesting method for language teaching at pre-school age in Poland.

Drama is an interesting method used more and more often in teaching languages. As a teaching method, it includes elements of play and therapy. Its basis is creative activity realized mainly by spontaneous improvisation of pupils in a role. The sense of drama is to create a situation in which pupils could identify themselves with other people or even things, play a role of some character and take on a different personality. During role-play children usually work in pairs or groups. Children work in groups on solving a problem and as a result they become more relaxed and less self-conscious about possible language mistakes they make.

The role of the teacher is to create an authentic learning environment where the pupils have a chance to develop. Proper use of drama in teaching facilitates the social and creative development of the child, makes learning easier, and allows the teacher to obtain interesting results in realization of educational and formative aims.

Thanks to improvisation which is the basic strategy used, the teacher and pupils “in roles” create imaginative “initial situations” containing a problem or a conflict and step by step they move towards the solution of this conflict. The effectiveness of this strategy stems from the sense of security, which is created thanks to the presence of the teacher, who can influence the children’s expression and communication.

Except for classes aimed at increasing language capacity of children, the preschool education program realized by the kindergarten also includes the curriculum.

This is in accordance with our priority which is curriculum content and language integrated learning. Subjects of the curriculum for kindergartens are in total or in part taught in English, e.g. nature corner, where plants and gardening tools are described in English, or issues connected with personal hygiene and health, which are introduced in a form of English-language games, etc.

The Project is open and free, aimed at parents and their children aged 3, 4 or 5. Our mission is to assist a child in their individual development, to treat them as a partner and to show the direction in which the development can and should go.

Proper use of drama in teaching facilitates social and creative development of the child, makes learning easier, allows the teacher to obtain interesting results in realization of educational and formative aims, but most important, it allows to ac-
Drama allows the children to learn a language naturally, in different everyday situations according to CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) principles. The main goal of the project is to create an environment which will allow children to learn a foreign language in a way that is most natural for their age and to increase educational chances of preschool children in the local community.

All the classes in the kindergarten are bilingual (English + Polish). Also “English for Parents” was introduced. During these workshops parents were instructed how to use English in everyday situations to increase motivation of their children to learn the language and how to make it a part of everyday life.

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No “Erasmus for All” ...?

Covering the programme period of 2014 to 2020, the fourth generation of European programmes is on its way. On 23 November 2011 the European Commission gave its proposal for the new, single and integrated EU programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport to be in effect from 2014.

The well-known and current Lifelong Learning Programme - with its Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci sub-programmes - and the Youth programme was proposed to be replaced by the new programme titled “Erasmus for All”.

During 2012 the proposal has been discussed by the European Council (27 Member States) and is currently under discussion in the European Parliament, who also will take the final decision during autumn.

The Commission’s proposal has come to a sudden “standstill” because the EU Parliamentary Committee on Culture and Education seems to wish to keep the current name “Lifelong Learning Programme” as well as the names of the different actions /sub-programmes.

In the so-called ‘Readings’ within the ordinary legislative procedure, the Parliamentary Committee makes an amendment in order to keep the name of the existing ‘Lifelong Learning Programme’ also for the programme period 2014-2020. The Committee argues that “the widespread recognition among the general public of the “Lifelong Learning” brand name as synonymous with Union learning mobility is such that the use of this brand should be continued for the new Programme also”.

It will be highly interesting to see the final outcome, the name and structure of the new European programme/s.

For background details regarding the new programme 2014-2020, see article in The Learning Teacher Magazine 1/2012.

The Learning Teacher Network on Facebook
www.facebook/learningteachernetwork
In March of this year the Dutch Inspection of Education announced that schools (primary and secondary) could offer themselves as an "excellent" school. From March onwards a jury of professionals and experts compiled a list of criteria for excellent schools.

Since July the jury is investigating the schools, who sent in their report on why they should be considered as excellent. Schools are invited to do a presentation and are later visited by the inspection team. The opinions of parents and pupils are also of importance. The Inspection is hoping to be completed by November 2012 and expects some tens of schools to be 'excellent'.

107 schools for primary and 57 schools for secondary believe they are really excellent now and deserve the predicate “excellent”. These schools would like to have recognition for all the extra efforts they make in order to improve the quality of their education in general or their specific successful approach to learning. There are about 7000 primary schools in The Netherlands and 650 secondary schools.

This initiative from the Inspection is based on the last government’s coalition agreement. The Inspection has held a negative image for a very long time, though in the past they tried to change that idea by supporting schools in their attempts to improve their educational achievements.

In brief ‘The inspection is your best friend’ was what they were trying to put across. This new initiative from the Inspection tries to look at schools in a positive way. However there are some people, especially school principals, who are not so positive about this kind of “Michelinstar”, as they call it.

**New EU report highlights major geographic disparities in education**

Where you live in Europe can strongly influence your education and prospects in life, according to a new European Commission report. The report, entitled ‘Mind the Gap - education inequality across EU regions’, highlights significant disparities in education opportunities and results across - and within - Member States.

There appears to be a North-South divide in educational attainment, with the highest rates of low-qualified people, with lower secondary education or less, chiefly found in southern European regions and especially in Portugal and Spain. In contrast, the regions with the lowest rates of low-qualified people are mostly found in the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. Geographic inequalities in education persist despite commitments by Member States to promote equity in education and training. The report – the first of its kind - calls on EU countries to work harder to reduce these inequalities.

The report shows that the regions with the highest proportion of individuals with tertiary education qualifications (with a bachelor or master’s degree or equivalent) are mostly found in the UK, the Netherlands, northern Spain and Cyprus. The regions with the lowest rates of tertiary education graduates are in Italy, Portugal, Romania and the Czech Republic. The report also highlights significant regional disparities in terms of adult participation in lifelong learning.

**Excellent schools?**

**European logos are being phased out**

The European programme logos are currently being discontinued. The phasing out of existing logos should be completed by the end of 2012. Existing information and communication materials remain valid until the end of 2013.

Instead, beneficiaries of EU funding shall use the European emblem (EU flag) in their communication to acknowledge the support received under EU programmes. The name of the EU programme can appear with the EU emblem.

For the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), there are no logos for the sub-pro grammes anymore. The generic LLP logo to the right is replacing them.

**Next steps**

In November the Commission will adopt its strategy on “Rethinking Skills” which will underline the need to address geographic disparities in education. In 2013, the Commission will present further evidence and policy advice to Member States on how to improve equity in education and training. A second report on the geography of educational inequality in the EU will be published in 2013.

**Background**

The ‘Mind the Gap - education inequality across EU regions’ report was compiled for the European Commission by the network of experts in social sciences of education and training (NESSE). The team of authors is led by Dr Dimitris Ballas of Sheffield University, UK.

The report draws on Eurostat data and contains over 100 maps which visualise regional disparities. It identifies the top 10 and bottom 10 EU regions for each of the indicators it examines. Other key findings from the report are:

- Regional disparities in learning hinder balanced regional development and economic growth;
- Regional disparities in education compound inequality between EU regions. They also encourage brain-drain towards the more developed regions;
- The nature, scale and effects of educational inequalities vary considerably across EU regions. Policy solutions must be tailored rather than generic;
- Effective use of the European Structural Funds can help redress regional disparities in education and their effects;
- More systematic collection of data at sub-regional level is necessary to improve the knowledge base and to inform policy-makers on this topic.

Read more on http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20120914_en.htm
Ageing teachers a challenge for EU education sector

Education at a Glance 2012, an annual report, identifies several areas in European education that are likely to create challenges in the near future. An ageing teaching force is one of them.

The annual report “Education at a Glance 2012” provides data from 34 countries including 21 EU Member States on performance in education. The report, compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), identifies several areas in European education that are likely to create challenges in the near future. An ageing teaching force is one of them: more than 40% of secondary school teachers in five EU countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Netherlands, Sweden) are aged 50 or older - in Germany and Italy the share is even higher at more than 50%. Gender inequality is also a problem: the report shows that nearly a third more women than men are enrolling in higher education in the EU.

Education at a Glance also reveals that:

• Education spending in the 21 EU Member States covered is on average USD 9,122 annually per student from primary through to tertiary education. This is slightly below the OECD average of USD 9,252.
• 84% of young people in OECD countries are expected to complete upper secondary education; in the EU countries, some 86% will.
• Europe continues to be the preferred destination for students studying outside their country, with EU countries hosting 41% of all international - EU and non-EU - students. International students make up 10% or more of enrolments in tertiary education in Austria, Luxembourg and the UK. They account for more than 20% of enrolments in advanced research in Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden and the UK. Across the EU, 76% of foreign students come from another EU country.

Welcome as network member

A platform for educational progress

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

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

Trust, respect and fun

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

All professionals in education and training are welcome

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

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

Mission

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

Membership

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

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

www.learningteacher.eu

The next issue of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in December. Articles may be submitted no later than November 15th 2012.