Almost on a daily basis there is opposition towards the usual ways of thinking on profit/benefit/effectiveness and efficiency especially in society and in education. University students and teachers are more and more aware of the transformation education has gone through over the last decade. Education became a key factor in calculating how successful (financially) you can become after leaving school or college.

Some years ago students started to protest against the loss of attention on their personal development as future professionals. Nowadays it looks as though we can say that the pendulum is going to swing to the ‘attention’ side. In discussions, ‘Bildung’ as an overall key concept has returned as what was and is missing in education and society.

‘Bildung’ can be described as the development of all human qualities/capacities of a person, from a wide basic education.

That means that cognition is not the only quality teachers need to focus on. It is also the development of critical thinking and the capacity to make moral judgements. In many countries philosophy has been introduced already for a longer time.

‘Bildung’ is necessary, as too much attention is and has been paid – some say – to technical and instrumental knowledge. What we need is an eye for the balance between instrumental knowledge and moral education. Critical thinking as part of Bildung actually should be embedded in all subjects.

Bringing back ‘Bildung’ in education again is one side of the coin. The other side is how education is organised in society. This aspect of today’s education is also under fire. Education systems became more and more based on efficiency and profit. And what we see now is, that teachers in Europe start to protest against that way of thinking about the conditions under which they have to work (stress), how they have to educate future generations (forced to focus on efficiency), how they have to cope with technology in education, how they try to find a new balance between (so to say) a ‘book’ and a ‘smartphone’.

Gerard de Kruif
Editor

Content

Editor ................................................................. 2
The need to unsustain ........................................... 3
NGO’s reshaping the future ................................. 4
Keep religion out of public schools ................. 5
Talent development ............................................. 6
Democracy and ESD - a workshop ............... 7
Biodiversity of rivers ......................................... 8
Art education in teacher training ................. 10
Implementing digital citizenship .............. 11
Is there life on PromethEUs? .................. 12
Newswise .......................................................... 14
What is critical thinking? ......................... 14
Safety of children uppermost in mind .. 15

Authors in this edition

Therese Almgren, Amar Bahadur Sherma,
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Luan Imeri, Jorinde Jonker, Marianne
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Articles with no author mentioned are produced by the network’s admin team.

www.facebook.com/learningteachernetwork
Yes, you read the topic correctly. There is a need to unsustain to be able to create sustainability in the world.

During one of the plenary sessions at the recent congress WEEC2015 (World Environmental Education Congress) Arjen Wals (Professor of Transformative Learning for Socio-Ecological Sustainability at Wageningen University and Gothenburg University) discussed the overall need to change our habits to become more sustainable. He emphasised that we need to understand why we cannot carry on with business as usual and that we need to unsustain our way of living. Wals also said that we need to start changing both in a social and technological way combined.

The importance of not continuing with business as usual is also emphasised by Johan Rockström (Professor in Environmental Science at Stockholm University) and 16 other world leading scientists in the Earth statement. This statement urges all of us to make it clear to world leaders that they have to deliver an ambitious, science-based and equitable outcome in the Paris congress in December that sets us on a path to limit global warming to below 2 degrees.

We believe that signing the statement shows that people and organisations are aware of the urgency, are willing to change and are willing to stop with our unsustainable pathway. Furthermore, Rockström said in the radio show “Sommar i P1” this July that 2015 might be the final year for humankind to actually change our dangerous pathway.

However, even if 2015 is a critical year, it is, at the same time, the year of opportunities. We still have the ability and the possibility to change before it is too late; before we tip over our planetary boundaries.

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NGOs reshaping the future in Macedonia - Part 2

In part 1 (LTN Magazine 1/2015) we described the role of the NGOs reforming education in Macedonia, especially the work of the Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. In this part we will describe some projects more in detail.

The last several years’ projects aimed at improvement of inter-ethnic relations in the country such as: the Child Friendly School model that was first introduced in Macedonia through the work of a team of academics on developing CFS standards and indicators. A baseline study was undertaken. A model for school self-evaluation based on teachers’-students’-parents’ participation was developed.

During that time, CHRCR (Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution) experts were also engaged in reviewing the national framework and subject curricula for the nine-year primary education according to the CFS standards, especially with regard to their multicultural approach and gender sensitivity.

From the beginning of 2012 (until the end of 2015) CHRCR serves as a partner organization to the Macedonian Centre for Civic Education in the implementation of the USAID Project on Inter-ethnic Integration in Education. It provides expertise for building capacities of the key educational institutions to introduce inter-ethnic integration at school level (all primary and secondary schools) by training master trainers and mentors and developing modules and manuals for training of trainers and implementing activities.

Within this project, CHRCR is in charge of establishing model schools for inter-ethnic integration and developing manuals in support of the implementation of inter-ethnic integration. It is also responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the activities in the overall project.

Currently, CHRCR implements the project on Diversity in Early Child Development. Within the project, CHRCR has proposed improvements in the official Early Child Development curriculum and raised awareness in pre-school teachers (from all public kindergartens throughout the country) for respecting diversity and multiculturalism. CHRCR produced a manual with workshops for pre-school children that promote respect for diversity and multiculturalism and is in charge of supporting its implementation in ten pilot kindergartens from different municipalities.

Despite all efforts of intellectuals, academics and NGOs, the schools in Macedonia are generally divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. It seems that the model of parallelism and separation has been mainly preferred over the model of integration. Probably because of the influence of politics but also because of education system, students are burdened with prejudices and ethnic stereotypes. These perceptions are reinforced by adults (including both parents and teachers) who perceive ‘other’ ethnic communities in a similar manner.

The current educational system should be reshaped to ensure that a model of integration is preferred by students (and teachers). A lot of work should be done, especially with teacher training programmes which must incorporate content designed in accordance with multicultural goals aimed at countering ethnic stereotypes. Frequent opportunities for genuine interaction among different ethnic communities must be provided in education to encourage co-operation towards a common goal.

The situation in Macedonia nowadays is pretty complicated. Despite the political crisis, thousands of exhausted refugees from the Middle East, Asia and Africa have crossed on foot from Greece in to Macedonia on their way to the European Union. This seems to become a perfect opportunity for the politicians to profit.

There is a perception that officials are trying to defocus opinion by creating artificial crises in the borders and, as a result, human rights are violated. The refugees are named as migrants and often they have been treated as criminals. Almost everyone is trying to profit on their Golgotha on the way for a better life.

From our perspective, everything is about human rights. They should be respected and we are using every opportunity to highlight these. In all projects and programmes, we are trying to promote respecting human rights and human dignity.

CHRCR (Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution)
Luan Imeri
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Imagine your 6-year old coming home from school telling you that he is going to hell because he is not in the religious instruction class. What do you tell your 11-year old daughter who comes home with a magazine describing homosexuality and sex before marriage as sinful? What do you tell your child in high school who comes home with a booklet that tells girls not to hug boys because it will be hard to resist sex and then compares having multiple sex partners with sticky tape that loses its stickiness after multiple uses.

This is unfortunately the reality in public schools here in Melbourne, Australia and in other states. Special Religious Instruction (SRI) is offered at many government schools and for many years, parents and schools had misconceptions about the curriculum and delivery. The Education Department (DEC) has a policy that allows religious providers to come into public schools for 30 minutes per week to explain the tenets of that religion. The most common form of SRI is Christian Religious Instruction.

The program used to be “opt-out”, which means that your child is in the program unless you write a letter to state that you do not want your child to take part. That might seem simple, but what if your 5-year old is the only one opting out and has to sit in the back of the class hearing the others sing and getting lollies?

At the start of the year the school sent out a form that explained that the program was all about values, part of the national curriculum and that it was endorsed by the DEC. That turned out to be false information.

The DEC had no idea who came into our schools; the program is extra-curricular and the CEO of the main Christian provider, Access Ministries, said: “In Australia we have a God-given open door to children and young people with the Gospel; our federal and State governments allow us to take the Christian faith into our schools and share it. We need to go and make disciples.”

The program segregates our children based on the religion of their parents. DEC-policy states that the children opting out are not allowed to do anything curriculum-related and this often means playing games on the computer or colouring in. Children miss out of approximately 20 hours of education per year due to SRI. The volunteers of the program like to present themselves as teachers. However they have only had eight hours of training and are deeply religious and evangelical. They tell the children that God made everything and explain how to talk to God. Their sessions have to be supervised by classroom teachers to keep the group under control.

Fairness in Religion in Schools (FIRIS) is an organisation set up by parents that has been fighting to get SRI out of public schools and have it replaced by General Religious Education, delivered by classroom teachers.

Thanks to FIRIS the program changed to “opt-in” in 2014, which means parents had to sign their child consciously into the program. The new form stated clearly what the true objectives are and that the DEC does not endorse it. Parents have voted with their feet and many schools have dropped the program due to low numbers.

The Victorian government announced this August that in 2016 SRI is no longer welcome during curriculum time! It is a win for education. The fight continues in other states.

Religion is a private matter. Families can choose to go to church, mosque or temple. Just keep it out of our public schools!

Ella Heemskerk
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The World’s Largest Lesson announces that their website is live with free lesson content on the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

We hope these materials will enable you to plan exciting lessons and activities to make sure all children, everywhere, learn about the Global Goals in the week starting September 27th 2015.

If every school in the world teaches children about these goals, we will help them become the generation that changed the world.

Link: http://globalgoals.org/worldslargestlesson

Keep religion out of public schools

Did you sign your child up for this?

“God says you are stuck in your sin and need to be rescued from his judgement”
You: An Introduction, a CEP-authorised SRE student manual, p.48

Scripture in schools: OPT OUT NOW!

The next issue of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in December.
Articles may be submitted no later than 15th November 2015.
On the 25th and 26th June 2015 I attended a meeting on behalf of The Learning Teacher Network at Radboud University, Nijmegen, in The Netherlands. This meeting was set up following the publication of an important book and research on the subject by the meeting host Dr. Marca Wolfensberger (http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-12919-8).

The meeting co-host was Ron Weerheijm and the organisation was done by Dr. Maarten Hogenstijn. Dr. Wolfensberger teaches and researches at Hanze University of Applied Sciences, and the University of Utrecht; Dr. Hogenstijn is based also at Hanze University of Applied Sciences; and Ron Weerheijm is a teacher at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences.

The meeting was attended by 19 participants from various countries across Europe where ‘Honors’ programmes exist within various Higher Education Institutions. Trying to define ‘Honors’ programmes is somewhat tricky in different cultures but as a first attempt I think that I would describe it as the provision of enhanced studies for undergraduate, or Masters, students within Universities, or even a provision for Gifted Students within University programmes.

Participants included researchers and teachers who work in this field, graduate students who have written dissertations on this topic, government advisers, and policy professionals. I was the odd one out in this group since The Learning Teacher Network was invited to offer insights and in this group since The Learning Teacher Network was invited to offer insights and answer questions about network development.

The aim of the meeting was threefold:
- To get acquainted with each other and to search for common interests within this agenda;
- To discuss the possibilities of forming a European Network around Talent Development/Honors Education in Higher Education;
- To explore the possibilities of organizing a conference on this issue in the Netherlands in 2016 as a particular step in the possible formation of a network.

The meeting took place over dinner on the evening of the 25th June during which a number of practical questions were discussed in addition to the necessary networking interaction of participants – each course of the dinner was taken in a different seating position! This included a one-minute introduction of each participant by himself/herself.

On the 26th June the day began with a Masterclass at Radboud University at which there were three possible classes for participants to attend. One of these was presented by one of the meeting participants, Pål Fernvall, from DTU Skylab, Technical University of Denmark, Copenhagen where he discussed the role of DTU Skylab in Innovation and Entrepreneurship meeting talent development.

A second Masterclass discussed Europe going down under, and the third Masterclass was about Developing a Sustainable International Learning Community. These were all examples of the kind of enhanced learning classes which are currently taking place in some locations and to some extent are examples of what might be possible.

Following the Masterclasses the meeting re-convened and after an Introduction to Talent Development in Higher Education by Dr. Wolfensberger there were six short inputs from participants about particular aspects of their connection with Talent Development. My contribution to this was to talk about The Learning Teacher Network. This was particularly focused on how we began, how we are sustained, what are values and working practices are, and how we network. The content of my input was the reason that I had been invited on behalf of the network.

There were discussions about the potential added value of European network formation and the practical implications of this. The meeting concluded with a discussion about next steps, in particular whether or not a European conference on this issue should be organized for 2016. Indications were that a host had already been found for this in the Netherlands and that it seems at the moment that this might be a possible outcome. The ultimate aim still seems to be about the setting up of a network of Talent Development practitioners.

For further information from readers about participants in this meeting from the various countries you could make contact the author directly.

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Democracy and ESD - A Workshop
- LTN Conference, Zagreb, Croatia, April 2015

ESD is a powerful and essential concept that teachers need to embrace in their educational practice. However the challenge for teachers is to find methodologies that engage learners but also develop their understanding of ESD.

At the recent LTN conference in Zagreb, I ran a workshop inviting participants to actively explore ESD issues as they are experienced in a democratic context and reflect on the challenges that might emerge as a result. The principles of democracy and sustainability can often directly oppose each other particularly in relation to consumerism and natural resource management and equality of distribution.

In previous conferences I have explored this issue in a theoretical and academic context. While this can be very valuable, teachers also require practical methodologies that can provoke discussion and learning.

The workshop was divided into three distinct exercises that provided an incremental progression through the topic allowing for active engagement and dialogue at each stage. The session finished with a reflection activity.

**Part 1: Giant Steps Activity**

Brainstorm on what are the rights we need in order to develop but maintain a sustainable balance - i.e. the right to food; the right to education; the right to shelter, the right to resources etc.

Photocopy the role cards and give each person one to read. Ask them to make a label showing their name and country of origin and to attach it to themselves. (Depending on the size of your group more than one person may have the same role).

Ask them to think about who they are, where they live, how many are in their family, etc. Now ask them to stand in character at one end of the room. Ask the groups to stand with their backs against the wall and use the full length of the room.

Explain that you are going to call out statements. After each statement is read they must take a giant step, a baby step, or stay where they are depending on what the statement means to them; Take a giant step if you can do it quite easily; Take a baby step if you can only do it with difficulty. Don’t move if you can’t do it at all.

Emphasise that the aim of the exercise is to try to experience what life is for their character-it is not about reaching the end first.

Now call out the first statement. Once everybody has responded, ask them to explain what they did and why. Choose more statements from the list, read them out, and allow participants to make their move. When all the statements have been read begin the debriefing.

In the debriefing session the main purpose is to explore with the group what they experienced as their character and how they felt as the exercise unfolded. Responses here can be varied and powerful in terms of emotion and insight into the relationship between choice, sustainability and personal circumstances.

**Part 2: Thought Tracking Activity**

This is a dramatic activity where the group are asked to respond to a written stimulus (a poem about consumerism and a reflective piece on the importance of having enough) in a physical way first and then with words. The group are divided into groups of 5 or 6 depending on the size of the overall group. In Zagreb, we had 5 groupings, 2 with the poem on consumerism and 3 with the reflective piece on the importance of having enough.

Firstly each group had to create a picture representing the stimulus they had been given (see picture(s) below). They were then asked to freeze in this position and as I tapped individuals on the shoulder, they would speak in character describing their thoughts in that specific moment. Here again we explore the concepts in a very visceral spontaneous manner. The responses evoke emotion and critical thinking that often goes further than simply reading the text.

**Part 3: Walking Debate Activity**

The final activity in the session was a walking debate. The group are asked to stand in the middle of the room in a straight line. They are presented with a statement. If they agree with the statement, they move to the right and if they disagree to the left. When they have moved they are then asked to justify their decision to the group.

This can lead to an interesting discussion that can be both reflective and provocative.

To complete this session participants were asked to write a personal reflection on their learning and thinking that emerged from the activities and how it might influence or change their attitudes or actions. This helps to consolidate the learning and embed a greater critical awareness of the issues involved.

**Conclusion**

The response to the activities from the group was very positive. They found it thought provoking, engaging and enjoyable. Exploring concepts within a learning environment can be challenging. Approaching them through interactive engagement and activities allows participants to think, act and respond. As each activity develops, participants get the opportunity to question their own thinking and construct new meanings and understandings.

As Aristotle suggests; “wisdom begins in wonder”.

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Biodiversity of rivers
- Interdisciplinary approach in a Comenius project

Freshwater ecosystems in Europe are rich in biodiversity and provide essential ecosystem goods and services to humans. Freshwater biodiversity is under pressure from many factors, ranging from the introduction of invasive species, and ending with the pollution.

Recognising the urgent need to reverse the trends of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, in December 2010 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution (A/RES/65/154) declaring 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation.

The Private Salesian High school wanted to implement the guidelines of the United Nations General Assembly and thus decided to organize a project: Comenius School Partnerships on biodiversity of rivers. During 2013-2015 Private Salesian High School coordinated the work on project: Biodiversity of Rivers. Partners of the Salesian High School were 6 schools: from Cyprus, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Romania and France (Reunion Island).

It was an interdisciplinary project that combines aspects of biology, chemistry, ecology, geography, physics, art and foreign languages.

Objectives of the project
1. Promote the importance of rivers and wetlands for biodiversity.
2. Examination and water quality in urban rivers partner schools.
3. Comparison of the landscape, flora and fauna in the rivers.
4. Study the impact of tourism on the river and development of the region.
5. Disseminate information on how to protect life in rivers.
6. Increase public awareness of life-threatening factors in rivers.
7. Dissemination of information about the biodiversity of rivers among students and the local community.

We wanted to draw attention of students, parents and society to the problem of biodiversity reduction and support the idea of creation new area of river protection. During the project educational outdoor activities were conducted.

Students got to know about techniques of study water: chemistry and biology of fauna and flora in rivers. Water quality refers to the physical, biological, and chemical properties of water that affect a wide range of ecological processes within a watershed. Likewise, natural processes, such as heavy rain and snow melt, and human-related factors, including urban development and agricultural activities influence water quality in a particular area, or watershed.

There are many ways to measure scientifically water quality and thus assess the health of water and how it changes over time and under varying conditions. Students used various techniques to monitor physical and chemical properties of water, such as pH, temperature, salinity,
and turbidity, as well its biological properties, such as the presence or abundance of phytoplankton, aquatic invertebrates, and amphibians.

The lessons were designed to be a part of an ongoing study of chemistry and biology and was composed of two segments: the collection of samples in the field and the testing of those samples in the classroom laboratory followed by the analysis of the results.

Students developed an understanding of the language associated with pollution and being environmentally aware. The students also developed skills in questioning, observation, predicting, investigating and experimenting, estimating and measuring, analysing, recording and communicating.

During the project students participated in competitions such as logo and film design. Different river topics were presented by the students in English during a series of international meetings.

Apart from ecological studies, students learned about the culture and traditions of other nations and become more open and tolerant of other people.

They visited different ecosystems - for example, the tropical forest of Reunion Island. Students and teachers participated in a special workshop about the ecology of aquatic organisms, went rafting on the river in the reserve of Etang de Saint Paul in Reunion Island and rafting on Nysa Kłodzka in Poland. In addition, there was the opportunity to get to know the nature of the islands through other expeditions.

Among them was the turtle breeding centre KELONIA in Saint Leu, where there are the largest and smallest turtles in the world. You can discover the underwater environment and look at the treatment and use of tortoise shell. The most exciting tour was a trip to the world’s most active volcano, Piton de la Fournaise, 2632m above sea level.

For teachers, it was an opportunity to exchange experiences, strengthen project management skills, and acquire fluency in, and knowledge of, innovative methods of working with students.

For the project coordinator, Dr Magdalena Szewczyk, the Comenius project was an opportunity to establish international contacts that could lead to new activities in the field of European Projects. It also provided the opportunity to strengthen the skills of running a website, project manage groups of teachers from partner schools, resolve conflicts in a group and negotiate.

The teachers, through integration with their students, have the opportunity to conduct more activities in the school community.

All project results: articles, presentations, movies, photos, competitions and posters are published on this website: www.comenius-rivers.eu

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“To be a teacher is my greatest work of Art” (Joseph Bueys, 1969). I start my article with this sentence, because I hope one day all primary teachers will realize they have the responsibility to develop creativity in children.

Unfortunately the situation for visual Art in the Netherlands is not very creative. Most of the time teachers pick some kind of an activity from the internet, with a very closed assignment and hardly any space for children to decide what their image would look like. The teacher knows the outcome, but to develop the artist in a child, space is needed. Trust in creativity, being able to organize a challenging art lesson and feeling at ease with art materials are needed as well.

Since Art is a marginalised subject in The Netherlands it is very hard to establish that. During the first year I have 7 lessons/sessions of 2 hours, which are obligatory for the student teachers and during the second year again 7 lessons of 2 hours, but only for students who would like to extend their knowledge about Art.

To make them more at ease with teaching Art in schools, I organize two sessions at a primary school. The first visit I let my students do research on the Artwork of the children and the Artwork in a public space which is surrounding the school building (for example statues, architecture, graffiti, etc.). During this visit they will experience the closed assignments for the children and the little time which is given to this beautiful subject. Together with the found artworks in the neighbourhood of the school, they have to design an Art lesson. I encourage them to make an open assignment, to give space to the children, so they can develop their creativity.

The students are free as to what they want to do, but I recommend them trying something unusual, to give themselves the opportunity to practise how to organize a complicated Art lesson and to do something the children will never forget.

Why am I doing this? I have the experience. As soon as I connect children with Art, the student teachers are becoming more interested. Often Art is something they find difficult to understand. Also, during their practice periods they hardly ever get a good example (from a classroom teacher) of how to give an Art lesson. Often they have the idea that children are not interested or that it is too difficult for them. During their two visits they start to realize that this is not true and that children can be intrigued by Art and that you can trust the ability of children to be creative.

During the second year I take this a little further. I let students experience a creative process, which I have called: “Creating out of nothing”. In this assignment they take three important steps. All outcomes are very personal and very different.

The first step is observing a chosen subject for two weeks. For example the sink at a certain hour of the day, a growing plant, the view out of a window, etc. Students decide what they will observe. I ask them to be very disciplined and not only to make pictures or drawings, but also write down what they observe. During this phase, they often discover that they start to “see” more. The second step is distilling a subject from the observations. Some students stay close to their observed object, but often they find something else - for example, particular personal habits or the use of a special word. With whatever they find, they make a piece of Art. The outcome often surprises them and it is the first step of trusting their own creative ability.

Art has so much to offer for education and carries so much of the essence of being human. Within the very little given space I try to develop teachers with an open mind and eye for Art and the development of the creative mind in children. Joseph Beuys was very right about his phrase. To be able to inspire is an art of its own and it is very important to be aware of and to focus upon.

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Art education in teacher training - Thomas More Hogeschool (NL) as an example
Implementing Digital Citizenship in the EFL Curriculum

Schools are places where most students get the bulk of their exposure to the Internet tools and resources, so teachers need to teach them the right way to use these tools safely as well as what is appropriate, respectful and legal in terms of creating and communicating for a large audience.

For students today, the Internet is one of the most powerful means of connecting with and making new friends. While adults know that the Internet is the least private of spaces, most students do not realize that the information and photos they post today can affect their future. Many students think that the messages they send online are private and that no one else will see them.

Teachers need to make students aware of online privacy issues, primarily those relating to disclosing personal information on social networking web sites, such as Facebook. Students need to be taught about the potential risks and consequences of posting personal information on the Internet and how to assess the various types of information they provide in their Facebook profiles, along with the different levels of access.

Teachers can help their students use the Internet safely by teaching them some basic rules. One of them is to keep their passwords secret. Passwords can stop other people from seeing your private information or pretending to be you.

As students get older they may use passwords to keep track of their money or to shop online. Knowing how to create secure passwords will help them keep their money safe as well as their personal information and online reputation.

Another important rule that needs to be taught is: “Do not share your private information on the Internet without your parents'/guardians'/teachers’ permission.” Pupils need to be taught to apply the same safety rules in cyberspace as they use when encountering strangers in the real world.

Besides, teachers can help their pupils use the Internet safely by teaching them about the dangers of spam and how they can avoid being exposed to offensive content or becoming innocent victims of online fraud. Keeping security software up-to-date, using secure passwords, using more email addresses and handling tempting messages effectively are very important tips that can help pupils fight spam in order to protect themselves and their computers.

Here is a list of engaging activities that can be successfully incorporated in the EFL classes in order to foster digital citizenship in students. They are meant to raise awareness among students around online safety issues and educate them about the responsible use of the Internet. However, the prerequisites for taking part in the following activities are: a good command of English (pre-intermediate-advanced) and good digital skills.

1. Provide students with practice in identifying strategies and creating secure passwords. Have them create a short PowerPoint presentation (4-5 slides) focused on creating secure passwords (e.g. dos and don’ts, examples of secure and insecure passwords and the reasons why they are secure/insecure, tips to keep their passwords secret etc).

2. Provide students with information about the potential risks and consequences of giving out private identity information on the Internet. Have them create a “Better Safe than Sorry” poster with tips to protect themselves and their families against different types of threats (identity theft, online fraud etc.)

3. Provide students with practice in identifying online requests for private identity information that come through spam messages. Have students create a “Stop Spam” poster with tips to protect themselves and their computers against spam.

4. Provide students with practice and tips to set privacy settings in their Facebook profiles as well as privacy options on their wall posts. Have them create a short PowerPoint presentation (4-5 slides) focused on protecting their privacy on social networking sites (tips, instructions to set up Facebook privacy options for profiles as well as for wall posts etc.)

5. Organise a workshop – “Pupils Teach Pupils” focused on tips for protecting students’ privacy online, conducted by the older students for the young ones. Outcomes: comic strips (generated online) on e-safety tips created by the young students helped by the older ones.

All the above-mentioned activities aim to enhance students’ knowledge and skills related to New Technologies in general and e-Safety in particular, their critical thinking and inquiry skills, as well as their communication in English and social competence.

Besides, they are meant to teach students about the consequences of giving out private information on the Internet, how to set privacy settings on different networking sites, how to create secure passwords and how to handle spam in order to protect themselves against offensive content as well as their computers against viruses or other malware (malicious software).

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THE LEARNING TEACHER MAGAZINE 3/2015
Life on PromethEUs is the name of an Erasmus+ school partnership consisting of five schools from Croatia, Italy, Poland, Sweden and Turkey. The Erasmus+ programme brings together seven former EU programmes in the fields of education, training, and youth. Regarding the education field there is a clear focus on the development of new and innovative teaching methods.

The aim for this development project is for the schools, with students aged 10-16 years, to put the Education for Sustainable Development ideas into practice, at least to some extent. There is obviously a lot of research, theory, good ideas and also examples of best practice about transforming education in this direction, but the challenge right now seems to be reaching beyond the "enthusiast teachers". These are those who have figured out the need for the transformation on their own and found methods to do it! Their efforts are admirable, but as UNESCO’s Global Action Programme emphasizes, it is also necessary to get the “John and Joan Doe teachers” to implement these new teaching methods, for a better future for all students around the world.

The partner schools’ work will be inquiry based and interdisciplinary using sustainability dilemmas regarding various socio-scientific issues. The ambition is that the schools’ different subject teachers will contribute with their various expertise on these multidisciplinary problems, in an education focusing on higher-order thinking skills. The students will work together with the assignment to build up a new civilization on the imaginary planet PromethEUs and solve different issues regarding this, like decision-making, religions, energy efficiency, economic systems, genetic engineering and robotic rights.

Students from the five countries will first work with the issues at their respective schools, but then meet up three times during the two year partnerships to discuss and debate with the goal to agree on a common solution on the many different issues in the task. The first exchange was in Podgora, Croatia in May 2015 and the upcoming two will take place in Istanbul, Turkey in the autumn and in Krajenka, Poland next spring.

The ESD concepts are broad and it has been evident that it is not easy for the “ordinary teacher” to make a transformation towards this if they are left to their own devices, both at the partner schools and in general. In this partnership therefore, the author of this article will act as a sort
of catalyst in the schools’ transformation processes, and at the same time doing research on it in a Design-Based Implementation Research inspired approach.

This is a research that aims to bridge the gap between academia and classrooms by forming close partnerships between researchers and practitioners in order to facilitate research into practice. Real-world problems for the schools are addressed and through a collaborative and iterative design, and an implementation process involving many stakeholder groups. This continuous engagement between the researcher and the practitioners strives to develop capacity for sustaining change in the schools.

New in our approach is that a trans-disciplinary student task is designed with a kind “framework” around it, based on Dana Zeidler’s and Troy Sandler’s framework of socioscientific issues (SSI). It is not detailed lesson plans but rather a structure to help the teachers in their implementation process, where each partner needs to adapt the “framework” to their circumstances. During the partnership both research and evidence inform changes and improvements in the design, through collaborative learning activities and through expert input from the researcher.

The initial findings from a researcher’s point of view indicate that the vast majority of the teachers really want to make a change in their teaching and furthermore are aware of the need for a sustainable future. At the same time teachers feel that they have neither the tools nor the power to make this change themselves. Looking at it through a lens of cost-benefit analysis, the teachers see a definite benefit of a re-orientation of the education and learning, but the effort (i.e. the cost) they need to put in to make it, are too great.

Therefore the most important is perhaps not to initially find the perfect way to transform all teaching at once, but rather “just to get started”. The aim for both the partnership and the research on it is, with the help of the researcher-practitioner liaison, to shed some light on both “the costs and benefits” involved and to try balancing them up, in order to get the teachers over the threshold.

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Follow the partnership on
www.lifeonprometheus.eu/
http://issuu.com/rgcn/docs/prometheus_handbook
Newswise: - Reading comprehension on current topics

Over 10 years ago reading comprehension in the Netherlands was considered a rather boring subject. Both teachers and students were not motivated to read the textbooks, for they had to keep using these for about eight years at a stretch. Then we invented Nieuwsbegrip, a programme for reading comprehension, based on reading news articles.

On a weekly basis we provide teachers with hands-on strategic reading comprehension materials at different reading levels to use with their pupils in both primary and secondary schools. In 2015 over 6000 schools in the Netherlands have added Nieuwsbegrip to their school schedules as an integrated subject. A hundred thousand children are now using learning and practicing reading comprehension this way. It has become a standard: reading about interesting topics that people talk about. Why not do this in other countries as well? Here is where Newswise comes in.

How does Nieuwsbegrip work?
Each week a team of 15 professionals write new lessons about a current topic. Teachers send in suggestions for topics through the website www.nieuwsbegrip.nl. The authors choose a topic that is interesting for both younger pupils (from 8 years old) and older students (up to the age of 16).

In one day all texts, exercises and manuals are written. During a school year we produce reading lessons at five levels that can be used in different school settings. Every week the teachers can download and print the lessons from our website and use the lessons with their classes. This includes online exercises for the children to practice with other texts and vocabulary from the weekly texts.

The effect of using Nieuwsbegrip in schools is huge. Children talk about topics amongst themselves, amazing their parents. They become better readers and are more involved in society, because they are well informed about what is happening in the world. Some examples of Nieuwsbegrip topics: the Total Solar Eclipse, Earthquakes in Nepal, the Football World Championship etc.

Teachers are encouraged to model (think aloud) strategic reading skills to stimulate the children to read texts in an active manner so that they are able to make a proper mental representation of the text. In Nieuwsbegrip we work on five reading strategies: predict, clarify, relations, ask questions and summarize. In every lesson a graphic organizer (key visual) is made using the information in the text.

Newswise
In 2014-2015 Newswise was created. Newswise is similar to Nieuwsbegrip but meant for teaching English as a foreign language. Like in other countries, in the Netherlands, English is taught in primary and secondary schools. The English teachers heard about Nieuwsbegrip and asked for an English equivalent. We started piloting Newswise and found that the lessons could also be used outside the Netherlands.

Schools can register on http://www.newswise.eu. Every fortnight there are reading lessons at two levels. These are the levels A2 and B1 from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. On the B1 level pupils are meant to read and understand factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest. The texts are written by native speakers. They handle world news topics that are interesting for all European students in the ages of 10-16 years.

Let us all make English reading comprehension more motivational! You can try Newswise for free.

Find out more: newswise@cedgroep.nl

Quote from a teacher: ‘I am very enthusiastic about the Newswise lessons. The topics are interesting and the assignments are attractive for my pupils.’

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What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking is frequently marketed as one of the most desirable outcomes of education. However, despite its exalted status within educational discourse, and moreover, a plethora of scholarly work devoted to the subject, most educationalists still struggle with the questions of (i) what is it and (ii) how can I teach it? This short article attempts to briefly answer the first question.

We live in an interrogative world. Here, we not only ask questions of the world around us, but it also asks questions of us. Our everyday lives require us to make informed judgments on: (i) what to believe or accept (cognitive rationality) and (ii) what to do or perform (practical rationality).

Typically our judgments are made based on the convicting force or strength of the reasons offered in support of a given belief/action. This is what we call the principle of justification. In other words, if I say I believe there are fairies at the end of my garden, a critical thinker ought to seek out and forensically question the reasons for my belief. If my reasons are not strong reasons, in this case, a lack of verifiable evidence, a critical thinker will conclude that my belief is mistaken.

There are two distinct steps in the critical thinking process. First, a critical thinker must be able to detect and carefully sift through the reasons someone employs to justify their beliefs or actions.

Secondly, a critical thinker must skillfully subject these reasons to a rigorous stress-test in order to determine whether these reasons are strong enough to warrant a given belief, claim or action. The purpose of this stress-test is to generate an informed judgment about whether the person is justified in holding a given belief, or carrying out a specific action.

The simplest definition of critical thinking therefore can be characterized as, any form of rational, interrogative reasoning that stress-tests the strength of the reasons used to justify one’s beliefs or ac-
Safety of Children Uppermost in Mind

One of the worst-hit fields on account of two earthquakes that struck Nepal having different epicenters is education—the first was on 25 April and the second was on 12 May.

Though most of the newspapers reported that the first devastating quake measured a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale and the latter was 6.9, the media once has lost its credibility by reporting different magnitudes. There was no uniformity in the reporting of different newspapers. Some papers reported 7.9 and some 7.6 on the Richter scale. The 7.8 magnitude quake is the biggest one in the history of seismography of Nepal after 15 January, 1934 since the catastrophic earthquake rocked Nepal during the regime of Rana Prime Minister Judda Shumser.

This year many budding clubs, organizations, associations etc whose existence was on the verge of extinction got a golden opportunity to play a little role in helping to publicize widely their personal blogs, websites, organizations, nominal institutions and clubs. Besides, some organizations were merely videorecording their shallow roles, shallow distress and helping their acquaintances, relatives, friends who were no longer in dire need of assistance to raise organizations’ and their personal profiles. There was an air of selfishness in the air.

According to the BBC News, more than 25,000 classrooms in some 8000 schools have been destroyed and more than 8000 people lost their lives. Some schools have set up makeshift classrooms, as we all know there is no compromise between risk and safety. Schools are the crowded places and schoolchildren are the most vulnerable to such catastrophes, so the safety of schoolchildren should be uppermost in the minds of the concerned. Likewise, popular schools and colleges in the valleys have started running classes despite the red stickers (unsafe).

Some schools are yet to be inspected by a team of experts though classes have resumed. Some wealthy schools have been accused of buying the green stickers (safe) from the authorized officials to keep the people under illusion. This is deceit and a crime. It is teachers’ obligation to teach and students’ to study, for neither the management nor the government is able to manage an alternative place for classes and motivate teachers. After all, teachers are humans; they do have their family.

In Kathmandu, most of the students were not traumatized, contrary to many people’s expectations, after classes resumed on 31 May. They did not seem to get into a panic. In a few schools, teachers were trained to evacuate students in case of another quake and psychological therapy was held to allay their fear in advance. Some students are still enjoying aftershocks, and they are enjoying discussing earthquakes.

When students are asked to practise ‘drop, cover and hold on’ drill on the school premises, the majority of them take it lightly; they do it because they have to. The government-funded schools have suffered more damage and destruction rather than individually funded strong schools.

Many of the schools in the Kathmandu valley do not have big playgrounds and alternative exits.

The government does not have any grounds to take action against schools that are turning a deaf ear to the instruction of the government not to run classes if the school has been labelled unsafe.

What if the school operators shut down their schools for the period of uncertainty? Where will students go? Students cannot bear one year’s loss. The government’s instruction is not practical and mature enough. The government should not have granted permission to the schools which did not meet all the criteria. Most of the private schools in cities are houses with almost no gardens and playgrounds. People rent a house and run classes.

The government should rather come up with a practical idea. Dumb politicians with merely a feeling of vague compassion, short-sighted policies and false promises at the misfortune of others cannot lead our nation in the right direction.

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