And for the teacher - for me as a teacher later - one of the days the week before we had already had our first, not very serious, meeting before children would enter. I had lots of questions on my mind, many about the children... Who will they be? How will the social atmosphere in the classroom develop? How can I make the first days as positive as possible, without crossing my own borders? It was exciting and at the same time a kind of routine.

And thinking about the first month beforehand: What kind of new projects could be interesting for this age and also myself? This was really important for me.

Both teachers and children should share the same aims for a new school year: we must be able to make fun and to enjoy learning. Making children curious, having them asking questions about the world and the learning stuff is making the necessary fun for a positive and open mind - children and adults during a full learning year. And knowing that there will be periods during which it will be a little less.

Experiment and tradition will both be part of the teaching and learning process.

Gerard de Kruif
Editor

The smell of a new school year

A new year: days of excitement for children, for teachers. I remember the first day at school as a child... the new teacher, the new classroom, different decorations, and especially that special smell.

I don’t know why and how to describe that, but on the first day there was always that special after-summer smell. When I smell that again, it arouses a combination of feelings - something trustworthy, excitement about what are we going to do/to learn and who will be the new teacher? And sometimes that specific smell had gone, because of a new chemical smell - fresh paint. That was a pity, but it also gave a kind of: “All is new and fresh”. These feelings all belonged to the first day or days for me as a school boy.
English to Access Good Jobs and Quality Education in South Asia

Many researchers opine that the history of English in South Asia is one of prolonged heated debates and controversies. The controversies about the legacy of English and desirably of its continued place in language policies and its cultural associations have still not abated. The population in South Asia is increasing year by year and so is the number of English speakers.

Since South Asia is linguistically diverse, English can serve as an instrumental link language between countries and regions. English is an official language in India and Pakistan. In the rest of the countries English is used as a language of education and medium of instruction. In Iran, an Asian Muslim nation, English is taught as a foreign language just from Grade 7.

Across the South Asian or Asian region, English is seen as essential in accessing the best education and job opportunities. English was a must only in high-level careers but is in demand now in every walk of life. It has to be used by individuals who come from different walks of life.

As the demand for English has increased across South Asia, English education has become more prominent in the national curricula of these countries—in part to better equip school leavers for the job market. In Bangladesh, for instance, it is mandatory from Grade 1 and an indispensable part of a school leaving certificate. Likewise, in Nepal, English is a compulsory subject right from Pre-School to Tertiary Level.

Low-cost private English-medium schools are mushrooming across the region in response to parental demand for an English background and as a reaction to the low quality of government schools. In Andhra Pradesh, India, for example the choice of private schooling increased from 24 per cent for children born in 1994-5 to the low quality of government schools. In Andhra Pradesh, India, for example the choice of private schooling increased from 24 per cent for children born in 1994-5 to 44 per cent for children born in 2001-2. Private English language tutoring schools are also common across the region.

Bangladesh suggests that if migrant workers were well equipped with vocational skills, including English, the remittance earnings could go up by $30 billion a year. As English is regarded a benchmark of quality education, culture and status across South Asia, knowledge of the language is perceived to lead to enhanced social status.

Not only is South Asia home to nearly one quarter of the world’s population and the most densely populated geographical region in the world but also is the financially poor zone with the lowest GDP per capita. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the countries to facilitate people’s entry into the workforce by proffering them computer literacy, communication skills, vocational training and English language skills and making people cognizant of global occurrences.

This would allow them to take advantage of employment opportunities in both home countries and abroad. Furthermore, on account of English language skills, an individual can be self-employed by running language institutions and expanding business because English is the only means of communication.

After an intensive study of some research, I can say confidently that there is an obvious need for skills’ development in South Asia and that people with higher literacy and numeracy skills and English language skills are more likely to gain employment and earn higher wages. Studies have produced impressive findings, citing increases in wages of 13% for speaking a little English and 34% for speaking it fluently, and such statistics have been celebrated in the media.

The details of such studies, however, are often neglected. English is promoted as if it is a panacea for poverty and skills development, and the fact that English accrues with other socio-economic variables is only likely to be acquired if there is a strong base of general education is not kept in sight.

No matter what research indicates, perceptions and ideologies about the value of English are pervasive and very strong across South Asia - even for the rural poor.

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Despite the increase in the provision of English, the low quality of education that is often provided means that demands are not being met.

Capstick, a researcher, lays emphasis on fluency which leads to increased opportunities for migration among migrants from Pakistan. A piece of research from

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Unemployment rates in South Asian Countries (CIA, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>Youth unemployment (15-24)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>15.5% (2008)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>5.0% (2012)</td>
<td>9.3% (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>6.5% (2012)</td>
<td>10.2% (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>15.5% (2012)</td>
<td>23% (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>46.0% (2008)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>6.2% (2012)</td>
<td>7.7% (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5.2% (2012)</td>
<td>19.4% (2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*India and the Maldives are excluded but Iran added for research purpose.
Autonomy in adulthood is sometimes mistakenly confused with language learning autonomy, which can be considered specific within the overall idea of general autonomy. Many students believe, therefore, that just because they are adults, it can be inferred that they are independent language learners.

The truth is that the level of language learning autonomy differs from student to student depending on their general background and previous language learning experience. In Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas (EOI’s), Spanish state-funded, non-compulsory language schools oriented to students aged 16+, teachers face a heterogeneous, multi-age body of students with a variety of language autonomy level.

Within the framework of life-long learning, the ongoing development and improvement of the adult learner’s language learning autonomy is an important part of language courses that should not be overlooked. In the EOI’s in Comunidad de Madrid, Spain, curricular content for courses aiming at B2 level, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), was outlined by a national educational law in 2006, and later developed by local regulations in 2008.

These latter provisions regard students’ strategic competence as a springboard for the development of language learning autonomy. The development of this competence includes enhancing communication strategies, as well as strategies related to the learning process.

Among those strategies related to the language process, specific components of “learning to learn”—including the development of awareness, motivation, planning, assessment, self-assessment, and self-improvement—were targeted in an action research project I recently undertook with B2 students at EOI level, in which the Biography of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) was used as a classroom-based, assessment tool to boost language learning autonomy.

The ELP Biography facilitated the adult student’s reflection on individual learning strengths and areas of growth so as to strategically establish, in collaboration with the language teacher, attainable learning goals each trimester. When planning, performance quantitative data were used as a start point reference for goal-setting; yet qualitative data provided by students, shared in student-teacher conferences, were prioritized.

Thus, language learning was tailored according to student linguistic and personal needs, disregarding the demands set by curricular linguistic content to some extent, in favor of the individual learning circumstances that influence each student’s ability to learn. Overwhelmed working parents or university students were, as a result, given the opportunity to focus on attainable goals by optimizing their learning strategies and modifying their learning habits to fit their circumstances. In the process, their specifics were identified and highly considered towards shaping a favorable learning context.

In this learning scenario, more than facilitating language learning, the language teacher coached students to ensure their personal satisfaction and to improve their motivation in the hope of, eventually, improving their communicative language competence.

A shared analysis of the student’s ELP Biography led to collaborative-decision making in terms of goal-setting and strategy use, which was agreed upon with the student in a learning contract, signed by both parties at the end of the first student-teacher conference.

Learning contracts were followed

The European Language Portfolio for the Adult’s Learning Autonomy
up and reviewed each trimester on the grounds of new collected data. When following up, student reflection on personal commitment and the efficiency of the strategies practiced, tried, or used was highlighted to establish a new, negotiated, short-term learning route.

For learners who had never experienced strategic learning with the ELP, this student-centered, innovative learning experience resulted in being very positive and rewarding. Students felt valued and in control when involved in the personalization and evaluation of their learning. Considering this, they suggested an extension of conference time (about 20m), even if it meant reducing whole-class learning time. Additionally, data collected in the research project suggested students’ development of all strategic competence aspects related to the language process that the study targeted.

Despite the study being classroom-based, not only does it bring to the fore the ELP Biography to foster learning autonomy when strong learning partnerships are established, but also the urgent need to listen to adult students and negotiate learning.

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Photographs by
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Read news on
www.learningteacher.eu
Since 2015, more than 73,000 students and pupils from 163 Eco-Schools in several EU countries have had a unique opportunity to participate in an international project called ‘We Eat Responsibly’. There are nine countries involved - Malta, Latvia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

It is an action-oriented EU Global Learning Programme aiming to develop critical thinking, knowledge, skills and the new attitudes in the field of responsible food consumption. The programme is coordinated by the Czech think-tank, ‘Glopolis’. It enables young people to adopt new consumption and behaviour patterns and gives the opportunity to their teachers to embed responsible food consumption topics in the curriculum. ‘We Eat Responsibly’ tries to raise awareness of parents and schools’ larger communities about the global impacts of our everyday food choices.

At the beginning of the school year, joint teachers and children Eco-Teams make a food review in their school and distribute questionnaires to the pupils’ households. Based on the results, the team chooses one of the topics of responsible food consumption given to be examined during the whole year. The six topics list includes processed food and palm oil, food waste, excessive meat consumption, local and seasonal food, the gap between producer and consumer and fair trade and agrobiodiversity. The exploration of responsible food consumption is an innovative way to show how schools can contribute to finding solutions to global problems such as biodiversity loss, wasting natural resources, poverty and slave work or deepening of climate change.

Throughout the year, Eco-Teams follow a Seven Steps methodology which is an approved strategy to help schools maximize success. Throughout the year, children learn about the issue they choose by participating in interactive lessons, watching videos, playing games, visiting farms and many other interesting activities.

By the end of the school year, the
Eco-Team organizes an Action Day to inform students, teachers, parents and the broader community about the issues chosen. We have recorded many examples of activities organised by Eco-Teams both in the Czech Republic and in international partner schools. There are just three examples here.

In July 2016, the Grammar school “Hlinská,” in Žilina, Slovakia organized a Student Film Festival. The students presented their own videos about the palm oil, food and social inequalities, fair trade, or food waste. After the screening young directors interpreted symbols and messages used in their films. A discussion followed, facilitated by the teacher. They managed to spread the message of responsible food consumption to the broader community by inviting students from the nearby elementary schools to watch movies together.

The students of the grammar school “Na Vítězné pláni” in Prague, Czech Republic, decided to raise awareness of chocolate production. In November 2015, they made their own “fair chocolate” with fair trade ingredients only. Students also designed an original packaging for the chocolate. After that, they sold the product in the school, while informing their customers about the conditions of workers involved in chocolate production.

In November 2015, “Kalnciems” high school in Jelgava, Latvia, launched a local campaign to stress the importance of the local food choice and to support local or- ganic farmers. The inhabitants of the town were informed about local organic farming products and they were given a vegetable or fruit from the students’ gardens. After that, the students discussed with some local municipal officers the same issue.

More information about the project, many examples of activities and stories about responsible food consumption are at www.eatresponsibly.eu

Table of participating teachers and children from 9 EU countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of schools involved</th>
<th>No. of teachers trained</th>
<th>No. of pupils in eco-teams</th>
<th>No. of pupils participating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>73650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Author: Jiří Marek
We Eat Responsibly communication officer marek@glopolis.org

More photo gallery on the next page
ESD Expert Net: Education for Sustainable Development across borders

The ESD Expert Net connects experts from Germany, India, Mexico and South Africa in a global partnership. Together they promote the international dimension of ESD and develop transnational approaches and implementation strategies, which are then adopted to the needs of the involved countries.

The members of the network, who work for ministries of education, non-governmental organizations, universities and other institutions in the field of ESD, are convinced that the capacity to learn and act together across country borders and continents are core prerequisites for the initiation of long term changes towards a sustainable future. Only through international cooperation can innovative ideas be realized and ESD can be reflected and expanded in its global perspective.

Education as driver of change towards all SDGs
The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 has marked a remarkable progress regarding the efforts to meet the challenges of climate change, poverty and inequalities.

In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have set the global framework for sustainable development from 2000 to 2015, the SDGs apply to all countries and appeal to the responsibility of all human beings when it comes to implementing measures that aim to a just world for present and future generations.

The SDG number four on quality education strives to achieve inclusive, quality education as well as lifelong learning for all. In the course of this, the sub-target to “[…] ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development” affirms the crucial role of education and in particular also ESD as key driver for sustainable development. Education has the potential to be an agent of change towards sustainability across all SDGs.

Common framework for the network’s activities
The SDGs provide a guiding framework for diverse actors that aim at a decent and liveable future. The ESD Expert Net operates along the same principle: The common goals are the undisputed foundation and focus of the network’s activities. However, they do not only serve as a strategic orientation, but also as a practical tool that feeds into the products of the ESD Expert Net.

Example: The SDGs and the network’s Training of Trainers
The ESD Expert Net offers a competence-oriented training for multipliers in the area of education for sustainable development. The target group ranges from teacher trainers to educators in non-formal settings. The trainers’ manual was compiled by network members from all participating countries; the implementation occurs adjusted to the particular national context.

The common backbone of all ToTs is the Whole School Approach or - depending on the group addressed - the Whole Institution Approach. The basis of this concept is a model of sustainable development, which refers to the future-oriented structuring of all areas of life. Besides the curricular implementation of ESD, it focuses on the structural integration of sustainable development in school management and entire school life.

Currently the network revises its ToT-manual with regard to the SDGs. Thereby it is not only a matter of updating contents but especially of pointing out the possibilities to use the SDGs as an instrument of measuring success on an individual and institutional level and as a methodical approach within the scope of school education. Appropriate teaching and learning material will supplement the ToT.

With that and further activities the network would like to demonstrate that the SDGs are more than a framework on the political level: They also rather provide a unique opportunity for practitioners to place sustainable development in all areas of education – and the other way round. More information: http://esd-expert.net

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School continues to use, in many cases, inadequate practices to the reality of today's students. As part of their reflective practices teachers should find and use local and real stimuli in the area they teach, making it a challenging area of expertise, both creative and meaningful.

One of the valuable tools in education is project work, a methodology where learning environments contribute to develop abilities and skills in different areas. Project work promotes students' interaction with others, encourages thinking about real situations and helps students to become more autonomous, interventional and confident, increasing their enjoyment for learning once they are able to understand the relationship between theory and real situations.

Based on the environmental experience of the local community we started a pedagogical project in the School Professor Aníbal Cavaco Silva, Boliqueime, Algarve, Portugal.

The Eco-Green Project: Education for Learning and Valuing the Environment presents a set of practical tasks, teaching young people to become aware of the importance of being in harmony with the planet. In this project the civic education and duties are values that have been worked with the students in order to make them know how to preserve and enhance the environment and become agents of change of their own world.

The first phase of the project was to create a Biological Garden which allowed students to engage in the following experiences:

1) Knowing, feeling and perceiving the nature
   Through practical sessions, orientated by local farmers and two environmental engineers, the students learned the notions of organic farming, permaculture, edible flowers, pollination and bio-pesticides.

   Students identified different types of soil, distinguishing them in poor soils and fertile soils. They learned about soil enrichment processes and how to preserve plant and animal species essential for sustainable agriculture. They also learned how to distinguish autumn, winter, spring and summer vegetables, how to identify companion plants and their function and build liquid fertilizers from wild plants, avoiding any use of chemicals that exhaust the soil and contribute to its imbalance.

2) Land Treatment
   Like any running project, the specific problems that arise need to be solved and that definitely contributes to the learning process. The slope of the plot was not favourable for cultivation so what to do to solve the problem was discussed. The solution was a land elevation, construction sites in wood and planting in a circle, so that the plants had optimal conditions of humidity.

3) Planting in circles and terrain elevation
   There was a great excitement to initiate the construction of the vegetable garden. The place was chosen, a piece of land adjacent to a playground, with good sun exposure, but nettles and weeds in abundance were in the way.

   At first, in small groups of four elements, they decided to photograph the place and draw sketches for the organic garden they intended to build in the school. The sketches were studied and analyzed and in the class they chose the most suitable one.

4) Selection of plants
   According to the guidelines given before, students assimilated the information to carry the placing of plants on the ground. Collaboration and cooperation were evident and, scattered in small groups, they gave some guidance to each other, as to the combination of vegetable and companion planting to put on the garden in order to have an abundant crop.

   They visited the garden every week and followed the plants growing whilst attending to the extraction of invasive
5) Living Lab Learning
The educational garden allowed the approach of several natural science topics. The classes are now taught outdoors and the study of the soil, the ambient conditions for the germination, the growth and development of plants and the importance of pollination in organic farming, were the main subjects studied.

A Living Lab provides students with a set of real experiences, in which theory and practice are connected and practical activities consolidate knowledge. Students learn to use their cognitive, intellectual and sensory abilities, develop attention and concentration, and focus on the activities carried out to ensure the desired success. To observe and witness the growth of different agricultural plants, a process that goes from the placement of the seed to the crop of the fruit, gave them a sense of protection, preservation, responsibility and knowledge of nature.

Finally it was time to show the school and the local community what our young people learned and were able to design. The second phase of this project was the organization of The Eco-Green Fair: “From Seed to Food”. The richness of this event is assumed in its transversal nature with the participation and contribution of different subjects involved, namely: Natural Sciences, Civic Education and Visual Education.

Several stalls were exposed at the fair, each one under a specific subject:

- The “Green Eggs”, one of the exposed stalls, presented and taught how to harness and recycle eggshells to plant seedlings.
- “Take your cans” was related to the cultivation of herbs and teas. Students created flyers with information on the benefits of the herbs and teas, presented curious facts and healthy recipes with them. Aluminum cans, were recycled, painted and decorated and filled with herbs and teas. For each can a flyer with explanations and information about its content was made.
- The Bio-pesticides showed the use of wild plants, berries, manure, blue soap, black pepper, garlic extract, among others. The principles of healthy eating were not neglected!

There were three stalls designed for the purpose, “Germination of edible seeds and flowers”, “Natural tasting” and “Nature’s Flavors”. These stalls had salty foods rich in vegetable protein, cakes made with vegetables, but without sugar and small healthy breakfasts consisting of fruit, yoghurt and natural cereals (oats overnight). The milkshakes, natural juices and detox, were based on fruits and vegetables as healthy and less calorific as possible. All those products were completely conceived and produced by the student aiming at a healthy and beneficial food.

The Live Learning Labs help to improve students’ learning conditions, valuing and respecting their differences and enhancing their abilities. Based on the students’ everyday culture, this type of learning is supported by interesting activities for the learner and in ways that meet their previous knowledge and aptitudes.

It is of great importance that the school recognizes and values the role of project work in students’ learning, namely about ways of responsibly intervening in the real world as the above project has been revealing.

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There have been several Comenius projects running in our school, Súkromné Gymnázium, Vážska 32 in Bratislava - Slovakia and this school year we decided to do something different.

We applied for the project and it is co-funded by the EEA Grants and the state budget of the Slovak Republic from the EEA Scholarship Program Slovakia. EEA Grants cover projects focused on cooperation with countries such as Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein. We found our partner school in Lorenskog, Norway.

The initial idea of this project called PLAY! comes from Slovakia from the current coordinator Vladimir Michalka and he came up with the main idea to teach students new skills in a playful way. We focused on three different areas of teaching: drama, diplomacy and sport. These study areas correspond with the specializations of the Slovak school.

Through drama, we wanted to introduce our national heroes, dance and literature to each other. So we prepared a performance. Songs, poems, dance, dialogues and more were blended into a play. During the first project meeting that was held in Lokenasen Skole, Lorenskog Norway we performed our plays in front of an audience. Besides presenting the show, we had a really rich programme that covered the other two areas. Regarding diplomacy, we visited the Norwegian parliament and as for the sport we played floorball. Moreover, we visited a Viking ship and the Fram museum. I think that our pupils have learned how to act on the stage and how to play different roles. They have experienced a new country and culture through the host families.

Social studies played an important role in the second part of the project. Our pupils were put in the role of politicians and they took a stand on topics such as human rights, democracy and refugees. They prepared presentations about these topics and presented them online.

We had mutual lessons where we could exchange our knowledge, information and experience. This time they learned how to express their opinions and how to support them. This part of the programme taught
them how to adopt the role of a politician who makes important decisions.

The third part was dedicated to sport and particularly to playing golf. It was during the second meeting in Súkromné Gymnázium School in Bratislava, Slovakia where the golf season had already started in April. Our pupils had roles of counsellors and golf instructors as well as tour guides and cooks. During this week, we had team building activities and icebreakers to get to know each other better. We went for several excursions such as: Red Stone Castle, a Bratislava City Tour, the TV tower Koliba, the Presidential Palace and the museum of Bratislava.

Pupils prepared delicious food every day including barbecues. As for golf, pupils adopted the roles of golf instructors and they took these roles really seriously. They learned how to manage their roles as instructors and take a responsibility for teaching golf techniques. We learned that we can rely on our pupils when they are acting on behalf of teachers.

They succeeded in teaching and they felt that they were important to the whole project. We let them feel proud of what they have done, because they performed in an excellent way.

We hope that pupils would like to PLAY with us again.

This project confirmed that a playful way of teaching and learning is a very motivating method and we will put pupils into leading roles more often to create opportunities to build their self-confidence.
A cloud module of Dutch for refugees

About one year ago, the refugee crisis was at its highest as many hundreds of thousands of Syrian native speakers of Arabic arrived in Europe. In the chaos of that moment and even later, many of them tried to reach the Western-European countries, especially Germany, but also Belgium.

For the first time in the modern era, our societies were confronted with the problem of integrating many thousands who had no means, spoke another language and had another culture. Immediately it has been clear for all concerned, that the knowledge of the local language was one of the keys for a successful integration as it is needed when looking for housing or work.

But here the challenge was new, big and diverse. At first, the number of teachers of the local language (i.e. Dutch) having a certain degree of Arabic was very small. Even teaching materials were often missing. The target group was very diverse: from analphabetic to university degree level.

Seeing this situation, the Center of Applied Linguistics (CAL) of Hasselt University (BE) in collaboration with its spin-off CommArt International, both located in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, decided to develop a cloud course of Dutch for native speakers of Arabic. The targeted level was A1, the targeted didactic approach for autonomous learning.

The scenario of the module elaborated by CAL in the framework of a former LLP-project and the authoring platform EMCG (electronic multimedia course generator) owned by CommArt were made available for free. A successful appeal has been made to Arabic natives studying at UHasselt and with the help of eight of them, the existing e-module EN-NL has been transformed to the cloud module AR(Arabic)-NL for beginners.

The module comprises four parts, each offering eight lessons, each starting with a short dialogue or text and offering five or six exercises. As the module is conceived for autonomous learning, it combines in one environment all instruments needed. The learner has at his disposal a contrastive dictionary of approximately 2000 items, the translation of each starting text or dialogue, the oral version of the basic dialogue in the two main accents of Dutch, the necessary grammatical explanations, short information about some cultural items (eating, phoning, shopping, traveling, housing...), a number of short thematic lexical lists and formulas for specific communicative situations.

This brand new hi-tech product has been introduced by means of a press conference. It has immediately been warmly welcomed with a massive demand. Therefore the decision has been made to add a second more labour market oriented module based on the same principles and following the same production procedure.

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Who doesn’t like to be read to in the evening before going to sleep?

The VoorleesExpress offers this experience to children who grow up with language delays in a family where reading to children is not a habit. As research shows, children who are read to at an early age have an advantage. It has a positive effect on language development.

My sister and I started the ‘VoorleesExpress’ (Reading Express) as a small scale initiative in the Kanaleneiland district of Utrecht, an area with many immigrants, low social cohesion and high crime rates. We grew up with a lot of books, were fond of reading, curious about other cultures and concerned about the language and literacy skills of the children in the area.

From 10 to 4000 families a year
In 2016 we have been working on the development and the rollout of the concept. In those years the Reading Express has grown from a small initiative to a national programme with a reach of 4000 families a year. What started out as an intuitive approach has developed into a professional method. We now work together with national partners concerning education, literacy and reading promotion.

We started in the city of Utrecht, but expanded to other locations using a franchise-based system. In each district of the country, one self-contained organization, for instance a welfare or volunteer organization or a public library, delivers the Reading Express programme. The franchises are supported through training events, tools, materials and the exchange of knowledge and tips.

How does it work?
The Reading Express volunteers visit families weekly in the evening at their homes over a period of twenty weeks. The volunteers read to the children and will involve the parents. The focus is on providing support for parents so that they can read to their children, or stimulate the language in other ways by themselves.

Reading should be fun!
Our challenge was to professionalize our approach and make it scalable, and in the meantime keep the project approachable. We aim to make impact, but we constantly keep in mind that the most important thing is that the families that join, and our volunteers, must feel comfortable and enjoy themselves. It is exciting to get to know each other, learn from each other and reading should be fun. We develop (online) tools and materials to inspire them and challenge them.

Collaboration with primary schools and pre-schools
An important objective of the Reading Express is also to strengthen home-school partnerships so that both school and parents are actively engaged in children’s development, and literacy teaching is supplemented and supported by families. Over the years we have seen that the schools’ responsibility and that of the parents were kept separate.

Often teachers have no idea what the home situation is of their pupils. They never visit children at home and have not much time to speak with parents. This is a shame because we have learned there is so much to win in the home situation. A child spends only about thirty percent of its time at school, so a lot of its development takes place outside school. And what we see is that most parents are very willing to stimulate their children more, but they do not know how or feel too insecure.

Within the VoorleesExpress we have created several tools and contact moments to facilitate the exchange between teachers, parents and volunteer.

European ambition?
We see that the social issues that we aim at are global issues. Right now we are only working in the Netherlands and cannot support initiatives outside the Netherlands. But we are very willing to translate the success of our approach to other countries. Are you enthusiastic about our approach? Do you feel the need for it in your practice? How would it fit into the way your education system is designed? We are very open to professionals with good ideas!

Anne Heinsbroek
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The Reading Express can be found in the Effective Literacy Practices Database of Unesco.

Photos: © Jelmer de Haas
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Moofy ‘Improve learning by moving!’

In September 2014, Neda Mutabdzija and Michiel de Bruijn met each other during the start of the Master International Sport Management at the Johan Cruyff Institute in Amsterdam. They both decided to do this study and to switch from their current jobs into a career in sports. Neda was working in the financial sector in Amsterdam and Michiel was a director of a primary school in the north of the Netherlands.

During the studies they decided to cooperate as partners to create the final assignment of that year; the Master business plan. This was the start of a successful team and the start of Moofy.

Moofy is a digital platform with many short movies of 3 minutes with all different kinds of exercises for children. The Moofys can be played at the digi board in the classroom. The short workout takes place behind or beside the table of the children. The music starts to play, the (famous) person in the movie introduces and explains the movements and the children can start to move right away.

After 2.5 minutes the cooling down starts, so the children can switch from the workout to the next lesson. Every month new movies are available at the website so the number and variety of workouts, energizers and fun movements will grow continuously. Teachers can use the Moofys without any preparation and within 20 seconds the entire class is moving.

Michiel has a lot of knowledge and experience as a director in primary education and noticed during his career that most of the teachers were having problems managing the concentration and focus of the class during the entire school day. This is where the idea for Moofy started.

We believe that it is increasingly important to create a good balance for children between concentrating and learning during the school day and to have time to move and relax between the lessons. After testing our prototype in 21 classes, 85% of the teachers said they were very positive about Moofy and would like to use it. Both the children and the teachers said Moofy helped to improve the concentration and that the Moofys were fun to do with the class.

Several studies show that moving during the school day stimulates the brain and helps to improve the concentration of the children and their results at school. Their focus will be better because they had time to move. The three minute exercises are fun and helping to renew their focus for the next lesson.

Moofy gives the teachers an instrument to let the children ‘discharge’ and to involve some entertainment in their lessons which helps both children and teachers. Schools can buy a yearly subscription to be able to use Moofy.

There are two major reasons why teachers are facing problems in managing their class in the Netherlands and why using Moofy is important and relevant:

• ‘Passend Onderwijs’ (inclusive primary schools) was introduced in education. This policy is resulting in fewer children being referred to special schools. They will stay at a regular primary school and this means that the composition of the groups has become more arduous for the teachers to manage, because of the presence of different types of children.

• Our educational system is mainly focused on verbal instruction by the teacher and individual work of the children afterwards. Many children have a need to move regularly to create a better balance between tension (concentration) and relaxation, so they are able to switch between the lessons and subjects.

After finishing the Masters study, Neda and Michiel started their own company and several companies and potential partners were interested in cooperating. Recently the Moofy site was finished and ready for all primary schools in the Netherlands. It is our ambition to help children and teachers to have a better balanced school day and to improve learning by moving!

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The St. Lawrence Primary School in Gozo organized a Project related to Citizenship Education. Ms Marcelle Vella and Mr Jeremy Vella, peripatetic PSCD (Personal, Social and Career Education subject) teachers facilitated a number of lessons with different groups of students.

The outcomes of the lessons were that of helping students explore how their participation and contribution to groups in the community enhances both intra and interpersonal skills and develop a connection with their community.

The lessons’ main emphasis was on the good qualities each and every student has which could be demonstrated during one’s participation in the different types of leisure. Students were given the chance to explore and discuss why it is important to belong to a group/s in the community, like a football team, scout group, folk group, ballet, jazz, choir, altar boys, band club, drums, jockey group, basketball team and Skola Skola Sport (where children participate in a number of different sport activities), etc.

Through different activities and processing (questioning, probing, ...) students understood how they benefited from being part of a group, like making new friends, enjoying themselves, breaking from routine, learning new skills and helping each other. Students also had the opportunity to learn about the necessary elements to make a group successful. They also discussed some important qualities like assertiveness, fairness, respect, good communication, commitment, punctuality, listening, patience, trust, collaboration, honesty, responsibility optimism and tolerance.

The project was concluded with a 'Show and Do' activity during an Open Day, organized for the families and classmates of the students participating. The students eagerly participated exhibiting objects they had made and skills they had learned. For example, some students spoke about the role of being members of a football team. They showed their football kit and explained why they wore the shin guards. They showed medals they had won and certificates awarded. They also showed some skills they had learned like ball passing, dribbling and juggling. One could feel the excitement and enthusiasm demonstrated by the students.

Other students spoke about their folk group. They wore their traditional costumes and danced with the music. Another student showed some hula-hooping skills on the stage and made a performance using the hula-hoop. Other students had the opportunity to speak about Jazz and Ballet Dance Groups and performed a dance, which was highly appreciated by the fellow students.

The ‘Show and Do’ activity was a successful and rewarding experience for all students, headmaster, teachers and parents / carers. It was evident that students felt a sense of pride and satisfaction.

Through the lessons and ‘Show and Do’ activity, students also practised a number of skills like self-awareness, building confidence, good communication skills, respect, co-operating with others and responsibility.

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Quality Education

The Sustainable Development Agenda (Agenda 2030)
On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit — officially came into force. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

Goal 4: Quality Education
The Sustainable Development Goal number 4 in particular highlights education and training:

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes
4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education
4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development

Additional support
Accompanying the Sustainable Development Framework is the Incheon Declaration (pdf) adopted by around 1600 participants at the World Education Forum held in Incheon, Republic of Korea in May 2015. The Declaration represents the firm commitment of countries and the global education community to a single, renewed education agenda.

An Education 2030 Framework for Action was adopted in November 2015 by UNESCO together with Member States, which outlines how to translate global commitments into practice at a country, regional and global level.
Empowering young people in Egypt

In Egypt, 9.2 million children and young people live in poverty, while an additional 7.5 million are vulnerable to it. Since children and young people constitute more than half (56%) of Egypt’s population, it is crucial to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The public education system in Egypt does not provide children and young people with the skills that enable them to make effective and empowering financial decisions to effect change in their lives. Social and Financial Education (SFE) can play a key role in achieving this, through empowering students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will allow them to make savvy and effective financial decisions that will reduce the possibility of their financial vulnerability which, in turn, reduces their risk of poverty.

In 2015, Aflatoun International and Plan International started an Erasmus+ programme targeting 1265 children and young people living in four rural villages in Qalubeya governorate, namely Ramada, Nay, Kom Ashfin, and Minyet Shebin. In total, 821 young people aged 15 -18 years old, who are both in and out of school, and 444 children took part (60% of the total were girls). Participants were organised into 60 youth or children clubs, each associated with the village’s local Community Development Association (CDA).

The Aflatoun International programme is delivered using active and child-centred learning methodologies. As part of the programme, children and young people join a club. These are democratically run venues for action and decision-making. Participants are encouraged to develop (joint) small-scale social enterprise or social justice campaigns; they save money and other resources on a small scale and run small financial enterprises.

The programme activities combine play and practical learning experiences, improving children’s and young people’s ability to play a significant role in the matters that affect them.

Results
Participating children and young people had clear improved social and financial skills as well as changes in behaviour and attitude: students taking part acquired a number of core social skills, including a heightened self-confidence, ability for self-expression, and problem-solving, being active agents of change in their communities, and an increased knowledge of their rights and duties. They also developed money management skills by becoming engaged in group savings and developing more responsible spending habits. In addition, boys and girls became more responsible, modest, cooperative, disciplined, and more respectful to adults. Their changed perception on gender roles and relations was a key added value of the programme for both sexes.

Conclusion
The programme can play a pivotal role in establishing a successful and replicable model for Social and Financial Education in Egypt through blending financial and social learning to achieve integrated and sustainable empowerment for children and young people.

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Subscript:
Founded in 2005 in Amsterdam, Aflatoun International is a NGO providing Social and Financial Education (SFE). Our programmes reach 4.1 million children and young people worldwide annually through 192 partners working in 116 countries.

Founded in 1937, Plan International is a development and humanitarian organisation that advances children’s rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners.

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