On top of the world

I am a thinker and I enjoy thinking

A network making the difference

Opinion polls on sustainability

Gender sensitive teaching
Leadership is a wide concept concerning people who are leaders or taking the lead. But what is a leader and esp. what is an educational leader? First thoughts are about school leaders or educational researchers. However each teacher in the classroom and outside of it can be, will be, and must be an educational leader. Educational leaders focus on the teaching and learning process of learners. They are familiar with knowledge about organising their teaching and at the same time familiar with the skills of how to do that. The same goes for education in the sense of pedagogy.

Over the last decade there has been a tendency to focus more and more on the teaching skills and the skills to support students in their learning. Everyday education was seen as part of the task that parents have. Schools concentrated on the other side of the education: more and more on the learning part, but less on the pedagogy.

Internationally, we notice that the focus, the pendulum, is swinging back and increasingly society expects schools to address education leadership again in its full meaning (education and pedagogy). However, there is one difference with the past. What we see now is a shared leadership between schools, teachers and parents when it comes to education. Parents are consulting specialists and teachers, and teachers are interested to know how things are going at home. It looks like schools and parents are satisfied with this shift. The Magazine would like to support this kind of co-educating between schools and parents.

Gerard de Kruif
Editor

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Front page photo
Image credit: Irena Spahić
Language learning in the 21st century has new tools at hand. Tools like blogs, virtual learning communities, podcasts, wikies enable a new approach to the process of teaching and learning a foreign language, making it more communicative, dynamic and immediate.

These new tools emerging from the Web 2.0 (the two-way web) allow combining and recombining in order to make new patterns, images and interpretations of reality. Web 2.0 is all about sharing, exchanging, cooperating, learning with peers.

Virtual learning communities (VLCs) are emerging and are important because they are based on the desire of participants in the community to learn from each other.

With this in mind, and knowing that students are familiar with these new tools and enjoy using them, I created a virtual learning community for the French language subject. The students are Portuguese teenagers in their first year of French as a foreign language.

The proposal was made at the beginning of the school year and immediately accepted and applauded. This environment permits each student to have his/her own space and at the same time, sharing it with the others.

In this space they are able to publish texts, videos, photos, films, music; they may open a discussion, announce events, comment on each others, etc. The whole environment is in French and the language used is always French.

The management of the platform is carried out by me, their French teacher, and one of my most important tasks within this project is to maintain and strengthen the activity between the members of the community.

So, this means that no one is left without an answer or a comment to what she or he does in her/his own personal space. The students quite often visit the platform out of the classroom and leave messages, change their personal pages and publish different things.

Although they are learning French for the first time and their vocabulary and sentence structure are incipient, they participate and are committed to this collective production.

The foreign language, far from being an obstacle is a medium, a linguistic structure inside another structure that they dominate and are familiar with. Sentences like: “Salut, ça va?”, “Ta page est très cool”, “Salut! Ta page est magnifique”, “Ta page est jolie aussi” show that they use the communicative competence of the language more than the grammar structures. This kind of communication is not often used in the classroom. Here they are commenting on the pages of one another and they feel they have the competence for this kind of task because this is what the ‘digital natives’ are doing in their lives.


Accompanying this text, the student published photos of herself dancing. By doing this, they are using different ways of communicating.

Using a Virtual Learning Community (Web 2.0 tool), the learning process is more effective, affective, richer and more engaging. The entire method is a more interactive and interpersonal one. Students have some freedom of choice, they participate at their own pace, make their own choices, collaborate and learn with their peers, and they have fun.

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“Apprendre le Français, c’est super”
Using Web 2.0 tools to learn French

“These students say in an implicit way - ‘here I know how to be and how I want to be’. So, this means that here they are learning.”
After thinking about this for a long time I finally did it. I moved from the Netherlands to Aruba, (Dutch Caribbean). What you’re about to read is my experience on Aruba, not facts!

The first two weeks of August was spent getting things started for my new live here and preparing in my classroom. I wanted to see the school and meet my colleagues. Which materials were available in the school? Not so many as I was used to, as it turned out. Of course the text books were there and everything is in Dutch. But they were all new to me. Especially “Zonnig Nederlands”, a language method made for the Dutch Caribbean.

The problem is, even if they do speak Dutch words and pronunciation are different. Dutch books mostly follow the seasons, and well… sunshine is here all year round! The school language is Dutch, but people speak Papiamento, Spanish or English!

The language turned out to be a big problem for me. I am teaching 7-8 year olds. Most children don’t speak Dutch at home. They start learning Dutch when they start learning how to read and write. So the children are about 6 years old. Of course they attend nurseries and kindergartens but the language there is Papiamento.

Then they start primary school and it is all in Dutch. The teacher speaks Papiamento but the materials are in Dutch. It is already quite difficult for a child to learn to read in his own language. Imagine, they have to learn to read in a foreign language. But I am not teaching this age group, I am teaching second grade. So they had learned Dutch for a full year.

Lucky for me because I don’t speak Papiamento yet. And then it turns out they hardly speak Dutch or understand one word I was saying! What did I get myself into?? I felt like I couldn’t teach anymore, had no control over what was happening in my classroom. And I felt bad.

But I was lucky, one of my colleagues came to offer me some help. Twice a week she is in the classroom next door. We opened the door and after one week things got better. Language is still a big problem every moment of the day. I have no internet or computer in my classroom to support me to make things visible for the children. And I told the children if there’s a word you don’t know, please tell me. You might imagine I ended up explaining words all day, every day. I was making drawings on the blackboard, looking for the word in Papiamento in my dictionary or using my blackberry to show a picture.

They were supposed to learn more words, but if they do not understand the meaning of the words, how can they understand the texts that they have to read?

The funny thing is, I have a few kids who read Dutch very well, but they have hardly any clue as to what they’re reading. What I mean is: working here is a big challenge for me. I have been here for almost 5 months now. Things slowly get better, the kids are starting to use more Dutch. And hopefully they are beginning to understand more Dutch as well.

The funny thing is, when I have supervision during playtime, the first grade kids come to tell me things in the local language and my kids help out by translating. And it is working more and more. Of course sometimes I am guessing what they mean, as I am sure they are doing the same the other way round.

The tasks they undertake are getting better and better, for example, dictation words or sentences. During the first few weeks nobody got good grades. I have a very different accent than my colleagues from Aruba, so the words sound very strange to the children. So I began dictating words every day for about 2 months.

Now the kids are doing very well. Not all of them all of the time but nothing like the beginning. They are getting used to me and my way of talking and teaching.

And now I can speak a few words in Papiamento, because my kids are teaching me as well. In March my Papiamento course will start, that might make things easier. It is a new experience and I’m enjoying every moment of it.

Yvonne Verver
Rosa College, Aruba (Dutch Antilles)
Opinion polls on sustainability at the NHL University

The NHL University is a medium-sized university of applied sciences, located in The Netherlands. We have just completed an initial study on how NHL is addressing the issue of sustainability. We think that many other teachers, lecturers, or executives from schools across the EU might be puzzled with this issue.

So we would like to share the results and would welcome your feedback and your experiences.

Three topics have been addressed:
1. What are the recent developments in education in relation to sustainability (EU, The Netherlands, other universities),
2. How is sustainability dealt with within NHL university today (May-June 2010),
3. What is the opinion of students and lecturers on sustainability at NHL?

The question was raised by the Executive Board on how the NHL University should address sustainability in its study programs? What are the pressures and requests from outside? How is the issue of sustainability addressed up to now within NHL, according to students and lecturers?

Frank Zeldenrust and Bertwin Kampman, two Public Management students, have been working on this as part of the minor Global Sustainability, coached by Petra Esser.

The aim of the study was to advise the Executive Board of NHL on how to deal with sustainability at the NHL University in the near future. Methods used were a desk study, interviews with key persons and questionnaires among students and lecturers (May-June 2010).

From 10,000 students, 678 responded and from approximately 800 lecturers, 52 responded.

The desk study revealed, that in Europe and in The Netherlands specifically, there are no clear guidelines or regulations on how to incorporate sustainability issues into higher education studies.

Currently, a wide range of diverse initiatives has been developed in studies at Dutch Universities.

It was recognized that sustainability includes such subjects as CSR (Corporate Social responsibility), climate effect, renewable energy, MDG’s (Millennium Development Goals), cradle to cradle, and also that it is not a well defined issue. However, the results of the questionnaires amongst students were rather clear:
- The majority of our students (69.8%) are of the opinion, that NHL has not been active enough on the issue of sustainability;
- They want more information on sustainable developments within NHL University (75.3%);
- And, they are of the opinion that more should be done in this area (82.7%).

From the lecturers we noted that:
- A majority of the lecturers (79.2 %) agree that sustainability is more and more important;
- They do not notice that NHL University is active in this area (66.7%);
- And they want to be better informed on new developments (72.2%);
- Finally, lecturers are of the opinion that more should be done by NHL about sustainability (87.2%).

This summer the report has been submitted to the Executive Board, whose members have shown their appreciation on the content and the on work of our students.

The students have recommended that NHL should install a knowledge team or expert centre on sustainability, in which interested lecturers from the four institutes would participate. This team should work out in more detail how to integrate sustainability into the over 70 different bachelor studies at NHL.

The authors would like to include the help of some of our students, as we did in starting up the minor Global Sustainability in 2007. Furthermore, NHL should plan how to include sustainability in all aspects of the university as a business (e.g. corporate purchasing). We are now awaiting more concrete action plans. Since NHL has a demand-driven education policy, we expect our Board is taking the results seriously.

We hope our approach may be inspiring for others in the education sector, although we realize that further work should be done and we are only at the beginning. We are looking forward to hearing about other attempts made to deal with this challenging issue of sustainability.

All feedback is welcome!

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The influence of light on learning

A Dutch worldwide active electronic company finished a joined research study in Germany (Hamburg) and The Netherlands to find out if classroom light had influence on learners.

A new lighting system for classrooms was developed and tested together with the Technical University of Twente (Netherlands). The research question was whether variety in colour of the light and the power of the light would have a positive contribution on the concentration, behaviour and learning achievements of children in primary schools.

Compared to schools where the classroom lighting was as usual (= normal) first results (March 2010) were the following: With the new light system children immediately had an average of 8.7% improvement on their concentration. For comprehensive reading the difference is even higher: 10.3%.

The results are sustainable. After a month children had an average higher score of 13.6% on concentration.

How is it working? The day starts with a clear light (comparable to a bright unclouded summer day) to arouse energy. The day ends e.g. with ‘rest’, light comparable to a soft evening sun. The teachers press 4 optional light modes depending on the activity: energy, rest, standard and concentration.

For further information: http://www.lighting.philips.co.uk/pwc_li/main/shared/assets/downloads/pdf/schoolvision/FINAL_Hamburg_case_study_LR.pdf


The network now on facebook

The Learning Teacher Network is now on facebook. The network wants to be more visible and active in social media. The ambition is to improve information and dialogue, enhance social networking, widen the group of network friends and make network initiatives more well known and discussed.

The name of the network page is The Learning Teacher Network with the direct link www.facebook.com/learningteachernetwork

Welcome!

More Afghan girls at school

Through support from UNICEF the number of Afghan children attending school has increased from around 700,000 in 2002 to 7 million in 2010. The UNICEF programme is titled Basic Education and Gender Equality in Afghanistan and aims mainly to increase equality at school. The programme includes the entire country and contributes to 500,000 more girls attending school. Furthermore, the girls can continue to higher classes.

The support also contributes to increase quality of education, to ensure continuing schooling in situations of crises and to strengthen women’s position through reading and writing skills.

ICT to integrate American education

Recently the United States has adopted a new national strategy for how teaching and learning in American schools need to develop in order to meet the more and more rapid change of society.

The answer is ICT (Information and Communication Technology). The action plan is built on integrating ICT at school as a natural part of the daily work in schools.

When the reform was presented, the US Minister of Education Arne Duncan described five main areas in which ICT will play a major role ahead: learning, assessment, teaching, infrastructure, and productivity.

“Through entirely integrating ICT in everything that the teachers do, we can give our students the digital skills and experiences which they need to be successful in the future”, Arne Duncan said.

Key documents on EU policies in education and training

On this website you can find a compendium of key documents on EU policies in education and training:


Women in focus at World Congress

For the first time the international teacher organisation “Education International” (EI) will arrange a conference with female perspectives.

The title of the conference is “On the Road to Equality” and will be held in Bangkok, Thailand in January 2011.

Two of the three main themes of the conference are to strengthen the female networks within EI and to highlight the importance of education for girls’ and women’s future opportunities. The third theme aims to describe the current situation for women around the world.

The results of the discussions will be a base for further discussions at the EI’s 6th World Congress in July 2011.

Education International is a global association of teacher organisations that represent 30 million teachers and education workers from pre-schools to universities.

Read more on www.ei-ie.org/en/aboutus/
I am a Thinker and I enjoy Thinking

The ability to think, solve problems, take decisions and be creative is crucial for all in today’s rapidly changing world. Many educators and researchers believe that specific knowledge will not be as important to tomorrow’s workers and citizens as the ability to learn and make sense of new information (Gough, 1991).

Six Thinking Hats Methods
Research has shown that Edward de Bono’s CoRT (Cognitive Research Trust) and Six Thinking Hats methods are excellent tools for the teaching of thinking as a skill.

Edward de Bono is world renowned for his development of thinking methods in the areas of creative and conceptual thinking. The CoRT thinking method has been specifically designed for Education which as de Bono argues has always been focused on the ‘what is’ type of thinking rather than the ‘what can be’ type of thinking (de Bono 1992). This method is practiced in various schools around the globe.

In Malta, a small group of teachers hold dedicated thinking classes encouraging pupils to leverage these tools in other subjects and their daily lives. Music, pictures, story-telling and role-playing are used to teach this method to children with diverse learning preferences and abilities.

Thinking tools
The CoRT method includes thinking tools such as:

* PMI (Plus Minus Interesting) for the widening of perception;
* CAF (Consider all Factors) for the exploration of a situation thoroughly before taking a decision or a course of action;
* APC (Alternatives Possibilities Choices) for the generation of ideas;
* FIP (First Important Priorities) for picking up what is most important;
* OPV (Other People’s Views) for looking at and understanding other viewpoints;
* C&S (Consequence and Sequel) for pinpointing the consequences of some action or plan;
* AGO (Aims Goals Objectives) for a direct focus on the intention behind actions.

Each of the thinking tools enables pupils to direct their thoughts in specific directions.

A range of strategies
The thinking tools are thus a range of strategies and processes which the learner acquires and makes use of in order to think more broadly, to make a creative effort in any situation, to consider different points of view and to consider consequences of his/her actions.

This is a directed effort to enhance ‘operacy’ (a term coined by de Bono, as opposed to ‘literacy’ and ‘numery’) wherein importance is explicitly given to thinking concerned with ‘doing’, the skill of getting things done. This leads to improved decision making and problem solving skills both within and outside the classroom.

References:
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Ms. Tania Farrugia is a Thinking Skills teacher at the Education Department in Malta and lectures in Lateral Thinking and Creativity in Education at the University of Malta.
On the top of the world

Finland balances on the top of the world when it comes to education: Pisa results tell about the high quality of Finnish education and Newsweek informs us that Finland is ranked as the number one country for education.

The ‘high quality of teacher education in Finland’ is quoted as the reason for this. All teachers, from pre-school to high school have done their masters degree in some area of education. Another explanation for Finland’s top ranking is the vast pedagogical freedom teachers have in their work: the curriculum defines the topics of teaching but the implementation as well as teaching arrangements are left to individual teacher’s professional consideration.

Results, such as those from PISA, inform us of the educational situation for students in different countries. One advantage of the Finnish education system is the fact that it is free all the way to university.

And not only is the education free, but also the school lunch and the learning materials. There are very few private schools and the municipalities that organize education, are guided by law. It’s obligatory to have many quality standards in the education system.

Every child in Finland has to have an equal opportunity to study no matter where they live or where they come from. This makes many demands on each and every school, such as a demand to organize native language or religion lessons.

However it is not easy to stay on the top. The Finnish education system has remained unchanged since the early 80s, but now the Finnish government is considering some changes to curriculum and subjects within.

Politics debate whether to increase the hours of the school week closer to European standard. Surprisingly Finnish students spend less time at school than in other countries. Also there are pressures to add more subjects, such as ethics and drama, to our curriculum.

Drama skills are very welcome to Finnish inwards!!! but the question arises, as to where the principals will find highly educated drama or ethics teachers for every school? There is a lot of work to be done in university education to fill this gap.

It seems that not only the teachers but also the school management is facing new challenges: staying at the top requires new kind of leadership and management skills.

There is a new generation of principals: highly educated in strategic leadership and management and very ambitious to develop schools to face the new requirements. These skills are essential in our everchanging and increasingly demanding environment.

I work as a principal in a very multicultural school but also as a member of the Helsinki education department’s quality team. Our work is to keep Helsinki at the top of Finland’s education system, at the top of the world. We are about to create and define specific quality standards of schools in our capital.

Even in the very beginning of our work we have noticed that many of those quality standards already exist. We just have to acknowledge them.

To keep the Finnish education system at the top might seem like an easy solution but the pyramid cannot be built from the top down. You have to start from the foundations: reading, writing, counting and learning to learn. When the foundation is solid the rest is easy.

After all, you cannot prevent a child from learning.

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Visible Learning

As highlighted in The Learning Teacher Magazine 3/2010, Professor John Hattie at Auckland University, New Zealand, authored a study (first published in 2009) on effective teachers all around the world.

Through 15 years research he synthesized 800 meta-analyses on the influences on achievement in school-ages students and built a story about the power of teachers, feedback, and a model of learning and understanding.

The research involved 83 million students and represents the largest ever evidence based research into what actually works in schools to improve learning.

The research found six evidence based signposts towards excellence in education.

PISA 2009 Results

The OECD’s influential triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 report, which gathers information on educational systems, schools, families and students through surveys of school leaders, students and parents was launched yesterday.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a system of international assessments that focuses on 15-year-olds’ capabilities in reading literacy, mathematics literacy, and science literacy. PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies such as problem solving. PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.

PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries. Begun in 2000, PISA is administered every 3 years. Each administration includes assessments of all three subjects, but assesses one of the subjects in depth.

The latest edition, PISA 2009, the fourth since 2000, is a collection of five reports covering 65 countries - including the 33 OECD member states - which comprise almost 90% of the world’s economy, to assess how 15-year-old students are performing in reading, mathematics and science. This report focuses on reading literacy.

The report’s focus on reading with an assessment framework that includes printed texts as well as electronic texts, also measures mathematical and scientific competencies, and presents questions used to gather information from schools, students and parents on students’ home backgrounds and learning environments.

PISA 2009’s focus on trend analysis over the past decade states that some countries’ results have improved; others have regressed, while some have remained the same.

Overall, PISA 2009 shows minor developments because most participating countries achieve similar results to the past.

Just as in the last report, PISA 2006, variation among the core group of 35 countries is smaller than that between students across all levels in each country separately. It is the difference between students and schools that makes overall achievements inequitable, not differences between education systems.

Some countries are out of average range, although there is an observable correlation between levels of socio-economic development and aggregate performance. In general, richer countries with more funding in education demonstrate better results than poorer ones.

In PISA 2009, OECD argues that the biggest improvements of “country performance” (rise in ranking) are achieved by narrowing proportions of students in the lowest levels, rather than increasing top levels.

Only one country, Canada, has so far completed a longitudinal study, tracking students over a number of years.

For most countries, PISA remains a snapshot sample of different 15 year-olds in each cycle. PISA reports the performance of different students in different countries (each edition of the report also brings in new countries) at different times, in different social, political and economic circumstances.

Read more on http://www.pisa.oecd.org

Contents of the “PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary”

- What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science
- Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes
- Learning to Learn: Student Engagement, Strategies and Practices
“The Learning Teacher Network” is one of few sustained projects and networks within the EU Lifelong Learning programme. Originating in 2003 as a Comenius 3 Network, after the three year funded period the network was sustained and transformed into a membership based, non-profit, international and educational network and association.

Today the expanding network has a member base of institutions and individuals at all levels of education and training in 30 countries in Europe and beyond.

Magnus Persson, Senior Manager at the Local Educational Authority in Karlstad, Sweden, was one of the founders of the network and he has been coordinating the network since the start. At that time, what made you lead the Learning Teacher Network?

- The European dimension has been part of my daily life for fourteen years. My personal motivation for international engagement is simply the deep satisfaction that lies in giving teachers, leaders and trainers genuine opportunities to meet and exchange experiences across cultures, borders and national systems.
- The joy, the new dimensions, the satisfaction and the added value that such human meetings in international settings bring to people are invaluable.
- There is incredibly much learning, happiness and individual growth when colleagues from different countries share, develop and transfer their knowledge into new environments.

The vigorous network is an international platform of practitioners for development and progress in education and training in Europe. Which are the most important working areas of the network?

- The initial thematic area was investigating the new and future role of the teacher. This focus remains, but during the last years the mission of the network has been extended to comprise three core areas: Education for lifelong learning; Education for sustainable development (ESD); and, Education for all.

Why are the aspects “ESD” and “Education for all” so important to schools?

- These are the vital issues for the future of schools in and beyond Europe. The challenges require new solutions to learning and in managing rapid change.
- Addressing these issues calls for communicative leadership as well as increased awareness and understanding of how knowledge is constructed.
- For the future, students must be able to create meaning, find solutions, construct and re-construct knowledge, and have the competence to transfer this knowledge for use in different situations.
- For this, each school needs to create learning environments where each one can feel safe to learn, re-learn, make errors, and explore knowledge and understanding. For this, each teacher needs to be directive, influential, caring, and actively engaged in the passion of teaching and learning.

What does the network of teachers, leaders and trainers provide to meet this challenge?

- Today the network offers to schools and individual teachers the opportunity to learn, share and network with open minded colleagues in many other countries.
- Communicating with and learning from others, exchanging experiences or visits, forming projects and partnerships, presenting or learning at international conferences, publishing articles to share best practice, or participating in a European training event are some examples of participation and where the network supports and provides the venues.

The Learning Teacher Network has not only successfully been sustained but was also awarded by the Commission in 2009 the “European Gold Award” as the best project within the Lifelong Learning Programme in Comenius. What are the main factors for this success?
- This recognition is a great honour. I believe there are several reasons for the award.
- Firstly, we "make a difference". By being a network by and for practitioners in education and training we bring colleagues from a wide range of countries together to share and discuss.
- At the same time we create valuable learning and new knowledge with new perspectives, which people not easily would find somewhere else and which can be used in each one’s own practice back home.
- Secondly, what we organise and produce has high quality. The successful and appreciated annual conferences, which are open to anyone, attract each year around 175 participants from more than 20 countries.
- Furthermore, the network produces this illustrated Magazine for schools and trainers, which is published four times a year, and an academic Journal. In both cases, the ambition is to portray best classroom practice, good examples of projects, and new findings on teaching and learning that are useful to student and school development.
- We also organise EU training courses in order to bring teachers and school leaders together to learn, meet and discuss essential topics.
- Thirdly, the "good atmosphere" and the unique composition of the network. The network is characterized by its open climate which is expressed by the network motto "Trust, Respect and Fun".
- New colleagues, becoming members or participants at an event, witness the welcoming atmosphere. They also appreciate the added value brought by the combination of competences: teachers, school leaders, trainers and researchers are united and share best practice on equal terms, where each one’s expertise is respected regardless of title or profession.
- Magnus Persson concludes that the strength also lies in the network’s ability to be tuned in on new discoveries in teaching and learning, and to bring to light matters that are critical to educational development.
- To us “early warning” is crucial in order to be in the front line. Being close to the policy making in the European Union provides information but also the possibility to influence. And, actively linking with research and studies brings awareness and knowledge of successful teaching and learning, and best practice.

The network’s 7th international conference will be held in Berlin on 27-29 January 2011 with the title “Leadership for an Inclusive and Sustainable World”. What is it about?

- By leadership is meant both classroom and school leadership. As I mentioned before, good leadership is one of the key factors for success in learning and school development.
- The objectives of the conference are to call attention to, portray and interlink active leadership and education for sustainable development as two critical areas for success in school development.

The Berlin Conference is open to all professionals in education and training. Participants will experience a rich selection of research and best practice brought by internationally recognized keynote speakers and more than 70 presenters from 16 countries at 40 workshops.

After the event conference presentations and documentation will be published on the network website www.learningteacher.eu
WE ARE LIVING IN A DIFFERENT WORLD; very different from the one most of us grew up in. The world inhabited by students in today’s schools has never been without instant communication.

As teachers sharing learning with tomorrow’s decision makers and takers it is essential to recognise the importance of being globally connected.

Leadership requires staff to form networks of school partnerships with a commitment to work collaboratively to help students become aware, responsible, confident and interdependent learners. A group of teachers and students from across the globe have designed the GLOBAL AMBITION programme as a step towards realising these goals.

Global Ambition focuses on learning internationally through links between Shetland’s schools and the associated primaries and senior schools in the Global Classroom partnership. The project offers opportunities for sharing learning in subjects and interdisciplinary activities, bringing together Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing either across stages or at a particular stage.

Global Ambition 2010/2011 aims to assist students to build on their own knowledge and experience and to share this whilst making real life contact with young people from other cultures, developing such skills as communication, cooperation and leadership.

Important aspects of the programme include students taking the lead in the planning and development of their learning and in the direction of the project as a whole with the emphasis on method rather than content.

The theme is: “WHAT IS A HOUSE? WHAT IS A HOME?” Exploring the differences between these two terms will encourage participants to think about their identity, community, culture, environment and many other subjects.

This will offer students challenging and interesting contexts and opportunities designed to develop individual, group and collective learning powers and potential. It also offers senior students (from Junior High/High School) an opportunity to support those in primary learning globally by assisting them on the project and working alongside teachers to plan and carry out classroom activities.

Although all methods of exchanging work are open to discussion, the main means of sharing learning between schools comes in the form of a dedicated Global Ambition Wikispaces website (http://global-ambition.wikispaces.com) which can be edited and updated by each school involved in the project.

The site allows students in Shetland’s schools and Global Classroom partner schools to meet, discuss, and share ideas with one another. Access to Wikispaces is fast, user-friendly and free.

Schools are invited to participate in the Global Ambition programme. This project makes it possible for a student from a rural croft in the Shetland Islands to share perspectives on their home with their peers in both affluent American suburbia and the sprawling townships of South Africa. We truly live in a different world.

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VISIT THE GLOBAL CLASSROOM ONLINE:
http://global-classroom.org/

Our partner schools are located in:
EUROPE
- Shetland Islands, UK
- Several Scottish towns and cities
- Ånge, Sweden
- Diepholz, Germany
- Zlin, Czech Republic

AMERICA
- Ridgewood, New Jersey, USA

AUSTRALASIA
- Canberra, Australia
  Christchurch, New Zealand

AFRICA
- Cape Town, South Africa

Poem
This is made by a mouse named Cheese

A small mouse longs cheese
Cheese from milk
Milk from grass
Grass from rain
Rain from clouds
A small mouse longs clouds

Poem by Martin, 7
The European Year of Volunteering (EYV) 2011

"If our hopes of building a better and safer world are to become more than wishful thinking, we will need the engagement of volunteers more than ever," Kofi Annan said.

It is in this spirit that 100 million Europeans dedicate their time and expertise to help those in need and give back to their communities.

Kick-off
To highlight the efforts of volunteers and encourage more citizens to join in, the European Commission has kicked off the 2011 European Year of Volunteering.

Vice-President Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, joined by Jean-Marc Delizée, Belgium’s federal Secretary of State for Social Affairs, and European Parliament Member Marian Harkin, presented the year’s slogan: “Volunteer! Make a difference.”

“I want to pay tribute to the millions of Europeans who take the time to make our world a better place,” said Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship.

“Deep within all of us lies the ability to step up and care for those in need. Volunteering strengthens our core European values: solidarity and social cohesion. As we launch the European Year of Volunteering, I want to rally support for people who make a difference. Now is the time for us to share and to give something back, for us to focus on helping the helpers!”

Volunteering
A Eurobarometer study in May 2010 revealed that 3 out of 10 Europeans claim to be active in a voluntary capacity. There are many different definitions and traditions concerning volunteering.

A common thread throughout these activities is that wherever people come together to help each other and support those in need, both society as a whole and the individual volunteers benefit.

Through volunteering, people gain knowledge, exercise skills and extend their social networks, which can often lead to new or better employment opportunities, as well as personal and social development.

The Commission helps young people participate in volunteering activities. Throughout the European Voluntary Service, thousands of adolescents and young adults travel outside their home countries to teach, promote cultural awareness and develop important life skills.

For example, volunteers at a home in Copenhagen called Verahus help the disabled residents in their daily lives. They arrange leisure-time activities with the residents, such as painting, music, games, sports and accompany them on trips.

Four main objectives
To highlight volunteers’ work, encourage others to join in and address the challenges they face, the 2011 European Year of Volunteering has four main objectives:

- lowering obstacles to volunteering in the EU;
- empowering volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering;
- rewarding and recognise volunteering activities;
- raising awareness of the value and importance of volunteering.

Activities 2011
To meet these goals, the Commission will encourage the exchange of good practices between Member States’ authorities and volunteering organisations.

The focus will be on training volunteers, accreditation and quality assurance, and efficient and effective match-making between potential volunteers and volunteering opportunities.

The Commission will encourage new Europe-wide networking initiatives to encourage cross-border exchanges and synergies among volunteer organisations and other sectors, especially with businesses.

Throughout the Year of Volunteering, hundreds of activities and projects will be highlighted and promoted. At the EU level, these include:

- EYV2011 Tour: Volunteers will tour the EU countries over a one-year period, showcasing their work and engaging with policy makers and the public at each step of the tour.
- EYV Relay: 27 “Relay” volunteer reporters will follow the work of 54 volunteering organisations and produce audio, video and written reports to be broadcast by the media. At the end of the year, the combined reports will be compiled to form a broadcast-quality documentary about the European Year and its tour.
- Four thematic conferences in 2011 to highlight key issues related to volunteering: 8 January in Budapest: Recognition of Volunteering; May/June: Celebrating volunteers and their valuable contribution; October: Empowering volunteering organizations; December: Closing conference on future challenges.

The Commission is working closely with the “Alliance” of volunteering organisations, the European Parliament, the Member States, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Volunteers.

More information
Official website for the European Year: www.europa.eu/volunteering (includes the timetable of the EYV Tour)

The EYV Alliance’s website: www.eyv2011.eu


92 to 94 million adults are involved in volunteering in the EU (23% of all Europeans over 15 years of age).

The official statistics below show the proportion of the population involved in volunteering in various EU countries:

Very high (40%): AT, NL, SI, GB
High (30-39%): DK, FI, DE, LU
Medium high (20-29%): EE, FR, LT
Relatively low (10-19%): BE, CY, CZ, IE, MT, PL, PT, SK, RO, SE, ES
Low (less than 10%): BG, GR, IT, LV

Whatever the questionable state of international comparisons, it is netheless clear that there has been a general trend increase in the number of active volunteers and voluntary organisations in the EU over the past ten years.
The development of teaching methodology, and of methods and forms of class work have become increasingly important of late. Numerous research projects prove today’s well-known fact that active participation in the process of learning enables better memorization and long-lasting knowledge.

This was one of the main goals of the two-year innovative project held in 2003 and 2004 within the programme ‘A Hidden Treasure’ by The Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sports, called With the Constructive Collection Lego to Better Communication and Quality Knowledge. The project joined two primary schools (Komenda-Moste and Bistrica at Tržič), twelve teachers, two education counselors and approximately 300 pupils.

The aim of the pupil-centered methods of teaching, which the constructing with Lego collection represents, is not only to improve pupils’ communication, construction skills, creativity, socialization, cooperation, tolerance to different ideas and methods, positive atmosphere in the classroom, but also to widen pupils’ view of possible solutions to problem-solving tasks.

Furthermore, as the results of the project show, pupils’ concentration, persistence and active participation increase enormously. Children simply follow their desire for discovering, which turns out to be extremely motivational.

What is more, pupils transfer their pre-knowledge to the newly gained one much more easily. Obstructions seem to have lost their limits. Even pupils with behavioral disturbances tend to prolong their level of concentration. The shy ones are given a chance to prove themselves successful in performing the tasks as well.

So, how can LEGO bricks be used as a means of teaching? How does one go about it? First of all, what teachers need to keep in mind is that LEGO bricks are not only a successful mode of motivation, but also the way to more picturesque presentation of the lesson topics. Secondly, the cubes can be used at any part of the lesson, be it learning, practice or revision.

Here is an example of the steps, used in the classroom during the construction game of LEGO bricks:
- the organization of the working place,
- the discussion on the theme and work instructions,
- individual or group constructing,
- putting the unused bricks back to their place,
- representing the products and estimating,
- the exhibition of the product.

What about the findings, based also on the questionnaire, answered by teachers, pupils and their parents?

The LEGO bricks have definitely proved themselves to be a useful didactic means of learning and teaching. Early and young learners tend not to be so skilled in group
work because of their individualistic approach to problem solving tasks. Such learners first try to solve a problem but it is at a later stage that they think about the correctness of their work.

The older and more experienced the pupils, the more planned their approach is. These pupils negotiate, taking their individual opinions and suggestions into account and try to find out the best possible solution to the problem.

Cooperation and harmonization increase as does the communication between them. Therefore it can be said that such work aims towards socialization, tolerance and widening the pupils’ perception of the problem.

Lego bricks can practically be used at any lesson, be it mother tongue or second language course, maths, music, science, etc. The list goes on and on. All a teacher needs is some imagination and the courage to make good use of one of the most educational resources available.

Therefore, play well!

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Multinational collaboration
- short reports from exchanges and project meetings

All readers are welcome to submit short reports from projects and exchanges to the Magazine for the sharing with others.

Austria meets Belarus
- our common European future

SMORGON INFORMATION CENTRE ON CHILDREN AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION (SICCHRE) Gymnasium N4 from Belarus carried our an exchange visit with Vienna Business school.

The teacher of the Year from Vienna Business school Mrs. Susanne Pratcher came to Smorgon gymnasium to share her experience in teaching, promoting children’s rights and learn from her colleague’s way of work as teacher of English, head of SICCHRE Mr. Vladimir Kalinin. Mr. Vladimir Kalinin was responsible for the exchange visit, round table discussions and cultural events.

Susanne had the opportunity to carry out some seminars to share the European way of teaching, portraying children’s rights at school and society in Austria, the methods of teaching foreign languages, and told about ICT projects and the educational system in Austria. A very interesting and impressive cultural programme was offered to Susanne to let her know more about history, culture, habits, customs of Belarusians.

She visited Khatun memorial, the Stalin line, a local eco-tourism house, museums, a house of marriage, local churches and had a meeting with local media.

Such an intensive and exciting visit is a good way for better understanding between two countries and cultures and many new project ideas arose during the visit. When Susanne came back to Vienna she published her report online:

http://webs.schule.at/website/Europa/Europa_belarus_austria_2010_en.htm (English)

Belarus is not so well known in Europe as other countries are, but because of cooperation as this one our youth is able to talk and work together.

Mr. Vladimir Kalinin
Head of SICCHRE and ICR cooperation with EU schools

Welcome to the Berlin Conference

The registration period for the Learning Teacher Network’s 7th international conference is open still.

We hope to see you at this high quality event, where four internationally recognized keynote speakers and more than 70 presenters from 19 countries will contribute to the content of the programme.

Read more and register on www.learningteacher.eu/berlin-conference
Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), these subjects are often accompanied by gender-specific misattributions of the pupils’ achievements.

Results of the PREDIL study in Germany discover that 78% per cent of the males esteem themselves as more capable in computer use than girls (Helling, Ertl, & Mok, 2010). 28% per cent of the girls surveyed agreed on this and only very few disagreed. Yet, over 80 per cent of both, males and females agreed on the statement that girls are treated better by the teachers in technical subjects.

These results are intriguing from two perspectives: On the one hand, males are inclined to overestimate their capabilities in technical subjects. Thereby, they reduce their efforts and operate on an inappropriate achievement level. On the other hand, the perception of being preferred hinders girls to appreciate their achievements and to develop a positive self-concept for these subjects.

Considering this, the PREDIL project (http://predil.iacm.forth.gr/) developed guidelines to raise the awareness of teachers for the issue of gender-specific behavior patterns and to provide methods and tools to consolidate the gender competence of pupils.

Applying them, teachers may discover inequalities but also break up existing stereotypes and give pupils individual support. In this respect, the methods of the guidelines are not so specific in that they would only be appropriate for STEM subjects.

They might be applied in any kind of case in which status inequalities and biased perceptions are an obstacle for equal-status interaction in learning settings. As reflection techniques, they serve the development of an awareness of and the understanding of gender and sex and are inspiring to make initial steps in the direction of an alteration of the gender ratios.

The subsequent dimensions are hereby taken into account:
- The gender-determined access to resources
- Gender-specific expectations, values and norms and the involved consequences
- Gender-related proportions of power and mechanisms of discrimination.
- Attribution patterns and their consequences upon the performance.
- Medial representation of women and men and the involved effects.

The guidelines provide several methods, e.g., short movies and videos, the 3R Method, the Anti-Bias approach, Story Telling, Concept Mapping, Reattribution training, and Coaching and are downloadable from the PREDIL homepage (http://predil.iacm.forth.gr/outputs.php) with a choice of several languages, or directly at UniBw in English (https://www.unibw.de/paed/personen-en/Ertl/predil/predil-results/good-practice-guidelines-en).

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Dilemma 1

In daily teaching and learning we are all facing situations and problems to solve. In this edition of the Magazine we begin to highlight dilemmas with which teachers might be confronted. The editorial board welcomes reflections on this dilemma but also wishes to receive new dilemmas from your own experience for publishing.

"I learned that making situations visible for children is a very good way to get them thinking about solutions. What I did was to construct some streets and houses of cardboard boxes together with the children to show them one of the biggest problems in front of our school, where parents bring their children all at the same time and we don’t have enough space for cars and bicycles. The traffic is chaotic early in the morning and very dangerous. I asked my children if they would have solutions to that problem. I very enthusiastically informed my colleagues of what I’d been doing, but it seemed they didn’t get it. What happened:

Some children were very excited about the houses and started to play father and mother in the cardboard houses. Some started to make a drawing of ‘the street’. Some started to have a discussion about how busy it was this morning. And others were just sitting there and waiting.

What should my next steps be?"

The Learning Teacher Network on facebook
www.facebook/learningteachernetwork
Youth on the Move
http://europa.eu/youthonthemove/

Youth on the Move is a European initiative that aims to increase the chances of finding a job by enhancing student and trainee mobility and improving the quality and attractiveness of education and training in Europe.

Youth on the Move is part of Europe 2020, the EU’s plan for how Europe will emerge from the social and economic crisis. The EU offers many opportunities to study, learn, train and work abroad.

Quotes
“By 2020 all young people in Europe must have the possibility to spend a part of their educational pathway in other Member States.”
European Commission President, José Manuel Barroso

“Young people face the ongoing challenges of a labour market for which high and up-to-date skills, adaptability and mobility will be the keys to success.”
European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou

Welcome as network member

A platform for educational progress

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

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

Mission

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

Membership

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

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

Trust, respect and fun

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

All professionals in education and training are welcome

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

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

The next edition of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in March. Articles may be submitted no later than February 15th 2011.

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Flemish Olympiad of French: www.olyfran.org

The site www.olyfran.org is the result of the Flemish Olympiad of French ("Vlaamse Olympiade van het Frans"), a contest of French language organized in Flanders (Dutch speaking part of Belgium) on a yearly basis since 1988.

Participants are pupils of the second half of secondary school education (14-18 years). Every year, approx. 7000 pupils register for the Olympiad. They compete in four different groups, taking into account the level of French they can reach in their studies, and in two phases, namely the "selection round" with written multiple choice questions, and the oral final with a mixed jury (teachers, university people, business people) for the best results of the selections. The level of the problems submitted in this phase is B1-C1 of the CEF.

The problems test mostly the competence of oral language by means of written exercises (questions, answers and micro-dialogues) and of text comprehension. Every year, six mixed commissions (secondary school teachers of French, university staff, business people) each prepare one hundred multiple choice questions.

All of this material has been brought together on the mentioned site and is available in free access. Every exercise is characterized by a set of codes: source-language, level of difficulty, aspect of the language tested, number of exercises to select for one round.

The result achieved depends on the number of right answers, the time needed to solve the exercises, their level of difficulty. For the individual user, the site offers a training mode, i.e. the correct solution is always accessible, and a test mode, i.e. the correction is given only after solving all the chosen exercises.

In the test mode, one can continuously publish his best results in a permanently updated hit-parade, monthly renewed. In addition, anyone can organize his own local, regional French competition by making a simple request by email. The site is available in six languages, as it is the case for the contrastive exercises.

Every year, starting on the "Journée Internationale de la Francophonie", an international contest is organized, the so-called "Tournoi Mondial de Français par Internet". It is a fully electronic contest by means of the material of the olyfran-site.

This contest has three phases: a selection round, the semi-final, the final, and it crowns champions of French in seven parts of the planet. Participation is entirely free.

Besides all this, the site offers a base of commented sites which are interesting for teachers of French. A teacher can also submit a free request for an international class as a partner for a common (exchange) project. After such an activity, classes can publish a report of their experience, as an example of "good practice" for newcomers.

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Publication Plan for the Magazine 2011
(we reserve the right to make changes)

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WELCOME TO THE 7th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Berlin, Germany
27-29 January 2011

Leadership for an Inclusive and Sustainable World

Full conference information on www.learningteacher.eu/berlin-conference

the Learning Teacher Network