The Learning Teacher

magazine

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Active aging in education

Once a teacher, always a teacher. Ask my family!

A teacher is trained or educated to play several roles. She/he is an actor, a scientist, a researcher, a pedagogue, a mediator, a professional in her/his subject or subjects, a fulltime organiser, a social person and more. There are not so many professions where you will find combinations like this. And we are proud of this.

And we say: it is more than just a profession. It is a mission! But sometimes it is a heavy one and for some it has been a heavy job for a long time, even from the beginning. Statistics for Europe* say, that the number of teachers over 50 still working is less than 50%. And what we further see/hear, is, that the idealism teachers started out with is decreasing. And what is the reason for that?

A general discussion about teachers leaving their job is taking place on LinkedIn in the discussion group of teacher training and education. Very often ‘bosses’ are blamed and that goes for young as well as for older teachers. And yet, there are lots of opportunities for teachers to end their careers in a satisfying way. 2012 was the European Year of Active Ageing. The concept: “There is a lot to life after 60 - and society is increasingly coming to appreciate the contribution older people can make. That ‘s what active ageing is about - getting more out of life as you grow older, not less, whether at work, at home or in the community.” (http://europa.eu/ey2012/).

On the (education) floor it will be the policy of boards and heads of school/directors to support their staff and to create opportunities within the school organisation to inspire innovation and create new challenges and to be seen as people from which you can learn something.


Gerard de Kruif
Editor
The Lisbon Conference: Education for Sustainable Development

We are delighted to welcome all colleagues from all levels of education and training, and from Europe and beyond, to the Learning Teacher Network’s 9th International Conference. The conference will be held at the modern, four star Hotel Tivoli Oriente in Lisbon, Portugal on September 26-28, 2013. The title of the conference is “Education for Sustainable Development”.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is a matter of rapidly growing importance, concern and recognition on international, European, national and local levels. In all countries and cultures, education and training is the key in order to describe, re-orient for and build knowledge, understanding and action for a sustainable future.

Education for Sustainable Development allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. ESD means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning.

The conference will therefore portray a range of pedagogical angles and elements to such sustainable teaching and learning. Within the topic of the conference, thematically the programme will address ecological, social and economic perspectives on ESD.

The conference topic will be introduced by internationally recognized experts in this focal area of the conference, followed by parallel sessions of lectures and workshops led by practitioners and researchers.

With deep appreciation of the many colleagues who will present and share their knowledge and experience, we are delighted to announce a conference programme that includes 40 quality sessions given by more than 70 presenters from 15 countries in Europe and beyond.

Alike the previous conferences, we look forward to welcoming colleagues from all levels of education and training in Europe and beyond to a golden opportunity for gaining new knowledge and sharing experience in a good and friendly atmosphere in an international setting.

Keynote speakers

- Ms Soo-Hyang Choi, Director of the Division of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development at UNESCO; Dr. Akpezi Ogbeugwe, former Head of environmental education at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); Prof. Charles Hopkins, UNESCO Chair on Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability and United Nations University (UNU) Chair on Education for Sustainable Development, York University in Toronto, Canada; Prof. Tom Tiller, University of Tromsø, Norway; David DeLuca, DoSomething.org, USA.

Read on the website

Full and comprehensive conference information is published on the network website, see:

www.learningteacher.eu/lisbon-conference-2013

www.learningteacher.eu

The next issue of The Learning Teacher Magazine will be published in March. Articles may be submitted no later than February 15th 2013.
Creativity and Learning - Appreciated European training course
Malta October 2012

Six hats out of six for the European training course: Creativity and Learning in Malta, the island of Edward de Bono!

Years ago I read an article by a Danish philosopher. I can’t remember his name, and the article wasn’t that interesting, only it had one important message: Education MUST change! The paradigm of education that has ruled the world since World War I is outdated.

According to the Danish philosopher the paradigm was introduced after the war, because officers and soldiers did not obey orders. Instead they were thinking themselves, and the result was disaster. Combined with the industrialism, it called for an education, where brains were trained to obey. Creative, innovative thinking was bad behavior.

By now most teachers have reached the same conclusion. Education must change. We need to teach creativity, and we need to teach creatively. The world needs creative people.

But how to do it? It is new ground to cover for already hard working teachers. Luckily there was help to get for those of us, who participated in the course “Creativity and Learning”.

The setting was beautiful Malta, a very comfortable hotel, tasty meals, fantastic weather and a highly skilled team of dedicated teacher trainers, who among a long list of fascinating angles to creativity, introduced us to Edward de Bono’s Thinking Hats, and to the eloquent Sir Ken Robinson. The trainers: Tania, Magnus and Susanna had mixed a theoretical and practical approach to creativity and learning: a regular eye-opener for teachers to whom creative teaching was new and inspiring for teachers, who were already working creatively.

And there was much more. Visits to historic Malta, and did I say that the weather was fantastic? The participants of the course were a blend of Europeans, from the Azores to Lithuania. And if the spirit of this course is a taste of what being creative does to people, you better get started! One of the participants wrote on her Facebook-profile after coming home: “I have never felt so much friendship in one place until this Malta experience”.

Almost symbolic for the whole course and the “creative Malta experience” was the meeting of some of us in the hotel lobby before 7 a.m. each morning. We walked to the beach. All ages, all nationalities toggled along, and we went swimming into the sunrise. An image of leaving darkness, moving towards enlightenment: also true for education.

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It is difficult to say what makes an experience really unforgettable: the place, the people, the ideas, the weather, the atmosphere, the relationships, the fitting of all pieces in their place?

My answer would be: all these together, but especially their echo inside you. This is what I’m still feeling after coming back from Sliema (Malta) still amazed by the multi-coloured, multi-national, multi-intelligent and multi-effect course that I attended as part of a Comenius Individual Mobility.

The course united teachers and teacher trainers from 14 countries. At first I couldn’t appreciate the value of this number, but when I dived into the multitude of sounds, accents and approaches, I realised what an international person means. I have always loved foreign languages, all of them, but never only for the sake of the languages themselves, but as channels to people and towards the inside of the peoples speaking the languages.

But dining with all these people, traveling together and exchanging ideas, spending our evenings under the Maltese warm and welcoming sky, and blending English with 14 different languages, sometimes at the same time, was more gratifying and mind-enriching than in my wildest dreams.

The conference room was not the only place I could appreciate my colleagues and my trainers. The 9th floor of our hotel, Victoria, the partying occasions, the trips together and the long meals filled with excellent Maltese food and wine, but also of a multitude of topics, jokes and experiences shared, were maybe even better.

Talking to Susanne over the table about the mathematical ideas related to which is the shortest distance between two points, she smiled and said very convinced: “A smile!”

I’m now in front of my computer reliving all the events and I realize again how weak words can be when mirroring the actual experience. I only hope that the power of a picture will portray the joy and gratefulness of my memories.

I also feel that urge to thank and show appreciation, but again there can’t be only one correct answer: to God for everything; to the National Agency, the trainers, all the colleagues and all the circumstances having made them the wonderful people I had the chance to meet for what I have received and experienced; to creativity, my principal, my students with their needs, Malta’s sun, Mdina’s ruins, Sliema’s hospitality, the breathtaking views of boats in the morning, being a teacher of English… Thank you all!

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Schools and internships
- How can Copenhagen Hospitality College play a part in improving the working environment in the restaurant business?

It is the unions, employers’ associations, restaurateurs, the school and the student’s responsibility to maintain people in the industry. Maybe our thesis can lead the way to put the working environment on the agenda, so it can become a sustainable business.

The restaurant business has many difficult and poor working conditions that have an impact on both physical and mental health. They experience long and irregular working hours, monotonous repetitive work, high levels of stress and problems with alcohol and drug abuse.

There are also problems with poor management, bullying and violence, which is part of the work culture. These problems develop work-related illnesses such as cancer and heart attacks and there is a high turnover of staff.

When you ask anyone in this industry, whether it is the school, chefs or students, about the bad working environment, they say that: “This is the way this business is, and there is nothing that can be done about it.” This does not seem right to me and I believe that it is possible to make improvements in the working conditions if everyone involved in this business takes responsibility.

What can the school do?
My master thesis examines the possibilities of improving the working environment in the restaurant business and my focus is mainly on how Copenhagen Hospitality College can play an important part in this. The school is a potential agent of change because it is the only place where all segments of the industry meet and they have the means to promote a better working environment through education of chef students.

The school and restaurants have different views on what the students should be taught and which working conditions are reasonable. The schools focus is to educate the students whereas the restaurants focus is how they can make enough money to survive. This can create problems in working towards improving the industry’s physical and mental health especially because the students are more in the restaurants than in the school.

The students want to change the current conditions but they find it difficult because they do not want to lose their internship and work. After talking with students, teachers and chefs, it is clear that neither the students nor the restaurants know the rules, rights and collective agreements.

Students only meet their union at the end of their schooling and many restaurants are not organized under a collective agreement, and this has an impact on the working environment. When the two institutions have different views on student learning and when both the students and the restaurants do not know the rules, how can the school make a change?

The school is required to educate the students in a subject about their working environment. This subject has until now been given a low priority by teachers, which is something students notice.

The teachers tend to do this because they are embedded in the discourse just like students and the rest of the industry, that the chef is a practitioner who finds academics uninteresting. It is important that the teachers themselves take the issue seriously because it has a great influence on student engagement in the subject.

It is important that the subject about the working environment is linked to the practice and to the profession as a chef. It is important to show that you can profit by having a good working environment, it reduces sickness absenteeism, staff tur-
nover, attracts talented employees and provides more creativity and efficiency in the kitchen.

Following the completion of this thesis the school has started to take teaching of the working environment more seriously and they will use more creative methods for the teaching of this subject. This is not the only thing the school is doing to create a better working environment in this industry.

I have through the work of this thesis been in contact with Copenhagen Hospitality College, the Union (3F), the employers’ organization (HORESTA) and a consultant company (Alectia) which all have participated in two meetings concerning improvement of the working environment in the restaurant business.

On the last meeting, they decided to form a cross-organizational taskforce, which is going to guide and advise restaurants having difficulties. It is important that this taskforce is a consulting company and not a supervisory body because the restaurants do not need to have more rules and regulations to follow but what they need is someone to tell them how to follow the current ones.

If all the parties of this business work together it is possible that the working environment will be improved, and if the school starts taking the working environment subject more seriously, they can guide the students into making them stand up for their rights.

This can also make the students understand that the industry may look different, and this can start a change in the work culture. All of this shows how much a school can influence students and the outside world.

Improving the working environment continues throughout life through daily interactions with others and with the world around us. It has to be an ongoing and self-motivated pursuit for keeping a sustainable industry involving lifelong learning.

There is both an economic gain by focusing on a sustainable working environment and a human benefit because it can reduce illnesses, reduce the number of people on incapacity benefit and retain people in the industry.

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EUROPEANA
- A portal worth more than a visit

www.europeana.eu is the online multi-lingual portal founded in 2008 to represent Europe’s cultural and scientific history and heritage. It is a collection of millions of items from European museums and libraries open for interested (European) citizens and scientists.

The access point is open to millions of books, paintings, films, museum objects and archival records that have been digitised throughout Europe.

The portal can be very supportive when looking for certain data and information, but also as a first orientation on a certain subject. The site can be very helpful. Collections of national and research libraries from 46 countries are open to the visitor. Sometimes you have to pay a nominal fee.

The top countries providing information to this portal are Germany, France, Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, Norway, the UK, Italy and Ireland. But also some of the central European countries are in the top 15, like Slovenia and Poland.

On the home page you will find: Explore Europe’s cultural collections. There you can fill in anything you want to see or listen to or know more about (in your own language) and see what they have. Maybe you can find your own school building or the building where you started your education as a child.

Even under an abstract concept like ‘education’ you will find over 120,000 documents in all European languages related to education and education research. And under each document once there is ‘free access’, it is explained what rights you have. And it is also here that you immediately can see what they have and what the genre of the information is: is it a text, an audio fragment, a video, an image, a photograph etcetera.

The second button (‘Explore’) seems to be the most important one. Under this button you will find: ‘exhibitions’ and ‘new content’. It is from here you can select e.g. exhibitions focusing on one issue.

At this moment various digital exhibitions can be visited, for example European Sports heritage, Art Nouveau, Weddings in Eastern Europe, Musical instruments, From Dada to Surrealism, Treasures, Travelling through History, the Roma, The Napoleonic Wars, Buildings, Spices, the Euro.

So, it is very diverse. Click on the exhibition and sometimes you can choose your own language, but English is always available. There are exhibitions to which more than one institution (library and/or museum) has contributed (a so-called: open partner exhibition).

Sometimes there are only texts, but most of the time images and texts. And re-opening the page, you will immediately find new exhibitions.

Just one example from the exhibitions: Weddings in Eastern Europe (actually the content is about Central Europe). Ten themes are popping up e.g. about the eve of the wedding and the songs that are sung before the guests leave. Information texts and audio samples are available side by side.

Soon the site will be renewed and users are asked to test the new blog.europeana.eu.

And finally after being logged in under “My Europeana”, you create your personal space, save your favourite items and searches, and add tags.

Europeana can also be found on facebook and twitter.

How is education structured across Europe?
- Easy-to-read and useful schematic diagrams available

How old are children when they enter primary education in Finland? How long does secondary education last in Germany? And what is the duration of higher education in Belgium?

The schematic diagrams on “the structure of the European education systems 2012/13” give a quick answer to these questions. They show the structure of mainstream schooling in 39 education systems, from pre-primary level up to tertiary education.

The diagrams cover the different education levels, the various age-groups at which pupils officially start schooling and the duration of studies at each level. Names of institutions and study programs are listed in the national language of each country.

The education systems of the 34 countries in the Eurydice Network (EU Member States, EFTA countries, Croatia, Serbia and Turkey) are included.


The link to the Eurydice network is http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php
Mathematics and number are everywhere. In everyday life situations, we need to be on time, pay bills, follow directions or use maps, and look at bus or train timetables.

In Flanders 1 out of every 20 children/students has a Mathematical Learning Disability (MLD; Desoete, Roeyers, & De Clercq, 2004).

The term MLD refers to a significant degree of impairment in the mathematical skills (with substantially low attainment – percentile 1-10). In addition, children with MLD do not profit enough from (good) help. This is also referred to as a lack of responsiveness to intervention.

Finally, the problems in MLD can not be totally explained by impairments in general intelligence or external factors that could provide sufficient evidence for scholastic failure.

Persons with MLD describe their problems as follows (Vanmeirhaeghe, 2012):

Kristel (master in education): “Why was elementary school like hell? Because I felt a huge pressure on me. Open your manual on page 68. There we go again! Where is page 68? Other pupils already had taken down the title while I was still looking for page 68. It was a constant feeling of needing to exert myself. I have to take care that I can follow. That is what made it so hard for me. Everyone was faster then I was.”

Sara (bachelor in journalism): I need three times more time than an average student to learn the same subjects.

In elementary school, a different way of teaching can be used to arrive at the same conclusion. Extra stimuli and remediating are necessary. Step by step instructions along with extra instructions should help the student to keep up with the knowledge of the other children.

However for some children at a certain moment compensation and dispensation is needed. Getting more time to make an exam, allowing the use of a pocket calculator and a formulary can be appropriate.

Wim (engineer): “You could say that I have given up the struggle with mental arithmetic. It remained a problem for me”

Teachers of children with MLD should pay attention to the inherent talents of these pupils to improve their weaknesses and to reduce obstacles. When children get through secondary school undamaged, convinced that they have difficulties in some things but are good at others, they will certainly find their way in life. Sara, Kristel and Charlotte described this as follows (Vanmeirhaeghe, 2012):

Sara: “I am convinced that I have become stronger because of this MLD. I have become persevering.”

Kristel: “I notice that many people in my surroundings quickly quit and then I think: ‘Why don’t you pursue?’

Charlotte: “You really get this attitude: ‘I can do it no matter what my disability, and I will prove I can do it.”

For more information about MLD we refer to the film (with English subtitles) free on the internet (Vanmeirhaeghe & Van Hees, 2012). ‘Divided by Numbers’: www.studerenmetdyscalculie.be

References


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Some thoughts about language at home and in school as a support for practitioners.

In recent years the advantages of bilingualism have made themselves heard in media and in education. The benefits of being bilingual are many. Brain research is claiming that bilingualism in childhood leads to smarter children, while according to Stephen Krashen being actively bilingual, together with reading and drinking coffee, helps delay Alzheimer’s or dementia.

However, being bilingual in a monolingual school can be a challenge. Children are often not given the understanding and credit they deserve for being able to juggle two or more languages.

Having worked for the past eight years in international education, where working with multilingual children is what we do all day, it is very difficult not to speak up when getting involved in education and educational training of future teachers in national, ‘monolingual’ schools.

What can we as educators do and think about in our daily dealings with multilingual children?

I would like to share some simple strategies that we use at my school. These strategies have been developed and perfected in accordance with the latest research on second language acquisition and mother tongue maintenance.

To start with it is important that the teacher acknowledges and is aware of the linguistic abilities of the children in his or her class – both the linguistic abilities in the school language, and the level of their mother tongue. Does the child’s level in their mother tongue is often a strong indicator of how quickly he or she will pick up another language. Is the child literate in his mother tongue, if so, to what degree?

Furthermore, does the child speak any other languages? Does the child have more than one mother tongue?

Once this has been established there are a few things that teachers should be aware of in the classroom:

• Multilingual children may need extra time. They need extra thinking time in order for them to make connections between the languages.
• Multilingual children should be allowed to use their mother tongue in school. This is often when difficulties can arise. Of course it may be difficult in certain schools to allow other languages to be spoken, but I believe it comes down to respect for
one another and respect for each other’s languages.

• If the child is literate in his or her mother tongue, allow and encourage the student to complete written assignments in his mother tongue – this way you can see if they have understood the task, and you can also gauge their level in their mother tongue. If you really need to know the accuracy of the work – involve the parents and ask them about it.

• The teacher should encourage the parents to use the mother tongue at home in order for the child to develop a strong first language on which he can successfully build other languages. Encouraging parents to speak a language different from their mother tongue to their children may have a catastrophic effect on the child’s language development as well as creating a gap in the communication with the parents or grandparents.

• Bringing a piece of home into school is very important for the children’s learning. This way the teacher shows the child that he is valued and interesting to the teacher.

• Activating the child’s prior learning – even if this means using another language – helps children learn. The child makes transfers between languages and only needs to learn new labels for concepts already known to him.

• Use visuals to help the children learn – picture dictionaries, picture cards, displays, gestures!

• Teach survival language to newly arrived children – language necessary to survive in school;

• Try to find somebody in the school who speaks the same language, if this proves difficult, make the effort to learn a few words or phrases in the language – it’s amazing the effect this can have.

• Let them work at their own level – differentiation is vital!

• Pre-teach concepts that are coming up in class – this way the child will have some knowledge of what is going on in the classroom and it makes him feel more confident.

These are simple steps that all teachers can apply in a classroom situation. We are here to facilitate children’s learning and to make sure that the children feel safe and learn. We need to avoid undermining the foundation on which multilingual children stand and realize the importance of maintaining, facilitating and encouraging the use of the child’s mother tongue.

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Educators working with adult students employ many types of mentoring models. One form of mentoring-in-motion, “Academic Spiritwalking” (Mulvihill, 2013) may be worth further consideration.

In simple terms, it is a mentoring conversation that occurs between an educator and a student over a series of walking meetings, rather than sitting in an office talking over a desk, or rushed exchanges in a hallway on the way to another class or meeting, or text-based communications via email, instant message or phone texts, or other types of exchanges that keep us sedentary.

This walking and talking methodology combines components of Native American traditions that use a “talking stick” ritual with psychological and physiological theories about the health benefits of embodiment/body movement, and with the emphasis on the mind-body-spirit connections within wellness theories.

“Talking stick” traditions include a ritual whereby full attention and honor is given to the person who holds the talking stick as they tell a story, share their experiences, present a dilemma, or wish to arrange their words for deeper meaning and self-understanding.

Wellness theories are predicated on the direct and inseparable mind-body-spirit connection. “Pedagogical listening” (Mulvihill, 2010) is at the heart of this form of mentoring and requires the educator to listen for the dimensions of the student’s storytelling that need alignment with their educational goals or aspirations.

This form of listening, in part, implores the educator to assist the student with integrating or re-integrating the different versions of the self that necessarily emerge when educational experiences are in the process of transforming the student.

It is listening with a particular set of filters that allow the mentor’s responses to be more holistic and meaningful to the student who is in a state of transition.

The research tells us that our overall wellbeing is enhanced when we can practice mindfulness as well as engage in regular exercise, (Barton and Pretty, 2010). And one of the ways we can engage in mindfulness is to seek out and/or create environments where educators can be in the presence of healing conversations and interactive forms of solitude.

The form of solitude that emerges during “Academic Spiritwalking” serves these purposes. If we, as educators, examine the spaces where we conduct mentoring activities and ask what it might be like to incorporate some form of “Academic Spiritwalking” into our own mentoring model, how might it enhance or better facilitate “pedagogical listening”?

Grab your walking shoes, a walking-talking stick, a student in need of a series of mentoring conversations, commit yourself to “Pedagogical Listening” and start experimenting with a version of “Academic Spiritwalking.”

I’ll be eager to hear your stories and to view your photos for a Visual Sociology project I am working on that describes the forms of mentoring we as educators are engaged in as we partner with students for transformational educational experiences.

References


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In Flanders (Belgium), just like in many other European countries, only a minority of pupils choose to study science, technics or mathematics. In 2007, the European commission published “Science education now: a renewed pedagogy for the future of Europe”.

In this report inquiry based education (IBE) was suggested as a necessary approach to develop a positive attitude towards science, technology and mathematics for children. One way to achieve this goal was by setting up coaching projects for primary school teachers focusing on science teaching.

This resulted in a close collaboration between the teacher training departments of three higher education institutions (i.e. University College Arteveldehogeschool, University College West Flanders (HOWEST) and the University College Ghent).

During the first project year a small group of teachers was challenged to implement the IBE in any given activity. The central point of interest for all participants was ‘sand’. These activities were filmed and thoroughly reflected upon. This experience proved to be very valuable to benchmark the participants’ beliefs and experiences towards this approach.

The most striking findings in this perspective are the following.

Most of the participants were not familiar with the inquiry-based approach. They tried to compensate for the ‘open character’ of the subject ‘with ready-made research questions, limited materials, fixed arrangement and little or no opportunities for discussion and alternative solutions.

A well-defined research question and acceptable criteria for the solution was very often lacking. Neither was there feedback to the original problem and the end of the activity. Moreover it seemed that the teachers struggled with their proper role. An open pupil centered teaching technique was easily confused with a very restricted role for the teacher: a facilitator who hardly participates in the process.

Most of the participants found it difficult to implement IBE in their own class.

During the second year of the project the focus was on teachers’ interventions to convert lessons to more challenging, open-ended activities where knowledge, skills and attitudes were equally important. Several problem solving strategies were stimulated and solutions were always put in perspective of the original research question.

Instead of facilitating the activity, the teachers took the role of participant (researcher): cooperating with the pupils in their experiments, promoting questioning and comparison.

This happened with an eye for reporting, (correct) measuring, setting up an experiment (control and different treatments), etc. This can only be achieved if there is enough time (and space) for free exploration, outside the box thinking, (re)questioning and… failure.

Availability of materials and tools, work plan, time (limitation) and context seemed thereby to be effective didactic levers to give an IBE boost to activities with little inquiry potential.

In conclusion, IBE proved not to be a ‘take it or leave it approach’ at all. For the inexperienced teacher, it is possible to implement this approach gradually in the classroom. Professional support and coaching however, seem to be very welcome.

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The International association “Interactive open schools” (short MIOS) works with schools in the region providing them with the skills and facilitation for networking among each other.

Our goal is to connect school: students, teachers and parents from Osijek in Croatia, Novi Sad in Serbia and Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina and provide them with the opportunity to learn from each other about their lives and diversity they have.

Our network of open community schools is a good place for schools and professionals to connect with each other and share knowledge, experiences and establish new friendships. We operate under the goals of connecting people and developing dialogue through mutual understanding and sharing the positive social changes on the Balkan region.

For the last two years, with the support of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation MIOS is developing inter-school projects between elementary schools. We connect approximately 12 schools from the Network of open community schools from 3 cities and provide them with skills on project management and partnership.

After the training teachers and students develop a joint project with their twinned school and implement it throughout the school year.

A main criterion is to connect schools from different cities. In the past two years schools implemented creative and valuable projects which ensured knowing about each other, identifying the characteristics of different cultural backgrounds (which makes sense in relation to the wider Balkan area), sharing the value of joint living and understanding that although we are different we still can and should create joint living. An important component is that schools always try to incorporate content of school subjects into the project and make the link between curricula and life.

### Types of projects

The schools have developed different kinds of projects: traditional & cultural, ecological, projects that promote healthy living habits and ones that promote joint values, understanding and peace. For example two schools (from Osijek and Novi Sad) have developed the “Pannonia spell” project which shares the rich cultural background of two cities and preserves tradition.

Through creative workshops culture and tradition is explored by creating t-shirts with symbols of these countries, singing songs in two languages (school from Novi Sad is a bilingual school where both Hungarian and Serbian languages are used), acting a traditional wedding and performing theatre.

One of the projects was focused on mutual understanding, peace and friendship which ensured students could meet and develop joint choreography for ‘peace dance’. In Tuzla students rally together to perform the song “Only not to be a war,” which wanted to send a clear message to the communities in both cities (http://youtube/IfubsjmVg90).

Six hundred students, parents, and teachers from the school in Tuzla hosted 42 students and 4 teachers from the school in Novi Sad.

In Croatia, partner school representatives visited the cathedral and were introduced to the interior of the cathedral, the choir organ, the crypt with tombs of saints, the old wall at the Diocesan court and eventually moved to the ‘Small Church’ and given a tour of the Diocesan Library. They had the opportunity to see books from the 17th century.

On the return visit in B&H both schools visited the madrasa and the mosque, Youth Centre, Gate, corsets and Orthodox church. Students noticed similarities in different religions and cultures. This was the first time for a large number of students and teachers to stay in the madrasa and the mosque and an Orthodox church.

These projects are very important since
they provide the opportunity for children to travel outside of their own country, meet each other and ensure new friendships. Also schools have included students with special needs (for example autism...) as equal participants.

During the project implementation there were interesting situations like when students from B&H asked their teachers how they will communicate with students in Novi Sad, when they don’t know that language (B&H, Croatia and Serbia are the same speaking area)!

The main focus for these inter-school projects was multiculturalism, interculturalism and intercultural education. This is very important for the development of a school. Intercultural dialogue has a future in the school network and developing it among the member schools will be something that MIOS will continue working on.

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"Interaktivne otvorene škole"
Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

For more insight on this interschool project please visit
www.youtube.com/user/interaktivneskole
Social and Financial Education in the Republic of Moldova

The process of inclusion of Social and Financial Education in the National Curriculum for Optional subjects in Republic of Moldova

Moldova is a small country (3.3 mln.) in the South-East of Europe. Being a former part of the former Soviet Union, the Moldovan educational system inherited an academic and adult-led and centred education.

Although in recent years modern educational policies have been improved: child-centred, child-friendly, inclusive schools etc., teaching practices have tended to remain the same, affected by a massive exodus of top educational staff, due to labour migration and low salaries as well as a socially unattractive image of the profession of ‘teaching’.

Since 2010, Aflatoun (an NGO focusing on social and financial literacy of children and youngsters) has been in operation. The program is named ‘Aflatoun’ for children age 6-12 years and ‘Aflateen’ for older ages. The programme has been working closely with two partners in Moldova: Children, Communities and Families of Moldova (CCF) and General Association Centre of Creative Development of Children and Adolescents Indigo.

Realising the benefit of working together, both organisations have united their efforts to make the Aflatoun programme stronger through increasing its scalability and advocating at government level.

In the case of the initial pilot programme, we first contacted the schools where we wished to introduce the programme and they were identified based on previous experience of working with them, as well as geographical proximity, in order to decrease the costs.

After that we contacted the Ministry of Education asking permission to work in 5 schools prior to accessing the grant for presenting the programme. The access to schools was very good due to previous contacts and experience.

Children were familiarized with concepts of finance – money, saving, spending, exchange, banking and livelihood - with a special focus on managing one’s personal money and the assets of a group, and they learned how to save and how to spend in a responsible manner.

At the School Level the Aflatoun Day/ Days were organized as forums for children to get to know each other better, have fun, eat, and dance and to communicate their experience to each other, their parents and the wider community in the form of plays, shows, etc.

Celebrating International Aflatoun Day - 17th of March - children learned how to save, how to spend and how to plan in a responsible manner a holiday meal as well as entrepreneurial skills in the context of the financial education. Regarding the teaching, we learned that in order to challenge the “old” ways of teaching you need to sufficiently expose the teachers to “new” methods, make them feel comfortable and safe with them and this, in time, will change practices.

As a result of this work and going through the long process of approval the Curriculum for Social and Financial Education and the Guide for Social and Financial Education was approved by the National Council for Curriculum within the Ministry of Education.

Aflatoun Curriculum involves five Core
Elements: personal understanding and exploration; rights and responsibilities; saving and spending; planning and budgeting; child enterprise (social & financial).

After piloting the Aflatoun programme for children under 14, we decided to use concepts and activities from the pilot Aflateen kit. The main reason was our work in residential institutions where most children were of pre-teenage or teenage age and therefore leaving care soon.

Assessment of these children showed very poor life skills, limited capacity to plan transition and to understand it, poor communication skills and total lack of financial skills as care and education is provided by institutions where young people don’t have the responsibilities which their peers in families may have.

In the school year 2011-2012 we piloted Aflateen in a residential institution for children with learning disabilities. To succeed we had to adapt the methodologies and focus on creative activities (drawing, collages, clay and dough-play) and open space discussions. The evaluation tools have been adapted as well to serve those children who had reading/writing problems.

Lessons learned: the “old” teaching methods are still widespread; Aflatoun is sometimes regarded as an extra-school activity with not that much importance for the school success; non-formal education in Moldova is not yet regulated.

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EU Skills Panorama

The European Commission has launched the EU Skills Panorama, a website presenting quantitative and qualitative information on short- and medium-term skills needs, skills supply and skills mismatches.

The Panorama, drawing on data and forecasts compiled at EU and Member State level, will highlight the fastest growing occupations as well as the top ‘bottleneck’ occupations with high numbers of unfilled vacancies.

Currently, there are around 2 million job vacancies across the EU despite high levels of unemployment. The website contains detailed information sector by sector, profession by profession and country by country.

The Skills Panorama shows that the occupations with the most unfilled vacancies in the EU today are those of finance and sales professionals. Other shortages most frequently reported concern biologists, pharmacologists, medical doctors and related professionals, nurses, ICT computing professionals and engineers.

The website indicates that the strongest mismatch between skills and labour market needs exists in Lithuania, Bulgaria, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland, whereas in Portugal, Denmark and the Netherlands the situation is much better.

The EU Skills Panorama will be regularly updated with the latest data.

Laszlo Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion commented: “The EU Skills Panorama is the first European tool to give access with just a click to relevant information about trends in skills requirements in all EU countries.

This online information tool presents comprehensive information on skills mismatches and will ultimately help to direct jobseekers to the most demanded occupations throughout Europe”.

Link to EU Skills Panorama: http://euskillspanorama.ec.europa.eu/
Misconceptions of teachers

October 2012 ‘Frontiers in Psychology’ published a research article by English and Dutch researchers on what teachers take from brain research into their classrooms.

The research is part of the big OECD project: Brain and learning. 242 teachers in primary and secondary education, interested in brain research in the UK and Netherlands were asked to fill in a survey which was aimed at assessing general knowledge of the brain. The assumption was that teachers translate results in neurosciences into their practice; correct and incorrect interpretations.

Out of 32 statements in the survey, half was nonsense, like the idea that children who are more visual, learn better when they get lessons with a lot of pictures, human beings use only 10% of their brain, children pay less attention to the teacher or their school work once they ate sweets, intelligence is inherited and much more like.

Other statements were correct, like: boys have bigger brains than girls, physical activities improve the brain function.

Almost half of the teachers (47%) believed in what is called brain-myths based assumptions of neuro-scientific research. They find it difficult to distinguish between pseudoscience and scientific facts. Therefore teachers should be careful how they translate interpretations of research results into their classroom practice. Beside this, more research showed that teachers teach in a different way if they believe in neuro-myths. e.g. when they believe that intelligence is a matter of ineritance, slower learners are not stimulated as much as they could be.

For more examples see the article:
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3475349/

Self control

Terry Moffitt and Avshalom Caspi, professors of psychology and neuroscientists at Duke University (USA) and King’s College (UK) found a new indicator for later success in life. In general we think that intelligence and socio-economic class are rather important factors to predict our position, health and happiness in general in future life.

Both professors followed a group of some 1000 New-Zealanders for some 40 years and discovered that self-control is as important as the two indicators mentioned above.

Three-year old children who have little control at that age are less better off after 30 years than their more self-disciplined fellows. There is even more. The first group has poorer health and are more overweight etc. In this group there are significantly more addictions, financial problems, unstable marriages and there is more criminal behaviour in this group. The research was repeated in the UK on 1100 British twins, who were followed as from the 90s. The effect was identical: those of the twins who showed less self-control at the age of 5 were less prepared for a successful future than their twin brother or sister. They smoked more often, achievements in school were lower and they showed less social behaviour.

But there is hope. The social class in which you are born does not change but your IQ can become a little higher and you can learn to control yourself, you can improve that quite lot.

Self-discipline, self-control is a characteristic, which can be very helpful in a society in which every moment there is a choice to make. Think of choosing food, of buying (credit card), moving or looking at TV etc. A task for teachers as well?

http://www.moffittcaspi.com/whats-new

Support to internaional work in schools

The website http://school-partnerships.eu and the resources on it are for teachers and school leaders who coordinate the international work of their schools. The materials presented here were created by an EU funded partnership between organisations in Austria, Germany, Romania and the UK.

These materials • enable school international co-ordinators to gain intercultural competence • provide teachers with a range of teaching techniques and best practice to develop intercultural competence with learners • demonstrate how intercultural issues can affect school partnerships • offer practical solutions to risk which may arise from these intercultural issues • develop some of the skills a teacher needs to act as project manager in an intercultural context • encourage participants to develop their leadership role in school and to become active disseminators for intercultural education for other staff and students

The training uses a range of methodologies including presentations, group work, role-play and open discussion. Inputs on intercultural education, leadership and strategic school development, project management, student voice and the creative use of school partnerships are made.

One key feature is the inclusion of a number of intercultural scenarios that feature some of the key issues faced by those in school who manage international activities.

Teachers could use these materials on their own or with colleagues or they could be used in professional development sessions for groups of teachers.

http://school-partnerships.eu
Class acoustics
- Exploring Speech Intelligibility in Occupied Classrooms

Physical learning environment
A classroom is a common place where a common group of people desires to engage in a common way with a common subject in a common time.

Classrooms in school buildings are places intended to be occupied by their users for considerable time. This raises demands for functional adequacy, for spatial and acoustic quality in order to facilitate successful learning. As speaking and hearing are still the main activities in teaching and learning, speech carries central importance and it requires clear comprehension.

Hence, the teacher has to be understood as a main speech source. In literature on school architecture, it is commonly assumed that attractive, well-designed, and well-maintained facilities contribute to positive school climate, good discipline, and productive learning.

Classroom acoustics and speech intelligibility
An extensive body of classroom acoustic studies documents speech intelligibility within simulated classroom contexts. An individual child participating in a headphone simulation test is still the main activity involved in education-related research on speech understanding although there is rising interest in real settings.

The project involves educational audiology and focuses on children who are following instructional processes in non-simulated occupied classrooms in primary education.

Determining speech intelligibility in authentic classroom situations may assist in understanding the acoustics of a classroom in terms of a complicated physical environment in which education occurs. To explore classroom acoustics in view of a broad range of influencing parameters, a set of instruments called “Speech Oriented MultiBand Analysis for Classroom Acoustics” (SOMBAC©) is developed. The Speech Intelligibility (SI) module of the SOMBAC© is described underneath.

Speech-in-noise test in occupied classrooms
The main goal of the speech intelligibility project at Artevelde University College is to describe a novel computer-supported speech-in-noise test for children in primary education, and to provide a test procedure that is feasible for generating speech intelligibility in occupied classrooms.

Occupied means ‘with a varying number of presumably normal hearing Dutch speaking children’. The SOMBAC-SI has been designed and employed by a multidisciplinary research team in order to explore to what extent children, sitting on a proper desk that has a specific distance and orientation towards a spoken sound source, can discern words at a particular position in presence of a fixed speech-in-noise ratio.

Applying the SOMBAC-SI one should be able to evaluate classroom positions as acoustically good or bad for speech understanding. The project follows the idea that in real classrooms disquieting acoustic elements of the physical learning environment affect speech intelligibility in a rather negative way.

This argument asks whether speech intelligibility is a matter of classroom-related and/or child-related characteristics. Next to unfolding the SOMBAC-SI instrument in which speech-in-noise group testing actually occurs, the project has two additional educational aims.

Firstly, as a part of the test procedure children were introduced into and challenged to inquiry-based learning. Secondly, during the preliminary tuition they were confronted with the benefits of good acoustic hygiene. Thus far, the instruction was supplemented by examples and hints for becoming an appropriate young researcher within the particular context of speech intelligibility.

Moreover, research instruments were shown and gradually explained in order to encourage and support children’s active participation in testing circumstances. Likewise, it was intended to motivate the children to be young researchers with the right attitudes, such as curiosity, punctuality, and honesty.

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