

ETEN: an european network open to the world

(ETEN board)

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Abstract

Some years ago the transition from the “Industrial Society” to the “Information Society” was the main concern for many of us. Information permeated all aspects of our societies; lately, we have moved on to talk about the “Knowledge Society.”

At the present time we live in a society of heterogeneity and interdependence which demands from us more flexibility, more openness, more awareness of others, more interconnectedness among our institutions. As professionals of education we need to think differently: we need to focus on man’s ability to grow and learn, on human resources and values, and less on institutions and systems; we need to focus more on learning ability, playfulness and creativity, less on memorizing facts, more on children as a valuable source of ideas, and not just on adults as the sole source of ideas, on technology to enable us to do new things, instead of on technology to enhance efficiency.

The challenge, we believe, is to construct partnerships driven by common interests that will multiply creativity, the keyword to an unpredictable world, but that will only happen if we pay more attention to new approaches to solving the prevalent problems of the increasingly multicultural societies. This is one reason why we believe that it is through enticing professional mobility networks that we lay the foundation for solutions to promote a more peaceful planet.

Recently, we see an increasing number of institutions applying for international

networks membership. And why do people join networks? In our opinion there are two main reasons: first, like the tide, it is inevitable: we cannot avoid it; it is a natural movement to become connected; secondly, this world is becoming more open (market-, finance-, information-, business-, health-, and education-wise). We are moving from a relatively fragmented world to the dense and indispensable interdependencies of an integrated planet. So we need collaboration, and we need policies which encourage the potential synergies and which can minimize the friction and risks of conflict that these changes may bring. These are just some of the motivations why we got involved in ETEN.

Key-words

ETEN, Internationalization, Teacher training, Europe

Writing about the European Teacher Education Network (ETEN) is, for us, a difficult task because the atmosphere that is experienced by the participants every time we meet cannot be described using only words. Nevertheless, we will try to give the readers an abridged portrait of our network.

ETEN was founded in 1988 by a group of teacher educators who decided that it would be imperative to promote cooperation, international collaboration in research and development, exchange of students and staff to provide opportunities for professional development, research and publication, understanding of the history, culture, values and traditions of the member countries.

As of 2010, ETEN has become a Network of over 60 institutions in more than 17 countries, mainly from Europe. ETEN, like the Internet, is a network without a hierarchy, but with a purpose: besides promoting the exchange of students and staff, we focus around TIGs - the Thematic Interest Groups. These groups of common interest are the stamina of the network, and would not exist without special people, the TIG leaders. The annual conference of ETEN is, in essence, organized around each TIG, where each TIG leader is responsible for accepting papers, organizing presentations, moderating discussions—a unique and a huge task. What makes this network so interesting is the way TIGs are created, become alive, or disappear (if they don't raise interest to more than 5 participants during two consecutive years) according with the interests that evolve from discussions during the network meetings. So, the network is very dynamic, always changing its geometry, which makes it a very lively body. To facilitate comprehension of ETEN, allow us to give you a portrayal about each TIG.

Knowing traditional stories from around the world, we find that the things we value most highly, fear most deeply, and hope for most ardently, are valued, feared, and hoped for by all people. But each culture has a unique response, made richer by details from its stories. Whatever the explanation, they fire our own imagination: so we explore **Myths and Fairy Tales** with the TIG leader Henning Kopart, from Denmark.

Knowing different ways of teaching in international educational systems, and respecting all sources of experience, and the range of ways through which such experiences can be mediated and interrogated, is essential in order to comprehend any community of learners, so we engage in **Reflective Practices** with the TIG leader Hilde Stroobants, from Belgium.

Other powerful influences affect people: some start to sing, some create images, some dance; we acknowledge our emotions, whether through visual arts, performance arts, or a combination of all. We are gathering also to recognize the value of **Arts Education**, with the TIG leader Peter Gregory, from the UK.

Some like to wonder about how children should be prepared physically, and how each country is putting their philosophy/paradigm into practice: Outdoors and Adventurous Activities? Scandinavian practices? Motivating Children? Inclusion in Physical Education: Yes/No? Movement Principle: 'Everything Every time'? These are just some among many other interests of the **Physical Education Movement Activities, Health and Outdoor Learning** TIG, lead by Anne Moerenhout from Belgium and Kaaren Mari Eid Kaarby from Norway.

Discussing and comparing different practices and experiences dealing with special education needs, inclusion, and diversity in different countries, sharing examples of good practice relative to students with special needs and their families, is part of the interest of the **Special Needs** TIG, lead by Danny Wyffells, from Belgium.

Some of us come to annual conferences looking to address issues like: the education of ethnic minority children, the education of children living in poverty, the education of children who are not speakers of the dominant language. Many children have ample opportunities while living in such settings, while many others don't. This is a concern that some of our colleagues are dealing with in the **Urban Education** TIG, like Fran Huckaby, from the USA, and Irene van der Leer-Veth, from The Netherlands, who share the leadership of this group.

We are also a group of people keen on meeting other people who investigate competencies for internationalisation in teacher and social educator training, but who mainly believe that there is an urgent need for our students to learn and understand about diversity in cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open

dialogue inside society, between nations and cultures. At many universities there are admirable initiatives and practices in this area of global awareness. That is one of the aims of the **Internationalisation** TIG, lead by Ben Bartels, from The Netherlands

Comparing each other's science curricula, our science teaching philosophies and strategies, reflecting about how students understand biological functions, and the usage of daily life situations in biological subjects at school, is one of the interests of the **Biological Sciences** TIG, lead by Bart Hempen, from Belgium.

In our respective countries Engineering, Science and Technology may have different approaches. By sharing and comparing experiences, we are developing a «World perspective» on **Technology Teaching and Learning**, making young people more interested in studying these subject areas. This is one of the aims of this TIG, lead by Maria Svensson, from Sweden.

Some say that, as we move south through Europe, performance results in mathematics become lower. We don't know if we totally agree with that, and that's why some of us will make an effort to participate more often in the **Mathematics Education** TIG. What we are sure of, is that sharing experiences and ideas among mathematics educators, will contribute to a better understanding, to promoting joint research and collaborative projects, and to the design of solutions to overcome the problem, which, we are sure, are also the concerns of the TIG leader Melvyn Brown from the UK.

Cellular phones are everywhere, from classrooms to the most remote places of our planet. Communication and information technologies and ways to work with young children need to be investigated. Around the world there are many governmental programs to make computers more available, seeking to provide children with new opportunities to explore, experiment, and express themselves. Computers are both a window and a tool: a window into the world and a tool with which to think. What are the issues that this raises to educators, schools, and policy makers? These are issues for **Early Learners and ICT/Multimedia**, TIG lead by An Vrouwenraths, from The Netherlands.

We are realizing that we cannot live without computers; we wonder how we can promote a greater understanding of the role and application of instructional technology in learning? What will be the school of the future? Will it be an "expanded school" which grows beyond the walls of the classroom? What about the impact of connectivity among nations and cultures? These are just a couple of issues for the **Instructional Technology and Learning (ICT)** TIG, lead by Kari Kumpulainen, from Finland.

Some of us live well without religion or faith, however religion has become an increasingly powerful and pervasive influence on global affairs and international relations as well as a foundation for cultural and civic life, ethics, and human self-understanding.

Providing a forum for the exchange of knowledge and techniques for teaching about religion and culture on all levels, for learning about and promoting understanding, respect, and tolerance for cultural and religious differences in teacher education and all educational curricula, and encouraging appropriate and responsible dialogue among teachers, students, and administrators of all faiths and religious perspectives about the challenges of multicultural and multireligious classroom instruction is the aim of the **Religion and Cultural Education** TIG, lead by Astrid de Keizer from The Netherlands, and James Gibson from the USA.

All of these considerations, thoughts, beliefs, and rationales are only possible because we enjoy debate, along with with the right of freedom of expression; we get a sense of fulfilment from liberating learning, while underlining the importance of values in human/child development and improving the quality of education by introducing and integrating democracy and human rights in education. Specifically this is one of the foci of the **Democracy** TIG, lead by Jan Pouwels, from The Netherlands.

ETEN is thus a dynamic network, a participatory learning platform and a community of practice, that reflects the will of its members, but also the challenges and changes that each of our countries and our institutions are facing nowadays. Our meetings are exceptional opportunities for sharing concerns and learning solutions to problems that we face everyday. After our meetings and conferences, a feeling lasts with us that we regained new and refreshing ideas, proposals that generally become solutions to problems we experience back home. Today many countries, and consequently our institutions, are undergoing dramatic and quick changes. It is only possible to change the world if we change the way we look at it in order to avoid escalation into chaos. Besides rebuilding trust and reform in our financial and economic world, we need urgently to better understand each other, to experience other ways of living, not simply putting ourselves in other people's shoes, but "getting inside the skin" of the other person. When we develop empathy with another human being, when we put ourselves emotionally in another person's situation, identifying ourselves with, and understanding better, the other, we tend to be more confident, sensitive, and assertive individuals and less self-centred and unconcerned. All this makes us stronger and richer, better equipped to face our daily lives, to work with our students and our colleagues in our own countries, and to share with them many of our values and knowledge, thus contributing to the preparation of citizens better able to deal with the challenges of a growing globalized, interconnected, and uncertain world. This is, in our humble opinion, one of the main purposes of ETEN.

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