

HIERD Hosts CIDREE Conference

On 5th November 2015, CIDREE (the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe) held its annual conference in Budapest, hosted by HIERD, its Hungarian member organisation. The CIDREE yearbook 2015, *Improving Literacy Skills across Learning*, edited by HIERD, was launched at the conference.

Dr József Kaposi, the Director General of HIERD and Alan Armstrong, President of CIDREE welcomed the participants. Dr Kaposi pointed out in his welcome note that this is the third important international conference related to education in Budapest this year: the CIDREE conference was preceded by the midterm conference of the ELINET project, also hosted by HIERD in April, and ECER in September, in which HIERD and CIDREE also took an active part presenting the yearbook 2014 entitled *From Political Decisions to Change in the Classroom: Successful Implementation of Education Policy*.

http://www.cidree.org/publications/yearbook_2014

Alan Armstrong added that he was looking forward to a day of professional dialogue, which he characterised as the most important day in the year for CIDREE, and a good occasion to share ideas with experts, which is important as CIDREE wants to be influential on all levels (both internationally and nationally, and also on the level of classrooms).

The first keynote speaker, Dr Christine Garbe, coordinator of the European Literacy Policy Network, presented the aims and achievements of ELINET, while inviting CIDREE members to consider joining the network. A project of almost two-years, the objective of ELINET is to tackle the „literacy crisis” in Europe (the worryingly high number of Europeans, who do not have sufficient literacy skills) by lobbying on the policy-making level, raising awareness, collecting best practice examples and creating tools like a framework for good practice, 30 country reports and a glossary of literacy terms. ELINET involves 78 partner organisations from 28 member countries, including HIERD and the Kecskemét Teacher Training College from Hungary. Further information is available from: <http://www.eli-net.eu/>

The second keynote speaker, Dr Petra Aczél, Director of the Institute for Behavioural Sciences and Communication Theory at the Corvinus University of Budapest, spoke about the challenges of literacy education in the 21st century. She presented some of the most recent findings about new media, digitalisation in education and generation Z. According to these, the new technologies make us forgetful, our attention spans shorten (there is a competition for our attention and an 82% information overload). Students today actually read and write more than formerly, however in a different way: what the supernow generation does is exploratory reading and writing for the exploration of the self (blogs and community media). Dr Aczél talked about the risks of overly customized web use facilitated by the semantic web, or web 3.0, which does not only provide information and is used for interaction but also collects information from the user, and of the popularity of smartphones, which are designed for individuals rather than communities. She also presented the results of a research project at Corvinus University in which the first year students were asked their opinions about the university. The questions extended to their reading habits and the findings were that the freshmen do not like academic papers, but enjoy experts’ blogs, which are representatives of non-canonized, debatable knowledge. This reinforced the idea that universities should not be

places of canonized knowledge, but of knowledge invented together. Our ideals for multiliteracy are students who participate in society, who can express themselves and use language as a tool.

The third keynote speaker of the day, Dr Gábor Halász, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Management at the Faculty of Education and Psychology of ELTE, and HIERD scientific advisor, presented about *Education in Hungary: Challenges and Recent Developments*. The EU accession in 2004 marked the starting point for major EU-funded development programs, which centred on social integration, curriculum and textbook development, teachers' professional development and pedagogical support systems. The other important milestone in Hungarian education was 2010, when a political landslide victory led to major changes starting in education. These included the lowering of the compulsory age of education to 16 years, an almost exceptional centralisation of education in Europe (with the establishment of the Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Centre), stricter curricular regulations and the nationalisation of the textbook market. Vocational education has been transferred to sectoral ministries, and new teacher categories have been introduced, in which moving between categories is established on a complex, competence-based evaluation. Simultaneously, a new inspection system was also created. Current challenges of Hungarian education include managing the centralised system, improving the status and professional motivation of teachers, integrating disadvantaged (especially Roma) students and reducing early school leaving, rationalising school networks and harmonising regulative frameworks with development interventions.

Following the plenary session, a literacy café took place, when conference participants could join in discussions at six different thematic tables, about arts and literacy, science literacy, mathematical literacy, multiliteracy, genres in textbooks and measuring literacy.

After the discussions, Alan Armstrong launched the yearbook *Improving Literacy Skills across Learning*. The ten articles of the volume (edited by HIERD) centre on the topic of literacy, presenting national projects/case studies to improve literacy skills (Slovenia, Scotland), research articles about genres in textbooks (Netherlands) and teachers' questions in relation to supporting text comprehension (Estonia), curricular changes to develop multiliteracy (Finland, France), tests of literacy (Sweden), the aim of literacy education (Ireland), and examples of European projects to tackle struggling readers (BaCuLit and ISIT). The Hungarian article, written by HIERD colleagues Katalin Varga, László Kojanitz, Ambrus Dobszay and Gergely Wintsche examined how the new generational textbooks improve literacy skills.

The yearbook was presented by editor Viola Bozsik, who identified five common features in all of the articles. All countries seemed to acknowledge that literacy is the responsibility of all teachers, throughout secondary education, and many also emphasised the importance of students taking responsibility for their own learning, that is, taking an active part in defining study materials and in the learning process. Awareness also characterised the articles as a common theme: being aware that the language of schooling can be very different from the language of the student, reflecting on this, and taking the necessary steps (paying attention to the language of instruction, teaching genres) seemed to be a component generally present in the literacy scene of all the contributing countries. Similarly, reflection is expected from students and teachers and education experts alike: the presented cases were full of examples

of students reflecting on their learning strategies, and the flexibility of teachers re-evaluating their methods, and teacher trainers redesigning their courses based on participant feedback. The Hungarian process of developing textbooks heavily relying on the feedback from teachers is also an outstanding example of this attitude, as well as the emphasis on formative assessment. Finally, the acknowledgment of complexity was present in all articles: the notion of multiliteracy has replaced traditional literacy, as the concept summing up what we expect from education (literate children – able to read and write, but also to argue, to think creatively and critically, to collaborate, to use digital tools, to find and filter information, to know their culture and respect that of others’, and so on). Also, more and more links are established between subjects, for example in the form of interdisciplinary learning modules, as a mapping of our complex world.

In the afternoon, four workshops were held about the four Cs of literacy, that is, about *Cognizing literacy – Theories*, by Irwin Jones from Ireland, *Cooperating in Europe – Strategies* by Christine Garbe, *Concerting curricular aims – Programs*, by Mary Byrne and Juliet McAlpine from Scotland and *Converting needs into advantages – Practices* by Nataša Potočnik from Slovenia. Rapporteurs noted down all emerging questions and problems discussed.

At the end of the day, a panel of experts answered questions gathered by the rapporteurs from the literacy café and the workshops. Alan Armstrong emphasised that policies have never changed practices, teachers in the classroom have. Therefore, it is essential to get their support. Gábor Halász reflected on a question *Why multiliteracy is important now?* by saying it has ever been important, both for life and work. Christine Garbe added that ELINET supports the narrow definition of literacy, that is, the ability to read and write (as opposed to today’s tendency of calling everything literacy: health literacy, financial literacy, emotional literacy, assessment literacy). Petra Aczél chose to answer the question *How to overcome subject teachers’ resistance towards literacy education?* by saying that reducing their stress level is of utmost importance. She also put emphasis on being more accustomed to failure: teachers should have the freedom to try and thus sometimes also to fail in their classroom. Dr Garbe added that our concept of teachers is that they must be a superhero – thus we doom them to failure. Teachers should be aware that they are not supposed to be single heroes, but to conceive themselves as being in a community, and needing multiprofessional support. On successful and failure, Gábor Halász noted that much depends on school leaders, and Alan Armstrong emphasised that teachers should be given support to know what intervention is going to work in their specific context.

The CIDREE conference ended with a gala dinner, and it was followed by the CIDREE General Assembly the next day. The topic of the 2016 yearbook is raising attainment of low achievers, edited by Scotland, to which Hungary also plans to contribute.