



May 2010

# EUROPLAT newsletter

## Welcome to EUROPLAT

What makes a collaborative project such as EUROPLAT successful? Of course we need to be clear about the major tasks to be accomplished but equally important is the need to understand the potential problems and risks involved in achieving these tasks.

One of the most exciting but formidable tasks within EUROPLAT is for each partner to create collaborative networks within their own country. Networks where information and innovation relating to psychology education within universities can flourish. Many of you have already started on this task by providing information for the country pages within the EUROPLAT website. A secondary task is for partners to ensure that psychology departments across their country are aware of EUROPLAT, to encourage their involvement (for example, through participating in EUROPLAT research (see page 3) and inviting other universities to become associate partners of EUROPLAT.

Successful outcomes for this area of work area might include national meetings to discuss the teaching of psychology, the creation and sharing of resources and evidence of changes in teaching practice. I am certain that this last sentence will cause some partners to feel uncomfortable because assumptions are being made about what is possible given the existing cultures around university life in their own country. I would urge partners not to hide such concerns but, instead, engage in the more active process of voicing their views thereby influencing the most effective ways in which EUROPLAT can support quality enhancement in psychology education within each country.



At our first conference, we will have the opportunity to share our hopes and fears and to ensure that the EUROPLAT project has relevance for psychology education in your country. In addition to collaborative discussion sessions, there will be opportunities for partners to meet with the York project manager, Nick Brennan and the newly-appointed project officer, Anna Lewandowska, to hear how partners plan to tackle the challenge of building national networks.

I am greatly looking forward to us meeting together to take EUROPLAT forward at the end of June.

## Quality Board

The Quality Advisory Board will play an important role in monitoring and evaluating EUROPLAT and will consist of up to six members invited by the core partners to provide guidance and advise the direction of the project.

The project management team have agreed a set of criteria for the Quality Board and a shortlist of members to be invited to join.

The criteria for the Quality Board are as follows:

- provide advice, support and critical analysis for EUROPLAT
- a forum for the input from key stakeholders to help shape EUROPLAT activities
- a channel for advice and information on subject related matters
- advise on EUROPLAT's development of its strategic and operational plans and progress against the original project work plan
- discuss the external evaluator's
- champion the work of EUROPLAT with external stakeholders and other constituencies and bring feedback to the project from these stakeholders
- advise and approve of the appointment of the external evaluator, managed by the Secretariat

The proposed Board members will be clarified before the Annual Conference and will hold their first Quality Advisory Board Meeting in Edinburgh at the Conference.

For more details please contact Peter Reddy at Aston University [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk).

## Core Partners Management Meeting

The second core project partners meeting was held in Salzburg in January. The core partners from York, Aston, Turkey, Austria, Portugal and Sweden attended the meeting to discuss the progress of the project and the next steps.

If you would like a copy of the meeting minutes please check on the website at [www.europlat.org](http://www.europlat.org) where we are publishing all the Europlat papers.

## Other news and events

EFPTA (European Federation of Psychology Teachers' Associations) is a sister organisation to EUROPLAT with its main focus on pre-tertiary psychology teaching. The purpose of the Federation is to improve co-operation of Psychology Teachers' Associations between European countries.

In April, our colleague Hans Reijnierse from the University of Applied Sciences, Vlissingen, The Netherlands attended the EFPTA Conference in Bratislava in his capacity as EFPTA President.

The motto of the international conference organised in Bratislava on the 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> of April by EFPTA and the Department of Psychology and Pathopsychology at Comenius University was *Teaching of Psychology in Europe beyond University: Sharing good practice, learn from experts.*

Dr Reijnierse gave the welcome speech underlining the importance of teachers' networks. Following the speech there were a number of presentations and workshops, which covered several themes including: the past and present of psychology teacher training in Slovakia; teaching of pre-university psychology in Europe, future steps for the EFPTA's international survey; psychology teacher in fighting misinformation; psychology in the cinema and learning processes in cyberspace.

Further details of the conference are available at the EFPTA website at [www.efpta.org/](http://www.efpta.org/)



## Innovation in teaching psychology survey

**Peter Reddy**

The Europlat mission is to enhance the quality of teaching and student learning in psychology in Europe. Our first research project seeks to establish a baseline measure of the current state of innovation in teaching psychology and, as well as reviewing psychology learning and teaching publications, we have created a survey. To succeed with both the review and the survey we need your help and support.

The survey that we have created can be completed quickly and easily and asks you to use your judgment in taking an overview. We have backed away from the classical approach of seeking precise and accurate detail from a sample from which we can generalise – because we think that accurate data is almost impossible to obtain and the attempt would fail through a low response rate. Instead we have adopted a heuristic approach and are asking for impressionistic data. This has the advantage of allowing us to cover a lot of material but is more like an attitude survey. It is the difference between asking if you know how many psychology programmes in France use plagiarism detection software (the answer is almost certainly ‘I don’t know’) and asking how likely it is that such software is used. This is a less precise question but it is much more likely to get an answer, although a relatively imprecise one. These answers will nonetheless help indicate where the baseline lies.

The survey has had the benefit of input from Europlat colleagues in Portugal, Italy, the Czech Republic, Sweden and the UK. It is concise and

asks only three main questions. It does not require you to know the answers, but asks that you use your experience to make a judgement about your own university, and about your country as a whole. We are not expecting a definite answer about, for example, the use of plagiarism detection software, but we are asking you to indicate the extent of your agreement with the proposition that this technology is used in 1) Psychology teaching in your university and 2) Psychology teaching in your country in general.

Thus the first question seeks a Likert scale response about the use of 13 categories of technology in psychology teaching. The second asks for seven focuses for teaching to be ranked, again for university and country; the third asks for judgments about 16 categories of pressure for change in psychology teaching. Finally we also ask for examples of innovative practice and for publications about psychology teaching to be added to a list.

We would be very pleased for your help with this survey. We would like at least one psychologist from the Europlat partner university in each country to complete it, many more if possible. Please complete the survey yourself and send it with your request for completion to colleagues in other universities.

The survey should have recently reached you from me via email, please let me know if it has not. Please return it as an email attachment to [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) or, if preferred, as a paper copy to Peter Reddy, School of Life and Health Sciences, Aston University, Birmingham, B4 7ET, UK.

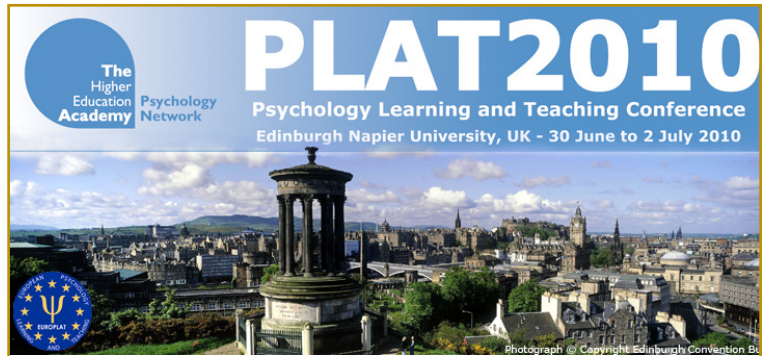
## Edinburgh Conference - EUROPLAT 2010

The first EUROPLAT Conference is to take place in the beautiful city of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK from the 30<sup>th</sup> of June to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2010. This will be an excellent opportunity for the 32 EUROPLAT Partners to meet for the first time and exchange knowledge and experience on all aspects of teaching and learning psychology in Europe. The Conference will coincide with the biennial PLAT2010 conference, which is organised under the theme: Managing change within psychology education.

During the conference, depending on your specific role in the project, various EUROPLAT partners will work together by attending targeted meetings related to your work package. These include project management, quality board, web-hub and research groups meetings. Participation and contribution from all Partners will be vital and will enable us all to deliver a really strong EUROPLAT project, which will meet the original project outline.

The final programme for PLAT and EUROPLAT will be sent to all partners and with both being fully integrated events all partners are able to attend the PLAT symposia, panel discussions, and workshop. There is an opportunity to choose from a broad range of topics including:

- Teaching research methods
- Student retentions
- Emotional intelligence
- Involving psychology students in the community
- Student well-being
- Advancing psychological science: The role of the British Psychological Society
- Assessment and plagiarism
- Second Life
- Teaching qualitative research methods
- Clinical psychology training
- Sandwich and other work based learning opportunities
- Applying the principal of psychology to learning and teaching
- Critical thinking
- Web based resources to support psychology teaching



- Developing 21<sup>st</sup> century psychology graduates
- Peer mentoring
- Giving effective feedback
- Enhancing learning through technology
- Student engagement
- Managing change within the teaching of psychology: New forms of teaching and evaluation
- Active learning

The programme overview can be accessed from: <http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/plat2010/html/programme.php>

The detailed programme of the PLAT/EUROPLAT2010 Conference is available from: <http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/plat2010/html/programmedetailed.php>.

The social events programme has been carefully selected and prepared for the occasion to offer participants a chance to:

- explore the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park
- visit the historic city of Edinburgh and the 18th century underground vaults
- mingle with other delegates at the informal Conference Dinner at The Caves situated in the heart of the Edinburgh's Old Town

The detailed list of social events and prices can be found on: [http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/plat2010/html/social\\_events.php](http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/plat2010/html/social_events.php).

## Teaching practice: Teaching psychology to small groups

### Annie Trapp

Although small group teaching poses some difficulties especially in economical terms (staff and time) it can be highly beneficial and in line with learner-centred approaches to teaching.

Working in small groups can benefit students in many ways. It can help them to develop skills which nowadays employers value the most: team working, cooperation, listening, persuading and problem solving skills. It can also teach students to think critically, enhance their sense of self-direction, boost their independence, and encourage them to take responsibility for the learning process.

In order to facilitate the learning process within small groups, lecturers should keep their dominant position to a minimum in order to encourage and equalise students' participation. This is sometimes described as lecturers taking the role of guide rather than expert. In doing so, it is important to consider some key factors, namely: group size and arrangement, group composition and cohesion, and task design and assessment.

Researchers suggest that effective learning requires the following group arrangements:

- Groups operate the most effectively with a maximum of six members; in the instances of larger groups it is beneficial to subdivide them for individual tasks
- Organising groups to sit in circles is considered the best way to facilitate interaction.
- Mixing low and high ability students benefits all as low ability students benefit from their counterparts guidance and high ability students benefit from assisting their lower ability peers.
- Using icebreaker techniques can build up group cohesion which in turn helps to enhance task performance, and makes students' interactions more productive.

Similarly, research shows that the learning tasks can either enhance or crumble group cooperation. Students need to feel that their individual contribution is equally important to the overall performance of the group. Students tend to minimise their effort if they notice that other group members are not contributing sufficiently. This is called "social loafing" and can be overcome by:

- Increasing task difficulty.
- Designing tasks that require high level of participation (e.g. assuming different roles in group therapy, collaborative essay-writing).
- Making each member of a group responsible for a different section of a task (interdependence of members).

A lecturer as a facilitator of group work can actively encourage and support learning outcomes by specific interventions or asking the right type of questions. By using verbal signals and non-verbal gestures a lecturer has the power to encourage or hamper the discussion. By making eye contact a lecturer can invite students to respond to the remark of their peers. Similarly, by detecting signs of confusion or interest a lecturer can encourage and sustain a discussion. Asking the right kind of questions is key to avoid silence and foster students' cooperation. Effective techniques include:

- Asking open-ended questions with no right answer.
- Asking one question at the time to avoid confusion.
- Allowing students time to think and digest a question.
- After you hear the response do not jump to the next question, allow other students to comment on what was said.
- When students ask a question, give time for other students to answer before answering yourself.

Some students experience a high level of social anxiety working in small groups. This may show itself through students being reluctant to answer questions, taking responsibility for background tasks in group projects, avoiding seminars that require oral presentations or persistently choosing to work with another student that is more talkative. It is important to recognise students showing signs of high social anxiety in order to work with these students to develop their confidence.

Further information about the guidance given above with the reference and suggested reading list can be found in:

The Higher Education Academy Psychology Network (2008). Psychology Teaching: Working with small groups. Accessed from: [http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/docs/pdf/p20080208\\_Teaching\\_Psychology\\_small\\_groups.pdf](http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/docs/pdf/p20080208_Teaching_Psychology_small_groups.pdf)

## Innovative partner stories within the field of teaching and curriculum

**Poland – Dr Emilia Soroko, Faculty of Social Sciences - Institute of Psychology**

### **The educational path in applied psychology**

In Poland, an education pathway has been introduced in the field of applied psychology. There are four types of class available. These classes provide students with an opportunity to become familiar with various areas in which psychology is put into practice. In the second year, the student chooses a variety of optional classes and decides on a path to be carried out during the third year. They can take different types of classes to make a learning path including lectures, seminars, ordinary classes and field classes. In the lectures students learn the theoretical grounds of a selected branch of applied psychology; during seminars they discuss important tasks in the area for a practising psychologist; during classes they improve their skills in diagnostic activities and/or the basics of psychological assistance. The field classes take place in specific agencies or institutions and involve conducting various diagnostic and counselling tasks under supervision of practitioners.

**Iceland – Dr Urdur Njardvik, Department of Psychology**

### **Emphasis on research design and statistics**

The Icelandic approach to research design and statistics is intended to provide graduates with useful skills for employers.

Almost every course taught at the Department of Psychology at the University of Iceland focuses on empirical research. Students are required to take several courses in research methodology and statistics while at the same time conducting independent research studies and experiments in various classes. Graduates from the programme thus have gained valuable knowledge of statistics and methodology combined with considerable experience of how to conduct reliable and valid research studies. The department emphasizes independent work, requiring students to come up with their own research ideas and collect and analyse their own data. These types of project are incorporated into various courses so that each student is required to conduct independent studies several times before starting their bachelor thesis.

This approach has proved to be very successful, resulting in graduates who have pursued careers with companies and institutions specializing in surveys and statistical analyses, i.e. Gallup Iceland, Social Science Research Institute etc.

**Germany - Prof. Dr. Birgit Spinath,  
Department of Psychology**

### **To raise awareness of the value of psychology in teacher training**

At Heidelberg University, about 350 student teachers each semester attend an introduction into Educational Psychology.

These students come with very different motivation, some of them extremely keen on gaining psychological knowledge and some of them not even knowing why psychology could be helpful for their lives. Faced with this situation, we take special care to point out the practical relevance of psychological knowledge for teachers. To shake cherished beliefs that are incompatible with empirical evidence, each week students submit written statements in which they analyze and evaluate research on current topics. Students get feedback from tutors on their statements, which is intended to improve their line of argument.

Evaluations show that at the end of this class, the majority of the teacher students appreciate the importance of psychological knowledge and are motivated to deepen their knowledge. As future teachers, these students will disseminate the value of psychology.

**Czech Republic – Mgr Ales Neusar, Institute  
for Research on Children, Youth and Family**

### **Strong relationships between research and teaching**

The Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Social Studies at the Masaryk University benefits from being closely connected with The Institute for Research on Children, Youth and Family (IRCYF) which is focused on human development.

Our strongest areas of teaching and learning gain from this unique cooperation of the department and the research institute and are thus developmental psychology, research methodology and statistics. Students learn from the first year how to write a literature review, design their own small studies, work in small teams, and learn statistics – everything under supervision of professional lecturers and researchers.

## Partner web update form

Thank you to those Partners who filled in the Partner Web Update Form. This information is an essential first step in building the EUROPLAT network and website. Please e-mail Anna if you did not receive a copy of the form.

## Newsletters

Thank you to Partners who contributed to the current issue of the newsletter.

If you would like to disseminate news to all partners or publicise a story relating to psychology teaching and learning in your country, please get in touch with Nick or Anna.

All contributions are welcome.

## Partner contracts

We were invited to the Brussels Coordinators Meeting in February. The meeting was hosted by members of the EC Lifelong Learning team, who gave us an update on financial management and reporting requirements for the project.

After the meeting, we were able to send you all final copies of your partner contracts. Most have now been returned but there are some outstanding, so please sign and return two copies to York as soon as possible.

## Feedback

If you have a suggestion, can think of doing things better, would like to comment on anything, please feel free to contact us!

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