

Pierre-Antoine Ullmo, et aut voluptium aut dellor
Education is the answer

About P.A.U. Education



Pierre-Antoine Ullmo

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Dedicated to all those who firmly
believe in this project

P.A.U. Education is a private company based in Barcelona, Spain, founded in 1995 by Pierre-Antoine Ullmo (Paris, France), with a staff of more than 50 people from 16 different countries working with public and private clients on a European and international basis.

Our projects are based on participatory educational schemes, community-building processes and innovative contents, and contribute to increasing, in an ethical manner, the quantitative and qualitative impact of our clients' social responsibility actions and communication strategies in the interest of the individuals they care for, the societies they are part of and the institutions they represent.

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Education

Whatever the question, **education** is the answer.

Education is part of our corporate name, our professional careers and our personal beliefs and, at P.A.U. Education, we all define ourselves as education specialists. There are many ways of being an education specialist. We work with and for teachers, trainers, researchers and social workers on a daily basis, but we add our own expertise, creating new educational paradigms based on key participation and mutual learning concepts.

Through education, children and young people can claim ownership of and better exercise their rights, and adults can better understand and overcome the main challenges they face on a daily basis. Through education, any group of people can get together, identify common values, strengthen democratic principles and improve social cohesion. Any institution, company or brand can also take this educational path to better define its mission, communicate values and goals and ultimately provide a better service to those people who trust in it and those in whom it trusts.

Through education, we therefore seek to encourage all social actors to think, question their surroundings and contribute to social dialogue, thus going back to the etymological root of the word “education”: “educere”, which means to draw out from within. Education is therefore considered not only as a knowledge and learning component, but also as a communication process.

Human development

Our conviction is that any social actor (school, university, association, company or public institution) or any individual has the obligation, capacity and will to contribute to human development and make the world a slightly better place.

Human development is a complex and almost limitless domain and we are well aware of our limitations. Nevertheless, we fully believe in the strength of commitment so well summarised by the anthropologist Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Human development is about change, and no change will take place in society unless citizens (starting with the youngest) are fully part of the process. The same applies in a company: change can take place in a sustainable way only with the active involvement of the employees.

Sustainable development means that any effort or project should have a lasting effect, be replicable and involve a representative number of people who are part of the problem they face as well as being part of the solution.

At P.A.U. Education, we have been working for years along the lines of the Bruntland Commission, which sees sustainable development as: “Meeting human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations.”

Human development means meeting human needs, and we all have a say in this. For us, this means that any educational proposal should address not only children but also adults,

including the elderly. Education in this context of sustainable development is the answer in order to empower future generations, as well as to enable present generations to immediately address the main issues the world and all of its actors are facing. In this context, taking care of future generations is a shared responsibility based frequently on intergenerational dialogue.

Knowledge

For us and for our clients, knowledge is the main component that enables individuals and communities to grow.

The Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen wrote that: “Knowledge is learning from the other across the border”. Our approach to knowledge is based on this dynamic vision. Knowledge flows from one school to another, from one company to another, from one city to another, and from one country or one language to another. Knowledge is part of a global communication process. Learning from the other requires the conviction that knowledge stems from dialogue.

We do not envision knowledge as a pre-imposed set of contents. All of our expertise is focused on generating original knowledge through dialogue and interaction between people and groups.

Feedback is especially important in our creative approach. The contents that we create are only the starting point of a knowledge generation process to which all actors will contribute, adding and creating contents of their own.

This is why, at P.A.U. Education, we help our clients to thoroughly investigate existing knowledge and develop new knowledge in those areas that are most relevant to their mission and expertise, creating partnerships with experts in each of these fields and exploring the communication channels that will enable this knowledge to flow.

Participation

Participation forms the core of our methodology and is central to our creativity.

Participation is crucial for a teacher seeking to engage students and parents in the learning process. Participation is fundamental for a company aiming to involve its employees in an empowerment scheme and strengthen corporate culture. Participation is essential for a public authority (city council or ministry) wanting to involve citizens in an awareness-raising campaign. Participation is key for an NGO aspiring to transform its members and volunteers into social activists.

P.A.U. Education's theoretical commitment to participation is based on the works of Roger Hart, Professor at the City University of New York. Roger inspired articles 12 and 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and, at P.A.U. Education, we believe that what applies for children also applies for every individual.

According to the UN, children have the right to express their views freely. The right to freedom of expression includes freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas

of all kinds. This right should be extended to all members (children or adults) of any community.

Everybody can agree on the benefits of participation and the importance of democratic values. The problem emerges when participatory projects have to be designed and when participatory initiatives have to be launched. Too many participatory initiatives fail to give children at school, citizens in a city or employees in a company a choice about the subjects that matter to them, time to formulate their opinions, the space to put forward proposals and the means to apply them.

Roger Hart uses a ladder as a metaphor to illustrate the different degrees of initiation and input children can have when working with adults. This ladder helps visualise what is and what is not participation. The first three levels are clearly non-participatory, describing situations in which, for instance, children's voices are used or manipulated to convey an adult message. The higher steps on the ladder represent genuine participation.

Our work is based on a reinterpretation of this children's participation ladder to extend it to any type of participatory strategy involving adults and/or children. Our main task is therefore to design projects that allow genuine participation at the highest possible levels of the participation ladder as a precondition for social change.

This means that our clients are ready to take risks, i.e. to fully accept the consequences of a participatory approach. I was once with a client discussing the benefits of a Web 2.0 strategy when a critical voice exposed the potential risk

of establishing dialogue over which the client might lose control. This is a crucial point: there is nothing to fear in a participatory process if the rules are clearly established from the start and each side knows what to expect from the other.

Audiences

Education is very often seen as children's territory. We all fondly reminisce about our school days. Education is something we received from our parents and teachers and something we pass on or will pass on to our children. Education is usually enclosed within the school walls, kept separate from real life.

At P.A.U. Education, we believe that education for all applies to all people throughout their lives, wherever they may be.

Everything starts with young children, and P.A.U. Education's journey started 15 years ago in a nursery school. Four-year-old children wrote a book about a ladybird which we published. This ladybird became the symbol of a unique educational project on child literacy: *The children write a book at school*. School teachers all over Europe were invited to involve their pupils in a participatory process by creating a book of their own that would then be professionally published by P.A.U. Education and publicised in the surrounding communities. A teacher training component was soon added and investigation and action were combined.

These participation, creativity and partnership components have been maintained throughout our projects, whilst audiences have diversified. This is why our audiences are

better defined in terms of users (i.e. project participants) as opposed to targets, to take into account the proactive role of users in a participatory scheme.

Our projects currently address audiences as diverse as school and university students and teachers, parents, citizens, employees working in multinationals or SMEs, eGovernment practitioners, building professionals, health specialists, and so on.

Education is no longer confined within school walls but forms part of everyday situations (on streets, in parks, at civic centres, companies, etc.).

Evidence of this fact can be given by any of the 80,000 multinational employees who have been involved in a training process about health at the workplace, the 100,000 adolescents who have participated in an education programme at school, the 50 experts in eGovernment participating in a European Commission-backed workshop, or the 10 street children who have written a book on their future with the support of an African NGO trained by us.

As I write, I am reminded of a specific educational event that took place at a supermarket. As part of a consultancy mission on the educational dimension of commercial venues, we invited customers to share their expertise with other customers. A nutritionist went on stage and, during a 30-minute talk about healthy habits, demonstrated the hidden potential of an organisation to foster educational exchange in the most unexpected places.

Communication

Education is our communication paradigm. Through education, we create communication campaigns based on dialogue and the exchange of practices. We do not believe in the strength and absolute power of pre-established messages but advocate implementing dynamic processes in which our target audiences are real protagonists and not passive recipients.

P.A.U. Education provides communication expertise but is absolutely not an advertising agency. Our work processes and methodology have nothing to do with the traditional communication approach. We do not have the ability to create brilliant and intuitive campaigns based on memorable slogans. We sometimes admire this creativity but consider it to be a superficial response to the real needs of our societies.

We believe that brands and companies now require a different communication approach to sell their products or services. Their communication strategies should be based on genuine commitments and true dialogue to create ownership and strengthen loyalty and trust. Networking and community building are the essential tools we use to design communication strategies.

We are now in charge of some of the leading European Union communication campaigns in the field of education, culture and citizenship. Many of our private clients use our services as an alternative to those provided by their usual communication specialists. Our distinctive approach has been recognised as relevant in a specific context in which traditional communication and advertising techniques are

unable to ensure lasting engagement among the general public or specific audiences.

Change

We all have the ability to initiate and bring about positive changes in our environment on every subject that matters to us. Change is central to our work. The projects we create must make change possible, at school, in the city or in a company.

Changing the world is not always an objective for our clients. But changing their world, even a little part of it, is always part of our mission. Our creative approach is therefore action-orientated and should include a proactive element to enable such change.

We have adopted a theoretical construction devised by our friend Professor Bjarne Bruun Jensen and his team at the Danish School of Education: the IVAC model for the development of health-promoting strategies involving children.

According to this theoretical model, young people should be given an opportunity to define the problem of significance to them, acquire knowledge about the problem, envision possible solutions and then, based on these, take action to address the problem and bring about change.

Reality tends to be very different and these phases do not always take place in succession. Nevertheless, they help to understand that any project should and could bring about change.

Creating the conditions (for young people as well as adults) under which change can be made possible is another way of stressing the importance of ensuring a lasting impact in the communities that are beneficiaries and actors of the projects we implement.

Ownership

Our action is comparable to that of a tourist visiting a city who first sees a building on the skyline, admires its colour, texture and form, but then gets closer, becomes more critical of the design details or the materials used and proposes new solutions to form a lasting and positive perception.

P.A.U. Education aims to establish new communication codes based on a thorough observation of the environment and genuine participation of stakeholders in the search for solutions.

This approach frequently leads to decisions that break with the traditional approach that consists of publicising a message in the best possible and often most aesthetic manner but does not question the sustainability or the authenticity of the message.

In a communication process, very often the problem lies not in the message itself but in the way in which the recipient takes ownership of the message.

For example, for a prevention campaign on obesity, everybody can agree on the relevance of the main messages. Everybody knows what to eat and how long to exercise daily. The problem occurs when this knowledge has to be

applied to daily life. This does not mean that the messages are wrong, but that they have been wrongly designed and communicated.

Two-way communication means acknowledging the importance of the other not only as the recipient of a predetermined message but also as the transmitter/creator of the same message. Being part of the message systematically creates greater ownership among users and guarantees a greater impact for any action, project or campaign.

Our methodology is therefore based on user contribution, changing the content generation paradigm from a top-down one, in which we create the content and users consume it, into a two-way or user-generated paradigm, in which users generate the vast majority of content and we edit, make visible and publicise their contributions.

Community building

The Anglo-Saxons have a word to define P.A.U. Education's field of competence: community building.

The word “community” usually refers to a group of people who either live in a particular place or have common interests or values. Communities are central to our expertise, which is based on assembling groups, identifying and consolidating their common interests, and creating the conditions for greater ownership. Far from implying withdrawal into oneself, building communities implies openness and dialogue with others.

More specifically, the methods we apply and the tools we use contribute to the creation of communities of practice, i.e. creating the conditions for people who have a common interest in an issue or problem to work together, share ideas, find solutions and bring about change.

These communities of practice can be found in schools, universities and companies; they can exist or be created in a city or on a virtual basis. In a community-building process, community members (students, employees and citizens) further their knowledge by interacting on an ongoing basis.

The essence of a community-building process is to learn from others and reuse knowledge. Much of this knowledge is tacit, and it is not always easy to document. Building communities is therefore the paradigm for two-way communication.

Exchange of good practices

How often has the need to exchange ideas and thoughts on an issue that is crucial to the future arisen? Reinventing the wheel is certainly one of the most costly, inefficient and widespread practices that humans have been carrying out for ages. Exchanging practices and sharing experiences is therefore directly related to efficiency gains and optimisation of resources.

We are currently under the impression that only technological tools (known as Web 2.0) can respond to this need and allow ideas and experiences to flow. P.A.U. Education has prioritised the human conditions and methodological requirements that enable the exchange of good practices. All organisations

are facing the same learning challenges (acceleration units, transversal task forces, the open method of coordination, and so on) and P.A.U. Education has the tools and references to successfully address these.

Everything starts with the definition of a good practice, one that is not necessarily better than others but that can be referred to because of its efficiency, effectiveness, impact, service quality, technology, etc. A good practice is meaningful if it supports exchange and if it is a mutual learning process that takes place between people or organisations that have developed successful or innovative projects or approaches to problems shared by others.

Ten years ago in Brussels, I was unexpectedly given access to a whole collection of reports written by European teachers who had participated in school partnerships (Comenius). I was fascinated by the wealth of thoughts and experiences contained in these reports, and puzzled by their lack of accessibility and availability. P.A.U. Education asked the European Commission for authorisation to work on these reports together with the teachers involved and publish a collection of good classroom practices in several languages. This example illustrates our overall approach, which is based upon the conviction that grassroots actors are the main drivers for change.

A good practice is one way of changing the world. Thousands of projects or experiences remain unknown. Reports remain undisclosed, waiting for someone to make them known, creating the conditions for such dialogue, either in person or virtually.

Social responsibility

Social responsibility is no longer seen as a fashionable concept, but is now a leading driver for growth.

P.A.U. Education has been exploring the field of social responsibility since it was established, going beyond words in order to create real projects and bring about real change.

Our clients and users are all moved by the idea of being socially responsible.

At P.A.U. Education, we like Sheldon Berman's concise definition of social responsibility: "Personal investment in the wellbeing of people and the planet". This means that our clients and users care about the world, on a local and a global level, and take action to make it a better place.

We have explained in detail how our methodology enables change through social participation. We must also insist on the commitment of our clients to make these changes happen.

In this context of social responsibility, authenticity and ethics are key ingredients for success. P.A.U. Education and its clients are committed to the design of ethical interventions that respect the fundamental rights of people to critically assess the contents that are given to them, express their ideas and opinions, and decide on their levels of participation.

Ethics means that our clients understand the need for transparent communication.

For example, a clear and transparent position is required in a school, bearing in mind that a project can be successful only if it responds to the real needs of pupils and teachers and

is not built on unclear or ambiguous objectives. This also applies for a company in which empowerment schemes on any subject must meet the real concerns of its employees and not create unrealistic expectations.

Our objective at P.A.U. Education is to help our clients position themselves legitimately and unambiguously as socially responsible actors, so that users know why the project is taking place, what to expect from it and how they can be involved in it.

Partnerships

Partnership is a key word at P.A.U. Education.

Partnership means sharing a project from the outset with all those involved and defining an innovative path that responds to the needs of the project users and can be understood and accepted by the client.

Partnership is a prerequisite for project ownership. It requires transparency at all stages of the project management process. At P.A.U. Education, every project is led by a specific project team that coordinates all actions.

Partnership is also part of the content creation and implementation process once the project is under way. The issues we deal with in our projects, which are central to our users, clients and society as a whole, require considerable expertise. This expertise can be found in universities, research centres, foundations, etc. At P.A.U. Education, we develop partnerships with knowledge centres all over Europe and the world (see RESEARCH).

We share this partnership culture with our clients, inviting them to work with some of the leading organisations in their fields of interest in order to gain expertise and generate added value for their audiences and society as a whole.

We are convinced of the need to extend public-private partnerships to contribute in an ethical way to human and social development. Our own story is about a private company venturing forth into the land of “public good”. We explain to our clients that their know-how, values, sense of responsibility and ethical commitment are key when it comes to their involvement in these innovative partnerships.

Creativity

P.A.U. Education is a creative company. We believe that human and social development issues require creative approaches that enable the transfer of knowledge and future change.

Where does our creativity come from? What makes it unique? P.A.U. Education was created 15 years ago as a publishing company. The company developed in an environment of books, authors and ideas. We started creating new editorial concepts in the field of family leisure and child “edutainment” and were featured on bestseller lists. I personally started my professional career as a publisher, first as the director general of Editions Jean-Claude Lattès (part of the Hachette Group) and then establishing my own publishing house. I have had the opportunity to publish authors including the Goncourt and Principe de Asturias prize-winner Amin Maalouf, the Nobel Prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz, the musicologist

H.C. Robbins Landon, the actor Gérard Depardieu, the musician Sting, and the artist Lorenzo Matotti. All of them have different skills, different personalities and different visions, but the same creative dimension.

Learning to respect authors, encourage their creativity and promote their ideas form part of our editorial culture.

Moving from the world of books to the world of projects does not mean giving up our editorial ambition. On my passport, under “profession”, I still put “editor”. Each project responds to a precise narrative and may use very different formats (print, audiovisual or illustration).

Creativity is present throughout the project chain.

Creativity is part of the briefing phase when we critically assess positioning and values with our clients.

Creativity is part of our strategic thinking when it comes to mapping the main concepts that lie behind the idea that will sustain the whole project.

Creativity is to be found in the contents and main messages we design explicitly for each project involving creators in all fields, responding to their needs and respecting their rights, developing relationships with authors, thinkers and illustrators all over the world.

Creativity is at the core of the participatory process and very often central to the users’ interaction strategy.

Each project is therefore a story of its own and the story’s protagonists are also the storytellers. Once the overall story has been defined, the users are given an opportunity to express their own creativity and enrich the initial story.

Subjects

When we look back at the subjects we have been exploring with and for our clients or as part of our R&D activities, we have before us a catalogue of original contents in many different fields of social science.

All domains of child creativity, including child literacy, writing and reading techniques, early language learning and art for children, are of interest to us. We focus on children's rights in order to address many of the issues central to child development, including the right to health, the right to education and the right to participation, coping with difficult issues such as the sexual abuse of children, role models during adolescence, etc.

We specialise in key issues for the prevention of risk behaviour. Road safety, HIV/AIDS and drug and alcohol consumption are some of the subjects we have been dealing with on a regular basis. The environmental dimension of our work can be understood by looking at our projects on mobility, urban development, environmental protection and science education. Social change is also at the core of projects on the introduction of new technology in the field of education and public government, health education, disability and work, the role of volunteering in social development, and so on.

This diversity is a reflection of our versatility in dealing with subjects and our uniqueness in applying our own methodology to bring about participation and enhance multicultural dialogue.

Networking

Networks are central to our work and provide spaces for the creation, sharing and dissemination of knowledge.

Networks are currently cropping up all over the place. With so-called social networks blossoming on the Internet, everybody appears to be rediscovering the value of networking, i.e. sharing information and services among individuals and groups with a common interest.

At P.A.U. Education, we work with networks on a daily basis. Our core network has always been the school network, but we also build city networks and association networks in order to maintain continuous two-way communication with our project users. We believe that a network is the pillar of any community-building process.

Our internal teams have developed a special ability to identify networks or create them from scratch if necessary. We refer to our work as networking and our people as networkers. Our networkers connect with the field, make contact with the grassroots actors in any country and make them feel that they are the owners and protagonists of the projects we implement.

Networking means taking the best out of the field, empowering people to exchange and gain from one another. Networking is a mix of attitude and techniques.

A networking attitude is based on respect, tolerance and listening. When making contact with the people in a network, it should be clear that what we have to learn from them and what they have to tell us is more important than anything we would like to tell them. When networking, we

make people speak about themselves, their experiences and practices. Empathy is essential to networking.

Our networking techniques include contacting hundreds of schools every day by telephone, having educators or social workers implementing actions in schools or cities, organising training workshops for associations, and connecting people via the telephone or virtual or in-person meetings, or through technological tools such as Web 2.0 portals.

Innovation

What level of technology is required in order to be seen as an innovative company? What does developing innovative projects mean? Innovation is everywhere and nowhere in today's world. We all argue about our degree of innovation and somehow we all fall short in our attempts. Innovation very often means going back to basics.

In our case, the most innovative feature of our work lies in the conviction that the main messages have to be created by the beneficiaries themselves in order to guarantee the impact of any project or campaign. Listening to people is innovative, trusting people is innovative, talking to people is innovative, and placing their creativity above ours is innovative.

Innovation is obviously closely linked to technology, and P.A.U. Education is also a technology-based company with its own technological tools and solutions.

Social networking is increasingly associated with Web 2.0. tools and the infinite possibilities that they afford to connect people, generate original contents and maintain

continuous dialogue. Over the past few years, our information architects, functional analysts and IT coordinators have spent a considerable amount of time studying, researching and implementing Internet good practice exchange platforms, most notably on a European level.

Our platforms are seen as a point of reference in the field of exchange of good practices: the www.ePractice.eu portal, which represents the state of the art in good practice exchange using community building tools and Web 2.0 services; the www.erscharter.eu website, which combines online and offline methods to enhance the exchange of good practice; and the www.elearningeuropa.info portal, which has become a significant reference point over the years for researchers and practitioners worldwide in the field of technology-assisted learning. The www.buildup.eu portal summarises a number of the innovative features that characterise our Web developments.

These platforms make use of the DRUPAL content management system, which has won the best open source PHP Content Management System award for the second year in a row at the Packt Publishing 2009 Open Source CMS Awards. Our commitment, beyond operating portals, is to fully contribute to open, collaborative information-sharing systems and approaches, guaranteeing constant upgrades, cutting-edge innovations and easy hand-over to our clients.

Research

I was trained as a researcher, and this research experience inspires part of our approach. I started my professional career at Berkeley University in the Centre for Real Estate and Urban Housing, developing an econometric model to simulate the housing demand on the French market. I then moved back to the French C.N.R.S. (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). I was hired by two senior researchers at the CEREPi (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur l'Épargne, le Patrimoine et les Inégalités), giving me the unique opportunity to form part of an intellectual experience that, to a certain extent, P.A.U. Education tries to reproduce. Dominique Strauss-Kahn (currently the director of the International Monetary Fund) was the director of the CEREPi at the time, and formally hired me. Denis Kessler, who was the acting director of the CEREPi and is currently the chairman of one of Europe's leading reinsurance companies, taught me that good research is based on hard work and team spirit.

For both Denis and Dominique, research was a necessity and a starting point for change. Their intellectual skills and brilliant intuition were supported by strong evidence and constantly challenged by unexpected results. Both of them helped me to understand the need for intellectual rigour and public-private partnership.

Research is seen as a continuous obligation at a company level to consolidate our expertise in the various fields in which we work.

We interact with some of the key actors in our fields of interest. Our research partnerships involve leading universities such

as the Danish School of Education, the Ecole Normale Supérieure, the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, the Freie Universität in Berlin and the IESE, as well as leading professional organisations such as the INIVE in Belgium in the field of building and energy, and Forschungsgesellschaft Mobilität in Austria for mobility projects.

Action research

We employ action research to actively explore new ways of addressing social and educational issues. Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem-solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a community of practice to improve the way in which they address issues and solve problems.

Many subjects cannot be addressed on a large scale without an initial experimental phase. Three examples best illustrate our approach.

A small article in the TV supplement of the French newspaper *Le Monde* mentioned an award-winning documentary at the Bamako Festival (Mali) entitled *The Hat*, dealing with incest and the sexual abuse of children. We contacted the Canadian director, Michèle Cournoyer, bought the rights for educational use, invited her over to Barcelona and launched a project in schools on the sexual abuse of children.

A visit to the promoters of the French science education project *La Main à la pâte* was soon followed by the first-ever implementation in Spain of this unique hands-on method at our own expense in order to validate the transferability

of this approach in Spain. *Pollen*, a European joint research project was then conducted, involving *La main à la pâte* and covering 12 European cities.

A long-standing concern about healthy habits led to the creation of an original research project in a small town in northern Italy, Maniago, paid for at our own expense. Maniago was a “città in forma” (a healthy city), a place to experiment the many relationships between schools and the community that could lead to healthier habits. The involvement of schools, city councils and local stakeholders resulted in a large-scale project, *Shape Up*, which was extended to 20 European cities.

Europe

P.A.U. Education is proud to be a European company. More than 15 years ago, I moved with my family from Paris to Barcelona. Since then, I have often had to answer the same question: “Why Barcelona?” In Europe, one still has to justify such decisions. George Mallory, a celebrated English mountaineer obsessed with climbing Mount Everest in the 1920s, used to justify his passion for unattainable summits by saying: “Because they are there.”

At P.A.U. Education, we justify our enthusiasm about Europe in a similar way: “Because it is there”. We see Europe as our school and our playground. Europe is a unique multiplier of experiences and a continuous source of discoveries. Europe is a mix of projects, people, delayed flights, remote hotels, small workshops and large conferences.

A few days ago, I was waiting at the airport while on my way home from Brussels after a meeting with the European Commission. I bumped into one of the coordinators of our networking teams who was on her way back from Riga, where she had successfully held a meeting on road safety with dozens of companies and associations, ministries and representatives from the European Commission. She spoke in a very natural way about this meeting, as though she had organised it in her home town. I realised then that we have a unique capacity to connect with people in any language and any setting, finding innovative solutions to establish dialogue and ensure that it flows between people and groups.

P.A.U. Education has progressively built its reputation on creating and operating large-scale European projects and contributing to research projects in partnerships. We currently have extensive experience in working with the European Commission.

We are in charge of some of the most original campaigns in the fields of education, culture and citizenship, and also operate innovative platforms for the exchange of practices in eLearning, road safety, eGovernment and energy.

Multiculturalism

Our team is an example of the world without borders to which Amartya Sen refers. People from 16 nationalities have defined a common space in which to live and work and promote multicultural dialogue on a daily basis. The P.A.U. Education offices are a hive of multicultural activity, a little tower of Babel.

All of us at P.A.U. Education define ourselves as citizens of the world. The possibility we have to experience other cultures, the professional skills we acquire through exchange and cooperation, and the sense of achievement as a result of meeting and establishing relationships with people from other lands have defined our lives.

One day, during a visit to the French finance ministry to present a school education project on the introduction of the euro, I was met with the words: “Here he is, the Catalan”. I, a Frenchman through and through, had become a Catalan! My colleagues in Barcelona see me as a Frenchman. I realised that one can have different identities, and this realisation was the continuation of a personal and professional adventure, which had begun several years previously when I crossed the Pyrenees.

Each of us has personal experience of cultural and social integration which makes our approach culturally sensitive as well as tolerant and respectful of differences. This is why we aim to build bridges, establish networks and exchange practices for the benefit of our clients and society as a whole.

Children's rights

In conclusion, I feel obliged to turn back to our roots: children and their rights. Everything we do and everything we believe in has been strongly influenced by children's rights.

I started the whole P.A.U. Education project by watching my children and entering into their world of play and creativity.

Our first projects were implemented in their school, and I was a parent before I became an entrepreneur and an education expert. By working with children, one learns to respect them as fully-fledged citizens as opposed to future citizens. One realises that they have rights and obligations.

Children's rights can be considered from the United Nations perspective as a legal document. They can be seen from the parent's perspective as an everyday challenge. In fact, they are both, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been a constant source of inspiration for us.

In 1999, we entered into a foolish project with UNICEF, involving schools and children in every country in the world writing a book on children's rights in their own language which we undertook to publish professionally. I have to admit that we failed. We managed to publish 103 books in more than 70 languages, but not the 200 I had envisaged. Nevertheless, looking at all these books, containing stories, drawings and different languages, I am proud of what we achieved.

We learned a lot from the children during that project, and we still do. We learned from their spontaneity, creativity and empathy. For a child, everything is (or should be) possible. Everything is worth exploring. Everything is a learning object and a communication argument. And this is what we try to apply in all our projects.

I had an opportunity some years ago to meet my friend Roger Hart and publish his book, *Children's Participation*, in Spanish. He did not know at the time that his book would become a constant source of inspiration for me and compulsory reading matter for all my staff. Roger wrote that: "Children can play a valuable and lasting role, but only if their participation

is taken seriously and planned with recognition of their development competencies and unique strengths”. I truly believe that this applies to all of us.

Antoine de Saint Exupéry, the author of *The Little Prince*, dedicated his book to all grown-ups who were once children. I believe that human and social development issues are frequently too serious and that we should address them where possible from a child’s point of view. Looking at every subject as if everything were still to be discovered and invented guarantees a refreshing and stimulating approach.

Welcome to our world!

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