



“An Opportune Moment”

by Viv Bird, UK, Former CEO of Book Trust, and a founding Member of ELINET Association.

The ELINET sessions in Madrid provided an opportune moment to launch the new all-age European literacy policy association (ELINET) building on the ambitious two-year project funded by the European commission (2014 -2016).

Over the last few years, ELINET has raised the bar for European-funded literacy collaboration, building on the 2013 Report of the High Level Group of Literacy Experts chaired by Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands. ELINET involved a wider expert group of 80 literacy organisations -practitioners and researchers - who, together, developed a number of European literacy frameworks and policy tools to address the literacy underachievement prevalent across Europe. Uniquely, these tools apply to all phases of literacy teaching from the early years to adult teaching: formal and informal learning, teacher education, family literacy, traditional approaches and digital literacy, reading promotion, engaging homes and the wider community, and fundraising.

In Madrid this July, we were able to move beyond the project to start to discuss how we might use these literacy tools in future. Implementing the European Framework of Good Practice session debate reflected the increasingly bilingual context for literacy learning (including support for migrants), and the need for more good practice examples from under-represented European countries, and digital literacy. The Literacy and Migrants workshop identified some of the challenges in the classroom, and the need for teachers to have an understanding of the theory of language acquisition, alongside practical teaching methods that engage and help migrant children learn the new home language. For example, singing songs and rhymes start to give a ‘language framework’ and word repetition through stories. The world-renowned Bookstart programme developed by Book Trust, England, and presented at a EU Read session, offers similar benefits for pre-school children. An Erasmus+ project highlights the benefits – and challenges of using volunteers to support adult migrants in their language learning. An all-age approach, as recommended by ELINET, can provide not only literacy solutions but, importantly, make a positive contribution to community integration.

The ELINET sessions included ‘Rethinking Literacy in the Digital Age’ where speakers from the European Commission Digital Research Centre highlighted the challenge of 100 million European citizens who have never used the Internet. Indeed, 37% of the European labour force has insufficient digital skills. The question was asked, is the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens sufficiently cognisant of the needs of the 70 million with insufficient literacy skills who could particularly benefit from digital learning opportunities?



As a founding member of ELINET, I recognise and support the valuable work of other European literacy networks such as FELA (national literacy/reading associations), EU Read (reading promotion), the European Basic Skills Network, but also the relevance of working with other related networks such as EBLIDA (European Libraries' Network) and SIRIUS (European Migrants' Education Network]. Indeed, SIRIUS has publicly stated that it needs to work with ELINET in future (and will indeed contribute to ELINET's Literacy and Migrants' thematic working group that I will be leading). It was evident at the Madrid sessions that ELINET offers the opportunity to work across networks and highlight to policymakers and politicians at national levels the importance of having a wide literacy focus in national education policy review processes. I believe that ELINET can bring this understanding to European governments through its group of literacy experts and policy advocacy. I look forward to working with European colleagues to bring a renewed policy focus on literacy that will bring benefits for individuals, society and the wider economies of Europe.