



## A reflection on 10 years of EAPRIL

by the past chair, Prof. Dr. Frank de Jong, Founding member of EAPRIL and Chair 2011-2015

The year 2006: Practice-Based and Practitioner Research (PBPR) was recognised by the European Association for Research on Learning & Instruction (EARLI) as an important branch of the research tree. Although EARLI focused more and more on academic and fundamental research, they realised that the PBPR branch of research also deserved to have its own platform. Filip Dochy, former managing director of EARLI & EAPRIL Office, initiated the idea of setting up a first PBPR conference in Leuven, Belgium. From the beginning the atmosphere was one of an intersubjective space of interaction where the impact of research on practice was equally important as its contribution to the heritage of knowledge.

This first PBPR conference in 2006 made me enthusiastic as a newly appointed professor at Stoas Vilentum University, setting up a practitioner research culture in the applied university. I recognized that a European platform for PBPR was an existential necessity for colleague professors at other applied universities, teacher-researchers, practitioner-research, and academic researchers involved in practice-based research. In short, for all people who aimed to contribute to the development of the praxis by research. I decided to put my shoulders under the development of such a platform. Today, ten years after, this platform is known as the European Association for Practitioner Research on Improving Learning (EAPRIL).

Not long after the first conference, I was happy to be in the inspiring company of Lynn McAlpine, Rob Martens, Kari Smith, Sari Lindblom-Ylänne, Goele Nickmans and Filip Dochy, all driven by the same aspirations and ideas from which EARLIL as we know it today has grown. We organized successive conferences in the Netherlands, Norway, Germany, and Portugal. In the meantime several meetings were organised to discuss the mission of this new platform and to shape this new European community for practice-based and practitioner research. From the beginning it was clear that it should be a platform for people with a heart for learning and/or professional development e.g. learning in schools and learning in professional life. People with a heart for improving the learning practice and who aim to contribute to the progression of the praxis by research. Finally, these in-depth discussions led to the formal establishment of the European Association for Practitioner Research on Improving Learning in education and professional practice (EAPRIL) as a non-profit organisation. As a result, the formal birth of EAPRIL was a fact.

After two years of chairmanship by Filip Dochy, the founding Executive Board withdrew themselves, after 6 years of hard work and building the fundamentals of EAPRIL. As one of the last Mohicans, I was chosen to take over the position of Chair in 2011. A complete new Executive board started directly after the Nijmegen conference, i.e. Ruben Vanderlinde, Anje Ros, Jörg Holle, Mark van der Pol, Wilma Amrein-Good, and not much later Marcelo Giglio. In 2013 and 2014, we were happy to welcome Sirpa Laitinen-Väänänen as chair-elect and Arnoud Evers. All accepted the challenge to reproduce the success of the Nijmegen conference and to strengthen the fundamentals of the EAPRIL organisation. This could not be realised without the invaluable work of the EAPRIL office, not the least of Ineke Berghmans.

With the help of the local organisers, among them the current chair-elect of EAPRIL, Sirpa Laitinen-Väänänen, the Jyväskylä conference in Finland (2012) was even a bigger success. More than likely also due to the high interactive level of the conference with for instance workshops, sessions that have an equal amount of time for presenting as for discussing, demonstrations and practitioner-researcher-sessions. That year the EAPRIL Executive Board launched also the EAPRIL Best Practice and Research Award, and the EAPRIL Clouds, which are thematic platforms on specific fields of interest, by which people can find others that share a similar thematic interest. 2012 was a special year in the history of EAPRIL as it became a financially independent organization, much sooner than hoped for. Considering

our self-fortunate with our sister association EARLI that supported EAPRIL throughout the first years of its existence, we managed to become financial independent and to have our own project manager on the payroll. Furthermore, it was noticed that EAPRIL as a platform for practitioner research became more and more known in Europe. The Biel/Bienne Conference in 2013 (Switzerland) was living proof as we reached a record number of participants, up to almost 500. More importantly, the EAPRIL board succeeded to attract a wider range of nationalities, practitioners of various levels (including teachers and students), and increased even more the level of interactivity, with for instance 'mother-tongue'-sessions and 'flipping the sessions'. Last but not least, school visits were added to the official pre-conference programme of EAPRIL, generating even more opportunities for practice-based learning. The diverse backgrounds of the EAPRIL delegates are astonishing, but the variety in curricula, pedagogy, and perspectives on education and learning and instruction in Europe is perhaps even more striking. EAPRIL chose to offer its delegates the chance to experience these differences along with the unique features of different national educational systems. To date, the school visits are a popular activity in the EAPRIL Conference Programme. The cooperation with the national Ministries of Education is inspiring in this respect.

The Executive Board did not only constantly work hard to secure the quality of the conference, but also aimed to strengthen the community in-between conferences via thematic Clouds. Although the latter is still a challenge for the future, the clouds brought participants closer together. Not the least during conferences where speed dating sessions and cloud workshops were organised to connect likeminded peers. Another important activity of the EAPRIL Executive Board is being in dialogue with other associations and communities, both national and international, to explore possible collaborations. For instance, a nice cooperation was set up with the community of systematic research Evidenced Informed policy and Practice in Education in Europe (EIPPEE), while also collaborations were explored with EUCEN and national networks.

One of EAPRIL's success stories is without a doubt the successful collaboration with the European Training and Development Federation (ETDF), which came into a constructive fairway after the conference in Jyväskylä. This collaboration even led to a merge of ETDF in EAPRIL in 2014. At the start in our mission statement and in our name (improving learning in education and professional practice), but thanks to this merge more opportunities arose to reach our potential. Slowly but steadily new and more doors are opened for the world of corporate learning by setting up projects in cooperation with researchers and companies, by an extra conference day with an own identity of learning in corporate organisations. The first was organised in Nicosia (Cyprus) during the 2014 EAPRIL conference. In 2015 the event Moving Corporate Learning from Good to Great is organised in close cooperation with various national networks all over Europe. Corporate learning challenges of well-known European companies such as Bosch (Germany), Danone (France), Rentokil (UK), BNP Paribas (Luxembourg) and others, are tackled in transformational labs and as a result, an interesting dialogue of researchers and practitioners in this field will arise.

The 10th EAPRIL conference was once again an interactive and inspiring event for all practitioner researchers in Europe and far overseas. Besides the well-known present and discuss sessions, workshops, structured posters sessions, flipping the sessions etc., for this anniversary year the 'International Master Class' for students is worth mentioning. Master students from various institutes were attending EAPRIL as part of their training. Most of them are experienced practitioners and some even presented their context, problem and (starting) research during roundtable sessions. The EAPRIL community was kindly invited to bring their input in these master roundtable sessions. Furthermore, to give more opportunities to local practitioners to mingle with European colleagues and researchers, a Luxembourgish day was organised, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Based on the success of our Swiss teacher-practitioner-day during the Biel/Bienne Conference, we decided to organise this again for Luxembourgish teachers. On Thursday various sessions were organised for and by Luxembourgish participants and teachers. Of course EAPRIL participants were welcome to also attend these sessions. In the afternoon an exhibition was organised of various projects conducted by schools, supported by the Ministry of Education of Luxembourg. Finally, interesting keynote speeches were organised, the Best Research & Practice Project award nominees inspired us, and we were intrigued by all colleagues that we met during our famous 'speed dating'-sessions. In no time a lot of interesting colleagues were met.

Dear EAPRIL conference participants and members, I wish you all many more interesting EAPRIL conferences, in which I hope you can discover new and interesting research projects, ideas, best practices and innovations. Above all, I hope you will get to know many international colleagues, thanks to EAPRIL, that are inspiring for your work, that stimulate you to exchange experience, or even trigger you to set some first steps for future collaborations.

Chair of EAPRIL 2011 - 2015

Prof. dr. Frank de Jong