ACEnet, an international network for arts and cultural education
and its concrete results

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During the past years, there has been a growing awareness amongst civil servants from ministries of education and/or culture about the necessity of sharing information and exchanging views with regard to policies on arts and cultural education. Different EU-member states face similar challenges, so that the need to learn from each other and take steps forward to enhance the arts and cultural education policies has been expressed on different levels.

Initiation of ACEnet
In 2002, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science initiated and established the “Network of civil servants working in the field of arts and cultural education”, in short “ACEnet”. This occurred following the conference on cultural education entitled “A must or a muse: Arts and Culture in Education. Policy and Practice in Europe”, which was held from 26 to 29 September 2001 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands1.

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science was responsible for the coordination of this network until September 2005. The Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture took over the coordination until 2008. Since then, it rests in the hands of the French Ministry of Culture and Communication (Relais Culture Europe).

From the beginning, the Education and Culture Directorate-General of the European Commission has been invited to participate in the network, and has done so.

1 For the conference paper, see http://www.culture-school.net/doc/Amustamuse_reader.pdf
**Goal of ACEnet**

The goal of the network is to enable civil servants working in the field of arts and cultural education policy to find out what is happening in the other member states of the EU (exchange of information) and to share insights and experiences with each other (debate on content).

This is achieved through the exchange of information via the website www.culture-school.net and via newsletters, as well as through periodical meetings, where content-related discussions take place. These meetings are either linked to the presidencies of the European Union or connected to specific conferences.

For instance, the first meeting in 2002 was used to investigate the possibilities offered by the network. The focus was placed on the expectations of those attending. In what ways did they expect to benefit from the network (learning what is happening elsewhere) and contribute towards it (sharing insights and experiences with others)? At a content-related level, the meeting was intended to initiate the formulation of joint subjects for discussion; for example, what themes do the participating countries have in common and which of these themes are suitable for discussion and the exchange of information at a European level?

**Results and effects of ACEnet**

Different initiatives have resulted from the cooperation originating within ACEnet. A clear distinction can be made between the results and effects at the specific Flemish level on the one hand, and the results and effects at an international level on the other hand.

At the Flemish level, the Flemish Community (as part of the federal Belgian state), has been an active member of the ACEnet since the establishment of the network. This has provided an opportunity for civil servants at the Ministry of Education and Training and at the Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media to cooperate with each other more and to exchange knowledge and expertise.

In Flanders the policy responsibility for culture and education is divided between two different ministries, and this often results in specific situations where cooperation is needed. In other countries, where both competencies are unified within the same ministry, it is easier to take policy initiatives which cover both domains.
The contacts between the CANON Cultural Unit of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science which were initiated and maintained within the ACEnet, eventually resulted in the co-organisation of **CICY** in 2009. This international conference on *Cultural education, Innovation, Creativity and Youth* took place in March 2009 in Brussels in the framework of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation².

The practical preparations for the conference were made by CANON Cultural Unit in Flanders and CultuurNetwerk Nederland in The Netherlands. The conference was organised with the aim of keeping arts and cultural education on the political agenda, both in national governments and at European level.

It addressed the question of “the cultural development of children and young people in a changing Europe: learning with and through culture”. The central theme focused on two different perspectives, namely the society and the process of cultural socialisation on the one hand, and the personal and creative development of the individual on the other hand.

These themes were highlighted and analysed by means of the following four sub themes:

- Cultural careers of young people (curriculum)
- New ways of learning (innovative concepts in intramural and extramural cultural education)
- Culture and citizenship: the broad learning environment
- The social role of educators

The conference gathered together some 130 policy-makers, educational experts and cultural specialists from 24 European countries. For two days they discussed the current position and the future of arts and cultural education. The debate was stimulated by keynote speakers who tackled a wide range of cultural issues – from the importance of the arts on the brain development of children, to the crucial role of “the story” in human society.

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² For more information and a report on the conference, see [www.cicy.eu](http://www.cicy.eu).
One of the key messages of the conference was:

“Creativity is a matter of showing respect for the language which most closely matches your personality. We live in an age which over-valourises the merit of verbal communication. Whoever is able to talk fluently possesses a clear advantage in our modern world. You have to talk about your feelings, explain your ideas; formulate your points of view. In reality, this skill is very unevenly distributed. There are many young people who feel most comfortable if they are able to express their emotions in dance, music, song or visual imagery… But in daily life these are languages which we tend to relegate to the sidelines. If someone is clumsy in relationships and makes few friends on the playground, we will usually advise them to follow social skills training. Little effort is made to explore the type of language with which youngsters feel most at home. This offers a great opportunity for creative education. Because afterwards, they will often also learn how to communicate better through speaking.”

(Peter Adriaenssens, child psychiatrist, presentation to the CICY, 12/3/2009)

At an international level, there have been several conferences organised within the framework of the network, and in pursuit of its objective. Besides CICY in 2009, there were, amongst others:

- Culture and School 2004 – organised by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Cultuurnetwerk Nederland, in The Hague (www.cultuur netwerk.nl);

Another concrete result at the international level is the Eurydice Survey on ”Arts and Cultural Education at School in Europe” (2009, www.eurydice.org).

The CANON Cultural Unit of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training first proposed this survey in 2007, following recent research (Robinson, 2000; Bamford, 2006) which underlined the number of concrete benefits arising from arts and cultural education, and
the necessity of a permanent focus on arts and cultural education within the formal education programme. The proposal was endorsed by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Department for Education, Training and Qualifications in Delegation for Development and International Affairs of the French Ministry of Culture and Communication.

Through the different representatives of the ACEnetwork, the survey-proposal was forwarded to the national Eurydice coordinators, and eventually a survey was drawn up which gathered more in-depth information on the educational systems of the different European countries.

The data collected in 31 European states made it clear that culture and arts are defined in many different ways. Cultural education also seems to serve many different purposes – ranging from developing knowledge of art history and creating awareness of national cultural heritage, to stimulating the development of individual expression and self-confidence.

Other findings of this survey include:

- Music and visual arts are taught to all pupils in Europe;
- Assessment criteria are usually defined at school level;
- Professional artists rarely teach their art(s) in schools;
- Partnerships with the artistic world and extra-curricular activities are a common way to promote artistic and cultural education.

This study gave the opportunity to different European countries to position themselves in an international context, and, by doing so, to learn from others and gain inspiration for best practice.

When the European Commission started its Working Plan for Culture 2008-2010, four ‘Open-Method-of-Coordination’ (OMC) working groups were founded. One of them was tasked with focusing on ‘the development of synergies with education, especially arts education’. The composition of the group was strongly based on the existing informal ACEnet.
Since its foundation, the OMC working group has been working on four main sets of questions:

- the content to be given to the notion of education in culture and the arts;
- the role of cultural institutions and artists in education, in culture and in the arts; the role of civil society, and the balance between formal and non-formal education;
- the training of teachers, providers of non-formal education, artists and culture professionals in methods of education in culture and the arts;
- evaluation and assessment: the (formal or non-formal) assessment of skills acquired by children and young people and the evaluation of the impact of policies and action in education, in culture and in the arts.

At the present time, the OMC working group is preparing recommendations for the European Union and the national states in a final report which will be ready in the summer of 2010.

The formal OMC meetings and the informal interim meetings on OMC working group matters are all different occasions on which ACEnet members can keep in contact and exchange knowledge about developments in national policy contexts, etc.

Last but definitely not least, the most concrete result of the cooperation within the ACEnet is the ComACE-project. This ‘Community of Knowledge on Arts and Cultural Education in Europe’ or ComACE³ will be a web-based portal with general information on arts and cultural education in European member states. The aim of ComACE is to promote and sustain the systematic exchange of knowledge and to compare information and practice through three main channels: a compendium, a glossary and a summary of news/events. ComACE is a long-term project which aims to achieve 'European-wide' representation.

The information that is collected from the different participating countries is compiled in a compendium and a glossary.

³ For more information: http://comace.org.
The compendium includes information in the following areas:

- policy: national, regional and local;
- formal education; from pre-primary to tertiary;
- non-formal education.

The primary objective of the compendium is to present an overview of how various European countries shape and implement arts and cultural policy. The underlying, long-term goals are to achieve greater coordination and cooperation between the different countries and to learn from each other's experiences and findings.

The glossary will give an overview of the terminology used in the EU with regard to arts and cultural education matters. The glossary serves as a supplement to the compendium and explains terms used in the compendium which could be misinterpreted or need further clarification. However, the glossary can also be used independently from the compendium. The terms will be shown in the language of origin, with a brief description in English.

The coordination of the first phase of the ComACE project (2009-2011) is being financed by the Dutch Ministry of Culture, Education and Science. This initial first phase started with just four countries, whose task is to develop working procedures and to set the framework for the content of the compendium within these four countries, as well as in the countries not yet participating. The participating countries at this stage are Austria, Belgium (Flanders), France and The Netherlands.

The content of the compendium, glossary and news/events summary will be collected by experts in the participating countries. These experts will play a significant role in the content development process. Countries participating in the project will finance their own contribution.

Cultuurnetwerk Nederland was asked to coordinate the project, and will perform this function for the first phase (until early 2011). There is a strong ambition to expand the width of the project, in order to allow more member states to exchange information and experience on arts and cultural education matters.
In this paper, an overview has been given of the network of civil servants working in the field of arts and cultural education – ACEnet for short – and its concrete results. The perspective of this overview is Flemish. However, the Flemish contribution is just one of the elements in the development of ACEnet, and it will only be through the continuing investment and commitment of different representatives in many countries, that the network can continue to operate, and work towards more and better arts and cultural education in an international context.