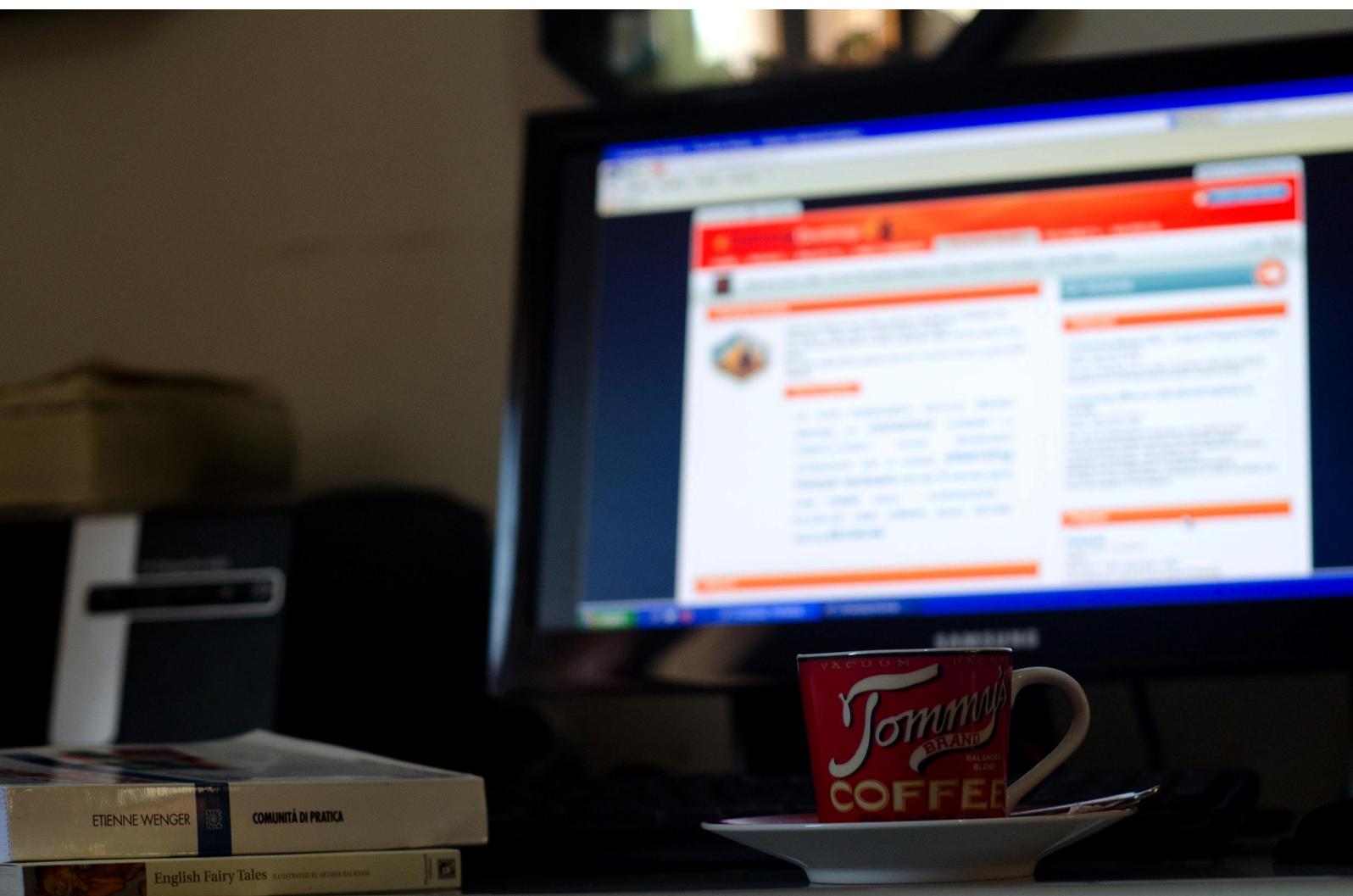


Zen and the Art of Teachers' Rooms Maintenance



a cooperative Handbook

Zen and the Art of Teachers' Rooms Maintenance



share, innovate, enjoy

Teachers' Rooms are pretty much a matter of timing, creativity, sense of belonging and sense of humour.

They are a meeting point – for different people, and different personal and professional lives.

Teachers' Rooms have to do with innovation, negotiation, and the pleasure of being and doing together.

I thank all of the teachers who embarked on the “eTwinners go social” LE, creating this handbook out of their journey.

Laura Maffei



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Step 1 - Creating a Teachers' Room

Before creating a TR, ask yourself what its **main focus** will be, what you would like to achieve, and **how much time** you are ready to devote to its management.

Also, make sure that a TR like that has not been opened by others.

Once you are ready to give it a go, take into consideration:

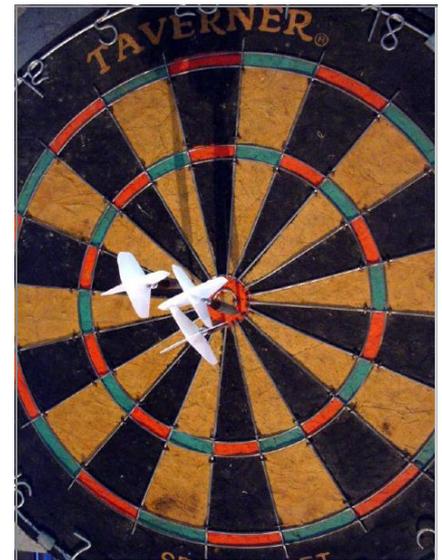


1) Management – you'll probably want to **share the admin role with a small group of co-runners and moderators**, in order to make the task less demanding and to get more ideas:

- start with a **group of colleagues**, sharing with them objectives and strategies and making clear what kind of division of work there will be
- if some of these co-runners were from your same school / same area, and you can meet in person from time to time, it would be a great pro
- teachers from different school levels will probably join in your Room. If in the managing team there are teachers from different school levels as well, they will be mentors to these participants and give them specific suggestions, tips, ideas, materials, according to their level

2) Target (ambassadors, beginners, post event, café, specific subjects, sharing practice...), **structure** and **features** of your Room:

- think of a **good, catchy name**
- **write your main objectives and expectations:** don't keep them in your mind, write them down and share the list with your co-runners, you'll be more likely to get new ideas
- think about the **first messages** (how to organize the forums according to the subject or subjects)
- no matter how challenging your core topic is, invite to collaborate both **beginners and experienced eTwinners**, so that you have different perspectives
- since a TR is a team, let beginners (and everybody) feel supported, living at the same time the experience of practice-sharing and of real collaboration. This will be a pretty good **motivation** for trying out other eTwinning tools
- send **personal messages** to the members, asking them what their expectations are or just welcoming them in.



3) Attitude – create a friendly atmosphere where people feel free to interact:

- remember that eTwinning is based on both **individual and team work**, personal and professional experiences: so don't be too strict and **leave the members as free as possible** in their sharing



- **don't be afraid of off-topic**, it's a normal aspect of any healthy interaction
- remember that **not all off-topic is spam**
- one of your main tasks will be to **strengthen collaboration**. You and your managing team must be first the example for the members, transferring in the Room your good energy, motivation, ideas and enthusiasm
- give the Room and the members their time, in eTwinning **you're never in a hurry**
- **don't get discouraged**: good ideas will produce their results in due time.

Some nice examples of not-yet existing Rooms:

- *a TR for sharing ideas and experiences among teachers who are parents as well, and live the two roles together*
- *a TR in Greek for Greek teachers, especially the ones in islands, far away from the capital*
- *the "Book club TR", collecting good ideas and new books that we read + helping each other promote reading to our pupils*
- *the "Teachers' poetry club", for all of us who are still romantic in hearts...*

**And if you feel safer in planning according to a frame,
why don't you try our...**



Planning Worksheet

1. Analyze (decide the main goal, objectives, audience, content)

First, Answer these questions

- What are you going to do with this Room?
- Who will join in?
- Out of the visitors you just identified, which are the top groups?
- If your Room had a personality, how would you describe it, in single words or short phrases?
- What do you want members to learn, find or discover from this Room?
- What kind of information will you be including in the Room?
- Who will be responsible for updating the room?

Second, put it all together into a simple goal statement:

This Room will ...



2. Plan (decide the first activities, timing, tasks...)

Once you have identified your target (their needs, interests etc.) and the objectives of your Room, a good and careful planning will ensure that the interaction is lively and engaging, purpose-driven, and attracts a diverse range of people:

- arrange the Team giving different roles
- recruit experts to serve as **guest speakers** for specific discussions
- consider time for training moderators and experts if needed.
- develop ground rules for your Room
- send out e-mail with information on how to participate.

3. Promote

- find an interesting name
- suggest weekly themes
- involve new moderators, experts
- send welcome e-mails / Current Events / Today's News
- suggest Top Stories, Hot Topics
- ensure that enough people are involved and prepared to participate in the discussion.

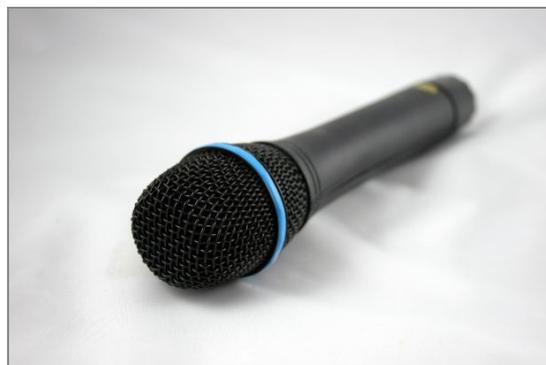
4. Evaluate

After the first weeks, circulate a forum evaluation (as a link to an online survey): this way, if things don't seem to work you can rearrange your plan quickly enough.

Step 2 - Managing the members and the discussion

1) Recruit new members:

- **invite people you know and rely on first**, and ask the members of your team, in your school, to do the same
- **talk about your TR** when you have chances to give speeches or take part in workshops
- do not insist on having too many members, as it would be tough to manage your TR then: **too many members = difficult to moderate = huge risk of drop offs**
- look for the **quality of communication** among the members instead
- try to **involve people teaching different subjects**, and with different ideas and personalities in order to have a variety of inputs
- promote your room using your **Journal**, your **personal blog** or pages on **social networks** like Facebook or Twitter
- promote your room during **local or regional meetings** and during **Comenius meetings**. Introduce the TR and show how it works... if they know they'll join in!
- promote your room during **Personal development sessions** at school & Inset training
- take advantage of **different Media** - use newspapers to highlight good practices



- **recruiting members works best if done by a team**, especially by someone you trust. We get loads of contacts and join requests and focusing on things that are really meaningful to us is vital: we all have busy days (and evenings)
- **main topic and goal should be clear** in order to attract people who are really interested
- being **flexible, communicative and “ready for help”**- that’s what always brings people together!

2) Keep members involved:

- keep it **simple and relaxed**
- **do not exaggerate with task or goals** to achieve: the effort to do-it-all eventually results in a failure
- **communication** is the key: communicate with your Room members regularly inside and outside the Room (a newsletter maybe?)
- **regularly answer** as many posts as possible and try to establish a **personal relationship** with the Room members
- choose topics which are really **relevant to you**
- then, ask and learn what the **interests of the room's members** are
- regularly insert **new inputs**
- do not publish a lot of information at the same time: it's better to **give inputs out one by one**
- share **useful materials**, worksheets, links etc.
- **share** positive experiences
- keep the Room up to date



- let activities and discussion arise from the **members' needs**
- when you discuss about an important subject from the school life (evaluation for instance) you can gather the main ideas and then let the members vote using a **poll**
- always communicate with members personally
- make everybody feel at home, possibly by using their first language in a simple, direct and effective way
- **ask members for advice**, for suggestions, make them feel a Room is not about “doing homework”, but about learning by sharing.

3) Advertise

- use the **eTwinning desktop**
- use other socials, blogs and wikis
- make a list of contacts and send them an email
- use **national teachers' platforms**
- ask the **CSS** to promote the TR in the eTwinning portal
- ask your **NSS** to promote the TR
- film a short video ad to promote the TR
- introduce it during Comenius meetings, L2 group meetings, etc.
- share the positive experience with active eTwinners - they have a lot of contacts and they will disseminate the information
- link to facebook everything you write and post: like it or not, logging in to FB is the first thing most of us do when switching on our PC



4) Take advantage of different tools and socials to widen the community

- use **skype, google hangout, flashmeeting, elluminate**
- create **google.docs** to let the members express their thought and ideas
- **publish a brochure or an e-book** related to your TR
- develop **new projects** using the ideas shared in the TR
- some of the most experienced members can create together a presentation using **prezi** and introduce the Room to the others
- use **virtual learning platforms**
- use **twitter**: it's simple, effective, quick to manage
- another option could be having one of those platforms, like hootsuite for example, where you can manage a post on multiple accounts at the same time, say advertising activities on your TR on FB, Twitter, etc.. big time saving ;)

And a final note on Netiquette ...

*We are adults and teachers and we can obviously interact without any flames. For this reason, **the ideal TR moderator is the invisible one.***

In fact, while managing a TR, moderators can remind everybody of the simple rules of Netiquette by being polite, having good sense of humor, and contacting members in a friendly and kind way.

And rest assured: while misunderstandings may occur, in a TR nobody could possibly want to insult someone else. So take it easy, just be who you are, and enjoy your time in the Room.



Step 3 - Engaging on a common project

1) Work together (when, how and why) :

- **Start collaboration in a common project only when the Teachers' Room is settled**, not immediately: so that trust is built among teachers (the same that in an eTwinning project)
- **exchange** interests, doubts, ideas, suggestions, advice and tasks in **sub-groups** created according to different topics / different school orders etc.
- **share** experiences and good practice for 21st century skills
- **brainstorm** together
- **try out with your classes some of the activities** suggested in your TR and then share the results among the members and discuss them
- **share with colleagues, students and parents the ideas of your TR** and listen to their opinion and thoughts in order to find new ways to work
- **arrange online meetings**: how often will the group meet? when and where, in the virtual space, will the group meet? (googledocs, wiki, blog, skype, etc)
- use **posts, chat, web 2.0 tools**, forums, file sharing, wikis, emails, social networks etc.



- **work together to show outside what you are doing inside** (dissemination): your conversation will reach new eTwinners and will go on with their ideas. For this reason e-journals could be great. Or newsletters. Anything to keep people informed about what's going on inside the Room
- if you are planning to create something together (ebook, newsletter, presentation...) **negotiate roles and deadlines**
- use **learning games**
- exploit **webinars, wikis, chats, Learning Events** etc. to spread pieces of good practice
- use **polls** to find out topics of interest for future projects or new TRs
- use **google.docs** for asynchronous collaboration and **Primary pad** <http://primarypad.com/> (or similar) for real-time collaboration. Facebook page is also good for collaboration and so are Twitter hashtags (#).



2) Spread the results:

- **NSSs should spread the results** of TRs through National web-pages or mail so that eTwinners can see the information on their front pages
- advertise TR on **social media networking sites** - e.g. set up a Twitter account and a Facebook page and promote the topics that are discussed in the TR - so that more teachers want to join the room on eTwinning. The social networking sites would serve just to promote the activities that are happening in the TR - something like backchannelling.

- organize **handouts, magazines, promotional campaigns** for successful Rooms
- **socialize it!** ...by putting the link of your blog or site in the social media (facebook, twitter, site of the local primary/secondary education agency, site of the national teacher's net, etwinning portal etc.)
- share info in **personal and school blogs**, your own profile, seminars, social networks, magazines, newsletters, youtube
- give information to **partners and/or other TRs** with different topics etc (in a sort of mutual support), etc.
- publish info about the Room in your school's journal or different e-journals and **allow comments** to find out what the others think
- share the new way of cooperating learned in your TR (and in general, in eTwinning) with your colleagues in your "real" school
- present the results in a conference
- devote a couple of hours to present the TR to the teachers in your school and organize a video conference with other interested teachers
- And... why not? **create a podcast with the voices of the members** telling what they really liked, or a video! It's nice to see or listen to happy people talking about what pleased them!



3) The Room and its outputs:

...**think about the output of your TR...**

is it something we **do**?

is it something we **learn**?

is it something we **create**?

is it something we **are**, or **become**?

Here are our ideas:



- the output of a TR can be **an eTwinning Group**
- **a common project**
- the improvement of the quality of personal learning and teaching and interpersonal collaboration (**professional development**)
- **a Learning Event**
- **a newsletter** published monthly (or so) to keep members and non-members informed on what's going on and also to show that the TR is very active
- newsletters can be sent by email or published on a wiki or blog
- **an ebook, a video**
- **a Learning Object** (for instance a Learning Unit, a CLIL lesson, etc.)
- a new **partnership**
- a new-born **community**
- a new **competence** acquired in the TR
- ...or another result that will come in time, and that we cannot yet foresee!

Conclusions

Teachers' Rooms are places where we meet, talk and create.
And you never know what a place like this can develop into.
Be it the pub you visit once in a while for a chat with old friends,
or the wonderland you turn to regularly, for fresh ideas,
or the shop window you just give a glance at,
anyway, it's worth your time
and it will improve your personal and professional life.

Teachers who attended the "eTwinners go social" LE chose as key words, for Teachers' Rooms, and for the whole eTwinning community, terms like **collaboration, dedication, creativity, tolerance and fun.**

And that's what happens when we work together,
on and off line: we create, we grow, we have fun.

We are professionals of the teaching and learning journey.

And we never travel alone.



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Basics on TRs - video tutorials:

eTwinning Tutorial - how to create a new Teachers' Room

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjDLVQKNw1g>

Managing a Teachers' Room

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfZMioay4Ao>



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