**Why I became a teacher: to show students how the world really works**

By Olav Twint, 11 November 2012[In the original there’s a photo here of the author]

When I finished studying my economics master's at the [University of Amsterdam](http://www.uva.nl/en) I didn't know what I wanted to do. My passion for my subject never left me, but I ended up getting a job at the university coordinating internships for medical students. Then in the last year before I went into teaching I worked as a foreign exchange officer for the [Erasmus programme](http://www.esn.org/) – working with groups of young people getting them enthusiastic about going abroad.

There are a lot of teachers in my family. My mother, who was a German teacher, told me at the time of finishing my master's, that teaching was terribly hard work for very little pay. So I didn't even think of teaching at that time. But I started really enjoying the sides of my job that involved working with young people.

When we decided to leave Amsterdam for Zutphen in eastern Holland three years ago, I decided to change my career to teaching.

I actually started teaching without any training after writing unsolicited letters to schools in the east of Holland. I got a job teaching economics to 14 to 17 year olds in Arnhem. It is not so unusual to get a job teaching economics without a teaching degree in Holland because schools can't get enough teachers with the subject knowledge otherwise. Many people who study economics want to earn more money than teaching offers.

The school wanted me as soon as possible, so for the first six weeks of my new job I had to commute from Amsterdam. I was late for my very first class. The students were waiting for me and I rushed in all out of breath with absolutely no experience of teaching. I knew my subject but I wasn't trained as a teacher I didn't know anything about classroom management, so some of the lessons were a bit of a disaster.

After the first year I got another job teaching economics at a Waldorf/Steiner school called [Vrijeschool Zutphen VO](http://vszutphen.nl), in Zutphen. It's a modern Steiner school that prepares children for normal exams. There is also a focus on more holistic subjects to prepare students for their whole future from drawing, to carpentry, to work through play. The school gives a lot of attention to individual students which is part of the reason I really love to work there. I also started studying for my teaching degree at the [university of Nijmegen](http://kunweb.hosting.kun.nl/concernpages/home_en.asp) when I started working at this school.

As I already had my master's, I didn't have to study the economics part of the teaching degree but it takes two years part time which I have been doing while teaching almost full time.

After one year I had major setback with the course as my youngest child at the time was diagnosed with kidney cancer. He was only two years old and at the same time my wife was pregnant. It was such a terrible time. You can imagine it's the worst thing that can happen. Now my son has only one kidney but he's almost recovered.

After my son's chemotherapy I was chronically tired, a tiredness that you just can't imagine. I had to miss loads of classes and in the end the doctor advised me that the only way to get over it was not to teach the last two classes of the day. This worked and now I'm so happy to be back to normal.

My school has been really understanding throughout but my studying was badly affected so I've still got to finish my teaching degree which I have to do by September 2013 and I'll do it!

A lot of the students studying teaching on the part time route have dropped out. In fact I'm the only teacher of economics left on my course. There's a bit of a time bomb with teachers here in the Netherlands as many teachers are poised to retire and not enough have been trained so I do think there's some work to do here in retaining trainees.

[Teaching](http://www.theguardian.com/education/teaching) is the career for me, I've realised that. At first when I taught at the other school before I had any training, I didn't have a lot of tips for classroom management, so sometimes it was really awful. I had no experience and had no training. I had a coach to help me but it was difficult to find time to meet.

But I discovered I liked to transfer knowledge and work with young people. The whole subject of economics is really about global awareness and the choices people make. I like to use current affairs and the news in all my lessons. I almost always start a lesson with a news item to inspire my students and to get a response from them, to make it current.

Being globally aware is really important especially in the Netherlands as we are such a small country. We are living on exports to other countries and trade. Our pupils almost all learn to speak English fluently and many learn German as well. There's a huge interest in the global appeal of the internet. I've got English friends who are teachers who tell me that our pupils seem far more globally aware than theirs in the UK.

I think we probably are more internationally aware than other countries. We are not patriots as the US are. When we say we are proud of our country, I think most of us are more proud of what we have achieved, for example the freedom we have or our welfare system rather than just patriotic. Our students feel like they live in Europe, they are Europeans and are concerned about Europe and the whole world.

From what I've read, especially on the [Guardian Teacher Network](http://guardian.co.uk/teacher-network), the concerns you have in the UK are similar to ours in the Netherlands. We too have problems with our politicians. Our politicians also think they know a lot about education and make decisions that teachers don't agree with. We too have pay issues – for example all Netherlands teachers are on a pay freeze along with all other public sector workers.

My students are interested in the world and being aware of what goes on is tremendously important to them. They are eager to learn because of current affairs which I use as a hook to interest them. So for example in work about the credit crunch my students will know a lot about Greece and what's happening there, my challenge is to get over to them more theoretical knowledge about the economic cycle.

All students in the Netherlands learn economics in year 9. They are 14 to 15 years old in the middle of puberty and so looking at society and themselves. Then they can choose to drop economics in year 10 so it's not compulsory like maths or literacy, but a lot of students choose economics because it's a subject you can do so much with.

Teaching is definitely the career for me. People say the best thing is the holidays, and we don't get quite as much as teachers do in the UK. But of course most teachers work a lot in their holidays. The best thing has to be the children. I love making my students enthusiastic about the subject and helping them learn skills that they'll need later on. Of course these are teenagers so making them enthusiastic, well that's the real challenge. I love to transfer knowledge about my subject, my first love, economics. I had a 12-year break from my subject and while of course I kept informed about the news during that time, it's great to be back. I've really chosen to do this and I do think it's quite a good idea to come into teaching later rather than straight from university. Once I've finished my teaching degree I'll have time to really work on my teaching and improve myself and my lessons, so I'm really looking forward to that.

[*Olav Twint*](mailto:cotwint@gmail.com) *teaches economics at school called* [*Vrijeschool Zutphen VO*](http://vszutphen.nl)*, in Zutphen, a Waldorf/Steiner school in the Netherlands.*

<http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2012/nov/11/global-awareness-economics-teaching-students>

Original forum: The Guardian (a major British newspaper)