

# Information for members

February 2006

**effe**

european  
forum for  
freedom in  
education

**Dear Members,**

**We have reformulated our aims!** Since the official formation of the *effe* in 1990 things have changed. It was time for verification and a revision of our aims. Unfortunately we can't now remove certain aims because they have been fully achieved. All we can do is alter the wording to make the meaning clearer.

**The aims of *effe***

**The members of *effe* are committed to:**

- safeguarding the human dignity of each child and young person and promoting the development of his or her individual qualities
- respecting fundamental human rights as the basis for all education and training
- empowering children and young people to act as responsible members of society.

**This requires that:**

- Education and training have to be geared to the abilities and skills of each individual child or young person and all curricula and training programmes should take account of this need
- All children and young people should have equal access to a variety of educational provision includ-

ing that provided by independent bodies

- Cultural and ethical values should so pervade educational provision that children and young people are able to develop their individuality and their sense of responsibility in free dialogue with their parents and teachers.
- In the educational systems of Europe the free choice of parents in accordance with their religious, philosophical and educational beliefs have to be guaranteed and distinctive ethnic and cultural characteristics have to be respected and protected
- Democracy should be practised within educational provision as an essential way of guaranteeing the practice of democracy in society
- Civic commitment to education must be strengthened in all the countries of Europe and the essential pedagogical, organisational and financial freedom of educational providers must be guaranteed
- The satisfactory education of teachers must provide an essential underpinning of these requirements.

The *effe* pursues its aims in line with the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20.11.1989. According to this Convention on the Rights of the Child, each child has the right to be respected as an individual personality and has the right to self-determination.

In all measures taken in relation to the child the best interests of that child must take priority, (see also Art. 24 of the European Charter of Fundamental Human Rights). This is an obligatory criterion for the education systems of Europe.

Bochum, End of 2005, approved from the Presidency, the Executive and the Council of the *effe*

## **Spring Day in Europe 2006 "Debating our Future"**

Spring Day in Europe is an annual school project on democracy and citizenship where young people learn about and make their voice heard on topical European issues. The theme for Spring Day in Europe 2006, "Debating our Future", calls for schools, teachers, parents and above all pupils to concentrate on the European Union.

Spring Day in Europe is organised by European Schoolnet on behalf of the European Commission. A team of teachers from 29 countries conduct this initiative and there is support from the national education ministries. In order to reach out to as many schools as possible and maximise their input into the debate, **Spring Day on 21 March 2006 and Europe Day on 9 May 2006** are the two highlights of the event. Schools have access to all the tools, activities and services of the project to organise events on either or both dates.

What would a day like this look like?

In a "light version", one could cover in one or more teaching units one aspect of the guidelines. It could also be a teacher unit with an exchange of outcomes with schools from other participating countries. One could also invite members of the European Parliament, make chat contacts, etc.

In order to facilitate and encourage schools to participate in Spring Day 2006 and to the debate Europe three strands of pedagogically-based activity guidelines are offered to schools:

- Learn and debate Europe
- Decide for Europe
- Together in the world.

It provides schools with the necessary political, pedagogical and technological support to implement events concerned with European issues and achievements

What a "full version" would look like, with the inclusion of current Comenius projects, you can watch from 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> March on Euronews, where they present projects from the Klagenfurt Waldorfschool, Austria. You can find more information on the schools' website: [www.waldorfschule-klagenfurt.at](http://www.waldorfschule-klagenfurt.at).

Interested in the **Spring Day in Europe**? Information and registration on [www.springdayeurope2006.org](http://www.springdayeurope2006.org)

### **United Nations Special Reporter on the Right to Education visited Germany 13<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2006**

UN Special Reporter Munoz (Costa Rica) spent 10 days in Germany. He visited kindergartens, schools and centres of higher education; he had conver-

sations with academics, politicians, ministers and stakeholders. The purpose of the visit was to examine the German educational system in terms of equality of opportunity. He was to pursue the question of whether sufficient support is given in German schools to the children of foreigners, children from deprived families and those with special educational needs.

The PISA studies had shown that in no other comparable state is the educational success of a child so dependent on social background as in Germany. Particularly scandalous is the situation of migrants' children. Every fifth young foreigner in Germany never attains any secondary school leaving certificate. Every third foreigner between 20 and 30 remains without any completed vocational training.

On Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February, at the German Institute for Human Rights in Berlin there was a meeting with representatives of NGOs including the European Forum for Freedom in Education. The majority of the NGO representatives present pointed to the short fall in the implementation of educational rights in the case of migrants' children and other disadvantaged children and young people. Those affected included, for example, the children of stateless parents, children of refugees and the children of various so-called marginal groups.

Only two NGOs, the *European Forum for Freedom in Education* and the Home Schooling movement, drew attention to structural difficulties. They touched upon the following areas:

- The right to education does not necessarily in-

volve the duty of attending school, even if it is usually so interpreted in Germany. Here no alternatives are available to parents.

- The legally established right in the Federal Republic to establish independent schools is limited by financial practice since there is no even-handed treatment of those running schools.
- The current introduction of standards of competence limits the right of a school to follow a curriculum different from that of the state schools and therefore to develop its own independent profile. The existing standards of competence are not concerned with outlining a model of minimum standards but with the imposition of a prescribed learning content later to be tested in exams. Far more necessary is a set of minimal criteria of competence towards which each school can work creatively and can develop its own profile, according to its own pedagogical convictions.
- In the view of those concerned with education in early childhood the right to education means the right to play. Nowadays there is a worldwide tendency to misunderstand the right to education as simply meaning the right to become school pupils. The right to education must for young children be so structured that the needs of the child are central and it must not become an adult style learning programme for adults. And the need of children at that age is to learn by playing. In some countries today it is still the privi-

lege of small children to organise their own learning process. This privilege must be defended.

At Prof. Munoz's press conference nothing was said about these incursions on freedom. But the Special Reporter's tour ended with a reminder that must be taken very seriously: that in a state as highly developed as Germany it is to be expected that the right to education should be implemented in an exemplary way. He made four interim recommendations. Firstly the federal government should abandon its reservations about the UNO Children's Rights Convention. Migrants and Refugees should then be regarded as coming of age at 18 and not, as at present, at 16. Refugees without permanent right of residence could then stay at school longer. Further, attending kindergarten should no longer cost anything. That has been hindering the integration of migrants' children. Thirdly human rights education should be implemented in theory as well as in practice, in schools as well in teacher training or further education establishment. A fourth major critical point was that the allocation of children to the various kinds of school should take place after the fourth class. With selection at the end of the fourth year the educational potential of children is not being fully tapped, said Munoz in his conclusions. The system of early selection in Germany has above all negative consequences for those who already have other problems, like migrants' children and children from socially deprived families. It has already been shown that in this selection procedure 44% are wrongly allocated.

The full report will be published in the next few months ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org))

It will be interesting to see what the decision-makers are in the end willing to alter. The idea of a further review, namely into the wide ranging rights of the Länder in the field of education, has already been rejected by both the Federal and Länder governments.

Nana Göbel-Lies Feron

### REPORT FROM ENGLAND

Late last year news came of proposed major changes in the organisation of English schooling and much excitement was created about possible new freedoms that were to be introduced. It was to be easier for individuals and groups to establish schools and the freedom of parents to choose a school would be increased. Each school would have greater self-government and local councils would no longer exercise the control over state schools that they have exercised since the beginning of last century. Moreover, an increased number of 'faith' schools (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc) were to be generously financed and admitted to the state system on the same basis as the Anglican and Catholic schools which now form one third of that system. These proposed changes seemed especially astonishing to English members of *effe* who, through the so-called Third Sector Alliance, had fought fruitlessly for many such changes since the mid 1990s.

These changes were proposed only for England. Education in the rest of the United Kingdom

is not under the control of the same Minister. Nor have the ideas proved popular either with the main teachers' unions or many members of the governing Labour party. It soon became clear that Tony Blair and his Education Secretary will have real difficulty in getting the proposals through parliament. Many members of the House of Commons are opposed to limiting the local councils' powers, others are suspicious that self-governing schools will exclude children that are not academically promising and that the groups likely to establish new schools will either be too narrow in their views or will be dominated by capitalists wishing to make money. Quite a large proportion of the Labour party also still believe that independent schools (including Steiner, Montessori etc.) should all be abolished and that all children should have to attend state schools. Otherwise the class divisions and inequalities in the local community will be perpetuated.

As a result of this opposition, the government has begun to compromise. It has made it clear that all schools in receipt of public money will still have to follow the national curriculum and will be subject to state testing. Schools will not be allowed to restrict the admission of children on academic grounds and while local government will no longer have the same control over schools that they exercise at present they will still be able to oppose the establishment of new schools in their area if they feel they are not needed.

In December a meeting was arranged at the Department for Education and Skills by Human Scale Education to dis-

cuss the plans with the officials responsible for drafting the new education laws. Those present included Fiona Carnie, a former member of the *effe* Executive and Robert Bell, vice-president of *effe*. Along with them were representatives of small schools, Montessori etc. all of whom were broadly in favour of the proposed changes which seemed likely to provide England with a far freer and more pluralist education system. But there were also present leading officials of the local education authorities many of which are opposed to the changes, some because they don't want to lose their powers and some because they cannot see how the proposals can be financed.

At that meeting it became clear that the reforms were, after all, not to be as far reaching as had originally been suggested in the government's White Paper and a considerable watering down in response to political pressure was already beginning. An official made it clear, for example, that there was no possibility of England ever following the Danish model of allowing small schools to be financed simply at parental request while the local government representatives insisted that they must still have control over local developments. Officials from the city of Brighton, for example, insisted that they could not welcome the admission of a local Montessori school to the state system on a number of grounds, including the inadequacy of the playing fields. Although there was some talk of state schools cooperating more closely with independent schools, there was also a clear reluctance on the local authori-

ties' part to spend taxpayers' money on joint activities.

All this was particularly disheartening for the representatives of Human Scale Education who felt that in recent months the government had been more positive about their ideas and even saw that some of those ideas were reflected in the original proposals. But the future of the proposed changes does not look promising and the fights in parliament in the next two months should prove very interesting indeed from an *effe* point of view.

Robert Bell

#### Notes

Robert Bell, as vice-president of the *effe*, has a remit to pursue the organisation's aims all over Europe. But he was also a founder member of the British Third Sector Alliance, a network of independent sector schools.

Human Scale Education is a movement aimed at encouraging smaller educational units based on democracy, fairness and respect. Fiona Carnie, one of its most active members, was also a founder of the Third Sector Alliance and a former chairperson of the *effe* Council

#### Education in Finland – the best in Europe?

The 'whole world' has made a pilgrimage to Finland in the past year. Do the Finns themselves see their achievement in such a positive light? What have been the consequences of the PISA study on the different education systems and cultures? What are the challenges and visions of the future?

Take part! From 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> June in Helsinki

You can find the programme on our Website. Please have a look at the working groups. It will surely be a very exciting colloquium!

#### Dear Members,

As previously announced, we are working on a new Internet presentation. In the range of "publications" *effe*-members from now on have the possibility to refer to own publications in the education field. We have made a start with the book 'Schulkritik und die Suche nach Schulalternativen- ein Motor der Schulentwicklung?' of Annette Pfisterer. For further information on this book which will certainly be of interest to many members, see the website. In return we would like to get free copies of your own publications to help us with our work.

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