

Information for Members

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effe
european
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freedom in
education

Dear Members,

Our colloquium in Brussels was a success and the conference report is nearly finished. Before you will all enjoy your summer holidays please enjoy the reading of our latest activities.

EU-Presidency Conference on Innovation and Creativity in Schools, 9-10 April 2008, Brdo, Slovenia

The *effe*, represented by Lies Feron, was again given the opportunity to take part in an expert and stakeholders conference organised by the EU-Presidency. In Lisbon in November 2007 the topic had been on Schools for the 21st Century. Now in beautiful Brdo, at the feet of the Julianic Alps in Slovenia, the conference was entitled 'Promoting Innovation and Creativity – Schools' Response to the Challenges of Future Societies'. With this conference the Slovenian EU-Presidency wished to give a boost to the changes needed for schools, including kindergartens, to be better able to promote creativity and innovative potential from the very beginning of learning processes. The aim of the conference, jointly organized by the Presidency and the European Commission, was exchange of views on the role of schools and education in general in promoting creativity and innovation and on what conditions

should be fulfilled for the necessary change to take place.

The conference, chaired by Mirko Zorman of the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport, was opened by the Slovenian Education Minister, Dr Milan Zver.

The Minister stressed that modern-day education faces problems that can be solved only by new approaches, new paradigms and new patterns of thinking and acting. He also outlined the dilemmas and expected trends which education faces, and concluded, "In future society, schools will only fulfil their mission by becoming, in addition to places where knowledge is passed on, places of innovation and creativity and, as such, places where new knowledge is created."

Esko Aho, a former Prime Minister of Finland, concurred with this opinion, stressing that the aims of education must include boosting entrepreneurial spirit in the sense of exploiting one's own potential, creativity and willingness to take risks. He went on, "It is not enough to do things better, the things we do must be better and higher in quality." This was further stressed by **David Istance**, an OECD researcher, who underlined the importance of developing new competences and school models as well as a

broader cultural context determining the success of both students and school. He presented four starting points capable of fuelling innovation and creativity:

- research and scientific findings,
- synergistic effects of networking and horizontally linked areas,
- interaction between modular structures, and
- information technology.

After those first keynote speakers, I started to wonder how this seminar was to be linked to how schools should be run. As mere enterprises?

But then **Jeremy Rifkin**, author in the field of economy, labour, society and the environment, turned the questions around and started taking about what innovation and creativity served for in the first place, and explained the inevitable connection between these two elements and the continued existence of mankind in general. He pointed out that the future of society very much depended on quality of life, which is the reason why "education must be oriented in particular towards the growth of every individual, not only with regard to profitability and efficiency, but also in terms of obtaining and developing values, solidarity and the integration of individuals into society." In this context, he emphasised that, in the past, education systems had been the driving force of every revolution and every major social change

and added that, with regard to the current globalisation processes which promise a new revolution, education would again play a decisive role in the future.

Furthermore the first results of the public consultation of the European Commission on schools for the 21st Century as well as the new study of Euridyce on the autonomy of teachers were presented. Both will be dealt with in the next *effe*-newsletter.

The conference continued the other day with different workshops on the following themes:

- partnership and networking for creativity and innovation,
- empowerment of schools as a necessary condition for creativity and innovation,
- skills and knowledge for creativity and innovation.

I participated in workshop three where we tried to find out how creativity should/could be enhanced by the curriculum. Three important findings came out:

- Teacher education is very important: teachers had to become “experts” in designing learning environments;
- The curriculum needs to be opened up more to a framework
- the contact parents-school is vital.

We also heard some good practices and I especially became enthusiastic by the “manifesto bambini”, an initiative from the Italian education ministry which came out in december 2007

and is a fine sample of how top-down and bottom-up can work together on changes. The children themselves are the protagonists on a road of reflection and communication about their own reality as an individual and about being part of a European community in everyday life. The little ones worked out their own manifest on school, thus being involved, gaining ownership and being creative.

You can find more information on

http://www.lazio.istruzione.it/manifesto_bambini/piano_nazionale.shtml

According to the European Commission and the Slovenian Presidency the conference was to mark a new period of education and training linked in with social and economic processes in Europe and they are probably right. The main conclusion of the conference was, therefore, that the above shifts could be achieved only by changing the mentality of individuals – teachers, students and thereby also the schools as the fundamental institutions in which knowledge is obtained and basic values created. Or one can put it in other words: the users of the education systems have to become aware of the changes needed and given the power to do so. Ownership and bottom-up implementation are the key issues. And from the policy side: the shift in mentality has to be sufficiently supported.

2009 – Year of Creativity and Innovation

The title for the conference is, by the way, a forerunner for the European Year of Creativity and Innovation which will run next year in

2009. In the press release from 31st of March, Commissioner Ján Figel’, responsible for education, training, culture and youth, states that the Year is “an effective way of helping to meet challenges by raising public awareness, disseminating information about good practices, stimulating education and research, creativity and innovation, and promoting policy debate and change. By combining action at Community, national, regional and local levels, it can generate synergies and help to focus policy debate on specific issues.” The activities of the Year should therefore create a strong impetus for a long-term policy priority...most of all enhancing science and technology as ways of innovation. But to content everybody, the European Year of Innovation and Creativity is of course also dealing with artistic creation and new approaches in culture, and as a cross-cutting initiative covering besides education and culture, also other policy domains such as enterprise, media, research, social and regional policy and rural development. The Year of Creativity and Innovation will follow-up the ongoing European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

Hearing on intercultural schools

.....a propos European Year of Intercultural Dialogue....on September 10th 2008 a hearing on intercultural schools, scolarisation of immigrant children and compulsory education: the impact in immigration policy and integration from early child’s curiosity to early school leavers will take place in the European Parliament. The *effe* has been supportive in the organisation of this upcoming event.

**European Meeting of Independent Education (EMIE)
May 30th 2008, Brussels**

Every year this meeting of educational organisations takes place. Present this time were representatives from ECNAIS, FUNDEL, ELLA, CEEC, FESE, OIDEL, EC-SWE, Montessori-Europe, SOCIRES, CoGREE, CJEE and *effe*, represented by Lies Feron. The meeting started with brief reports from the participants in which current activities and focal areas were presented.

After that Professor Jan de Groof, chargé de mission to the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education gave an introduction to the present unsolved juridical problems and possible juridical consequences of the existence of various interpretations of the term “freedom to education” which are imbedded in particular in “The Convention of the Rights of the Child” (CRC); “The European Convention on Human Rights” + protocols (ECHR); “The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”; “Equal Treatment Directive” and “The Treaty of Lisbon”

The new Treaty of Lisbon was particularly discussed, as the Charter on Fundamental Rights is not part of the Lisbon Treaty, but in the amendment of art. 6 “The Union recognises the rights, freedoms and principles set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”, thus making the charter legally binding.

The preamble of the Lisbon Treaty again reinforces the

rights in the ECHR but does not create new rights.

The new European Treaty, which is not yet ratified by all member states and which coming into force is questionable because of the NO of the Irish people, was then compared with other existing treaties.

All very technical and a lot of food for lawyers but the conclusion is quite interesting: As there is “still room for confusion” Jan de Groof stressed that what is needed is a “co-reading of the various documents in a coherent way” and recommended that the EMIE hold a seminar within the coming months on developing “a common strategy on the promotion and sanction of the freedom of education”.

The EMIE decided to arrange the seminar.

A further topic of the meeting was on independent schools and the question of social cohesion and equal opportunities. It was a topic that had been raised already last year in September at the OIDEL conference in Lisbon (see Newsletter October 2007). Various arguments were raised, e.g. the “image problem”: that independent schools are traditionally seen as endangering social cohesion and a possible threat to promotion of equal opportunities. But also that little research on exactly this topic is available or carried out.

The EMIE concluded that knowledge about independent schools should be promoted. Therefore better exchange between the independent schools and school organisations should take place.

At the end of the meeting the *effe* urged the other members

to make sure that information is distributed to the members and that we actively support each other.

Human Scale Education: Small Schools Conference, 26-27 April 2008, Bicester UK

Staff from 16 small schools and learning organisations met together in Bicester in April 2008 to share experiences and learn from each other. This event has been taking place annually for over 10 years and the turnout this year was the highest yet. It is organised by Human Scale Education (HSE), since 2007 the *effe*-office of the UK, and sponsored by the Potential Trust.

This year’s particular focus was to explore how staff working in small schools can best be supported. It is recognised that it can be hard to recruit staff for alternative schools and to support their professional development once in post. At last year’s event a group met to discuss these issues and a small working group then met again for a weekend in October 2007 to take the ideas forward. Many valuable suggestions were made and a report of that meeting was sent to all small alternative schools.

It was recognised that all small schools need to reflect on how they support their staff and we talked about the value of providing mentoring and also encouraging visits between schools. Interest was expressed in setting up regional networking meetings for those working in holistic and child-centred ways. Efforts will be made to establish links with providers of teacher education with the aim of involving them in such meetings. A further development is the proposal by the Institute of Education in London to organise a series of seminars on different educational philoso-

phies. A separate report of these discussions has been produced and is available for anyone who is interested. (mail to info@hse.org.uk)

A theme that ran through the weekend was the exploration of different educational philosophies. Richard Pring, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Oxford and HSE patron talked about the philosophy of John Dewey, about whom he has just published a book. Dewey's ideas about helping young people to grow and develop as human beings within democratic learning communities are highly relevant in the assessment and target-driven culture of today. Dewey's view of the teacher as someone who mediates our inherited culture making it relevant to the lives of the young people in their care is based on the teacher knowing their students well. Dewey would have been appalled by the emphasis in maintained schools today on the delivery of information.

Over the weekend other philosophies were also discussed including the ideas of Krishnamurti and Rudolf Steiner as well as the question of how to democratise the learning process.

A number of other discussion groups took place including:

- How do we evaluate children's learning?
- Topic-based learning
- Self-managed learning
- Developing your school
- The funding and management of special needs provision
- Inspection and registration
- Funding and fundraising

Those who attended the Conference spoke of the benefits of being part of a network of small alternative schools and the value of regular meetings to enable the exchange of ideas.

House of Commons Seminar on Small Schools

Another result of this fruitful gathering in Bicester and of the work of HSE was a meeting held at the UK Parliament on 10 June 2008 to draw attention to the effectiveness of small schools and small learning communities. The seminar was organised jointly by the National Association of Small Schools and HSE and was chaired by Member of Parliament, Matthew Taylor who is a long-time supporter of small schools. Matthew represents a rural community in Cornwall in the south-west of England where there are many small village schools. Many such schools across the UK are threatened with closure and the purpose of the meeting was to highlight their wide-ranging achievements.

Mary Tasker, Chair of Human Scale Education (EFFE's UK Office) spoke about the work of a smaller number of large secondary schools in urban settings which are organised as a number of smaller schools on one site. The Department for Children Families and Schools is pressing for larger schools and yet there is a substantial body of evidence which demonstrates that children do better when they are educated within smaller scale settings in which they can be known and valued as individuals. Mary also drew attention to the tension

between the Government's relentless quest for higher academic results and its "Every Child Matters" agenda which seeks to improve the health, well-being and all-round attainment of all children.

The meeting was attended by politicians, local authority officials and head teachers and contributed to the ongoing campaign to raise awareness of the value of small schools.

Fiona Carnie

We wish you all a pleasant summer!

Editorial:
Lies Feron;
Barbara Ziegler-Fonck;
contact@effe-eu.org
www.effe-eu.org

Sparkasse Witten
Bankkonto: 433813
Bankleitzahl: 452 500 35
IBAN: DE50 4525 0035 0000 433813
SWIFT-BIC: WELADED1WTN