

EUDEC Newsletter



20 May 2010

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News and Events

EUDEC AGM 2010 Registration update



The organisers for this year's annual EUDEC meeting in Roskilde, Denmark, were overwhelmed and thrilled with the large number of early registrations. So far a total of 95 people have registered from 14 countries: the UK, Finland, Germany, Hungary, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, the Ukraine, Spain, Denmark, Norway and Croatia.

Statistically, the group of registered participants looks like this:

- 40% school students
- 10% university students
- 50% teachers/parents, others

If you are planning to attend but still haven't registered, [please do so](#) soon to help with the planning.

North American Democratic Education Conference, NADEC 2010

Five democratic schools from New York State are collaborating to host the North American Democratic Education Conference (NADEC) in Albany, NY this June. NADEC is intended as a celebratory forum for educators, students, parents, and others intimately involved with democratic education an opportunity to share, build, and have fun together. The gathering is held

at the Free School from June 22-24th to give participants the chance to attend the AERO conferences that immediately follows NADEC. The conference is completely volunteer run. To register and for more information please visit: www.nadecconference.org



North American Democratic Education Conference

IDEC@EUDEC 2011 - Interview with Chloe Duff, conference coordinator



How are things going with the planning now, with just over a year to go until the actual conference?

It is all going well. I feel as though things are really starting to take shape, and I am still really enjoying and learning a lot from the experience. We should have a date set very soon, and then we can start registration, which is very exciting.

What do you expect the structure of the conference to be?

Well, we have had lots of different ideas about how the conference should be structured, but it changes all the time. I think the main thing we are hearing from the [EUDEC](#) members and IDEC delegates is the importance of open space. We are hoping that the conference will run over ten days. EUDEC's AGM will happen over two of the days. Another two days will be open to the public to promote democratic education and the work of EUDEC. These two days will be the most structured, with planned talks, workshops an education fair and keynote speakers. We will have one activity day so people can explore the surrounding countryside, and the rest of the time will be open space sessions with a few planned talks and workshops. Not forgetting social activities and get-togethers in the evenings.

How many participants are you expecting?

We are expecting to attract 500 participants for the full ten days and an additional one to two hundred people on the two public days.

Describe the planning committee and how you work.

The planning committee is made up of students and ex students from Sands School and Martin, who teaches

English at Sands. I try to spend at least two days a week working on the conference at the moment, and I feed back to the group what I have been doing by email. We try to have a meeting once a month on a weekend so we can spend at least half a day working on the conference, and then I meet more regularly with the people that are still at Sands for shorter meetings during the school week.

Who else has been involved and how have they helped?

The EUDEC Council have always been there for advice and support, and that has been a huge help to me. Isaac Graves of [AERO \(Alternative Education Resource Organisation\)](#) has also offered me some invaluable advice and enormously generous offers of help. Mike Weimann and Meta Sell (Mike organised [IDEC 2005](#), Berlin) visited us at Sands last week and shared from their experience in Berlin. Oli Lyndale of [Zeroscale](#) is making us a website and designing us a conference logo free of charge, which is unbelievably generous. Many other past IDEC organisers have also offered their advice and support.

What are you working on at the moment?

I have been planning the content of the conference website this week and talking with Oli about the image and style of the website and logo. I am also in negotiation with a potential venue about cost and revising the budget, again!

What's the biggest challenge that you face?

The biggest challenge we face without a doubt is funding. It is very important that this conference is affordable and accessible but it costs a huge amount of money to put on an event of this size. I have mentioned this a lot in emails and on [IDEC@EUDEC's Facebook](#) but if anyone wants to join a group to work on fundraising for the event or has any ideas or advice about fundraising please get in touch. Email - cduff@eudec.org

Regional News

Spain

David and Lynette Gribble offer Seminars in Pamplona

[David Gribble](#)'s visit To Pamplona was organised by the Tximeleta Association for Innovation in Education in collaboration with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Public University of Navarre. David and his wife, Lynette, arrived on April 21 by ferry, which they managed to get tickets for in the last minute, given the suspension of flights due to the volcanic eruption in Iceland.



On April 22, David offered a conference at the public university for students undertaking a degree in Primary Education. Through examples and anecdotes on the variety of schools he had visited around the world, David illustrated that children can be given the possibility to decide what, how and when they want to learn, and can participate directly in the daily decisions of their schools. There were some questions, and in line with the comments made, the talk aroused great interest in the students who concluded the conference with a grand ovation. As a consequence an opening has been made within the syllabus to include a similar class within the subject of Educational Institutions.

David and Lynette also had the opportunity to visit [Tximeleta](#) during the morning of April 23 where they shared a pleasant time with the children.

During the weekend of April 24-25, David carried out a workshop in the Nicholas d'Oresme hall in the Public University of Navarre with the invaluable aid of Lynette. More than 50 participants from conventional schooling and from free schools all around Spain attended the workshop entitled:



"Free Schools: Utopia and reality in daily practice."

David introduced group work and active participation, reflection and debate on various aspects related to the different modes of approaching learning and children participation in the decisions within their schools. He narrated a variety of anecdotes and gave numerous examples of decisions taken on various issues in different schools around the world. It was especially interesting to hear first hand the anecdotes from Sands School of which he is a co-founder.

Finally he referred to issues regarding the movement for Democratic Education of which he is an active member, and which Tximeleta, as a member of the [EUDEC](#), is promoting in Spain. The workshop served as a platform to establish relations among the participants and addressed the possibility of fomenting new initiatives in this field. On Saturday all participants enjoyed a luncheon together where they discussed their backgrounds and opinions.

The Tximeleta Association expressed its gratitude for the effort, enthusiasm and dedication on the part of David and Lynette during their visit.



Josu Uztarroz, member/parent of [Tximeleta](#), a free-democratic school in Pamplona, Spain



Germany

EUDEC Kids' Weekend in Leipzig (May 28-30)

On the last weekend of May, the [Freie Schule Leipzig](#) is hosting a

EUDEC Germany meeting. This will be the first

[EUDEC Germany](#) meeting focused on exchange between school students.

The schedule will be planned and structured by the participants themselves ("open schedule").

If you would like to come, please sign up as soon as possible! For signups and information, write Benni bs@freie-schule-leipzig.de or Alexander ao@freie-schule-leipzig.de.

Croatia

Free School – Association for Promotion of Democratic Education, Croatia

In the fall of 2007 a group of teachers and parents in Croatia started looking into alternative education. The search for options inevitably led to democratic education. An email was boldly sent to [Summerhill](#), and Zoe Readhead kindly put us in contact with the EUDEC founding fathers, Leonard Turton and David French, who in turn



invited us to come to the conference [EUDEC 2008](#) in Leipzig. We then founded our own association so we could promote the idea of democratic education at home and attended the conference.



A free school in Croatia

The year 2009 was marked by promotion activities. We invited [EUDEC](#) representatives (students and teachers from democratic schools) to come to Croatia to help us introduce and promote the idea of democratic education. We spent the rest of the year promoting and finding people (parents) interested in founding a school.

This year, 2010, has been one of action. To found a school one needs to undergo two assessments by the Ministry of Education. The first one is the assessment of the need to found a school. This one, we lodged on 1st April and are awaiting the outcome. Providing the Ministry of Education gives a positive assessment of the need, we can go ahead with the school

founding process and submit the founding documents, the curriculum and the location permits for assessment and final approval. While the first should not take too long, the second stage might last up to two years.

At the moment there is a serious interest in school founding in two places in Croatia: in Samobor, a small town near Zagreb, and in Karlovac, where the association is registered and is working from.

We are hoping for the school founding process to begin in September 2010 and to finish by September 2011.

Current obstacles include a lack of finances, premises and resources (teachers willing to embark on the journey of democratic education); insufficient number of students to cover costs.



Dragana Boljesic-Knezevic, EUDEC Council member and founder of [Free School - Association for Promotion of Democratic Education](#), Croatia



The Netherlands

Democratic schools threatened by school inspection practices

In the Netherlands, freedom of education is a constitutional right. Free for teachers to provide, free for students and parents to choose. The constitutional freedom of education is unmatched in Europe and is only surpassed by Belgium. The constitution also states that the government supervises education and that limitations of freedom for schools can only be set by laws agreed by parliament. In principle no one has problems with government supervision per se; the issues start once the supervision is executed. So far the theory.



So what is really happening? While the Netherlands has no history of private, non-governmental schools, since 2000 a lot of (small) schools have been

started, initiated by parents, because they were very dissatisfied with the governmental schools.

The government saw this as a serious problem because they could not “control” these schools as there were no legal criteria the schools had to comply with. However this did not stop the school inspection authority. They would rule that students could not fulfill their legal compulsory attendance at those schools (schulplicht). As a result, parents were prosecuted in court. The criminal judges had a slightly different view, as people are innocent until proven guilty. And in the absence of legal criteria, it is rather difficult to prove someone is guilty.

In mid 2007 the government amended their laws to include criteria for schools, and the school inspection authority started to inspect schools. However, the inspection authority concluded that the legal criteria were too broad and actually unworkable, so they kept doing what they had been doing all the time: deciding what schools should do according to the opinions of the inspection authority, not according to the laws of the country. In short, there are criteria for schools, but the school inspection authority refuses to apply them.

This is resulting in lots of legal proceedings, costing an enormous amount of time, energy and money. This has especially affected the two Sudbury schools, [De Kampanje](#) and [De Koers](#), but other

democratic schools also have serious problems if they do not want to comply with the manipulation of the school inspection authority. Many schools have complied and surrendered their identity. “Das Urteil” by Kafka gives similar insights.

However, legally the odds are in the schools’ favour. Last February another parent was acquitted, as the school inspection report did not stand in court. And on top of that a study of the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights showed that the schools stand more than a good chance. The only question is whether the schools can survive until their constitutional freedom is re-established?



Growing as a school in this adversarial climate is hard, though there are parents who, after being informed that they will be prosecuted, are happy to enrol their children in our schools. Working in the school as a staff member, I experience why we are doing it and why it is more than worth all the effort.



Peter Hartkamp,
co-founder and staff
member, [De Kampanje](#),
the Netherlands



- teaching freedom in early childhood; reflections and experiences
- libertarian education in society; a comparative reflection of the approach based on actual experience at the "Mammut" district centre and others
- democratic schools; experience and comparison

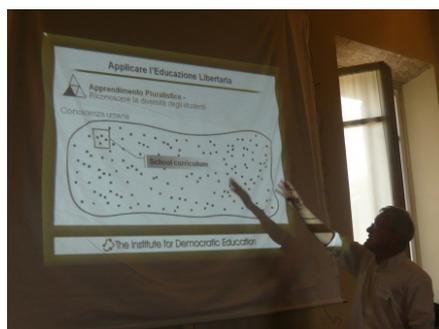


Italy

Second national meeting on "Libertarian Education"

Sunday morning, nine o'clock at Villa Buri, surrounded by a beautiful park, people begin to arrive. Later we will count 160 adults, plus many children. It is the second Italian meeting on libertarian education, as promoted by Francesco Codello and realised with the hospitality of the Kiskanu School, Verona, Italy. The day starts with an interesting speech by Codello on the historical background, principles, and theoretical and practical importance and value of libertarian education. His speech also serves as starting point for the questions and subjects elaborated in the five working groups in which the subjects are

- the independent libertarian school; principles of action and thinking
- the libertarian teacher between necessity, imagination and wishful thinking



As often under these circumstances, it is difficult to recount all that happened. There are many small encounters, new acquaintances made and knowledge gathered, ideas conceived during the lunch break...

The atmosphere was that of a mixed group of people, each with their individual background and motivation, united by the quest for an alternative to the institutionalised scholastic system. Common reasons were the strengthened self-esteem of the adolescents after experiencing an alternative school, the belief that a true adult is not a person trained in giving and taking

orders, but one who is conscious of himself and his surroundings.

The [Italian network on libertarian education](#) has defined some of its goals as

- to bring together groups of parents on one, and teachers on the other side, that are interested in alternative education;
- to enter into dialogue and exchange with other European experiences through the organisation [EUDEC](#);
- to develop a formation for future alternative teachers that draws on, and transfers, experiences and skills from who is already walking an alternative path.

A delegation from Italy is looking very much forward to attending the [August meeting of EUDEC in Denmark!](#)



Irene Stella, founder of [MUKTI](#), a democratic school founding group in Italy

Articles

Research in the Field of Democratic Education

Speech given at the opening of EUDEC 2008

by Derry Hannam

It is a great privilege and pleasure to have the task of welcoming all the new faces who are joining this already successful conference for the next two days.

Many of you are not personally involved in democratic schools at the present time, and that is equally true of some of us who are already here.

I should perhaps briefly define what in my opinion is a fully democratic school. It is one in which all people of whatever age have an equal vote in decisions concerning the day-to-day management of the school and where there is absolutely no compulsion or coercion for students to attend any particular learning activity or lesson. There can be many variations within these criteria but they are probably at the core.

I guess that we are all keen to learn more about how such unusual schools can work whether we are home-schoolers, students, parents, researchers, teachers, administrators, inspectors or people hoping to start a new school.

I am sure that many of you will share my purpose for example, which has been and still is to introduce more democracy into our traditionally authoritarian state/public school systems. My

own work is in the UK and Europe as a whole through the Council of Europe (COE) and the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions ([OBESSU](#)).

I don't know if the word serendipity translates into German (perhaps Jung's 'synchronicity' comes close) – it means the way in which things sometimes appear to happen by chance but later turn out to be truly significant events. Just by chance while I was waiting to go to university to study to be a teacher I got a job in a very democratic group therapy psychiatric unit for young people. There were no uniforms or white coats for staff and all the people in the unit addressed each other by their first names from the most senior psychiatrist to the youngest patient. The 'treatment', or perhaps I could say 'education', basically involved living together and making decisions in democratic community meetings twice a day. Sometimes visiting doctors would say 'this is crazy – we cannot discern who are staff and who are patients.' I used to say to them 'In that case do you think that you might be in the wrong job?'

I learned that we are all unhappy and confused at times in our lives and then we need help. At other times we are stronger and can help others. I had a parallel approach when I went to university to become a teacher. I thought that we all, whatever age, sometimes need to be learners and at other times can

be guides or teachers. So when I was forced to go to psychology lectures about Pavlov and his dogs and Skinner and his rats. I asked. 'What has this got to do with children growing and learning?' The lecturer became a little tired of this arrogant student who asked too many questions and I was allowed to leave the official course and to construct my own 'alternative'. In the college library I discovered a whole section of books, some very dusty having not been opened for years, by Dewey, Tolstoy, Lane, Wills, Boeke, Russell, Bruner, Vygotsky, and, somewhat prophetically, A.S. Neill.

Their arguments for a democratic approach to learning and schooling made total sense to me, and my somewhat depressed spirit began to soar into the sky again. From the start as a teacher I introduced democratic methods as much as I could even if the overall situation was authoritarian. It was always possible to change something, and it always worked! Gradually I become responsible for larger parts of schools and it just went on working. At times I can honestly say that every child was participating democratically and taking responsibility for something however small....

[>>complete speech](#)



Derry Hannam, Retired Headteacher, Inspector, Council of Europe Adviser, enthusiast for democratic education as democratic practice everywhere - including schools

Spotlight on Schools



Den Demokratiske Skole

Roskilde, Demark

Website:

www.dendemokratiskeskole.dk

Year founded: **2009**

Number of students: 20

Age range of students: 6-15

Number of staff: 4

Funding: Government and parents

The school is democratic. Staff and students have one vote on all decisions made in weekly school meetings. Learning is initiated by students and staff individually. Conversation and play are big parts of

the school life. The parents are allowed to be in school for a short time when they pick up their kids.

Conflicts are solved by a judicial committee; when someone is accused of breaking a school rule the judicial committee will call that person in and deal with the deed as fairly as possible. The founders were inspired by Homer Lane, A.S. Neill, Daniel Greenberg, Hanna Greenberg, Mimsy Sadofsky, Leonard Turton, Michael Sappir, Jesper Juul, Christel Hartkamp and many other experiences, persons and authors.

[>>more schools](#)

My experience...

My experience at Kapriole ... and beyond by Paco Yoncaova



I spent my primary school time (5 years in my case) at [Kapriole](#), a democratic school in Freiburg, Germany. After that I attended a comprehensive school to graduate (Abitur) there in 2006. I feel that my time in the democratic school, even though it was shorter than at the state school, did form me significantly for my life: I think this time helped me to keep that mind-attitude of naturally being interested in things, enjoy discovering and learning things and not feeling I always only have to prove something to someone else. It helped me to become a person, I would say, whose mind is free for the actual content of a matter. When I look back at my primary school time I see that excitement that lived inside me.

There were so many things to be explored, so many doors to be opened, and the nice thing about it was that we all, teachers and fellow students alike, we did it together. We all tapped that big bubble of knowledge together, taking our motivation and interest as the engine that drove us through it. Everybody was a member of the crew and provided his or her abilities to get best prey at the end of the day. There was nobody who fed us with a certain amount of stuff we had to learn right here right now. We were all like little nutshells dancing on the vast ocean of knowledge, and the school was our home base that provided us with the instruments and materials that we needed to extract the interesting parts from this deep sea.

Later in my secondary school I felt that people who wrote good grades without knowing or being interested in the matter were happier than people who knew and understood things but wrote bad grades. Democratic education helped me not to not judge my personality by grades. I definitely feel well prepared for life and to lead it a way I choose. I feel that a lot of people around me are trapped in schemes (school, study, work, family, security, insurance). I feel that I'm often able to take a step out, view things from another perspective and then choose what I want to do.

In secondary school I often felt slowed down by jumping from

one test to the next. We didn't have time to look behind the scenes. Very often we only learned how to pick an apple and not how to grow the apple tree. Later on, you are lost if there once is no apple to pick because you cannot fix the cause. I feel that my time in democratic education provided me with the mind attitude that brings me to find the cause and fix it instead of being lost if the tools I have don't fit. This is one of the most valuable diamonds I took from that time. People often don't recognise this as actual learning, but to me it's one of the most important things to learn in life because it is, for example, the key to get back to things you learned in school but forgot about them long ago.

After graduating from secondary school I worked for several months in India in a project as a volunteer, did my civilian service in Germany in a landscape architecture office and now am voluntarily working for a project (for over one year now) to build and establish a democratic school in Peru. Sometimes people try to tell me I'm losing these years just because I'm not studying something. I'm very grateful to have made the experience that not only schools and universities are places to learn and study but the whole world is full of places that I can go to and learn from.

[>>read more stories](#)