

IDEC@EUDEC 2011 Conference Report

From the 3rd to the 14th July 2011, nearly 600 people came to the River Dart Country Park in the Devon countryside. 34 countries were represented, which is more than at any other gathering of the international democratic education community to take place so far. The delegation consisted of people from amazingly varied backgrounds and from many different walks of life, including students, teachers, academics, parents, organisers, journalists, film makers, writers, activists, caterers, carpenters, hospitality workers and musicians, just to name a few. Almost half of the participants were students, and over 80 schools and organisations were represented. Participants came to the conference from as far as New Zealand, Taiwan, Brazil and many places in between. A vast array of languages was being spoken, and there was a lot to be learned from the diversity of the people, cultures and countries represented.



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EUDEC Annual General Meeting

The European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC) is a democratically run organisation working to promote democratic education in Europe. Every year EUDEC members meet for the organisation's Annual General Meeting. This year it took place at the IDEC@EUDEC Conference venue 2 days prior to the Conference. During these meetings a new EUDEC Council, Oversight Committee, and Auditors were elected by EUDEC's members. As well as the elections the AGM approved a new EUDEC diploma that will be available for graduates of EUDEC member schools, a new Membership Committee was formed, a reduced membership fee was approved for students, staff members and parents from member schools and much more.

IDEC@EUDEC Open Schedule

We decided to keep the majority of the conference programme as open schedule, meaning there were very few planned talks and workshops; this way the participants had the space and resources to run their own workshops, offer talks and lectures, show films, or do whatever they liked. Everybody from the organising group that had attended previous democratic education events had seen how well open schedule had worked and how much the diverse crowd that attend these conferences have to offer. From my own experience of visiting many democratic schools around the world I have seen how different they all are and can see how much we can learn from each other. We saw that setting the conference up in the way we did, with mostly open schedule, was like creating a democratic school for the participants, a place for them to come, meet other people and learn about the things they wanted to learn about in the way they wanted to. There was of course a wide variety of talks and workshops offered in the open schedule including Building an Educating Neighbourhood in Brazil, Korean Alternative/Democratic Education, How to Change Policies Concerning Education by Popular Vote, Latin Dancing, Hiring a EUDEC Coordinator and Cooperation between State and Democratic Schools, just to name a few.



The Public Session - Democracy in Education: an International Conference

Over the weekend of the 9th and 10th July we opened the doors of the conference to members of the public for Democracy in Education: an International Conference. The organising group worked in partnership with the [Phoenix Education Trust](#) (a UK based charity working to promote democratic education) to organise this part of the conference. Kate Gribble (former Sands student) was the main coordinator of Democracy in Education: an International Conference and did an amazing job organising this weekend at the same time as studying and sitting her A level examinations at a local college and holding down a part time job.

The purpose of this weekend was to share our ideas and experiences about democratic education with teachers, students, parents and anyone with an interest or involvement in education.

The weekend session had a fully packed timetable of talks, workshops and panel discussions. David Gribble (UK), Derry Hannam (UK), Lynette Gribble (UK), Yaacov Hecht (Israel) and Amukta Mahapatra (India) were some of the special guest speakers during this part of the conference. There were several panel discussions including one panel made up of students from democratic and state schools. During this discussion the panel talked about their own personal experiences of schools and the positives and negatives of each type of school. On the Saturday afternoon there was a panel discussion hosted by Isaac Graves (USA). The members of the panel were Derry Hannam (UK), Yaacov Hecht (Israel), David Gribble (UK), Zsa Zsa Shea (UK), Mathew Davis (USA), Amukta Mahapatra (India), Elizabeth Baker (USA) and Justo Mendez Aramburu (Puerto Rico). There were a series of prepared questions about democratic education put to the panel, and then the floor was opened up to members of the audience for questions and comments. There was lively discussion and a balanced overview of democratic education around the world presented to the audience of people new to this concept.



The highlight of the public session was the Saturday night party, where everyone gathered in the main marquee for an evening of music, dancing, celebrating and lots of cake! The party was to celebrate the birthdays of the democratic schools and organisations in the UK. It was Summerhill's 90th birthday, Park School's 25th, Sands School's 24th, Phoenix Education Trust's 10th and The Family School's 3rd. We had enormous cakes made for each school and organisation, which were shared around with the 600 guests at the party. To see a video montage of the party very kindly put together by Alex Delfont of The Box Collective click on this link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLtEjU9egek>

Fun and Games

As well as all the talks and workshops that took place during the conference, there were a lot of other activities going on in every corner of the venue. The arts and crafts tent was always full of glitter and paint-covered people making beautiful pictures and collages. There were epic games of Capture the Flag happening on almost a daily basis, and I even heard someone say that they thought there were so many people in one of the games that we may have broken the world record for the biggest game of capture the flag! There was face painting, a reggae party, karaoke, computer games on the big screens, elephants and rhinos, swimming, theatre performances, an art exhibition, trips to the coast and to the moors, and who could forget IDEC@EUDEC's Got Talent, hosted by EUDEC's very own Frankie London, (aka David French). We got to see fascinating and entertaining acts from all over the world, songs, skits and much more. And following the long IDEC tradition, Jerry Mintz hosted the auction to raise money for the next IDEC in Puerto Rico. Musical instruments, clothes, personal training, jewellery and all kinds of things were generously donated by participants and everything was sold off by Jerry with the help of the hilarious Diego from the Puerto Rican delegation.



The Organisers' and Participants' Perspective

Or Levi – Technical Producer



I have been attending IDEC conferences for many years, the first in Japan when I was 14, and have been working in the field of events since I was 17 as a sound technician and technical producer so it was a great privilege for me to have the opportunity to put my skills to use, organising an event that has been an important part of my life for many years. From the organisers' perspective, this was a unique and amazing learning process, as organising an IDEC is very different to organising any other conference or event. As technical producer my job was to provide all the physical and technical needs of participants and to create and maintain the infrastructure that was running in the conference. In the ten months that I was a part of the organising team, I had a constant inner struggle about how much control I should keep for myself, how many of the responsibilities in my area I should delegate to other, less experienced, people and what should I leave for the participants to do for themselves. In the end, by the time of the conference, I found myself not doing much, and all of the people in the organising group and many of the participants were taking on massive roles for themselves to help to make this conference an amazing experience for me and everyone else, and I think it all went quite well!

Chloe Duff – Conference Coordinator



It has been a very long process organising the IDEC@EUDEC Conference and it seems like such a long time ago I was nervously waiting to hear if I had been given the job to organise the 2010 EUDEC Conference and I was imagining what the conference could be and all the possibilities there were. Thankfully, I did get the job and in June 2009 the long rollercoaster ride started and the ideas we had in the organising group developed and we decided to combine the EUDEC conference with the 2011 IDEC and then more and more ideas came and we tried to put as many of them into practice as possible. Throughout this process I got the chance to travel, meet amazing people from all over the world, attend inspiring events, attend some really dull events as well, meet my boyfriend, push myself and learn to do things I didn't have the confidence to try before, make new friends, learn more about democratic education, form solid opinions, open my mind to new ideas, work long hours, get more stressed out than I have ever been in my life, become a bookkeeper, work with students and teachers, speak in public and so much more. It has been an amazing process, the most challenging thing I have done, and I have learned so much that will be so valuable to me throughout my life. When I first started working on the conference I couldn't imagine why on earth I would need so much time to organise something, but as time went on I began to realise what goes into organising an event, and even after 2 years of hard work and planning we still didn't have time to do everything we wanted. It was a very strange feeling when I realised that I was spending every waking minute thinking about this conference, working on the conference and that the conference itself would be over in just 10 days. Organising this event has opened so many doors to me and I am now in the privileged position where I am getting offers of work and have many choices. I really do believe that democratic education is the way forward, and I am glad that organising this conference brought me back to my passion for education. I know I am so lucky to have had the privilege to attend a democratic school as a student and to work with the amazing people involved in democratic education around the world for the past 2 years. This experience has made me realise

more than ever the importance and value of democratic education and the way this conference was run, mostly by school students under the age of 16, is proof in itself that democratic education really does work and is a brilliant thing.

Participants Thoughts and Feedback



We received a lot of feedback from IDEC@EUDEC participants, mostly compliments but some constructive criticism as well, which has been useful for us to reflect upon and learn from. The most important thing that has been mentioned a few times and is something I feel we all need be more aware of in future events is the need to slow down when speaking for translation. This is a very important issue, and I am going to make big efforts to be mindful of this at future events so that people do not feel isolated or left out because of language barriers. A lot of people talked about the fact that they had made new friends and are excited to meet them again at future

IDEC's and EUDEC events. People wrote to tell us about the life changing experiences they had had, the interesting things they had learnt in workshops and talks; one person wrote, "There should be an indoor place on the conference site where people can hang out until late in the night. Conference time is too precious to be spent sleeping." And another person wrote to say the conference had changed their life for the better as they now work at a democratic school!

Who Was There?

Countries Represented:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Puerto Rico, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, UK, USA, Ukraine, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Switzerland, Greece, New Zealand and Peru.

Schools, Educational Institutions and Organisations Represented:



AERO, Alianza para la Educacion Alternativa, Bealings, Bedales, Brookfield High School, Centro Sor Isolina Ferre, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, Colegio San Ignacio de Loyola, Danish University of Education, De Koers, Democratic Education Consortium/Black and Latino Policy Institute, Democratic Education Consortium, Democratic School De Ruimte Soet, Demokratie und Integration Brandenburg , Demokratische Schule X, Demokratisches Bildungsnetz e. V., Den Demokratische Skole, Det Frie Gymnasium, Edinburgh Steiner School, Escuela Democratica de Huamachuco, EUDEC, Freie active Schule Stuttgart, Freie Schule Heckenbeck, Freie Schule Leipzig, Freie Schule Pankow , Glockseeschule, Hauptuniversität, Het Leerhuis (Leerhuis Brussel), Holistic Education School, Hurum Waldorf School,


IDE - Institute of Democratic Education, IDEA, Infini.nu - centrum voor democratisch leren, Jena, Kapriole, Keshet Democratic School, Keshet Shvilim, Kibbutzim College, King Edward VI Community College, King's College London, krisU, LandesschulerInnenvereinigung Bayern e.V. (LSV Bayern), Maridahdi Early Childhood Community, Marjon Plymouth, National Chengchi University, Taiwan, Netzwerk Schule, Neue Schule Hamburg (NSH), Nuestra Escuela Inc., OJO DE AGUA, Open University, Park School, Pedagogie Nomade, Port Łódź, Democratic Preschool, Proyecto P.E.C.E.S., Inc., Queens University, Rivista Libertaria - Rete educazione libertaria , Roskilde University, Sacred Heart University, Sands School, SchuelerInnen School, Seed School (middle/NGO), Self Manged Learning College, South Dartmoor Community College, Stork School, Stover School, Sudbury Gent, Sudbury Jerusalem, Sudbury München e.V., Sudbury School Gent, Summerhill, Teacher Training College in Denmark, Tel Aviv University, The Family School, The Kibuzim College of Education, The Patchwork School, The Phoenix Education Trust, The Tutorial School, TING – Schule, Tokyo Shure/ Shure University, Univeritiy of Vienna, KRÄTZÄ Berlin, University of Hamburg, University of Leipzig, University of Vienna and Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster.

Thank You!

The conference would not have been what it was without the help and support of a great deal of people so I would like to give a huge thank you to everyone from the organising group and everyone from Sands who helped in planning and organising the conference and that worked so hard to make the conference a success. Big thank yous also go to Marisia Fein-Brown and Ronja Metzger, who came in to help in the build-up to the conference and were so kind and helpful, Frankie and the catering team that worked extremely hard to produce all the delicious organic meals, Guy who lost his big voice organising the serving of the meals, all the volunteers that helped during the time of the conference, Or for everything technical and putting up with me being a stress head! Joanna Benson who made all the incredible cakes for the party, Luke Flegg for filming the talks and workshops, The Box Collective for all their help setting up equipment and for the music at the party, Jack and Shaun for coming all the way from London to help and all my friends that came and helped out, Donald Barr for teaching me and helping with the conference accounts, Hannah for help with the insurance, Anna Leatherdale who gave me the opportunity to organise the conference in the beginning and taught me a lot, Meryl and Steve and all the actors and artists from Sands that performed and showed their work, Gemma Farmer from the River Dart Country Park who did way beyond what was expected and was a pleasure to work with, all the River Dart Country Park staff, the EUDEC Council who were always there to offer help and support, the past IDEC organisers, all the speakers and presenters and everyone that contributed and of course a big thank you to all the participants who made the conference into what it was.



What's Next?

From the 24th to the 31st March 2012 the International Democratic Education Conference will be taking place in Caguas, Puerto Rico. There is a great line-up of speakers and it will be the first time the IDEC has taken place in this beautiful part of the world. To find out more and to book your place visit <http://www.idec2012.org> 

EUDEC's next conference will be from the 28th July - 5th August 2012 at the Kapriole in Freiburg, Southwest Germany, in the heart of the Black Forest. Keep a lookout on the EUDEC website for more information about this conference:

<http://www.eudec.org/eudec2012> 

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