

2010 - EUROPEAN YEAR FOR COMBATING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

ECSWE Declaration: Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 04.02.2010

1. In 2010 and beyond, ECSWE will engage in a Europe-wide campaign to address the issues of poverty and social exclusion. ECSWE will cooperate with like-minded organisations in raising consciousness about all forms of poverty and social exclusion and seek ways to combat them.
2. Poverty and social exclusion can affect and afflict people emotionally and materially and consequently have a profound effect on an individual's wellbeing. ECSWE members recognise that poverty and social exclusion are complex problems that manifest differently on various levels of society and within diverse cultures
3. Severe economic poverty remains a challenging problem in many parts of the world, but less so in Europe. In the countries of Europe, other aspects of poverty are becoming more apparent - problems such as loneliness, disconnection and marginalisation. Aside from the beneficial aspects of new technologies, an unintended effect of the rise of electronic media and social networking has seen the occurrence of social exclusion and bullying among children and young people.
4. Educational institutions which actively seek to nurture social and emotional intelligence can help counter tendencies to social isolation that a developing knowledge-society may produce in its wake.
5. Steiner Waldorf schools undertake their work out of respect for the individual child and young person and in appreciation of universal human rights. Generosity, tolerance and co-operation are values which can support social prosperity, economic well-being, environmental sustainability and creative diversity. Progressive societies consist of learning communities that call on a sense of solidarity, interdependence and support across gender, age and all social-cultural backgrounds.
6. Active support for human and cultural diversity lies at the core of Steiner Waldorf education. The educational approach and ethos focus on a practical understanding of the multi-faceted richness of

human relationships. Such richness has physical, social, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Neglecting any one of these dimensions can lead directly or indirectly to corresponding forms of poverty.

7. To this end, ECSWE encourages its member organisations and schools to help increase the visibility of good and best practice and to learn from the best practice of others.

Steiner Waldorf Accolade in European Report into Creativity

In late 2008 we were contacted by KEA, a Brussels-based strategic consultancy working on behalf of the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture).

They were in the process of preparing a report on the "Contribution of culture to creativity". The aim of the study was to show the contribution of our culture and art to economic and societal development as well as the merit in integrating artistic creativity in the Lisbon Process to the same extent as scientific innovation. On behalf of ECSWE Christopher Clouder was invited to their office in Brussels in order to present the role of creativity in Steiner education.



One of the core aspects of the study was to consider ways in which creativity can be stimulated as well as identifying what kills creativity and to that purpose they were interested in assessing Education Systems and looking more precisely into the role of schools and education in stimulating creativity.

The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education was contacted because a case study carried out by the European Commission showed that Waldorf students were highly creative and they were therefore keen to know more about the Steiner Waldorf approach. In particular they were interested to look at how much the Steiner method uses the arts and whether it has a proven impact on the students' creativity. We were able to show them our accredited research in this regard on the WREN pages of the ECSWE website.

In June 2009 the KEA Report *"The Impact of Culture on Creativity"* A Study prepared for the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture) was published and we were very pleased that Steiner Waldorf education was reviewed in the Report as one of only two pedagogical methods that were referred to. The text is included below but in summary the Report found that; *"The Waldorf school is seen to exert a favourable influence on the development of the personality (e.g. personal sense of worth, self-assurance, creativity, flexibility) and of social competency (e.g. empathic faculties, consideration, ability to cooperate) as well as the development of the ability to form one's own opinion and become self reliant."*

The full report can be downloaded from www.keanet.eu and the following extract can be found on page 103:-

Waldorf education

The Steiner-Waldorf education is a pedagogical method based on Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy. The first Waldorf School opened in 1919. It is nowadays one of the largest independent educational systems in the world with about 1000 schools and 1400 kindergartens.

A main characteristic of Waldorf schools is the interdisciplinary nature of the learning process which integrates practical, conceptual and artistic elements in each lesson. Imagination plays a central role. Waldorf education systems aim at developing thinking that is both creative and analytical. One of Waldorf education's central principles is that schools should be self governing and that a high degree of creative autonomy should be left to teachers.

The UK Department for Education and Skills, which conducted a report²²⁸ on the differences in curriculum and pedagogical approach between Steiner-Waldorf and mainstream schools, recommended that schools in the state sector would benefit from some Waldorf strategies, especially with regard to the Waldorf approach to art and creativity. A 2008 report by the Cambridge-based Primary Review found that Steiner-Waldorf schools achieved superior academic results to English state schools. An international study was conducted to determine if there

was a significant difference between the creative thinking ability of Waldorf students and state school students in England, Scotland, and Germany. The sample consisted of 1,165 third through sixth grade children.²²⁹ The findings obtained from administration of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking Ability, suggested that Waldorf students were more creative than their state school peers.²³⁰

Two additional surveys complete the picture of the impact of creative learning. In the US, a survey shows that Waldorf alumni are three times as likely as the general U.S. college population to have studied arts and humanities. Also, up to twice as many go on to study science in college, including both life sciences and physical sciences²³¹. Their primary characteristics are the integrative quality of their thinking and their creative and imaginative capacities. Another survey was conducted amongst former Waldorf students (in the age brackets 30-66 years old in Germany and Switzerland²³²). It shows that there is a significantly higher number of teachers, engineers, medical doctors/pharmacists, and artists among the former Waldorf students (in comparison with the general population statistics).

Sophistication of culture and creative aspects of life play a more significant role for Waldorf alumni than for the general population.

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227 Arnstine, Democracy and the arts of schooling, State University of New York. Press, 1995.

228 2005 report Steiner Schools in England by Philip Woods, Martin Ashley and Glenys Woods of the University of the West of England, Steiner Schools in England, University of West of England, Bristol: Research Report RR645.

229 479 English, 193 Scottish, and 493 German students.

230 Ogletree, The Comparative Status of the Creative Thinking Ability of Waldorf Education Students: A Survey, 1996.

231 Mitchell D. and Gerwin D., Standing Out without Standing Alone: Profile of Waldorf Graduates, Profile of Waldorf School Graduates. Research Bulletin - Spring 2007 - Volume 12 - #2.

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The views expressed are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of ECSWE.

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