

ECSWE Conference – Tampere, Finland – 20 September 2013

Curriculum – the whole is greater than the sum of its parts

The ECSWE conference on the important subject of 'Curriculum' was held at the University of Tampere and organised by the Federation for Steiner Waldorf Schools in Finland, the University of Tampere and Snellman College, the Finnish Steiner Teacher Training Institute.



ECSWE Council Members outside Tampere's Rudolf Steiner School by Eeva Raunela.

The first speaker of the day was **Tero Autio**, PhD, Professor of Curriculum Theory at Tallinn University who addressed the subject – 'Finland on the current educational and curriculum world map?'

He introduced the subject by explaining the importance of curriculum; we all come to the world through curriculum, it is the organisational and intellectual centrepiece of education in all its stages and school is arguably the most successful single institution in human history. Curriculum is a framework and there is no meaning without a frame. However the Professor finds that there is a problematic trend towards standardization in curriculum.

There are two models of curriculum: the curriculum model promoted by the USA and the didactic model espoused by the Scandinavian countries and Germany and with eastern influences from Russia.

Economics is the driving force behind the curriculum model of the USA and has replaced politics, culture and society in its desire to achieve social cohesion and standardization. There is an emphasis on outcomes in this system which leads to teaching to the test rather than to educational freedom. Recent changes have seen the introduction of market competition, league tables of performance between schools, a return to traditional models of curriculum. This systemic replacement of experience by evidence-based educational reforms has pushed aside teachers' intuition and professional judgement in the Anglo-American model. Professor Autio finds that this method diverts teachers' attention onto short-term tasks and easily measurable indicators of achievement, thus away from the long term engagement of teaching, learning and study. He believes that at its best evidence-based research can inform but not prescribe educational practice.

Professor Autio has looked at President Obama's educational policy: 'Race to the Top', which seeks to adopt standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and thus enable the country to compete in the global economy. He believes that this policy and the historical and theoretical shift in education and curriculum theory in the Anglophone world from learning to learning outcomes has led to the disappearance of the subject and subject matter in Anglo-American education. He sees that globalization and the standardization of subjectivity go hand in hand and that the image of the teacher in the Anglo-American context is an intellectually passive "agent of the system" with very little space for professional freedom, autonomy and judgement. When curriculum is a manual then teaching essentially means teaching to the test.

In the second, didactic model, the curriculum is not seen as a manual but as an organisational and intellectual centrepiece of education with the teacher as curriculum maker. This relationship between curriculum and the teacher gives the teacher complete freedom within the framework of the curriculum to develop his or her own approaches to teaching. This viewpoint is traditionally internalised and respected especially in the Scandinavian countries, Singapore and Canada. The didactic model embraces moral, ethical, political, aesthetic and practical dimensions and is the basis of wellbeing and living in a sustainable society. China is putting this curriculum theory at the centre of its current education and curriculum reform agenda. They are making an effort to re-relate curriculum and teaching to Chinese wisdom traditions beyond communism and capitalism and towards Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam and the latest Western intellectual advancements.

Professor Autio ended his lecture by concluding that school is not for life, it is life.

Next to speak was **Irmelí Halinen**, Head of Curriculum Development of the Finnish

National Board of Education (a body independent of government and made up of educationalists) addressing the subject of Curriculum Reform in Finland. She started her lecture by emphasising that the work of a school is to help young people find their own life meaning, that meaningfulness is a core task in teaching and skills and subjects are secondary to that.

She then looked at general educational reform in Finland which despite its impressive PISA results is due for reform in terms of objectives, lesson-hour distribution, the National Core Curricula and the local curricula; this work will be carried out between 2012 and 2017. An important principle in Finland is that each process of drawing up a core curriculum document involves broad based cooperation with education experts and various stakeholders, as well as support for local curriculum development efforts.

Implementation at a local level and teacher freedom are very important factors in Finland and Mrs Halinen wants to see teachers create their own curriculum with a framework at local level. She believes this curriculum process is important because it provides an opportunity – a common framework, time and structure to discuss the changes taking place and to develop schools and teaching.

Mrs Halinen believes the key questions of reform include:

What will education mean in the future? What types of competences will be needed? What kind of practices would best produce the desired education and learning? (Vision)

How will change be realised in municipal and school cultures and in every lesson? What is the significance of personal vision and will? (Action)

What kind of skills will teachers and other school staff require to be able to work so as to promote education and learning for the future? (Teacher education)

How do the national core curricula and local curricula guide and support the work of teachers and the school community? (Standards)

Mrs Halinen observes that the world in which schools now operate has undergone major changes since the beginning of the new millennium, increasing the impact of globalisation and challenges for a sustainable future. This means that competences needed in society and working life have changed and we require skills for building a sustainable future. Therefore the content of teaching, pedagogy and school practices should be reviewed and renewed in relation to changes in the environment and skills. Schools have a central role in supporting the sense of coherence for their students and helping to take responsibility for choices and actions that shape our future. The core of the reform is that school will be developed both as a growth community and as a learning environment enabling student wellbeing and a sustainable life style. Pupils in Finnish schools will devote more time to social studies, physical education and music and the visual arts in order to improve their well-being. Mrs Halinen described the main features of the school culture as a learning community as:

Responsibility for the environment/future orientation

Celebrating diverse cultures/awareness of languages

Varied working approaches

Interaction and empowerment

Wellbeing

Safety in daily life

She sees schools as being communities that learn themselves while supporting their pupils' growth and encouraging all members to learn and she finished her lecture with a quote by M.H. Immordino-Lang – "Help kids know how to make meaning and sense of what they are learning so they can see who they are".

Professor Eija Syrjäläinen, PhD then addressed the subject of Curriculum theory and school

welfare. The Professor talked about the safety and wellbeing of students as well as their mental and pedagogical safety and how lack of time is leading to difficulties for teachers to really meet their students. She looked at how teachers can care for their pupils as individuals and how competition on an everyday basis can fuel violence. The Professor discussed Finnish PISA results and commented that in the area of well-being Finland is not doing as well as it could be, which is perhaps as a result of stressing competitive elements.

This led onto the lecture of **Professor Eero Ropo**, PhD from the School of Education at Tampere University on Narrative perspective to curriculum theories. He discussed how Curriculum is the most important document for school education and described school learning as a narrative process with the essence of learning being the construction of meaning.

Looking at Narrative in Social Sciences and education he observed that the narratives of the world are numberless and with an almost infinite diversity of forms. All classes, all human groups have their narratives and indeed the self is a narrative. What happens to us is important, but what we think happened to us is crucial for our narrative. This narrative or story starts in early childhood from the images we interpret or stories we hear about ourselves. Later on we reconstruct identity narratives throughout our whole lives using experiences and reinterpretation of memories.

Professor Ropo then went onto look at Learning as a Narrative process and how we construct meaning into stories. From a phenomenological viewpoint learning is a result of interpreting our perceptions into experiences that have meanings. Learning can be understood as a process in which we create meaning and encode the meanings into long term memory – human knowledge is not objective, free from personal interpretations, perspectives or positioning. We create narratives that are contextual and situational and therefore depend on how we

position ourselves in the learning and recall situations.

Professor Ropo observed that in the process of constructing meanings, we work on three levels and that this structure can be applied to the construction of curricula:

Personal, autobiographical level – what does this mean to me?

Social level – what are the meanings which the community constructs?

Cultural level – what are the meanings related to culture, science and the global community?

Schools are places of narrative learning but the problem is there is too little time for meaning-making in school education.

Professor Ropo looked at a model which works well and is based on Paul Ricoeur's Three-Stage Mimesis Process:

Pre-narrative stage: Students have no prior knowledge (preconceptions etc.) about phenomenon to be learned (e.g. gravity) – mimesis 1

Narrative stage: experiences are collected into narratives having a plot (creating a story about gravity) – mimesis 2

Reconstructive stage: Narratives become part of our perception and experiences (the created story of gravity is verified in real life) – mimesis 3

The mimesis process is the key to constructing meanings, and positioning is a tool to keeping it going. Positioning theory is where people try to reposition each other by their own positioning during discourses. Student positioning influences what the student perceives and how experiences are interpreted and teachers enhance the construction of different meanings by using methods that position students to personal, social and cultural meanings in relation to the curriculum topic.

In conclusion Professor Ropo said that pedagogy should focus more on enhancing meaning creation on personal, social and cultural levels. He said that learning is a process

that produces narrative knowledge and that our identity is a result of meaning making and narrative processes in and outside school learning. This identity influences our positioning – on what we perceive and the information we receive and thus relate to the kind of meanings we create from received information about ourselves as learners and people.

Pia Pale, the Finnish Representative on the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education has posted all English materials on their website which can be viewed at:

<http://steinerkoulu.fi/index.php?page=curriculumseminar2013>

International Network of Steiner-Waldorf Parents

October 2013 Meeting in Riga, Latvia by Mariam Francq

INSWaP celebrated its 7th anniversary in October in Riga, Latvia at the Adazi Waldorf School.

Since the preceding year in Florence, there was so much to share and to plan for the future. Not only were previous countries present (Austria, England, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Sweden), but a few new ones were to be welcomed as well (Brazil, Hungary, Russia). Participation was just as high with c. 60 parents, teachers, friends, and former students....including of course many local visitors from the two schools in/around Riga.

After a brief recall of Inswap's history and national presentations, each country described the situation of its Parents' organisations and particularly whether or not they had a national association. An article written by Tracey Puckeridge, CEO of SW in Australia, contained a very pertinent text on the importance of a harmonious teacher/parent relationship and the

necessity of sufficient information and knowledge of SW pedagogy by the parents.

We were rewarded with the best possible proof of a harmonious school experience, thanks to the testimonies of two former students of the beautiful Adazi school where the meeting was held; both were proud of having gone through a Waldorf school which had given them self-confidence and confidence in the world.

So many other items on the agenda which we can only catch a glimpse of...besides doing some eurhythmy, and finding out about beautiful Latvian customs and folklore...learning about a new inspiring marketing method, French experience in communicating with "the outside world" and a most enthusing speech by Christopher Clouder, (former Ceo of ECSWE), on the theme of being open to the world..., cultivating interest in what is happening around us..., CATS program in Switzerland..., increased need for imagination, creativity, resilience...,facing the new challenges of the future ..., Waldorf schools in process of becoming.... enough ideals to dream of...

But THE project one would really not have dreamt of so far.... is the Pozzolatice project in Florence! Who would ever have imagined that in order to add a high school to the existing kindergarten and primary school in Florence, they would create a "Village of Culture" by joining hands and forces with very worthwhile other cultural projects (schools of Osteopathy, Midwifery, Permaculture, Circus, etc., etc... among others) and occupy the grounds (c. 9 acres land and over 1200sq yards built premises) of a former hospital overlooking Florence from the hills About 2 miles away. And the other aspect of this amazing project which will make many a hair stand on end.... is the separation between the economic/administrative and the pedagogical directions of the school.... Very rare so far in the usual Waldorf environments... But necessity being the mother of invention, and resilience being the new motto, this unique

opportunity was a true modern challenge to face and to experience. Bravo!

And to end our tour of this meeting's events, we also spoke of WOW day, a Russian school's smart fundraising idea, individual student exchanges, couch surfing for older students, summer camps and other such challenging projects. Of course, after all the lessons we learned during this session, communication was not to be forgotten.

We decided to start a bi-annual newsletter, open a mail account for massive mailing (1000 schools), find ways of financing some of the expenses of our future meeting, continue developing our website and updating it etc.

And last but not least, our coordinating committee doubled its size, to our great pleasure, counting ten members now, from Austria, England, France, Hungary, Iceland, Italy (2), Latvia, Norway, and Sweden.

A very positive note to finish this report... hoping it will stimulate **many new participants from all corners of the world to our next gathering in Austria from 10 to 12th of October 2014! Welcome!**

ECSWE
Rue du Trône 194, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium
Registered in Brussels.
AISBL 898.707.869
www.ecswe.org

Correspondence
ECSWE,
Kidbrooke Park,
Forest Row,
East Sussex,
RH18 5JA, UK
Tel. +44 1342 822115
Email. ecswe@waldorf.net

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ECSWE News is produced by P.Sullivan.

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