

The Art of Education: Empowering our children to shape their future

ECSWE/Waldorf100 Celebration in Brussels

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To celebrate the centennial of Steiner/Waldorf education, the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE) organized, an international conference in Brussels on November 7th entitled “The Art of Education: Empowering our children to shape their future.”

A diverse public of 200 participants attended, including people from organisations working on education and mostly based in Brussels, Waldorf teachers and school principals, policy makers from the European Commission, Parliament members and permanent representatives to the EU, pupils & alumni from Waldorf schools, and ECSWE representatives.

The event as a whole was permeated with beauty, artistic composition and vibrant energy. The welcoming architecture of the Royal Theater of Flanders (KVS) matched the welcoming care that was prepared by the organizing team and the smiling hostess Ilona De Haas (assistant manager at ECSWE) who presided over the conference and ensured that everything went smoothly.

The conference opened with welcoming words by Richard Landl (ECSWE chair) and Detlef Hardorp (ECSWE representative from Germany) and Michael Bloss, former Steiner School pupil and current Member of the European Parliament. At breakneck speed, Prof. Gert Biest gave a crystal clear, crisp keynote with an inspiring vision for the future of education: “Trying to Be at Home in the World - Education for the present”.

To bring balance in the day and for the participants, inspiring keynotes alternated with rhythmic choir sessions, in which Julie Planche and her team made sure the audience was kept awake and breathing.

In the afternoon the audience was invited to participate in working groups to share their viewpoints with each other. As a guiding impulse the following quote from Rudolf Steiner was given:

“The question should not be: What does the human being need to know and be able to do for the social order that exists now?, but rather: What capacities are latent and what can be developed within the human being? Then it will be possible to instill ever new forces into the social order from the emerging generation. This social order will then always be imbued with that which comes from the young people who enter into it; rather than molding the emerging generation in the image of what the existing social order wants to make of it.”

(R. Steiner, "Educational Freedom and The Threefold Social Order" August 1919, GA 24)

The overarching question for these conversations was: **How can education enable children to unfold their unique potential while building meaningful relationships with the world?** What instruments are needed to pursue this aim and what capacities do teachers need to develop

Each working group had a different focus on key competences or overarching themes such as assessment, early childhood, teacher education, and curriculum design. At the end, key findings of each group were collected and will be used as impulses to strengthen the ECSWE's work on these topics.

The entire conference was also attended by a number of young people from the Ghent and Leiden Steiner schools. Their reactions at the end of the day set the entire room in motion! The climax and apotheosis was created by a quintet from the twelfth grade of Stuttgart (see photo: three violinists, a cellist and a clarinetist) who at the end of the day brought a potpourri of modern and classical music with a virtuosity that stunned the entire room.

Clara Aerts worked for more than 20 years as a Steiner/Waldorf early childhood educator in Flanders/Belgium. Since 2008 she is a member of the coordinating group of IASWECE, doing advocacy work in Brussels, coordinating new projects for Waldorf EC and international active as lecturer.