

“Seeking Solidarity in a troubled Europe. Challenges and Choices for Schools and Education“

This was the theme of a European Conference for teachers and education experts that took place from 7th to 10th of April 2015 at the Academy for in service training and personal development at schools in Bad Wildbad. In cooperation with the Academy the invitation came from the International Association for Christian Education (IV) and the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School (ICCS). OStDin Dorothea Eisele (Heilbronn) was the director of the conference.

The 30 participants (including the speakers) came from Belgium, Germany, France, Great Britain, Hungary Latvia, Slovak Republic and Switzerland.



The thematic work happened under the following perspectives: “strengthen the people”, “clarifying the issues” and “shaping the future.” On the basis of a report of a participating head teacher from Switzerland the following selected points and experiences shall be mentioned:

Dr. Peter Schreiner interviewed three resource persons. Doris Peschke, general secretary of the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). She emphasised that migration is one of the oldest issues in the world and challenging also the churches. They should see it as their duty to promote dialogue and therefore also to influence states action and policy.

Rainer Wieland, vice-president of the European Parliament named human dignity and human rights as common issues of a Christian commitment and of secular politics. He argued for strengthening democracy and recommended especially a project of the European Parliament called Euroscola (<http://www.europarl.org.uk/en/education/euroscola.html>)

Alfons Scholten, teacher at the Fliehdner-Gymnasium in Düsseldorf and chairman of the European Association for Education and Science introduced a statement on challenges for school and education ([Theses_1](#)) and mentioned especially the opportunities of a single school. A partner project with a school in Romania has enriched both partners and is also a good example of ecumenical learning. The project proves that also skeptical views concerning such type of projects can be changed.

The world café about concrete actions of learning in solidarity showed that solidarity is especially needed in fields where chances are not equally distributed, that solidarity starts with the individual and can be lived also in school.

With Dr Dzintra Iliško from Latvia a „new“ country of Europe came into the fore but what is rarely known there is the phenomenon of migration. School can prepare for new challenges through providing information about “the other”, but there is also the need of personal experiences. ([Summary](#))

As a crucial insight of a long-lasting implementation of the social field work named „Compassion“ Daniel Mark from Freiburg stated that the commitment of youngsters produces a sustainable increase of happiness in life together with the experience, that the caretakers needs those in care and not only vice versa ([Compassion at St. Ursula-Gymnasium](#)).

The religious educator Dr Eszter Kodácsy-Simon illustrates through using examples from school books how the issue of „What is solidarity“ can be dealt with in religious education. In her home country Hungary the promotion of the Roma population is an acid test of solidarity. In her second presentation the speaker presented manifold examples from the classroom.

Another practical example was presented by Michael Otte, the project “Model United Nations (MUN)“. MUN brings together students for big international conferences, provides manifold learning effects but needs also a lot of preparation.

The method Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), developed and used in the Netherlands, encourages young people to think anew and to use a different language. Taco Visser explained that all can benefit from this method.

A concrete example of using ideas of reform pedagogy in an impressive way was presented by Ernst Thöni with his school „École d’Humanité“ (Hasliberg/Switzerland). Strong, self-conscious, solidaric and responsible persons are aimed at through this pedagogical approach.

A completely different world was introduced by the head teacher of a school in a big city in Romania Dr Hrisanti Bulugea. She informed about the difficult process to develop the school with its own profile, the patience and optimism that was needed to overcome existing problems, not least of an administrative type.

Under the heading "Creating future" Alfons Scholten presented practical ideas ([Thesen_2](#)) and informed especially about the European in service project called ELICIT = European Literacy and Citizenship Education.

Johan ter Beek introduced in his presentation a completely different approach or personal development: „Your story“ (www.ystg.org) works on the basis of computer games and social networks. The enthusiasm for games is used to encourage young people to identify a personal view in seven crucial areas of life and to write their "own story" with the aim to connect personal luck with the commitment for a better world.

Feed back from participants

Seeking solidarity in a troubled Europe can only be achieved in collaboration with others. The seminar in Bad Wildbad offered many valuable opportunities to meet, to listen, to talk and to reflect with colleagues from different countries in a mutually supportive way and in very congenial surroundings. The formal sessions were of course important, but so too were more informal personal encounters during meal times and in the evenings. It is these professional working relationships which will continue to develop now the meeting is over and help us to continue to move forward and achieve our goals.

Lesley Prior, University of Roehampton, England

Please, do send my feedback to the academy that it was a well organized seminar that integrated deep philosophical, theological and methodological discussion of the issue of Solidarity. The event was organized on a high level as a collaborative and interdisciplinary event.

Thank you again to the organizers for all the effort they put in organizing this event.

Dr. Dzintra Ilisko, University of Daugavpils, Lettland

Die Europatagung von IV und ICCS in der Landesakademie Bad Wildbad vom 7. bis 10. April war wieder eine große Bereicherung, die mich lehrte, wie schön und vielfältig und sympathisch unser zusammenwachsendes Europa doch sein kann. Die Solidarität der vielen Nationen, Völker und Individuen im Ansatz schon zu erleben, in der langen Sicht wenigstens zu denken, das macht Mut und bestärkt mich in der Bereitschaft, mich für diese Idee der Einheit in der Vielfalt zu engagieren. In der persönlichen Begegnung mit Vertretern all der teilnehmenden Nationen wird diese Idee zu einer positiven Vision trotz aller Hemmnisse und Blockierungen, die wir in den Medien fast täglich präsentiert bekommen. Danke für diese Erfahrung!

Michael Otte, ehem. Schulleiter, Windsbach, Deutschland