

Editor's note

■ The EUDEC Council is extremely pleased to send out this first Community newsletter, at last. The past three months, since the end of our first Conference, have been extremely busy for Council. We have been emailing back and forth like crazy. This first newsletter marks the day that this activity starts crossing back over into the Community. We have several interesting things for you.



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What has Council been up to all this time?

We would also like to mention that EUDEC's Guidance Document is now available on the following link: http://www.eudec.org/download/eudec_guidance_doc.pdf – for all members who have not yet read it, this is a good chance to do so and see the document that drives our organization.

Enjoy the newsletter!
Best regards,
Michael Sappir
(on behalf of the EUDEC Council)

Conference Report

by Martin Roberts

■ On 26 July, after almost two years' meticulous planning, the first EUDEC conference finally got underway at the University in Leipzig.

The main aim of the conference was to present, and hopefully establish firm foundations for the European Democratic Education Community – an organisation set up to promote the values of democratic education throughout Europe. We had no idea how this was going to go – we started out at the beginning of the conference with only 12 members – but we knew that we had passion, and that we were right: in a democratic society, education MUST be democratic. Obvious, isn't it?

We had hoped that, by the end of the conference, we would be able to get

our membership up to 50, thinking then that we would have a good number to begin to reach out to other like-minded people across Europe.

Well, by the start of the final meeting on 2 August, EUDEC was already 83 members strong, representing 17 countries across Europe – with people still asking to join up when the meeting ended. At time of writing, our membership has grown to 104!

So what's next? All of our new members bring skills and experience to our community – we are now in a very strong position to work together, to cast our net ever wider, so that, at the Annual General Meeting in Poland next year, we will hopefully be in a position to decide on specific actions that we

want to pursue in order to further our collective goals over the coming years. Council is working intensely on getting everyone involved as soon as possible

A huge thanks to everyone who participated in this year's conference; we are now a strong organisation, and only getting stronger.



Martin Roberts teaches at Sands School, Devon, UK, and is a member of the EUDEC Council.

Post-Conference Thoughts

from David Gribble

■ I enjoyed the conference very much, but principally because of the people who were there, rather than because of the actual talks and workshops. It is always interesting to hear people describe what goes on in their own schools, but otherwise what I learnt from the conference is that the best workshops are the ones which lead to genuinely open discussion, in other words where the people who have set up the workshops are asking questions to which they do not know the answer, rather than trying to persuade people to accept a particular point of view. Two good examples were the workshop on freedom, on the first day, when whoever it was that had suggested the topic failed to turn up, so the group had a rich discussion and produced a dozen new ideas for workshops in the next few days, and the workshop run by Kate asking how equal is it possible to be.

The latter made me think a good deal about the way we present the ideal of

equality between adults and children. Equality may not be a good word to use, because firstly we are not equal because we are not all the same, and secondly we are not equal because we have different roles to play. Jesper Juul, the Danish family therapist (who was not at the conference) described the necessary relationship as "a kind of dialogue that many adults are unable to establish even with other adults: that is to say, a personal dialogue based on equal dignity." Perhaps when we say there is equality between adults and children in democratic schools we should specify that we do not mean that everyone is the same, but that everyone has equal dignity. Although an abstract word like "dignity" doesn't help all that much.

The third thought I had about the conference was that the word "democratic" was becoming too powerful when people used it in discussions. The term "democratic education" was originally

chosen because "progressive education" had been hi-jacked to describe something we did not stand for, "free education" was likely to provoke an immediate negative reaction, as were "child-centred education" and various other terms, but nobody disapproved of democracy. At IDECs and at the EUDEC I have noticed a tendency to present democracy in rather a narrow sense as an objective, rather than as a loose description. There is sometimes a feeling that the more "democratic" you can be, in terms of, for instance, voting procedures and the formalisation of the school's administration and the involvement of parents as well as pupils and staff, the better your school is. I just don't think this is true. One of the things that I think distinguishes a good school is openness to change.



David Gribble is co-ordinator of the International Democratic Education Network (IDEN), Trustee of the Phoenix Education Trust, Editor for the Lib Ed collective and a member of EUDEC.

Starting up

by Leonard Turton

Part One: Back Then

■ It is hard to imagine now what it was like during that first major wave of democratic education start-ups of the late sixties and early seventies. 'Free Schools' back then were accepted as part of a social and cultural fabric that included an explosion of pop music, civil rights, Andy Warhol, women's rights, Haight Ashbury hippiedom, Vietnam, the blurring of class barriers, Carnaby Street, children becoming formidable consumers, the sexual revolution, draft dodgers ... well, you get the picture.

Democratic schools were fashionable and more than hip. In any Canadian city you could start a pop group or a free school and it was cool, it was prestigious. People sought you out. Free schools were in the air and high up on the media radar. Free schools started by people who ... hadn't much of a clue what they were doing.

But that was the beauty of it.

Beauty aside, the reality was that most schools back then had a life measured in months rather than years. And all too soon the media was mixing up free

schools with free love and hippy culture for many a sensational news story. The 'movement' eventually ended up taking too many hits and was, to a degree, publicly discredited (not always unfairly, as naïve founders quickly ran out of money or got lost in confusion over freedom or began to squabble among themselves). Seeing these schools as a fashion rather than a serious educational alternative, the media soon lost interest and set off after John Travolta and Saturday Night Fever. The democratic school movement, however, continued. It shed the unrealistic and the unworkable, settled down to a few well run success stories, and moved silently forward.

Looking back, what happened was a bit like early rock n roll ... Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, Elvis, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis ... a wild, crazy creative boom ... and then bust.

But the seeds were sown. The schools and practitioners that did persevere gave us the strong models, organisations, web sites and body of experience that we see around us today. And now, although hardly mainstream, the demo-

cratic education movement is experienced and substantial and appears to be, if intelligence and harmony can prevail, on the edge of major breakthroughs.

But, just for fun, let's go back into the hazy mists of a free school start-up many decades ago. When there were no mentors, no web sites, no models, no start a school kits, no ideologies. Just one book, Summerhill, and an A.S. Neill who refused to encourage followers but rather said 'Don't follow me. Think. Be yourself. Do it your own way.'

Next Newsletter, Part 2: Leonard and a draft dodger, not knowing what they are doing, improvise wildly and found Odyssey House Community School.'

Got a start up story?

E-mail Leonard - lturton@eudec.org



Leonard Turton teaches at Summerhill School, Leiston, UK, and is vice-chairman of the EUDEC council.

Ulv sund Friskole

by Rikke Knudsen

■ In Denmark, on the beautiful Island of Møn 3 families are working to start up a new democratic school. Our sources of inspiration are democratic schools in general, and Sudbury schools in particular.

Right now my family has opened its home to kick-start this process and I am spending 32 hours a week, 4 days a week with my kids and two boys from one of the other families. We are hoping to attract some more kids as months go by.

We want to tell nothing but the truth about the essentials of democratic education – and the truth can often be a

very provocative thing for those who hear it. We have succeeded, with the help of a graphic designer, to produce a website and advertising materials that seem to work very effectively. To avoid being seen as unserious, or look like hippies, we decided to present our provocative message as seriously and positively as can be. To see the result, visit our website at:

www.ulvsundfriskole.dk

We have had some pleasant surprises. A few days ago, an 11 year old girl came by on her bike in the afternoon. Her mother had read her our flyer and she found it very interesting. She spent two hours here, just talking with

my 12 year old daughter, and finally asked if she could come for a trial period. Starting up a school is a long and difficult process, one which consumes loads of time and money – but it is fun, exciting and rewarding, as well.



Rikke Knudsen is a member of the EUDEC Council.



EUDEC Today – an interview with Leonard

by Leonard Turton, with some pointed questions by Michael Sappir

Michael: Leonard, after the Conference in Leipzig and a successful membership drive there has been a lull in Eudec activity. You asked me to interview you to help clarify, and talk about EUDEC and where we stand today.

Leonard: Well, the two years leading up to the Conference, starting with a meeting at Sands in 2006, were very intense. It involved regular meetings of the Leipzig planning group over about 18 months, as well as a series of meetings in Leipzig and Vienna, with people from various countries paying their own way to work long weekends, to discuss and craft the organisation itself, to define its purpose, to develop a constitution and a legal entity under Phoenix in the UK, and finally, to elect a few of the people involved to be the first Council, to begin to manage and carry out the goals of the Guidance Document (see links below) ... by the way, it's important that everyone remember that the Council was never meant to do everything on its own. Council is simply a kind of glue to keep a far flung organisation centred and on task. The Community decides what is to be done, and Council is elected to make sure it happens.

Michael: And then came the Conference.

Leonard: Yes, well all the focus over the two years was to get ready for the first Conference ... to have a great conference and launch the organisation.

Michael: EUDEC went quite smoothly.

Leonard: The Conference did from the start. The organisation, in the end, also, yes. Ultimately, we had no idea about what kind of response we would get ... because we knew people were used to coming to conferences, but not to an NGO start up. As soon as we got to Leipzig we realised that we were spread very thin.

Michael: How so?

Leonard: Well the actual daily running of the conference completely occupied most of us, so that it was soon apparent that the manpower and time available for EUDEC, the organisation, was quite small.

We also realised that a lot less time had gone into the organisation launch than the co-ordination of the conference itself. The first day, if you remember, we improvised a set-up in a second entranceway down the hall from the registration desk and that

simply didn't catch. The next day we regrouped and set up a very obvious info point in the entrance. That's one example of how we were improvising right through the week.

Michael: The info point was quite a success.

Leonard: Not as first. Those of us who were not so involved in the conference proper actually held a meeting and decided to really sell EUDEC and EUDEC memberships. We met every day and went on a PR blitz.

Slowly, by repeating our message and talking in the mornings and in as many workshops as possible, by getting as creative as we could with our info table, we felt a kind of swing take place. A buzz. We made some short speeches (which were decided upon and written during the week) at the start of the public session and finally, in the last few days, everything snowballed.

Michael: You must have been relieved.

Leonard: And amazed. Because the memberships by the end of the Conference was a very large number of people, and so many people had volunteered their skills. But we were still running hand to mouth.

Michael: Meaning?

Leonard: Well suddenly the conference was coming to an end and we had a General Meeting rushing at us. So we looked at the Guidance Document and hammered out an Action Plan. Looking back on it, I'm not sure we should have done that.

Michael: Why not?

Leonard: At the time it seemed we owed it to everyone to give them a feeling that we were going to all join together and get to work, right away. So we ended up, in my opinion, with a rather confused final meeting, with people volunteering and a quickly written agenda.

I think it shouldn't have been called an Annual Meeting ... we weren't ready. We had just been born into seriousness, or reborn, and everyone was excited but exhausted. Ideally, it should have been a celebratory get-together, and then we should have had another couple of days for people who wanted to make work teams to get together and start planning stuff. But that was impossible. So we had people volunteer, and made some rather well meaning but

rash statements that we would get going in just a few weeks.

Michael: That didn't happen.

Leonard: Nope. First of all we were all completely burned out. We didn't realise that at first, but after Leipzig we needed a rest. And we also found ourselves, once again, scattered across Europe, a real shocker after being so close for those ten days. We tried to get things together, we all tried valiantly to communicate online from wherever we found ourselves ...

Michael: And?

Leonard: Well we denied our tiredness but it soon surfaced when we had a hard time becoming efficient so quickly, and believe me that was a surprise. Slowly we realised, with some alarm, that not only were we a bit stale, but that we had a large organisation of volunteers we had made promises to ... we could almost hear them drumming their fingers and wondering what was going on.

At the same time, we clearly understood that we had developed no actual method of working with that many people at distance. (Companies like IBM have money and sophisticated web-based organisational tools – we don't, although we are investigating that option). Remember, with the original group, we met every few months, usually in Leipzig. But with over 100 people, that was not going to continue. So we attempted to divide up responsibilities and form ourselves into work team leaders but each task was too complicated ... and most early initiatives stalled.

Michael: Why not just turn let the organization loose?

Leonard: Well the organisation won't work unless we decentralise and package out authority over particular projects, but it also won't work if we go galloping off in different directions too quickly. We needed to find a way to get things up and running in a focussed way, keeping to the goals and aims of the Guidance Document. We needed some new working procedures and restructuring ideas ... that would fit the new size of EUDEC and would kick start the actions everyone wants – but in a way that is practical. So we deliberately slowed up. Then there was the money issue.

Michael: The money issue?

Leonard: We have very little to no money. That is one reason the website remains so modest. Why there is no web magazine, for instance.

Michael: So where is EUDEC today?

Leonard: The council has restructured itself. We meet online once a week, as always, but have decided to work on one project at a time as a team ... the first is the newsletter. The next is making better use of the EUDEC Forum (see links below). Then we will concentrate for two weeks to analyse funding.

After that, we are going to try and do a serious think about a restructuring of the organisation. We can't change the Guidance Document because only the Assembly can do that. But until it can be realistically updated, we are going to iron out some new organisational methods that will decentralise, develop independent country chapters and create groups of people into manageable and concentrated project teams. And I know you have been working very hard on this, Michael.

We will look at it over three weeks and then work together on finalising it in Copenhagen. We are also continuing to work at

translations for the web site and we will be contacting the people who volunteered to be Country Contacts. We hope to have another newsletter out soon and to have the restructuring ideas to show the membership a short while after Copenhagen

Michael: Copenhagen will actually be the first Council meeting.

Leonard: Yes it will. We have never before been able to meet and just get to work on the work of EUDEC. Meetings up to now were either involved the birth of EUDEC or the Conference.

Michael: It's only been just over two months since the end of the Conference.

Leonard: Yes. It seems like a big slowdown sometimes but when we think of what we want to accomplish, what excited everyone about EUDEC at the Conference, and the unexpected response and rather large organisation, spread across the whole of Europe, that just sprang up over 10 days last August, it now seems obvious that there would be surprise, some confusion, some rethinking ... and now some restructuring going forward.

We really do want to thank the members

for being so patient and want to assure every one that they will soon be involved to whatever extent they want to be, but in a practical manner that we hope will be rewarding and that will move us all forward toward those goals we all got so excited about in Leipzig.

Related Links

Guidance Document

http://www.eudec.org/download/eudec_guidance_doc.pdf

EUDEC Forum

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



Michael Sappir studies at the University of Leipzig, Germany, and is a member of the EUDEC council.

Want to discuss what you read in the newsletter?

Visit the EUDEC forum and discuss the newsletter with other members!

<http://www.eudec.org/forum/> (registration required)

Some interesting discussions you may want to read and join:

Equality?

In a workshop at Leipzig, Kate Gribble (Sands School, UK) asked a pointed question: can students and staff truly be equal? What do you think?

Link: <http://www.eudec.org/forum/index.php?topic=130.0>

Tell us about it

What are the main difficulties for democratic schools in your country?

Link: <http://www.eudec.org/forum/index.php?topic=126.0>

Regional Chapters

Regional Chapters are likely to become a major part of how EUDEC works in the coming years. How do you think Chapters should work?

Link: <http://www.eudec.org/forum/index.php?topic=128.0>

EUDEC 2010 (Denmark/UK)

The next full conference is still a while away, but let us get some feedback on how to make it even better than EUDEC 2008, while we all still remember it well.

Link: <http://www.eudec.org/forum/index.php?topic=127.0>

Life after school

What do you think schools have to do to best prepare their students for independent life?

Link: <http://www.eudec.org/forum/index.php?topic=129.0>

Future Newsletters – Call for Input!

We would like this newsletter to develop into an invaluable source of information on Democratic Education in Europe with: news on EU and national policy changes, articles on schools, scientific reports, personal reports from students, teachers and families involved in democratic education, information on new schools and a Q&A section. Your ideas (and articles) are welcome (info@eudec.org)!