



REPORT ON THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL EPC EUROPEAN PORTFOLIO CERTIFICATE CONFERENCE IN POTSDAM, 2-3 NOVEMBER 2007

At the beginning of November, around 70 delegates representing 40 Waldorf Schools from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Czech Republic and the UK gathered in the leafy neighbour to Berlin that is Potsdam to share ideas and initiatives towards the development of a Waldorf Leaving Certificate for possibly all Steiner/Waldorf Schools in Europe.

The conference was called by the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE) and hosted by the Waldorfschule Potsdam. Other interested organisations present were the Bochum-based IPL (Institut für Prozess-orientiertes Lernen) and the Swiss-based IPF (Initiative fuer Praxisforschung), Solothurn, as well as members of the German working group on qualifications and outcomes.

This gathering represented the launch of a project that was initiated by the German working group on qualifications and outcomes and ECSWE in January, 2007. They had provided an international platform for comparing the various school leaving processes, including the qualification certificates commonly used in European countries. In particular the Steiner Waldorf School association in the Netherlands had developed and implemented a Qualification Portfolio Certificate folder used by all Dutch Steiner Waldorf Schools. The project goal is to further develop the certificate folder while looking for a basic framework common to all European Steiner Waldorf Schools. Thus the project aim is to translate the students learning outcomes and competences acquired in the realm of ordinary formal learning as well as the unique benefits of project work, plays, work experience, concerts and many other types of non-formal learning that flourish in a Waldorf Upper Schools into a leaving certificate that would bear a uniform Steiner/Waldorf trademark as well as eventually gain the bearer access to Higher Education, Further Education or employment, as freely as the currently accepted "Gold Standard" routes.

In his opening address, Dr. Thilo Koch, teacher at the Waldorfschule Potsdam and coordinator of the EPC-project, introduced the idea of a European Portfolio Certificate and described the specific and general perspectives of a European cooperation with regards to certified competence portfolios.

Such a certificate folder would include the following key elements :

- A portfolio of the student's work, some of it self-selected, and mostly evaluated on the basis of project work or continuous formative assessment.
- A text identifying Waldorf Education in general, the National network of schools and the individual school concerned, its curriculum choices and methods.
- The student's self-assessment.
- The teacher's assessment.
- Certificates relating to extra-curricular activities, sport, music, IT, etc.

In order to develop these key elements as well as the folder that is to be based on them, first steps in implementing the project were proposed:

1. Examining the possible benefits of a common Qualification Certificate Portfolio folder in general and of the proposed Netherlands QCP model in particular. What could be a common denominator in terms of appearance and/or structure?
2. Adapting the model to the specific national and/or cultural needs, and testing it with the goal of enabling a decision making process based on well evaluated learning outcomes, as documented by the QCP.

As agreement is reached over a period of time in the Steiner Waldorf Movement on forms and practices, an external Steiner Waldorf evaluation could evolve, extending the portfolio certificate's currency and leading to wider recognition, beyond the Waldorf movement itself.

Thilo Koch suggested that the following steps, taken over the next three years, would get us well on the way. Waldorf Schools throughout Europe are invited to participate in the project and are asked to comply with the following:

- a. Register the name of the school with the project management and appoint and name a school based project manager,
- b. Document all steps taken in the project and write a summary in a biannual report,

- c. Develop its evaluation criteria and accept an evaluation of the local experiences by an international team
- d. Communicate in English or German.
- e. Regarding appearance, aim at a uniform design similar to that of the Euro currency, where one side of the coin is common to all and the other reflects the individuality of its locality.

Clearly, this process presents considerable challenges, not least because the developmental work represents largely unpaid extra work in each school. On the other hand, the incentives are equally clear :

- Assessment and recognition of a far wider range of learning outcomes, formal, informal and non-formal.
- The students' own choice of components, the design of his or her own certificate profile (portfolio) and hence a greater sense of responsibility and ownership of the certificate.
- Pedagogical benefits in the form of years of portfolio/project work on the students' (and teachers!) part resulting in them becoming aware of and accustomed to reflect on their own learning and to presenting their learning outcomes to others.
- Increased motivation on both the students and the teachers side resulting from this process, a boost in the quality of teaching (breaking with old habits) and learning, with consequent improvements in parent relations.

This all comes at a time when there is a favourable background in European educational politics. The Bologna, Lisbon and Copenhagen processes all call for the maximum mobility of students and labour, leading to a focus on assessment and certification of competences, beyond the testing of mere skills. And competence based description of learning outcomes is best done by portfolio - an obvious incentive for a European Portfolio Certificate.

Many universities already do their own testing. The former "Gold Standards" of A Levels and other school leaving certificates are being called into question because

- a) They do not assess so much of what is learned at school.
- b) They eliminate many candidates for higher and further education by selecting again at course entry level.
- c) There is still a very high dropout rate among those who gain University places with these "Gold Standards" qualifications (in some cases 30% and higher).

The Steiner Waldorf schools in Belgium (Flanders) and Norway have already developed competence-based curricula. The Belgian Steiner Waldorf curriculum was officially recognised and has been put into practice for

several years, securing access to tertiary education. The Norwegian curriculum is currently being implemented. It is being closely evaluated by the individual schools and State authorities.

Against this background, the long-term aim is for portfolio-certificates to become competence based portfolio certificates that are recognised Europe-wide.

CURRENT PRACTICE

The Steiner Waldorf schools in the **Netherlands** have a web-based format for assessments that form part of the leaving certificate. This may be used on a voluntary basis, but in practice all the upper schools have opted in and are also using the purpose-designed outcomes folder that gives nationwide identity and also includes a text that characterises the individual school issuing it. In addition, the students have the option of inserting own work pieces or school certificates, giving proof of their individual achievements. Seven years of experience have now been accumulated with this format of certificate which is awarded on the merits of the acquired Waldorf education and before the students go on to start State exams, further education or employment. So far only limited access has been secured to higher education on the basis of this certificate. Nevertheless, the Netherlands folder sparked off the EPC-project.

The **Bochum** folder contains the student's original Class 12 project and a folder with certificates and portfolio reports.

- Included is a description of the project, a self-assessment and the teacher/mentor's assessment.
- Four distinct projects are reflected on: Class 9 Agriculture, Class 10 Surveying, Class 11 Work Experience and Class 12 Art History Trip.
- "Extra-curricular" elements such as plays, choir, orchestra, mask making are all certified, as are a series of other projects, including some main lessons.
- A wide range of documentation is featured, including photos, films/videos, PDF files etc, the key criteria remaining work description, self-assessment and teacher assessment.
- It has been noted that as the students progress through the classes, self-assessment becomes less descriptive and more analytical.
- Some certificates are formative, cataloguing progress over four years in a given subject.
- Generally the student's competence becomes quite evident. The process includes peer review at each stage (each project is presented to an audience) and this is a key safeguard of authenticity.

The Potsdam school has structured its middle and upper school programme so as to secure 10 lessons per week of project work from classes 7-12. Some projects enable students to co-operate across the

age-range in classes 7-9 and 10-12, which produces good synergy. All activities are evaluated continuously and over the years with the active participation of the students.

Portfolio documentation and presentation is established in all classes 7 and up and is included in all subjects, main lessons and project work throughout the year, high-lighting in public portfolio presentations and self-designed examinations for middle school qualification as part of the examination procedure.

To a limited extent, this has even played a role in the assessment of two subjects in the Abitur.

The achievements and benefits of portfolio-based work are obvious to students, teachers and parents. On the one hand, it makes the students' trust in his or her own commitments and achievements grow, on the other hand, it increases the students' faith in other people to acknowledge and appreciate the outcomes of their work, if produced and presented authentically. Thilo Koch's report and the various portfolios presented on several tables showed that in the last seven years the Potsdam school have made the above mentioned benefits a reality.

Picking up the idea of the EPC-project, 50 Steiner Waldorf schools in Northrhine-Westphalia are embarking on a process which aims to attain external certification. This involves setting and agreeing upon your competency framework, then getting an external assessor to check that you are meeting it. A period of three years has been set in which to achieve certification. All classes 12 complete a portfolio and then may go on to take the Abitur in year 13.

Luxembourg is working with the International Baccalauréat (the first Waldorf school to do so) and finds that portfolio work can be included in the 25% allowed for coursework. All subjects there are taught in blocks, which helps develop appropriate skills.

In Switzerland the leaving certificates currently gain access to vocational training but not yet to higher education in general. The roj (Regionale Oberstufe Jurasüdfuß, Solothurn), assisted by ipf (Initiative für Praxisforschung), issues competence based portfolio leaving certificates accepted by various Swiss institutions and so far one university (the University of Plymouth, with whom ipf cooperates).

In Europe, numerous countries are substantially changing education systems. Programmes associated with 'life-long-learning', the differentiation between formal, non-formal and informal learning and the recognition thereof and other aspects constitute various possibilities for cooperation of Steiner/Waldorfschools with other European partners. Dr. Detlef Hardorp gave a short report on a CEDEFOP confer-

ence in Thessaloniki, Greece, concerned with the recognition of wider scopes of learning outcomes in vocational, secondary, further and higher education. Great interest was shown for his presentation on recognising a wider range of learning outcomes in secondary education through portfolio, since this places the student more in the centre of education, which is also the central tenet of Steiner Waldorf education. The EPC-project fits well into this framework.

WHAT NEXT ?

The Conference concluded with a conversation on how to network so that experience can be shared and focused especially on the positive pedagogical effects of the enhanced teacher-pupil dialogue resulting from the portfolio/project style of working.

The students are enabled in these more individualised conversations with the adult to help find their own higher goals.

Directly following the conference, the ECSWE Initiative Group met and decided to further explore the potential for EU (Comenius) funding for cross-boarder development work on portfolio certificates. A limited number of schools will be able to participate in the Comenius part of the project, all participants of the EPC-project will benefit from it.

In the meantime, and until an EPC website is available, it remains, for those enthused and inspired by this conference, to find and network with interested colleagues in their regions. Half-yearly reports in German and English will be posted on the website via Thilo Koch (koch@ecswe.org).

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