

Respetemos y apoyemos  
a nuestros profesores



juni 2011 --- jaargang 37

**vbschrift**  
nr. 04

verenigde  
bijzondere  
scholen

02  
ECNAIS

Creating  
the future

# Independent education reinvents itself

Text: drs. Peter Warnders Photos: Peter Owen en Peter Warnders



The participants of the ECNAIS conference in Madrid were challenged by the speakers, Luisa Ribolzi, Professor of Sociology of Education to the University of Genoa, and Chris Sigaloff, Vice-President of Kennisland (Knowledgeland) to reinvent independent education. This led to ideas and views that serve as input for the further reflection on the added value of independent education.

**A** society where learning stands central is constructed out of several components. In the first place, there is always the government. This is not only necessary for (a part of) the funding of the education, but also for the supervision of education. Education remains a public task, therefore, a form of supervision is unavoidable. A second component is formed by the world around us. Education is in the middle of it. Businesses are the third component. Education and businesses

are two entities which logically cannot survive without each other. The culture of a society determines the fourth component. Parents and students form the fifth and sixth component.

#### Diversity is good

A number of preconditions are necessary to give independent education a place within these six components. It must be recognized that every child has equal rights, also concerning funding of education. Resulting from this, every child is also entitled to its own learning arrangement and therefore

to tailored education. For teachers this means that they should take the responsibility and indicate actual interpretation so that all attention can be paid to learning and shaping. In this way a professional learning environment will arise.

Whichever way it goes with independent education in Europe, one condition is that the independent schools should take the initiative themselves and be ingenious. Depending on the traditions of a society, the schools will give content to education and differ

from each other. And that is good! Ultimately it concerns the diversity of education and the diversity of society. A diversity, which we must all respect and which ensures the colouring of the school. The school must be open for this and take responsibility.

#### Teachers on the sidelines for a while

The position of teachers on this matter is remarkable. In many respects they lag way behind their students when it

pendent education. The quality of education is naturally connected closely with the teacher in front of the class. Even though it was suggested that he/she should stand on the sideline by the brainstorming on renewed education, this does not mean that the status of the teacher, and the elevation of it, is a separate problem. Because independent education has the duty to be different and better than state education, it is necessary to invest in it.

## Students, parents and market must collectively redefine independent education

concerns the question what is good and inviting education. Therefore, on the way to devising a renewed independent education, they should perhaps remain on the sidelines for a while. This obviously does not apply to parents and students, because they are more able than anyone else to indicate the way to a new future for education. They accelerate jointly with the market. The economy benefits from a good education. These three parties (students, parents and market) must collectively redefine and shape inde-

Where funding of education is concerned, there should be no distinction between state and independent education. In reality there are large differences per country. Differences that must be respected. There is one important requirement in this respect. The type of funding of education cannot have an influence on the autonomy of education. The autonomy has a direct influence on the quality of education.

Independent education must maintain



the freedom with its own learning environment to take advantage of new developments. It can reflect itself, for example, to the key competences formulated in 2006 by the European Union: (foreign) languages, mathematics and technology, digital competences, learning competences, social and civil competences, development of initiative and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness. In this way the school becomes an essential component of the world and co-designer of that world.

#### The Role of ECNAIS

Which role can ECNAIS play to shape the new thinking on independent education? Naturally it is important to share experiences with each other and exchange best practices. This means, however, that the mutual communication must be good. Communication via website and social media can offer assistance. Furthermore, ECNAIS will have to be more visible in politics than it already is. In Brussels, but also in countries where independent education still has to row against the current. Countries where civil society is still full in development. But ECNAIS will also have to go to its own schools with the question 'what can ECNAIS do for you'. In this way it is possible that subjects come to the fore which can be used as building blocks for 'Independent schools of the 21st Century'. Building will continue in Warsaw on 17th, 18th and 19th November 2011 and in Bratislava in April 2012. ■

#### Spanish independent school

Fixed components of the annual ECNAIS conferences are school visits. In Madrid, the Colegio San José del Parque was visited. The school was founded in 1918, by the Marist Brothers, a Catholic religious order of French origin which is devoted to education and missionary work in its schools throughout the whole world. The school has two thousand students between the ages of 2 to 18 years, who nearly all go to university after their final exams. The background of the Marist Brothers ensures that much more attention is given to students with learning difficulties.

The Colegio is totally financed privately. Per year, the parents pay €3,500. The average class size is thirty students. In addition, the school receives income from the rental of spaces and sport facilities (including tennis courts and a swimming pool) and extra-curricular activities. Everything that is outside the curriculum is paid for. The Marist Brothers have their own publisher and printing house (the fourth largest in Spain) that not only produces its own study books and materials at low cost, but also folders, school guides and diaries.

The curriculum dovetails the Spanish state education, but because it is a private school, it has extra accents. The teachers earn the same salary as their colleagues in the public sector, however, by teaching the extra-curricular activities they get extra pay. This makes the school more popular for the teachers but also the large positive parental involvement plays a part.

# Innovation influences *Struggle for life*

Text: drs. Peter Warnders Photos: Cedric Bousché and Peter Owen

During the annual ECNAIS conference, representatives from thirteen European countries took the first steps to collectively recreate the future of independent education. Struggle for life and innovation were the themes in Madrid.

Independent education is built upon several backgrounds and ideals. Besides realizing their dreams, independent schools also have to deal with everyday problems. How do we keep the funding of education in order? How do we remain challenging for teachers and students? In many Eastern-European countries this is certainly a struggle for life. Independent schools have never been common there and in times of economic decline they come under even more pressure. It is therefore important that independent education shows what it stands for and reverses the roles, so that the government can no longer overlook the contemporary social importance of independent education. This is possible by bringing the diversity and the quality of independent education out into the open and showing that education as a whole, and therefore the whole of society, will become stronger.

## Struggle for life

During the three-day conference in Madrid, in preparation for the re-inventing of independent education, introductions were presented by Professor Luisa Ribolzi from Italy and Chris Sigaloff from the Netherlands. Professor Ribolzi (Professor of Sociology of Education at the University of Genoa and governing board member of the OECD) concentrated on the struggle for life that independent schools experience.

According to Ribolzi there are four rights that independent schools can claim:

- the right to start a school
- the right to existence
- the right to an honest competition with the public-authority education (state schools)
- the right to its own identity.

The provision of education is a public matter, which originated from the desire to elevate the people. State education was given the task to enable the participants to gain a minimum basic qualification. Alongside this, independent education arose from the idea that this form of education can offer something extra.

‘Education is a state matter. It is therefore the political majority which decides over the planning of the education system and the curriculum for all schools including independent schools. This is the reason why these schools immediately feel infringed in their autonomy to offer something extra. But because state education, even though it is arranged in a multiform way, does not succeed in any way to offer the extras of independent education, a separate task remains set aside for independent education’, according to Ribolzi.

‘Society these days is becoming more multiform.





Even in Eastern Europe, homogeneous society is declining. This should automatically lead to more diversity in education, and therefore to more independent schools. More diversity for its part can contribute to public and private education being experienced as self-reinforcing parts of a public establishment. This has of course advantages. There will be more competition, resulting in increasing quality of education. High quality education will benefit the whole of society. Parents also receive more options, because the quality of education increases across the board. A condition for this quality battle as a result of a more multiform society, is however that private schools must (continue) to be able to be established and they must also be actively (financially) enabled to provide education. On the other hand, they must be willing to undergo a form of supervision and ensure a distinguishing identity. Unfortunately this is not the case in many countries and the existing independent education is forced to go on the defensive. It is therefore important that independent education starts to work on its own future. Innovation is the keyword here.´

#### Innovate

The theme of innovation was further discussed by Chris Sigaloff, Vice-President of Nederland Kennisland (Knowledgeland) and among other things, involved in the Leerkracht aan Zet (Teacher's Turn) project of the VBS and education pioneers in secondary education. She firstly gave a description of Europe as a knowledge society which is not in a good state. She then shared her vision on innovation. According to her, it no longer concerns input output, but a network approach. Finally, she arrived at the point also brought up by professor Ribolzi, that ´the present education is for the middle bracket´. Teachers no longer behave as professionals. Schools let themselves be led weak-willed. Why does nobody say: ´Stop, that's enough´, she wondered. Finally, she explained what a school should look like in her opinion.

The ideal school, according to Sigaloff, gives students more room to learn what they want to learn, when

they want to learn and how they want to learn. The ideal school ensures that students are able to collectively shape the development of society. The ideal school embraces diversity. Well trained professionals who want to shape good education and are prepared to learn for life, work in the ideal school. The ideal school is transparent, flexible and able to learn and improve itself. This type of school can bring back the passion in education. It can also contribute to a society in which responsibility is taken for education and attention is given to results and quality again. One condition, however, is that education has to change society first. This is because good education can only thrive in a society where education, in all its manifestations, deserves the place that it is due. Where we all extract everything that education has to offer and not be satisfied with anything less. ´It is up to ECNAIS to work on this collectively´, urged Sigaloff to her audience. ■

#### What is ECNAIS?

ECNAIS is the European Council of National Associations of Independent schools. This European organization looks after the interests of independent schools. These are schools which have arisen from a private initiative, either from a religious background, or from the need from parents for good (pedagogically renewing) education. The funding of these schools varies per country. In the Netherlands there is independent education and the equal funding of state and independent education has been laid down in law (in addition there is also private, totally unfunded, education). Characteristic of all independent schools in Europe is that all schools, irrespective of the type of funding, have a form of inspection and a curriculum prescribed from above. In the Netherlands, the Besturenraad, the Bond KBO, the Bond KBVO and the VBS are members of ECNAIS. Simon Steen, general director, is the president.

Further information on ECNAIS can be found at [www.ecnais.org](http://www.ecnais.org).

# Respetemos y apoyemos a nuestros profesores



Comunidad de Madrid

[www.madrid.org](http://www.madrid.org)