

## ***Manifest ECNAIS Seminar Sofia, Bulgaria, 19-21 November 2015***

### **New approaches to learning as key to success**

The 2015 ECNAIS Seminar showed a variety of approaches to learning and above all the importance of meaningful learning for the society of the future.

The Bulgarian example is proof of this. As pointed out by Prof. Sergei Ignatov, former Minister of Education in the period 2009-2013, education in Bulgaria still being seen as social work and not as a professional educational activity. Acquiring skills has in general never been a focus point in the Bulgarian education policy. The past rather than the future has determined for a long time the discourse of education in Bulgaria.

Prof. Ignatov stressed that the student should be in the center of education and that a more holistic approach is needed. For Bulgaria this should not be too difficult, as it has a proven history of inspirational pedagogical approaches to learning.

Good examples of this pedagogical renewing, typical for Bulgaria, were shown by Prof. Silvia Nikolaeva:

- the Sunny Pedagogy by Peter Deunov
- the Suggestopaedia by Prof. Georgi Lozanov
- the Method for Developing of a Powerful Intellect by Teodosiy Teodosiev.

These three pedagogies all show some basic characteristic features:

- a humanistic paradigm, value-based approaches
- addressing human nature as a whole
- reaching highest human potential
- looking for effective tools to break the internal barriers
- enlarging the individual potential for accelerated learning and development
- holistic interdisciplinary approaches to learning
- having followers and sustainable practices.

Some of these aspects were integrated in the daily practice within the schools, which presented themselves during the highly valued school visits on the second day of the Seminar.

The tension in present day education policy in Bulgaria was pointed out by Mariana Bancheva, MA. This tension focusses on conformity within the system and is felt as an obstacle for transformation through education.

Prof. Olga Dysthe from Norway went in depth to point out how new approaches to learning could be a key to success. She did so by lecturing on the polyphonic classroom. In her thesis (based also upon the works of prof. Gert Biesta) that in polyphonic classrooms, where pupils feel invited to participate and take part in dialogue and where their voices are being heard, pupils develop a natural defense against undemocratic ideas and practices. Prof Dysthe: "In a way a school is always polyphonic or multi voiced in the sense that it has many voices: pupils with different background, culture, experiences, abilities, knowledge etc."

A polyphonic classroom stimulates a pupil to self confidence, gives her/him the capability to learn and to go into dialogue with each other, the teacher and the text they are working on, which may even lead to an intertextual dialogue. Its the teachers responsibility to strengthen the child's self-confidence and self-esteem and to give it the tools for the development of her/his talents and skills as to become a responsible person.

Colleagues of the Associations of Independent schools in Greece, Rumania and Ukraine made an interesting comparison between the education policy development in Bulgaria with recent developments in their own countries.

The Bulgarian hosting association BAPS was present at the seminar with an extended delegation. The seminar has been organized in a collaborative way of co-creation and close cooperation between BAPS and ECNAIS in such a way that it also benefits BAPS and that it strengthens the position of independent education in Bulgaria.

The participants in the seminar reflected on their own impressions of the seminar in international working groups. The outcome of these reflections will be integrated in the publication of presentations and dialogue on the ECNAIS website.

The added value of independent schools for the society as a whole can be stronger when they receive - under justifiable conditions - a fair share of the available public funding.

The Bulgarian Seminar made clear that if throughout the years reform in education is structurally being avoided, this will finally lead to a status quo and dependent individuals, whereas future society needs critical thinking and creative, entrepreneurial and empathic persons, who are capable of baring responsibility for the civil society.