



GUERRAND-HERMÈS FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

# Towards a Common Vision for Education

Developing the Concept of Human-Centred Education





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*Sharing ideals and values, reflecting on practices, connecting with educators world-wide, and focusing on the meaning of educating in a human-centred way.*

**Report of the GHFP Conference on  
Human Centred Education  
Innsbruck, Austria  
18-20 July 2005**

**by Dr Scherto Gill**

**Project Website  
[www.human-edu.net](http://www.human-edu.net)**



GUERRAND-HERMÈS FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

## BACKGROUND

### Towards a common vision for education

The goal of the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) in educational research includes a commitment to effect broader positive change within conventional education systems and to finding productive ways to meet the diverse needs of young people and communities. It also aims to support educational projects that give space for the development of each child's innate human qualities. In working towards this goal, the Foundation has developed a close connection with a number of schools and educational projects worldwide.

In 1999 GHFP sponsored the first International Conference for Educators, a gathering of 25 project leaders and teachers from Europe, America and Asia, for an open dialogue and discussion about how teachers' own development impacts on the children they work with. This conference was co-ordinated by Dr Laurie Lathrop, an Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC); and facilitated by Dr Reynold Feldman, an Educator and Director of Blue Sky Associates. The Conference took place during the summer of 1999 in Tlaxcala, Mexico. What emerged as common to all the participating projects was the founders and teachers' deep belief in their approach, and their genuine concern that the authentic self and potential of every student be respected and nurtured.

### Towards developing human-centred education

The Tlaxcala Conference showed that innovative and alternative educational ideals could act as engines of change for existing educational systems and practices.

As educators shared their experiences it became clear that, in spite of their social, cultural and economic differences, there were a number of common threads in their approaches to education:

- a loving and respectful environment
- attention to the whole person – body, mind, emotions and spirit
- responding to the needs of each individual
- nurturing each individual's authentic talent
- human-scale units within schools

GHFP believes that these common threads are the core values that can define human-centred education (HCE).



## THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EDUCATORS

As GHFP extended its contacts and links with more projects that educate in a more human-centred way or support or enact HCE values, a common concern emerged. Because these projects use very innovative approaches to education, most are seen as alternatives to mainstream education and are therefore isolated and lack support. A strong need was identified by these educators to come together, share experience and learn from each other's practice; and, above all, to support a mutual endeavour.

In response to this situation, the GHFP initiated, organised and sponsored a second Conference, entitled 'Human-Centred Education', held on 18-20 July 2005 in Innsbruck. Amongst the 60 participants were founders and teachers from 30 schools and other educational and social projects worldwide; educationalists and educational consultants from NGOs; and university professors and educational researchers.

Mr Simon Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, the Chairman of the GHFP's Executive Board, summarised the outcome of the event:

*'The conference enabled the expansion of a network of like-minded educators from very diverse backgrounds, who provided critical mutual support and conviction to a common vision. This connection between people is invaluable because it helps the ongoing development of the human capacity and talents of these teachers.'*

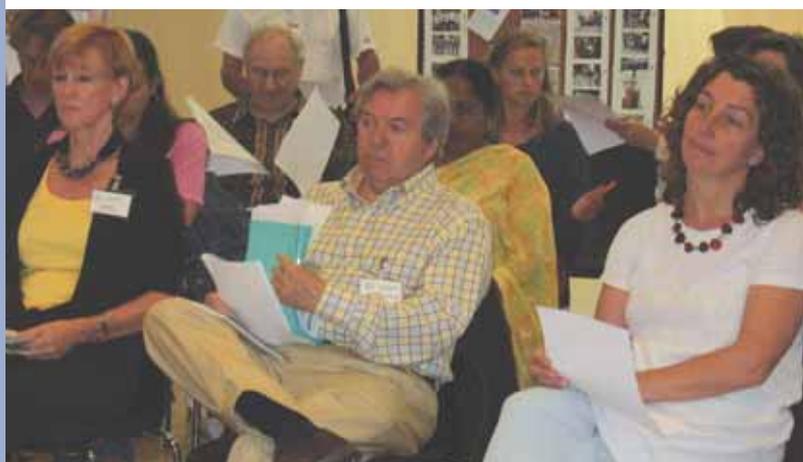
## OVERVIEW

The idea of HCE not only points to processes and practices within schools and other educational institutions, but also embraces a learning experience for all who are involved, including the educators, who are themselves committed to the core HCE values.

The purpose of this conference was to:

- bring educators together to share diverse approaches to human-centred education
- provide opportunities for educators to articulate and reflect on practice
- deepen our understanding of essential qualities of HCE
- establish common ideals and consolidate language, discourse and educational strategies that help translate the vision into day-to-day practices
- enable educators to connect with and support each other

The conference thus helped connect educators worldwide, allowed them to engage critically with academic research findings in the field, provided space for sharing educational practices and personal narratives, and created opportunities for deeper dialogue and discussions.



## CONFERENCE STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS

As the conference organiser, the GHFP planned a meeting arena that would enable participants to have a rich human experience; creating as much space as possible for sharing insights, intimate group discussions and experiential learning.

Overall, the conference explored four sets of questions. The discussions and dialogue were centred round a different theme and questions each day:

### 1. Reflect on good practices

- What makes good and effective practice?
- How does it contribute to the development of children?

### 2. Think critically on our practices

- What can we do to improve our educational practices?
- How can we best help our students in this changing world?

### 3. Conceptualising the aim of human-centred education

- What are the essential qualities of a truly human-centred education?
- How do we create educational experiences that enable human flourishing? What do we mean by that?

### 4. Reflecting on learning from the conference

- How has this conference changed the way we conceptualise ourselves and our work?
- How can we apply what we have learnt to our professional situation? What practical steps can we take when we get back?

### With this goal in mind, the conference was structured as follows:

Each morning, in the first two hours, panel speakers presented their projects or research and engaged in dialogue with the audience. This was followed by small group discussions until lunch time. The afternoons saw 2-3 parallel short experiential workshops before continuation of group discussions. Hence, the main activity throughout the day was interaction and discussion within small groups. The evenings were kept as an open space for participant-initiated discourse, forums and workshops.

Silence and circles were features well received by all who attended. The conference started with the formation of a number of semi-circles and peer bonding using appreciative enquiry approach, and ended with one big circle symbolising our unity and integrity as a group and as human beings. These were moments where we each recognised others as individual human beings with inter-connectedness and interdependence.



**Prof Michael Fielding** is the director of the Centre for Educational Innovation, University of Sussex, UK. Michael has been a schoolteacher, headmaster, university lecturer, educational consultant and researcher.

A poet and philosopher, Michael has been one of the critical and fierce voices to confront the British national curriculum, school effectiveness and approach to school management. He maintains that education must be person-centred, democratic and aim at the flourishing of each individual as a human being. Professor Fielding's work proved to be one of the key inspirations of the conference and in developing the concept of human-centred education.

*'I find that many of the values and truths that I held fast to were confirmed by the people in the conference who believe in the same things. I feel the only reason that I am not fulfilling the precepts that I most hold dear is because of the situation here being that I can only do so much to change what happens in an educational setting in Indonesia. Hopefully, it will be enough to change the way children learn, discover and become who they are meant to be in life according to their own inner.'*

Salamah Dick, teacher, Cita Bina Buana, a school in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

## CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEECH

### Keynote Speaker Prof. Michael Fielding

Michael's speech set the tone of the conference discussion and interaction as open, human-centred and critical. His argument, based on the work of the Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray, is that the centrality of human-centred education is the communal nature of human being and becoming. Michael maintains that a notion of community must go beyond the dialogic to embrace human beings in the many sidedness of their agency as persons. Community is fundamentally relational, emancipatory and inclusive, and is most appropriately understood as a process. He says that within each community there exist two forms of opposite human relation, the functional and the personal: the functional being for the sake of the personal and transformed by/expressive of the personal.

Michael quoted Macmurray's essay on 'Learning to be Human':

*'The first priority in education – if by education we mean learning to be human – is learning to live in personal relation to other people. Let us call it learning to live in community.'*

He suggests that schools be person-centred dialogic learning communities where we listen to and learn from each other. He adds that to create such communities, the unit of teaching and learning must be human-scale.

Professor Fielding's well-researched insights and critical analysis provided theoretical and philosophical underpinning for HCE.

## CONFERENCE CO-ORDINATION

The conference was co-ordinated by a team of experienced facilitators. Being aware of the aim to provide the participants with a human experience, the organising team, led by Mr Sharif Horthy the President of the GHFP, met each day to reflect on the comments and feedback from the previous day's activities. They then sought to adjust the programme accordingly. Participants commented that there was an open and collegial atmosphere where people listened empathetically and shared thoughts and experiences in an honest manner.

It was also acknowledged that much interaction and communication was inspired outside of the meetings. Many such conversations led to fresh ideas that penetrated the agenda. The GHFP plans that future conferences provide intentional space for such interactions.



***'Community is not fundamentally about place, time, memory, or even the belonging or significance found in close relationships. Community is rather the reciprocal experience people have as persons in certain kinds of relationships; it is an experience of being that is alive in its mutuality and vibrant in its sense of possibility. Community thus turns out to be adjectival, not substantival; it is not a group of people, nor is it the mere fact of a relationship; rather it is the shared mutuality of experience that is constitutive of it. Community is a way of being, not a thing. Community is a process in which human beings regard each other in a certain way (love, care, concern for the other) and in which they relate to each other and act together in mutuality as persons, not as role occupants. Furthermore, the mutuality is informed by the values of freedom (freedom to be and become yourself) and equality (equal worth) which condition each other reciprocally.'***

Fielding, M. (2001) Learning Organisation or Learning Community? A Critique of Senge, *Reason in Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 2



**Dr Peter Laurence** was for many years a lecturer and administrator in higher education. He is now the founder director of Education As Transformation (EasT), which serves as a resource for the educational community as it attempts to define the role of religious pluralism and spirituality in the educational process. Since 1996, EasT has sponsored conferences and provided consulting services and resource materials to educational institutions.

*'What stays with me from Peter's talk are the ideas of authenticity, minding the light that allows wisdom to emerge from within, encouraging respect, and for us as teachers to be present. These are all important aspects of my work, I hope.'*

Laurie Lathrop, Professor, University of Maryland

## DAY I

### REFLECTING ON GOOD PRACTICES

**What make a practice good and effective?**

**How does it contribute to the development of children?**

### PRESENTATIONS

In the morning plenary session the conference heard two presenters, who talked about how different educational philosophical thoughts and values converge in terms of these questions.

Dr Peter Laurence shared his understanding of Quaker educational principles, which are based on the primary concept that each of us, as students and teachers, have access to an 'inner light' that provides wisdom from within. This inner light is also seen as spirituality: a connectedness with each other, the world around us and the higher wisdom. Peter summarised the key principles of Quaker education, which include the priority of experience, linking pedagogy to the whole of life, inviting all voices, and non-violence – using intuition rather than fear as a tool.

Peter highlighted authenticity in education, saying that good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; identity and integrity being key to human-centred education. Dr Laurence's description and analysis of Quaker education principles inspired much reflection during group discussion.



One of the Quaker structures outlined by Peter was the 'Clearness Committee'. This is a process by which a group of people will help to identify and tackle an individual's problem. The 'Clearness Committee' is made up of a group of colleagues; the process begins by the individual writing about their problem for the committee to read. The entire committee then devotes undivided time and attention to the individual and their problem in a meeting, the process being marked by a cycle of questions and responses.

Leonardo Wild described the educational principles and approaches developed by Rebeca and Mauricio Wild in the Pestalozzi School (Pesta) in Ecuador, established in 1977. The Pesta approach is based on the understanding that, within carefully prepared environments, and through mutual respect, children and young people make meaningful decisions and initiate spontaneous and autonomous learning activities. Guided by their authentic developmental needs, they grow emotionally, socially, and intellectually without losing contact with their inner self. The Pesta principles reinforce each child's joy of life, curiosity, individuality, the natural conviction of his or her own self-worth and the worth of others – and also meet the highest academic standards. Leonardo explained how this approach transforms the lives of the students and the teachers, who take part in a mutual learning experience.



**Leonardo Wild**, a writer and speaker, has been a member of the Pesta Educational Foundation and its administrative council since 2002. He has been involved in creating new ways of education which have spread in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and Spain, as well as other South American countries. He has introduced visitors to the Pesta methodology and has represented it at international congresses.

**Mithra Foundation** is an independent and voluntary organisation that works among the migrant population living in the slums and on pavements in and around Bangalore in Southern India. Its aim is to empower children and women so that they regain and secure better socio-economic status in their households and in society at large. Since 1992, Mithra Foundation has been supported by a team of mental-health professionals, development workers and activists. Their outreach presently covers seven slums with a population of around 30,000.



**Mrs Sarojini Vittachi** has worked in third world development for over forty years, in tribal and rural areas. She studied at London School of Economics, taught at London University, and researched poverty groups in Britain in the sixties. She worked for UNICEF for over two decades in many countries round the world, and her final posting was as Regional Director covering twenty-two countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including war-torn countries like Iraq and Sudan. Thereafter she worked for the United Nations on the Peace Process between Israel and Palestine and was posted to Gaza.

## WORKSHOPS

The three parallel experiential workshops in the afternoon provided further opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of good practices and how they contribute to children's development.

\* \* \*

Joe and Bella Rosario, founders of the Mithra Foundation, gave a detailed view of how they strive to provide an educational experience for under-privileged children living in Southern India, who are more vulnerable to exploitation for child labour, and are deprived of their basic human rights.

Bella explained that the education for human rights programme offered by Mithra Foundation provided a very different experience to its children, and how such education might empower them to play an active role in their own development, helping them grow up into 'noble' human beings.

\* \* \*

Mrs Sarojini Vittachi, a retired UNICEF officer, presented a slide show through which she spoke about the importance of educating girls and women. She said that her experience working in developing countries brought the realisation that one important key to breaking through poverty is education, particularly of girls.

Sarojini told those present a story of her visit to a mine, where young girls were doing hard labour for long hours each day. During her visit Sarojini had sought a moment to ask the children, 'What is it that you want most?' Sarojini told her audience, 'To my great surprise, what

they wanted most was not food to eat, a house to stay in or a school to go to. These children told me that what they wanted most was to play.' With such touching observations, Mrs Vittachi created an awareness of gender issues in India, with emphasis on the great benefits of ensuring girls' access to education.

\* \* \*

Sebastian De Los Rios, the founder and director of Colegio Amor, a school in a shanty town outside Bogota, Colombia, presented a proven successful educational approach developed over nearly two decades: educating through love. Sebastian showed participants lively evidence from Colegio Amor that love and compassion are instrumental to life, learning and development. He spoke of the importance of the intimate relationship and close involvement between teachers and students, and how the school has thus developed an environment and culture of trust and care.

Those who work at Colegio Amor believe life at home affects life at school and vice versa; Sebastian argues that it is therefore important to be involved in all aspects of the child's life. Examples of this extended relationship include visits by the teacher to the student's home, in order to gain insight into what informs each child's relationship with themselves and the world: Sebastian described vividly how this approach has benefited the life of students, as is shown by their enthusiasm for being part of the Colegio Amor.

**Colegio Amor** was founded in 1988 in Soacha, a shanty town near Bogotá, a migrant community made up mostly of families who have been violently displaced. The project looks at youth as an agent of promoting peace and well-being in the wider community. Colegio Amor, as its name suggests, is a 'School of Love'. It provides food and security, protection, love and respect to all its students. It also encourages students to develop skills and awareness that help prevent them from suffering the abuses and damage caused by the social instability of being migrants. The school also provides educational programmes that enable young people to learn vocational skills in preparation for a more sustainable life once leaving the school. Colegio Amor provides not only education, but also various social services to the local community.

*'I became more aware of the importance and value of the relationship between the learner and teacher: the recognition of the intimacy of this relationship, and the need to value it and deepen it by including the learner in reflecting on how they learn, by involving families more, by investing time in developing opportunities for information about children and families to be exchanged between staff team members. We may begin to include home visits as part of our school culture.'*

Marian Imhasly, teacher, Lewes New School, UK

## GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Every group was randomly formed, each having about six to eight people. In the morning the group came together and spent time getting to know each other. Depending on the facilitator, most groups began by inviting each individual to tell a story about him or herself or about their journey in becoming an educator. These personal stories formed a basis for participant's narrative inquiry into their personal and professional development.

### KEY REFLECTIONS FROM DAY I GROUP DISCUSSION

- Good practice should reflect the goals and aim of education itself.
- It must involve a learning environment where the individual child's learning needs and pace are taken into consideration. This environment includes the relationship between the child and the adult.  
  
These relationships are essentially characterised by care, love and compassion.
- Good education practices must be grounded in the community, where all members are respected as individual human beings and all members are engaged to be part of the learning process and share the learning experience. Such a learning community would potentially transform all those involved – including children, families, parents and, above all, the teachers.
- A good practice is an on-going process. It is contextualised and leads to our continued growth as human beings. It is inclusive and provides individuals with the opportunity to develop their true talents and potential.

## DAY II

### THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT OUR PRACTICES

**What can we do to improve our educational practices?**

**How can we best help our students in this changing world?**

On the second day of the conference, participants were confronted with these two questions that aimed at taking our discussions to a deeper level. The conference was encouraged to think critically about their respective and diverse practices.

### PRESENTATIONS

Dr John Pryor started the plenary session by problematising the issue of assessment. Many of the participating schools and projects recognised that, apart from following their unique curriculum and using innovative approaches, they are mostly cast out of the mainstream educational system due to their reluctance to use test-based and summative assessment to determine their students' learning. So how do we assess our students' learning and development? John introduced a model of formative assessment, and discussed it in the light of this being a human process, which involves dialogue and collaboration between and amongst learners and teachers.

\* \* \*

Kumari Beck is a lecturer, in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada. She presented the work-in-progress of her research group, which focuses on how care might be cultivated in the classroom.

She referred to examples from their case studies within a qualitative research of eighteen teachers in diverse educational settings of Western Canada, to illustrate the importance of care in teaching. Through reviewing Nel Noddings' theoretical framework on the issue of ethics and care in education, Kumari argued that ethics of care form a vital core of a teacher's practice and are a central part of human-centred education.

*'If no adult has time to spend with a child – shared time that yields dependable and supportive evaluation – then society looks for an easy and efficient way to evaluate: test, test, and test, year after year. Then fear and competition take the place of eager anticipation and shared delight in learning. Although we may find out by such methods whether children have learned certain closely specified facts and skills, we do not get a full picture of what each unique child has learned and how he or she has built on the gifts we offer. What we learn in the daily reciprocity of caring goes far deeper than test results.'*

Noddings, N. (2005) Caring in education. *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, [www.infed.org/](http://www.infed.org/)

Dr John Pryor suggests that this model of formative assessment is a divergent model, characterised by many features including:

- a view of assessment as a collaboration between and amongst teachers and students
- flexible planning and open forms of recording (narrative, quotations etc.)
- primarily open tasks with questioning by teachers and learners directed at 'helping' rather than testing
- a focus on miscues - aspects of learners' work which yield insights into their current understanding – and on prompting metacognition
- exploratory feedback aimed at prompting further engagement from the learners
- critical reflection on the task and its context, with a holistic view of assessment criteria
- an intention to teach in the zone of proximal development



**Dr John Pryor** is Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Sussex, UK, where he directs a Professional Doctorate. As an educator and researcher his interests are wide, including social issues in education with a focus on gender, group work, assessment, the human effect of new technologies, and the development of professional practice. As well as working in the UK, John has a broader international involvement and is particularly interested in Africa. His work seeks to investigate how education might help people develop the connections with others that make their lives more fulfilling.

**The effective communication model** has been developed by Stephanie, a parent, a TET (Teaching Effectiveness Training) trainer and communication consultant, with the support of the teachers and children at Lewes New School, UK. The school is a project inspired by the first International Conference for Educators and was founded by a group of parents in Lewes in southeast England. The school believes that relationship is key to the quality of life. They see their model for communication as a way to develop personal relationship positively and effectively. The human relationship is what underpins the ethos in this school.



## WORKSHOPS

The two parallel experiential workshops of the second day afternoon provided opportunities for educators to engage with two very different practices within schools.

\* \* \*

The first workshop was led by Stephanie Davies-Arai. Participants were allowed to have a flavour of a effective communication model by being a part of role-play, whereby they could experience the difference in feelings and emotions that a child might feel when encountering communication from an adult. Many participants were touched and even shaken by their own experience during the workshop as it brought profound awareness about how they have approached communicating with children, and how they were communicated with when they themselves were children.

\* \* \*

Concurrently, Illène Pevec (Founder/ Director, Children's Peace Garden Projects) shared with her audience her perspective on important and diverse effects of learning that can be generated through creating a natural environment in school grounds. Illène has initiated and directed a number of successful projects in both Brazil and Canada, in which the main focus has been to encourage children, teachers, parents and other members of the community to transform school and community grounds into gardens of peace. In this process, children learn about nature, their relationship with environment, the process of communication and decision-making, and working together collaboratively with love, compassion and respect.

## KEY REFLECTIONS FROM DAY II GROUP DISCUSSION

The following were the key reflections that emerged from the ongoing group discussions generated by the day's questions:

- If the world is changing, then so too should our educational practices; as the world evolves so must our ideas and strategies. Sensitivity and agility of mind are required to adapt to specific situations.
- There is a need to define clearly what 'education' is and how this definition relates to 'school'; and to recognise that assumed definitions often don't hold true to what is actually happening in the world.
- It is important to make children's education more holistic, addressing their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social needs.
- Observing other teachers in other contexts is a way to further understand what we ourselves might do to improve our practices.
- It is important to allow inspiration to guide us, outside the boundaries of conventional practice.
- Children should be encouraged to find their own solutions to problems, and find their own way in the diverse world; but they should also be guided by providing strategies of non-violent conflict resolution.



**Illène Pevéc's MA** was based on an action research in which she combined her interests in nature, science, creativity and exploratory learning to create gardens with children as learning and playing environments. Illène received a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency to begin 'A Child's Garden of Peace' project in an economically challenged neighbourhood in Santo Ângelo, Brazil. The first two years' development of the project was recorded and turned into a film, which was accepted to be shown at 'A Planet In Focus', an international Environmental Film festival that took place in Toronto, Canada, in September 2005.



Fiona Carnie was National Co-ordinator of Human Scale Education in the UK for 12 years where she was involved in promoting human scale learning environments within

the maintained and alternative sectors. She now works as a consultant to the organisation on their campaign for public funding for alternative schools and is leading a project funded by the Department for Education and Skills to encourage parental involvement in education. Fiona is also a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Educational Innovation at the University of Sussex. Her publications include *Alternative Approaches to Education* (2002), London, Routledge Falmer and *Pathways to Child Friendly Schools: A Guide for Parents* (2004), Human Scale Education.

### DAY III

## CONCEPTUALISING THE AIM OF A HUMAN-CENTRED EDUCATION

What are the essential qualities of a truly human-centred education?

How do we create educational experience that enable human flourishing?

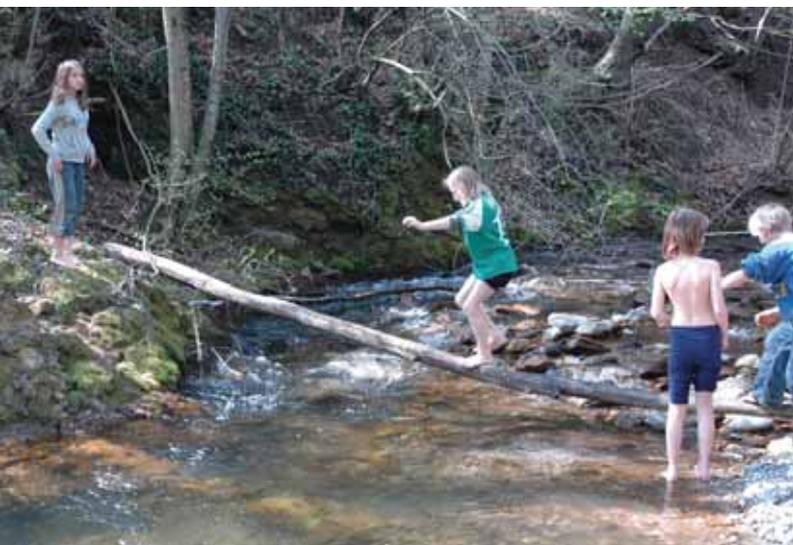
### PRESENTATIONS

The plenary of the day saw Fiona Carnie's very thorough summary of the previous two days' group discussions. Also drawing from her own work within Human Scale Education, Fiona encapsulated the essential qualities of human-centred education. She highlighted holistic process, respect and care, democracy, parents and community involvement, the need to be underpinned by environmental concerns, and the importance of human scale. Fiona stressed that human-centred education, by deeply connecting to its core values, should help develop children's awareness of self, others, and all that lives in the world, through a democratic, collaborative and integrated process.

\* \* \*

Following Fiona's summary, Professor Ian Cunningham, Founder/Director of South Downs Learning Centre, UK, gave a vivid example of these core values at work through stories and video documentaries about the activities of a group of youngsters at his learning centre. The centre provides a personalised learning experience to young people, who create and follow their own learning programme with support from a learning group of six other young people plus adult facilitators. These young people are mostly dropouts or failing in large state schools.

At the centre they are given the opportunity to learn what is relevant for them, to select an area in which they are interested and expand in particular topics. These teenagers are encouraged to set their own goals and determine their own path of learning. Ian highlights the importance of meaning-making in the learning process, and of how working within a small and supportive group provides young people the opportunity to develop sense of self in the world.



*'One of the things I learned is the importance of STORY. For me that which stuck most from the conference was Ian's story of James, the disaffected, illiterate teenager who was a genius at putting together car motors and building bikes for his friends from scratch. By working with him to tap into these native talents, Ian was able to get him to believe in himself as an intelligent, competent person, who then was able to acquire as much formal learning as necessary so he could pursue his dreams and realise his talents as a source of sustaining himself and helping the world.'*

Dr Reynold Feldman

**Professor Ian Cunningham** chairs the consultancy Strategic Developments International Ltd. and the not-for-profit charity Centre for Self Managed Learning. He is Visiting Professor in the School of Lifelong Learning and Education at Middlesex University and a Visiting Fellow in the Centre for Educational Innovation at Sussex University. He was Chief Executive of Roffey Park Management Institute, UK, from 1987 to 1993.

Ian invented the Self Managed Learning approach in the late 1970s as a result of a wide range of experiences in the educational world and in organisations. Recent projects in education include working with the Institute for Democratic Education, Israel; evaluation of Summerhill School; research and writing on learning. Current projects include working as part of the team running the South Downs Learning Centre; running Self Managed Learning programmes in schools in England; researching, writing and consulting with various international companies.



**Kathy Eldon** is a journalist, writer, producer and activist. Kathy's life changed dramatically in July of 1993 when her son Dan Eldon, a Reuters photographer, was stoned to death in Somalia at the age of 22. In the aftermath of this tragedy she transformed a personal sorrow and hatred into great compassion, forgiveness and hope. GlobalTribe Network is one of her many endeavours to make the world a better place.

The work to which **Lailah Armstrong** has devoted her life started in 1989 after she came in contact with Professor Karsten Hundeide, a developmental psychologist from Oslo University. The professor was developing a programme, based on psychological research, to help children by supporting their caregiver. After studying with Karsten, Lailah became one of the founders of the International Child Development Programme in 1992, and since then has worked as Senior ICDP trainer and consultant in different countries across Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia.

**Roda Viva** began in 1981 as the 'Alfragide Project', a kindergarten for refugee children. It has now grown into an educational project catering for 134 children and young people from Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, India, Sao Tome, Guinea, Brazil and Portugal. Roda Viva focuses on the development of each child's self-worth and competence, encourages family participation in the educational process, and strives to reduce discrimination.

## WORKSHOPS

Parallel workshops on the third day further marked the diverse approaches to HCE.

Kathy Eldon (Founder/Director, Global Tribe Network, worldwide) gave her audience an interactive tour of her work, which focuses on connecting young people worldwide through modern media. Kathy said that proper use of media can empower young people to take the initiative and effect positive changes in themselves and world around them. Global Tribe Network helps them to document their own lives and voices and provides a platform for them to broadcast their views through the internet.

\* \* \*

Lailah Armstrong, Director/Trainer, International Children Development Programme (ICDP) gave an experiential workshop that deepened participants' understanding of the fundamental principles of ICDP. Through role play, she highlighted the importance of warmth and trust, attentive listening and empathic communication in developing the relationship between child and carer. She argued that this relationship determines the physical and psychological development of the child.

\* \* \*

Francisca Pedroso (Director, Roda Viva, Portugal) showed those attending her workshop how HCE approaches can lead to enhanced self-esteem for refugee children and young adults attempting to re-establish themselves in a new socio-cultural environment. The project's main approach is 'Active Learning Process' whereby all activities are planned, initiated and evaluated by students.

## CONFERENCE CONCLUDING SPEECH

In her concluding speech, Mrs Sarojini Vittachi reminded the conference to bear in mind the importance of the fundamental right of children and young adults to have access to education. She used Varindra Tarzie Vittachi's writing on children's rights to summarise this:

*'A child has the need and therefore the right to be a child. This is an important fundamental right of a child: the right to a childhood.'*

Sarojini challenged us to explore how to encourage mainstream state education to become interested and adopt the HCE principles in order to benefit more children and young people. She also asked us to consider ways to take this initiative forward, scaling up and making our efforts self-sustainable, through critical reflection and ongoing assessment.



## SUMMARY OF THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF HUMAN-CENTRED EDUCATION

Drawing on the myriad strands conjured from the conference activities and interaction, the following points summarise the essential qualities of human-centred education as identified by the participants:

- Human-centred education aims at human flourishing and developing each individual's full human potential, and enabling the expression of their true talent
- Human-centred education focuses on the holistic development of all aspects of the child as a human being, including intellect, feelings and emotions, aesthetics, creativity, body and spirit
- It stresses the centrality of positive human relationships, which translate into love, care and respect; mutuality of learning; an awareness of self, other and of environment; and must be grounded in the community
- Human centred education helps children to become their own teacher; consider everything as a potential source of learning; be guided in their development by their best self
- It helps children to exercise power with responsibility, develop a healthy sense of playfulness and fun, develop their capacity for discernment, become resourceful and cultivate a sense of mystery and awe
- Human-centred education is a lifelong process of human becoming and personal growth; it encourages individuals to become not just knowledgeable but wise, and to be reflective human beings



***'I am very glad we came to the conference. I was encouraged by the very friendly, open and inviting atmosphere!***

***As a small project, we are only starting to make connections. Now I feel we are embedded in a greater web of people who care about issues we find important. This touches me deeply and encourages me to go unconventional ways and to keep questioning general beliefs.***

***After the conference, I am also thinking about how I want to live and what kind of environment I should prepare for myself to keep growing and have my needs cared for.'***

Ina Golde, Rappelkiste & Aktive Schule,  
Potsdam, Germany

## **INTERACTION DURING THE CONFERENCE**

The conference interaction formed a data set of an academic research paper, later presented by Dr Scherto Gill and Dr John Pryor, at British Educational Research Association's annual conference in September 2005. The paper attempted to explore and develop existing theories of teachers' narrative, personal identity and professional development in the context of socio-cultural theories of learning.

They argue that inter-related aspects of theorising of teachers' learning and development are highly relevant and of value in the light of research data which took teachers' interaction during the conference as the primary data set.

By way of a case study of a teacher's experience, they highlight the significance of teachers acting as narrative inquirers, who engage directly with each other and use their own voices to shape and re-shape their professional-personal development, and thus explicate the relationship between the teacher's narrative inquiry into their personal identity, educational practice and professional development. It was concluded that the conference had encouraged teachers' development both personally and professionally; and that these are mutually constitutive and mutually enhanced.



## REFLECTION ON CONFERENCE LEARNING

Part of the last day was devoted to reflecting on learning from the conference. We asked participants:

- How has this conference changed the way we conceptualise ourselves and our work?
- How can we apply what we have learnt to our professional situation?
- What practical steps can we take when we get back?



Participants were encouraged to work in their own institutional teams where appropriate, and reflect on their learning during the three days. Some groups presented their deliberations using posters, making it possible to share reflections and show how further steps had been realised that could move a project forward.

### Erlebnisschule and Lebensraum Niederhof, Austria

The two schools worked together as a team. They wrote that they no longer felt alone in their search for a better educational experience for children and young people. The conference made them more aware of the challenges confronting all the participating educators, researchers and members of the organising team. They asked:

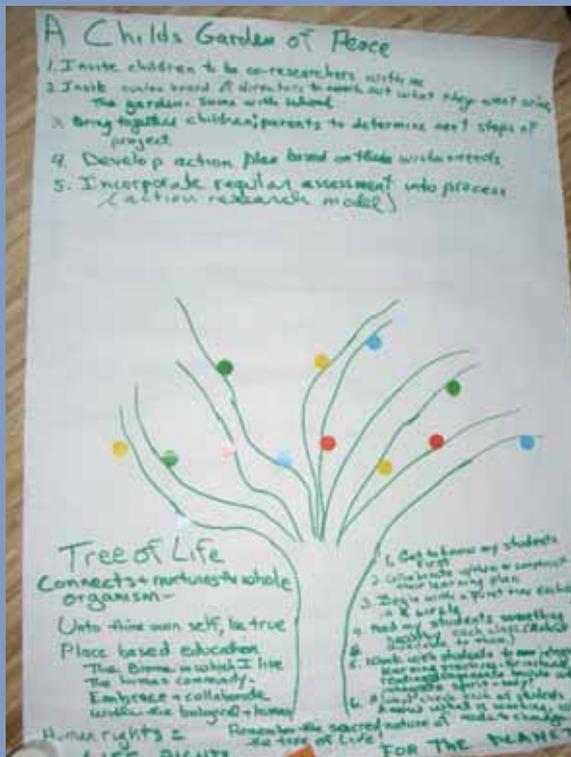
How can we stay in contact with the other projects of the world? And how can we support each other?

How can we expand our project so that it becomes a global project?



## A Child's Garden of Peace (Canada/Brazil)

Illène Pevéc's reflection showed her plans of how to integrate the ideas learned from the conference into her new project. The conference reassured her about her approach to the project and learning. She felt encouraged to return to the university to embark on a Doctorate research on using the natural environment to develop children's awareness of self, other, community and the world.



### Tree of life:

Connects and nurtures the whole organism

Unto thine own self, be true

Invite children to be co-researchers

Bring together children and parents to determine the next steps of the project

Develop an action plan based on these wishes and needs

Incorporate regular assessment into process (action research model)

## Centre for Educational Innovation

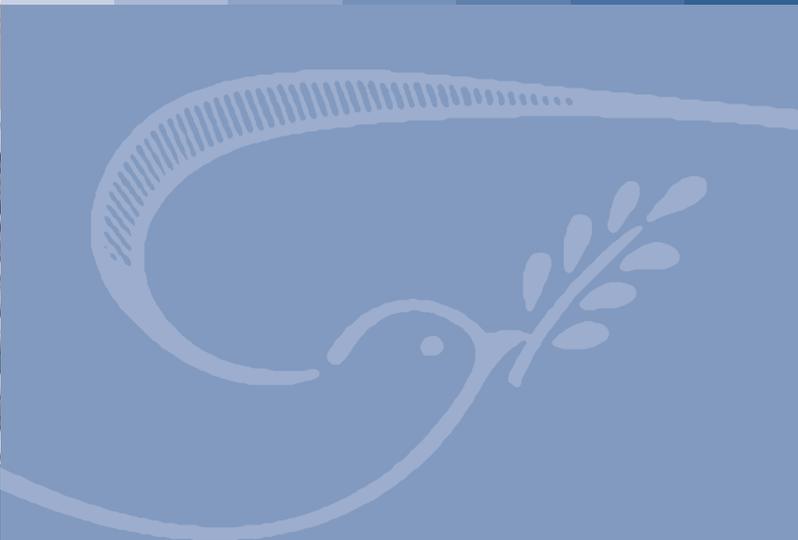
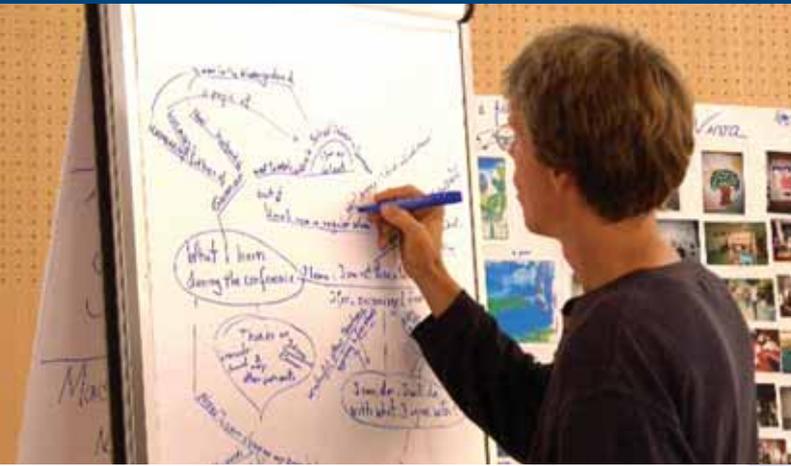
Three academic researchers from the Centre reflected on the implication of the conference on their own work within higher education. They considered:

How do we bring-about change toward human-centred university education?

What would a human-centred university be like?

- Dilemma around values and beliefs
- Supporting adults who work with children
- Communicating human-centred learning in multi-media ways





**Bina Cita Utama School, Indonesia**

Salamah, who was about to start a new class in September, felt concern about how she could educate a class of over 20 children with mixed ages, mixed races and mixed abilities. At the end of the conference she reflected that she had understood that, with this challenging group, she would be more of a facilitator, rather than a teacher. The conference gave her the confidence to work in a human-centred way and to develop a new relationship with children, teachers, parents and the community at large.



**Lewes New School**

Three teachers from Lewes New School reflected on the meaning and significance of the 'circle', 'silence' and 'relationship'. Their insights included:

Circle – change classroom environment to put the circle in the centre

Silence – appreciation of silence as nourishment for all human beings

Relationship – fundamental basis for life and learning processes



**What I want to take back:**

Interconnectedness between:

STUDENT – TEACHER

COMMUNITY – FAMILY

ENVIRONMENT – UNIVERSE



**Sofiah Mackay, Australia**

It struck me that a lot of the work I have been doing with young people (non-formal education and development work) embodies much that conference participants concluded was needed for a more human-centred education - with greater emphasis on facilitation rather than teaching, and empowering young people to set their own learning / life agenda rather than over-prescribing or dictating. So that was reassuring to experience.

**Sandra Uhlig-Ammar, Reppelkiste and Aktive Schule, Germany**

We took home inspirations from personal contacts outside the fixed structure of the conference; i.e. talks about the economical development and its impact on our social life.

We took home questions about ways how to establish structures and a culture that are more sustainable and respectful towards life in all aspects.

**Rasjid Cesar, Tierraviva, Argentina**

I believe that one of the wonderful and positive things is that we can be in contact with others in spite of the distances and the cultural differences.

Personally, it served me so much to attend the conference, because I understood that the social area of our project is very related to education. Although our project is not a school, we work with the communities trying to recover their abilities and their human dignity.

**CONFERENCE LEARNING CARRIED FORWARD****Uraida & Pedro Vacacela, Inka Sumana, Ecuador**

Pedro: I feel that I am not alone with my ideas of a world social transformation by education. The conference encouraged me to extend my work in other areas of Ecuador and to visit some of the projects that were presented in the conference. I feel it is important to create solidarity amongst us all.

I commit myself to communicating with the different levels of education in my country; getting in contact with them ... I want to plan a national native education conference in Ecuador. I sent to the Native Bilingual Education Director in Ecuador a proposal for making a big meeting of teachers in 2006.

**Marian Imhasly, Lewes New School, UK**

In our increasingly result driven culture it was reassuring to participate in a conference where practitioners were working within the context of questions and ideas that are related to the needs of humanity.

The conference affirmed questions/ aspirations of my own, and I think it is important to mention that it is not always easy to share questions of this level. I am left with a wish to further these themes/ideas within our school. It is encouraging to reflect that our school is living many of these themes; we need to live them more thoroughly and embed them more deeply across our school life.

**Benita Elisabeth Gavilán, Vida Plena,  
Paraguay**

I have learned so much about the different approaches in the different projects presented. I am especially grateful for having met people who share similar philosophical underpinning. We could exchange experience, knowledge and views, the conference deepened our understanding of our work.

Now I am facing the challenge to explain to people who ask me about my journey to Europe, what 'human-centred education' means, as they are just used to barrack-like education, based on reward and punishment.

**Salamah Dick, Cita Bina Utama School,  
Indonesia**

The big difference, as I see it, for students in our school is that they feel happy, secure, safe, trusted and valued for their differences, ideas, contributions and beliefs. They are encouraged to relate to each other and to help each other up and down the levels.

The teachers feel valued, relaxed, happy and trusted. They prefer being in our school than working in their other school environments – some of our teachers being government employees are not free to be with us full time, and they are, therefore, in a situation of being able to measure differences first hand.

We implement the 'circle' and 'hooray' developed at Lewes New School – holding hands and cheering for our new day.

**Laurie Lathrop, University of Maryland,  
USA**

I teach adults online, working at home with little collegial contact, and often wonder if I am doing things in a right way. This conference, with its articulation of values, helped me feel I was going in the right direction.

It also strengthened my relationship with students. ...This conference gave me the tools to think about my relationships with them and confirmed me in my approach.

Peter Laurence's presentation had the most influence on me. What stays with me from Peter's talk are the ideas of authenticity, minding the light that allows wisdom to emerge from within, encouraging respect, and for us as teachers to be present. I now have a new awareness of what I do, how I do it, and why, as well as words to describe it.

The conference has strengthened my understanding and reinforced the direction of my approach in setting up and teaching my courses and in relating to students.

**Eleazar Luft, CeLuAn Project, Brazil**

The idea of a conference between educators from similar projects worldwide is very interesting and exciting. Knowing what other people are doing encourages me to continue to learn and change.

### **International Child Development Programme**

[www.icdp.info/](http://www.icdp.info/)

ICDP is an international NGO concerned with the provision of human care through the activation of empathy and education of both caregivers and children.

### **Susila Dharma International Association (SDIA)**

[www.susiladharma.net](http://www.susiladharma.net)

SDIA fosters global co-operation and understanding through long-term partnerships, education and capacity-building, through its network of members and projects in more than 30 countries.

## **Africa**

### **CONGO**

#### **CSSD Lemba Indu School**

[www.susiladharma.org/members\\_africa\\_drongo\\_lembaimbu.html](http://www.susiladharma.org/members_africa_drongo_lembaimbu.html)

Based in a part of Kinshasa with few other services, this school offers human and social aid to over 360 students, and serves the local community in various ways including providing a well for drinking water.

## **PARTICIPATING PROJECTS**

### **Asia**

#### **INDIA**

##### **Mithra Foundation**

[www.susiladharma.org/members\\_asia\\_india\\_mithra.html](http://www.susiladharma.org/members_asia_india_mithra.html)

Mithra works directly with people living in temporary housing or slums in Bangalore. Their educational objectives include the empowerment of women and children, and human rights education.

##### **Girls Education Plus (GEP)**

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

The GEP believes that the education of girls and women is vital for development and for ensuring positive changes in individuals, communities and societies. It provides information and resources to support such initiatives.

#### **INDONESIA**

##### **Sekolah Cita Buana**

[www.expatri.or.id/orgs/citabuana.html](http://www.expatri.or.id/orgs/citabuana.html)

Sekolah Cita Buana is a well-established, bilingual and multicultural independent school in Jakarta. The education focuses on the whole person and integrates multicultural understanding.

**Bina Cita Utama**

[www.msubuhfoundation.org/news.html](http://www.msubuhfoundation.org/news.html)

Bina Cita Utama is a community school in rural Rugan Sari, Central Kalimantan. Through its balance of Indonesian and international education approaches, the school creates an inclusive learning community.

**Europe****AUSTRIA****Erlebnisschule**

[www.erlebnisschule.net](http://www.erlebnisschule.net)

The Mödling-based Erlebnisschule encourages children to take responsibility for themselves, choose their own activities and work at their own pace. The children thereby are able to develop an inner strength and a sense of self-worth within a relaxed natural atmosphere.

**Lebensraum Niederhof**

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

The Lebensraum Niederhof, in Lower Austria, believes in the importance of 'inner developing impulses of children'. For this reason the school does not function in the traditional structure: there are no schedules, no class rooms and no tests.

**Pikler Playgroup in Innsbruck**

[www.pikler-hengstenberg.at](http://www.pikler-hengstenberg.at)

The Emmi Pikler approach encourages trusting the child to be an initiator and explorer. The concept encourages children to be confident, curious, cooperative, secure, peaceful, focused, cheerful, aware and inner-directed.

**BRITAIN****Centre for Educational Innovation (CEI),  
University of Sussex**

[www.sussex.ac.uk/cei](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cei)

The CEI is a forum for innovative work with schools and colleges within the region, primarily in the areas of leadership, pupil-centred learning and student voice. Space is provided for debating issues around education, in particular the agenda of the government.

**Lewes New School**

[www.lewesnewschool.co.uk](http://www.lewesnewschool.co.uk)

The main ethos of this 'human scale' school is nurture for all aspects of the development of the child: intellectual, emotional and spiritual, within an environment of mutual respect, trust and honesty.



**South Downs Learning Centre (SDLC)**

[www.selfmanagedlearning.org/youngpeople.html](http://www.selfmanagedlearning.org/youngpeople.html)

SDLC offers a personalised learning experience to young people, using small learning groups. By choosing their own goals and approaches, students are encouraged to discover their own fulfilment in life.

**Human Scale Education (HSE)**

[www.hse.org.uk](http://www.hse.org.uk)

HSE is an education reform movement committed to small scale learning communities based on the values of democracy, fairness and respect. The organisation works directly with schools and individuals to promote learning that values people as humans.

**Centre for International Education (CIE), University of Sussex**

[www.sussex.ac.uk/education/1-4-21.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/1-4-21.html)

CIE co-ordinates various international research projects in education development and has extensive links with other educational institutions across the globe. It also offers a Master's programme in International Education.

**FRANCE****World Movement of Mothers**

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

WMM recognises the vital social and economic role of mothers and the family. The organisation is involved in various projects related to the empowerment of mothers and support for their role and works to provide resources through networking across the globe.

**GERMANY****Free School of Life and Learning, Selent**

[www.freie-schule-selent.de](http://www.freie-schule-selent.de)

This is an alternative school, which orients itself to the pedagogy of Maria Montessori and Rebeca and Mauricio Wild.

**Rappelkiste & Aktive Schule, Potsdam**

[www.aktive-schule-potsdam.de](http://www.aktive-schule-potsdam.de)

This kindergarten and primary school are inspired by the idea that education must respect each child's development and their ability to direct their own activities. The main task of adults is to observe the children and create an environment that enables them to fulfil their needs.





### **Susila Dharma (Germany)**

[www.susiladharma.de/](http://www.susiladharma.de/)

SDG is one of the many national members of SDIA. The organisation runs many active projects in collaboration with the German government and other local NGOs to support health, education and community development.

### **PORTUGAL**

#### **Roda Viva, Amadora**

[www.susiladharma.org/members\\_europe\\_portugal\\_rodaviva.html](http://www.susiladharma.org/members_europe_portugal_rodaviva.html)

This educational project caters for 134 refugee children and young people from many countries. It focuses on the development of each child's self-worth and competence, encourages family participation in educational process and strives for inclusion.

## **South and North America**

### **ARGENTINA**

#### **Tierraviva, Buenos Aires**

[www.susiladharma.org/members\\_samerica\\_argentina\\_tierraviva.html](http://www.susiladharma.org/members_samerica_argentina_tierraviva.html)

Tierraviva is a community project working with women in prison, especially those with children to help them develop strategies for transformative experience in and after prison.

### **BRAZIL**

#### **CeLuAn, Santo Angelo**

[www.susiladharma.org/members\\_samerica\\_brazil.html](http://www.susiladharma.org/members_samerica_brazil.html)

The CeLuAn is a school and community project that focuses on developing constructive family relations using the ICDP principles.

### **CANADA**

#### **A Child's Garden of Peace (Canada/Brazil)**

[www.cityfarmer.org/grandview.html](http://www.cityfarmer.org/grandview.html)

Illène Pevéc works with teachers and school children to build community gardens to inspire environmental education. Both projects provide a peaceful space for the community to enjoy, and encourage people's awareness of their relationship with the environment.

### **COLOMBIA**

#### **Colegio Amor, Bogotá**

[www.susiladharma.org/members\\_samerica\\_colombia\\_amor.html](http://www.susiladharma.org/members_samerica_colombia_amor.html)

Colegio Amor is based in Soacha, a migrant community of mostly violently displaced families. The school provides food and security, protection, love and respect for all its students, and the skills and awareness that will transform their lives and give them social stability.

## ECUADOR

### Pestalozzi School, Quito

Founded by Rebeca and Mauricio Wild, the Pestalozzi School takes a radical approach to learning. With no fixed curriculum or preset course of study, children are free to direct their own learning and discovery. The Pesta method has inspired other alternative education models in Austria, Germany, Holland, Spain and Switzerland.

### Inka Samana

ueaitis@hotmail.com

This is an alternative school whose elementary and high school education has been recognised by national educational authorities. The school takes an intercultural approach to teaching and learning, embraces indigenous wisdom and knowledge and encourages children to tap in their own cultural roots.



## PARAGUAY

### La Vida Plena

[www.susiladharma.org/members\\_samerica\\_paraguay.html](http://www.susiladharma.org/members_samerica_paraguay.html)

La Vida Plena is a kindergarten where young children are offered opportunities for non-directive and self-guided learning within an environment equipped with structured and non-structured learning materials.

## USA

### Global Tribes

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

This organisation aims to connect young people throughout the world via meaningful service projects. It also seeks to raise awareness of global issues through creative media, mobilise youth globally, and provide them with tools and resources.

### Education As Transformation (EasT)

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

EasT explores two main issues: the role of spirituality and the impact of religious diversity in educational institutions. The organisation works on an international level serving as co-sponsors to educational programmes and conferences.

### Wisdom Factors International (WFI)

[www.wisingup.com](http://www.wisingup.com)

WFI's mission is to make available the riches of the world's wisdom through books, study groups, workshops, speakers, and the general emergence of 'human-centred education'.

## GUERRAND-HERMÈS FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace believes peace is a human concept that can be achieved when people are in touch with their own humanity.

Inspired by this belief, the Foundation has, at its core, the aim to enable transformation that allows humanity within each individual to flourish.

*Founded in 1996, the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) is primarily a think-tank whose aim is to foster peace, harmony and understanding between people. The GHFP acts as a catalyst for positive change.*

### OUR MISSION

The mission of the GHFP is to promote the development of qualities that are needed for ensuring peace and a humane society.

In order to initiate and facilitate processes that bring people towards understanding, compassion and personal growth, the Foundation aims to create quiet, safe and open spaces for dialogue, education and communication. This contributes strategically to the resolution of problems, and to the development of people's full potential and talents, in a spirit of optimism and realism.

### WHAT WE DO

The GHFP works as a learning organisation, investigating areas of human concern in order to identify key questions and promote dialogue and discussion.

Specifically, the GHFP conducts and encourages research as well as initiating and supporting projects in the areas of inter-religious dialogue, education, and livelihood. The work of the projects, combined with the results of our research, serve to inform the GHFP in organising topical conferences, providing a context for transforming participants' approach to their own work.

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