

Content

1. **Special edition of the International Curative Education Conference in Dornach, October 5-10, 2020**
2. **ELIANT Position paper: Digital media in childhood and at school**
3. **How do we look forward to Christmas?**
4. **Call to our parents “Christmas in that time”**



1. **Special edition of the International Curative Education Conference in Dornach, based on an interview by Lien Van Laere**
Report by *Bart Vanmechelen*, Member of the Leadership Team

From 5 to 10 October, the international conference for curative education and social therapy took place in Dornach, Switzerland. This time, the theme of the conference was “lifelong learning”. A retrospective of a special five-day event, at the Goetheanum and for the first time also online.



Our biography as the greatest teacher


Bart Vanmechelen opened the conference on Monday evening, on International Teacher's Day, together with his colleague Jan Göschel. In his lecture he focused mainly on the inner side of learning. What makes someone a good pedagogue or teacher?

Bart: "Among other things, I told an anecdote about my start as a teacher at the Parcival School in Antwerp. Actually, I thought I could only contribute on the practical start-up of the school year, but in the end I rolled into the teaching profession there and continued teaching for five years. In that time I experienced that you only really learn something by doing it. Our biography is our greatest teacher.

I also learned that therapeutic education is mainly about getting to know the children well and adopting an inquisitive, open attitude. As a teacher, I felt every day what it is like to not yet be able to do something, but to want to learn it. The children have grown very strongly through this: especially from the experience that we were learning and we are going a path of discovery together. They felt: it doesn't matter if I can't do something yet, by doing we will learn".

The basic attitude of the beginner

Bart: "The main purpose of my lecture was to convey that, as a teacher or educator too, we should be prepared to place ourselves in the beginner's attitude over and over again.



Only in this way can we continue to look with open eyes at the questions of the pupils, children or adults we care for. Again, and again we have to let go of our own habits and insights in order to re-learn what is important for these specific people. It was nice to be able to speak freely about the fact that we never get to the point where we all know and can. The inner schooling path has no end point. This is also reflected in the basic exercises that Steiner has given us: they are absolutely not just for beginners. They invite us to a lifelong practice.

Bridging school in flexibility and in distance

Bart: "Due to the corona measures, the conference was also a school of flexibility. During the preparation and up to the last moment there were continuous changes, both in the group of participants and in terms of restrictions and possibilities.

We learned a lot about the technical aspects of making a conference available online, including live translation, and about simultaneous online and offline collaboration in hybrid workgroups. To my amazement, we were able to create a sense of connection between the people who attended live and those who experienced the event online elsewhere in the world.

I experienced this most strongly during a working group of the Social Initiative Forum - an initiative that seeks to support and develop solidarity between social projects around the world. Among other things, the working group did a role-playing exercise in which the spectators had to guess which social needs and possible answers were portrayed wordlessly by the others. The groups consisted of people who were present live, as well as people who participated online. It was fascinating to witness that process and to see how much empathy and joy it brought".

Limitless ability to meet

Bart: "Technology has limitations and sometimes disrupts processes. But at the same time the whole thing was only possible thanks to technology and it was special to experience how capable we apparently are as human beings in bridging the limited bandwidth of the digital. The participants felt really involved, also those who participated online. Despite the danger of fragmentation and distractions, there was an atmosphere and a flow that we built up together and in which people knew how to connect. The experience that we can have valuable encounters and living experiences with the help of digital media gives us new possibilities for the future. It allows us, less dependent on time and space, to continue to connect internationally in between the conferences. In this way we can keep the connection and cooperation between colleagues in therapeutic education and social therapy worldwide alive in closer connection to our daily work. And it will become a more breathing process, which will also become accessible to other co-workers.

By organizing the conference both live and online, it has also become more accessible. Online participation is more democratic, people don't have to travel and they don't have to leave their working place for the entire duration of the conference.

It also opens up new possibilities for inclusion. Anyone who, due to a disability, finds it difficult or daring to travel can now attend the conference in a relatively simple way and from their own familiar surroundings. Initiatives have already been developed to teach people with special needs how to work with a computer, make connections and exchange experiences with others".

Learning in a space free from fear

Bart: "On Tuesday Sonja Zausch gave a lecture on how important our body is to support our learning processes. That theme was given an extra dimension by the corona measures. How do our experiences effect and resonate with our bodies? Among other things Sonja talked about how important it is to create a learning environment where there is no fear, where people never feel like they have to be someone else and where they can still grow in different skills, attitudes and thoughts. An environment in which that access is opened up without them doubting their personality. Especially with people who have had traumatic experiences, it is important to be extra careful, in order to make learning possible for them again. The importance of good health, vitality and joy for movement also were addressed in Sonja's lecture.

2. ELIANT Position paper: Digital media in childhood and at school

The early use by children and toddlers of digital media has negative consequences on the development and maturity of the fore brain, according to newly published independent studies. Recommendations for media education in line with child development, together with links to scientific studies, are to be found in the [full Position Paper](#), in the Fact Sheets „[Digital Media in Childhood and Education](#)“ and „[Growing up healthy](#)“ and in the [summary Position Paper](#).

We therefore kindly call for your signatures about digital free kindergartens and age appropriate digital learning - more information on the Eliant website www.eliant.eu



3. How do we look forward to Christmas?

Report by Ann Naeyaert, Christoforusgemeenschap, Munte, Belgium

Dear friends,

2020 is a most wonderful year!

In our socialtherapeutic community, we have several houses and workplaces, for all together 24 man and woman with learning disabilities. And now, how do we, as Christoforusgemeenschap, look forward towards the celebration of Christmas?

Every year, from October on, we are exercising the Oberufer Christmas play. And together with our adults, co-workers, volunteers and musicians, it is a time to enjoy and look forward to go on stage and bring this play in our village church in Munte, for an audience of families, neighbours and friends.



But this year, the time between Michaelmas and Christmas is completely different. The houses and workplaces are separated.

So we made in every house an Advent Garden, where each one takes a small candle, set in an apple, goes his/her way through the garden to enlighten the own candle on the shining big candle. It was an intimate moment this year.

Everyone was enjoying the feeling to have been able to bring light in the darkness, everyone in his/her own way.

Further on, in the houses, the preparation to Christmas goes in different ways: or by making time for Advent and Christmasstories and songs, or by working on the Oberufer play and singing the Oberufer songs.

Together with the villagers of Munte and the Waldorfschool in Munte, we made posters for every fellow villager in Munte, to hang up at the window, as a Christmas greeting for all the neighbours and all the people who come to walk these days in our beautiful environment. And of course the 5 kilometers walk with 7 nativity scenes was set up, as every year.



So, no Christmas play with an audience, no Christmas celebration with the village of Munte.

But most of all, for our adults with learning disabilities, the obvious and natural relation with parents, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbours was and is completely turned upside down.

The fear to contaminate or to be contaminated by the coronavirus affected everything and everyone. We had to make choices because of rules that come from the federal Government and from our own Flemish state agency for people with learning disabilities. Contacts have to be diminished, houses and workshops separated, co-workers have to wear mouth masks, washing hands, holding distance, everyone in the world knows these rules.

'knuffelcontact' (hugging contact) is an often used word and this kind of contact is seen as the most 'dangerous' one to contaminate each other. Of course, for many of our adults, hugging is vital for their wellbeing. Families and co-workers have to balance between safety and wellbeing.

But Corona gave us, Christoforusgemeenschap, also the time to reflect on the daily life. To reflect on what is essential and to slow down the everyday rush. To take more time to speak with our adults, to take time to exchange experiences and feelings before rushing forward. Some families experienced the unexpected comforting feeling that their son or daughter was at ease, although they could not go home every week or every fortnight. Alternatives like e-connection were tried out, although it is only a substitute and the real contact remains the most important.

Patrick, one of the adults who lives in a sheltered house in the village, together with 2 other men, describes his 'Corona'-year as follows:

"Hey best friends from over the whole world, who joined the international congresses! Here a letter from Patrick from the Christoforusgemeenschap in Munte. The corona era keeps us on a leash. Normally I visited my parents every Sunday, but from the 12th of March till the beginning of July, and since 12th of September till now, I am without going home and family visits. It is impossible for me, because of my father's situation. He is 81 years old, heart problems and parkinson are his main problems. But still, I remain optimistic. It is not always easy, but with the help of the Christoforusgemeenschap, I get through it. I PROMISE! Even it is not possible now to take the bus, to go and visit cities and so on.

Now that we come to the end of the year, I wish you all a merry Christmas and a very joyful new year 2021.

God Bless You and God Bless Every Country, Greetings to Everybody, Patrick De Wulf"



4. Call to our parents “Christmas in that time”

Dear parents,

We hope you have a nice Christmas time, despite this annoying corona period. We wish you strength and wisdom to get through this period!

You may send us pictures of your Christmas and New Years’ celebration – or for example in the institute of your son or daughter / brother or sister - with a very short description, which we can put in the **next Link in January 2021.**

Thoughts of the ECCE Vice-President

In the last ECCE Link (October ’20), Luisa Valeria Sapia of the Italian Association for Anthroposophical Curative Education and Social Therapy, concluded her article about the Covid-19 pandemic with its many unavoidable consequences that influence and shape all spheres of human existence:

“We can’t help but point out that disability is liable to become more and more invisible and confined, on one hand because of the limits and regulations set by inappropriate and too rigid restrictions, on the other hand because of the globally increasing and rapidly evolving social inequalities. We also ask ourselves how can we really meet the needs of children and teenagers, more and more confined in spaces (not only physically) where it is hard to find adequate nourishment for the soul.

Bearing this all in mind, we can say that it is the experience of being at the threshold that unites all of us as humanity, and calls upon us to care and value the small and smallest, so as to see our tiny actions as “distilled” from light-filled purposes, replenished with heart forces.”

Bernard Heldt



ECCE is wishing you and yours a happy, healthy, and abundant

