

## The European experience of II Colloquium JESEDU-global2021 (by Ilse Dekker, JECSE Director)

*More than 80 European representatives participated in the second JESEDU colloquium, intended for colleagues in leadership positions in our Jesuit Global Network of Schools, just before the summer holidays. This colloquium, originally intended to take place in the summer of 2020 in Indonesia, now took place online with around 400 participants worldwide. With four strands – on educating for faith, for depth, for reconciliation and for global citizenship – the colloquium circled around the main theme of ‘Discerning for a Hope-filled future’. The Asia-Pacific Region designed the program, containing 8 interesting key-note speeches and some beautiful video’s animated by students and alumni, in close collaboration with the Educate Magis Team which facilitated two rounds of global as well as regional (European) discernment circles.*

As for their main takeaways from the experience of the colloquium in general, our European participants mentioned that, whilst it would have been better to meet in person, there was still great excitement in meeting so many people from around the world and engaging in conversation with them. The Discernment Circles were rich and made it possible to really live the experience, and it was consoling to feel part of this global Ignatian family, sharing similar challenges and hopes. It was mainly a precious opportunity to reflect on our ministry and to widen our perspective, reaching out to other realities in our world, and the (really challenging) strands were very well selected. Making available the pre-recorded keynotes, with the pre-colloquium time to reflect for ourselves first, was very helpful. Last but not least, the methodology of the spiritual conversation was experienced as an inspiring and powerful method for deep listening and discerning our motions, even online!

### On the four strands

For our regional conversations our European participants engaged themselves with the strand they considered most relevant in their local and the general European context today. It was strongly felt though, that all four are very important for our education and very much interconnected.

#### *Educating for Faith*

Participants repeatedly commented that ‘Educating for Faith’ was what made Jesuit schools distinctive; without this faith dimension the schools would be no different to any other school. The Catholic tradition offers a wonderful narrative and sees the educational project from an eternal perspective. The Christian narrative transcends the small worlds and limited perspectives that dominate the lives of our students. It offers a vision of life that is filled with hope and purpose. Furthermore, the narrative is inclusive and reaches out to everybody. The insights and practices of faith have something very practical to offer young people. In fact, they provide an antidote to many of the negative aspects of young people’s life experiences. Sometimes, we can be shy about presenting our narrative, preferring to speak about values instead. But we need to speak about God, about the transcendent; the challenge is to do so in clear and attractive terms. We are challenged as educators to be authentic and to be a witness ourselves in this way. Related to this is the on-going need for staff formation, providing opportunities (and resources) for staff to encounter God.

#### *Educating for Reconciliation*

Around ‘Educating for Reconciliation’ it was mentioned **that** modern society is very fragmented; there is no longer a strong sense of societal cohesion and social solidarity. The gap between rich and poor is growing as is the frustration and anger that this inevitably gives rise to. Thus the need to bring people together, to bridge the gaps and reconcile differences, has never been greater. Leadership in many of our countries is very populist and the quality of political discourse is coarsened by simplistic slogans and hate-filled policies. There is a real need for our students – armed with the Christian world view and the values of Catholic social teaching – to consider being politically active. This larger and more generous and hope-filled perspective is badly needed at the highest

political levels. In our schools it would be important to better listen to the students themselves ,who can surprise us by their depth!

### *Educating for depth*

Although 'Educating for depth' is very much connected to the other three strands, most European participants feel that depth is key, since a meaningful landing of the other strands would only be possible through an in-depth process. Depth is the power of Jesuit education and our responsibility; our counterpoison to superficiality. Depth is the doorway to seeing God in all things amidst everything distracting us. It offers an integrated way to work from the Gospel, bringing meaningful (and reconciling) experiences to students and teachers. Depth is part of our spiritual and faith life but also part of (inclusive) personal life in general; thus it is also a way of building bridges between people with different beliefs.

Living in these fast times, depth is all the more important and, in this context, it is also a social challenge. Teaching, learning and relating can be like a superficial puzzle, very wide but very flat; in education we can decide to either just widen the puzzle or to help teachers and students to teach, learn and relate in a different, deeper way. We feel this is critical for Europe, were we now have a very poor understanding of education (as if it would just have to do with making money and being successful). Our schools too are too much focused on academic results, which brings in competition and does not help to bring in more depth. We need to find ways for deeper types of evaluation. This is especially true during this time of the pandemic, which is calling for a slower, deeper kind of spiritual life and for discovering new ways of living and leading, relating and reconciling, to overcome the globalization of superficiality. Depth will transform the whole school and better care of both teachers and leaders in our schools; to help them ask deep questions as a key point in life.

### *Educating for Global Citizenship*

Educating for Global Citizenship, finally, is considered a core project with great potential as a framework for our renewal. What we call global citizenship must coincide with global thinking; we need to think globally and act locally. A challenge is to find a good equilibrium between reflection and action. What can be integrated in the curriculum is helpful, but activities on their own do not create the narrative. Global Citizenship is a project of the three H's: Head, Heart, and Hands, not just focussed on academic excellence. When the project become the tools and the engagement we are putting into practice the IPP.

We therefore need more time for reflection in our schools, and we also need to take care of our employees. The discernment circle strongly sensed the need to educate for depth from a deeper faith and to accompany the teachers on this path of faith formation and reconciliation, in openness to teach from the perspective of the Spiritual Exercises. In general (our very busy) teachers are worried that we demand more work from them, but Global Citizenship is something that can be integrated within their curriculum.

### **To conclude**

Finally, there would be a desire to create more similar opportunities, at the global as well as European level. The themes were relevant, and we would need more time to deepen them. These meetings help improve our understanding of how our Ignatian schools work and make us aware that we have a common language while at the same time celebrating our diversity. We need to reach out to other schools through Educate Magis, which makes it possible to walk as a network despite our distances, to have deep conversations in this digital way, to offer this experience to our students as well, and to address these deep topics which can be truly transformative!