



# An Annual Celebration of Democratic Education

EUDEC/IDEC 2025 Report



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# INTRODUCTION

## What? When? Where?

In August 2025, from 1 to 7 August, the European and International Conferences of the Democratic Education Communities (IDEC) converged in Belgium under the banner IDEC@EUDEC 2025. The venue was De Kluis, a youth residence in the forested area of Meerdaalwoud, in Sint-Joris-Weert, near Leuven. This marked the first time either of the two conferences has been hosted in Belgium.

QUEST was proud to be one of the official organizers of this conference, alongside Orvita, CollectiveUp, Kenny Vranken, and Sigrid Delmotte contributing actively to its organization, programming, and overall vision. Our involvement reflected our core commitment to advancing equitable and participatory models of education.

## Purpose and Theme

The conference's guiding theme was "Democratic Education: a Culture of Dialogue", signaling a focus on mutual listening, equity in discourse, shared power, and bridging divides between education models, communities, cultures, and age groups.

It aimed to bring together educators, students, researchers, activists, parents, and organizations from around the world to share practice, theory, innovations, challenges, and to co-create new pathways in democratic and self-directed education. Open Space formats were central, enabling participants to propose sessions, host circles, convene workshops, and engage in dynamic interchange.

# OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

**01**

To introduce and strengthen democratic education in Belgium, and raise awareness on self-directed, participatory educational models that exist all around the world.

**02**

To provide a platform for exchange for democratic education practitioners globally, fostering networks, peer learning and collective action.

**03**

To foster dialogue among children, young people, educators, parents, activists, and communities across cultures on power, authority, inclusion, decolonization and transformation in education.

**04**

To bridge research and practice in the field of rights-based education.

**05**

To bridge traditional and alternative education philosophies improving mutual learning and integrating approaches.



# PARTICIPATION & PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

## Participation Overview

The conference brought together participants from around the world, including educators, students, youth workers, academics, and professionals working with and for children. In total, 379 individuals from 42 countries across all continents attended. This rich diversity of cultural and professional backgrounds helped contextualize education in different countries and provided valuable insights into best practices, fostering opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas.

The most represented countries were Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, South Korea, Italy, Poland, and Turkey.







## Programme Structure

The week-long IDEC@EUDEC 2025 conference unfolded through a vibrant mix of pre-arranged sessions and spontaneously self-organized activities, all open to an intergenerational audience. Each day officially began after breakfast, with sessions running from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., including a mid-day break for lunch and informal exchanges.

Alongside the main program, there were spaces and activities especially welcoming for children, such as building a treehouse together with older peers and parents, as well as drawing sessions and forest walks. A youth tent was also set up, offering young participants a place to self-organize and host their own activities, discussions, and creative workshops.

Evenings brought a rich variety of experiences, from music performances and storytelling circles to shared meals and drinks at the bar, which, as night fell, transformed into a lively dance floor.



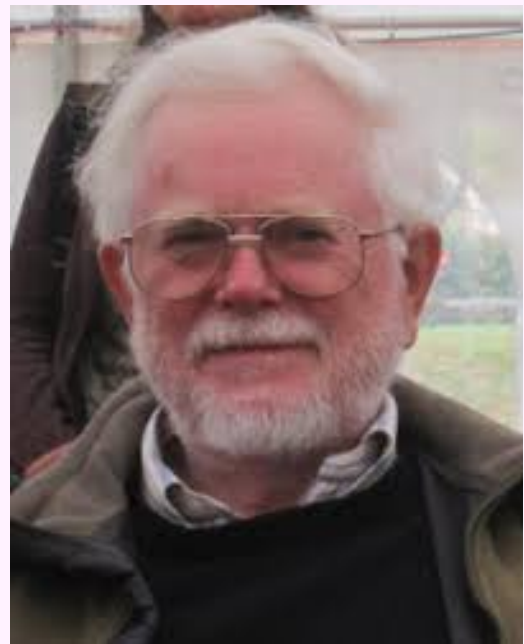
# SPEAKERS & WORKSHOPS



## Another Way is Possible: How to Be a Democratic Teacher in a State School & the 20% Project

**Speaker:** Derry Hannam

This session explored practical strategies for integrating democratic principles into state schooling, even within the constraints of traditional education systems. Hannam drew on his experience as an educator and advocate for student participation, illustrating how teachers can create spaces where students have real voice and choice.



Key topics included:

- Student autonomy: How to give learners meaningful responsibility for decisions about their learning and classroom life.
- The 20% Project: A framework where students spend 20% of their time pursuing self-directed projects, encouraging creativity, inquiry, and ownership of learning.
- Balancing curriculum and freedom: Practical tips for meeting state requirements while maintaining democratic practices.
- Teacher mindset: Emphasizing reflective practice, collaboration, and trust in students' abilities.
- Case studies: Examples from schools that have successfully implemented democratic teaching strategies within state systems.



# AI and AGI Are Changing Everything – What world are we preparing students for?

**Speaker:** Sebastian Deichmann



This workshop focused on the future we are heading toward and why the traditional school system may struggle to adapt. It considered the role of democratic schools in this transformation and our responsibility in shaping what comes next.

## Structure:

- Part 1: Presentation on the challenges ahead and the implications for the world and democratic education.
- Part 2: Open discussion on collective responsibility and possible next steps.

## Key Takeaways:

- The rapidly changing world due to AI and AGI challenges traditional approaches to education.
- Democratic schools have a role in preparing students to navigate and influence this future.
- Collective responsibility is essential: educators, students, and communities must engage in shaping educational practices.
- Emphasis on discussion and collaboration to impact the future of education.



## Decolonising Curriculum at Our Democratic School



### Speaker: Eve Tonkin

Eve Tonkin shared her experience of creating a decolonised curriculum at a democratic school in Aotearoa New Zealand. It included a presentation followed by Q&A and space for participants' reflections. The session focused on the reasons for undertaking this work, the processes used, the challenges encountered, and ongoing efforts.

### Key Questions Explored:

- Is the European democratic model a perfect fit in post-colonial or colonised countries?
- How might traditional democratic education be challenged by indigenous perspectives on the nature of reality?
- In what ways might learning communities benefit from these perspectives?

### Key Takeaways:

- Decolonising the curriculum requires examining whose knowledge and perspectives are prioritized.
- Democratic schools can integrate indigenous insights to enrich learning and create more inclusive communities.
- Reflection, discussion, and ongoing adaptation are central to the work of decolonising education.

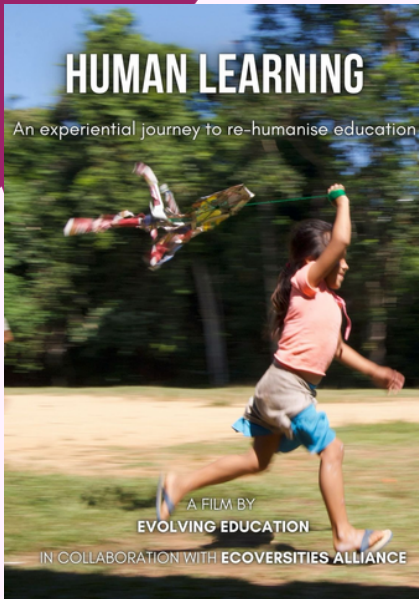
## What is a Democratic School?

The session explored the concept of a democratic school, examining its principles, practices, and unique approach to education. Participants discussed how democratic schools differ from traditional schools in terms of governance, curriculum, and student participation. Key themes explored were student voice, participatory governance, collaborative and experiential learning, and shared responsibility within the school community.



**Speakers:** Karl Geller & Olivia Grégoire





## Human Learning

**Speakers:** Luz Olid and David Caballero

This workshop was an experiential exploration of human learning, combining mindfulness exercises, group co-creation activities, and the premiere of the short documentary film Human Learning. The film highlighted innovative education projects from the USA, Spain, Mexico, and Colombia. The session was facilitated by Luz Olid and David Caballero from Evolving Education.

## Mainstreaming Democratic Education

**Speaker:** Sifaan Zavahir

The session addressed the ongoing marginalization of democratic education, despite over a century of democratic schooling and more than three decades of the IDEC community. With mainstream education systems increasingly authoritarian, the discussion focused on strategies to bring democratic practices into mainstream schools and gain state recognition and support for existing democratic schools.



### Key Points:

- Democratic education remains an “alternative” despite its long history and global community.
- Mainstreaming democratic practices requires legal and systemic strategies, including leveraging International Human Rights Law.
- The session built on prior initiatives, such as the IDEC 2023 Resolution on Compulsory Education and EUDEC 2024 sessions on Human/Child Rights.
- Proposals included developing a Quality Assurance System to support all education environments, democratic schools, mainstream schools, and family-based education, in becoming more democratic.



## Learning Maths and Geometry Through Movement and Imagination

**Speaker:** Pavel Kraemer

Pavel Kraemer invited participants to rethink how maths and geometry can be taught by connecting learning to the whole body and the emotional life of students.

Traditional methods—mechanical, rigid, and often anti-democratic—fail to inspire curiosity, and online self-learning alone is insufficient. Through movement, imagination, and embodied experiences, the session showcased how maths and science can become engaging, meaningful, and participatory.

## Fundamental Rights as a Tool to Claim Freedom of Education?

**Speaker:** Katy Alli  
Representing ALLI asb

Katy Alli invited participants to explore how fundamental rights can serve as a framework for guiding decisions in education, with a focus on the right to education. The workshop examined how institutionalized rights can foster consensus—such as setting standards for quality assurance—even across cultural differences or conflicting views.



Participants also gained insights into how courts and international institutions interpret broad concepts like “dignity” or “violence,” clarifying what can be claimed from legal and political perspectives.

### Key Takeaways:

- Fundamental rights provide both opportunities and limitations for advocating educational freedom.
- Legal frameworks can support democratic and inclusive practices in schools.
- Interactive discussions emphasized the practical application of rights in real-world educational and political contexts.

## 25-Year History of Democratic University in Japan: Tekisen Democratic University

**Speaker:** Kageki Asakura

This session highlighted the development and practices of Tekisen Democratic University (TDU), celebrating its 25-year anniversary. TDU has established strong collaborations with democratic working organizations and aims to realize a lifelong democratic way of life. The session featured insights from the university's director and former students/staff on how the democratic university was founded, how it operates, and how it continues to promote participatory and democratic education.





# Training the Teachers of Tomorrow: How to Adapt to an Ever-Changing World

**Speaker:** Giulia Magno

Giulia Magno introduced participants to the core ideas behind The Necessary Teacher Training College, emphasizing the need for a new approach to educator training in an ever-changing world. The workshop included interactive exercises showcasing principles such as learning by doing, community engagement, and learning through travel. Participants—students, educators, and facilitators alike—gained practical ideas and tools to inspire their own teaching and learning practices.



## Reinventing Democracy

**Speaker:** Nuwan Dissanayaka

The core idea presented is that everything on Earth is subject to extinction. However, the species that evolve demonstrate a greater capacity for survival than those that remain static. For humanity, education is presented as the essential tool supporting this ongoing evolutionary process.

Specifically, Democratic Education is a framework that actively nurtures the qualities necessary for this evolution.

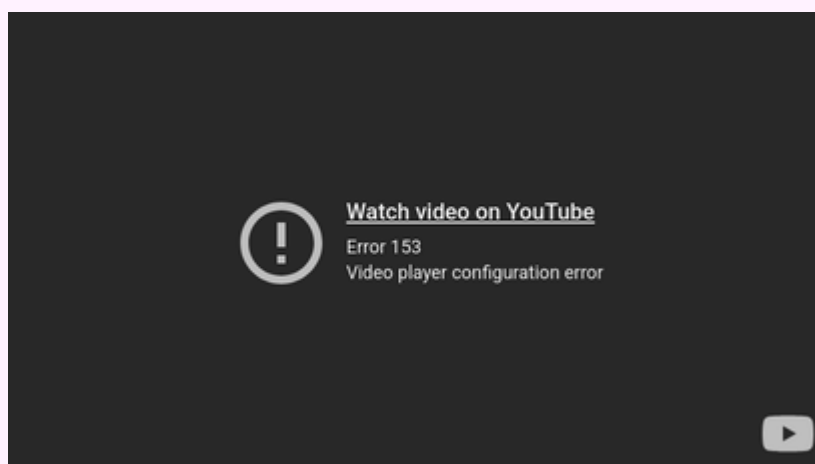


The concept of Democracy itself is not static; it has been continuously evolving over time. Given the scale of modern global challenges, it is now a critical juncture—a "high time"—for democracy to take its next crucial evolutionary step. This necessary reinvention is presented as the key to ensuring humanity's continued survival and preventing its own extinction.

### Key Points:

- **Extinction is universal:** All Earthly life is vulnerable to extinction.
- **Evolution enables survival:** Species that evolve are more likely to survive than those that remain unchanged.
- **Education as humanity's evolutionary tool:** Human evolution now depends largely on education as the mechanism that supports continued adaptation.
- **Democratic Education as essential:** Democratic Education is identified as a framework that cultivates the qualities humans need to continue evolving.
- **Democracy is evolving, not static:** The concept of democracy has continually changed throughout history.
- **A critical moment for democracy:** Current global challenges signal that democracy must undergo its next major evolutionary shift.
- **Reinventing democracy is vital for survival:** This reinvention is framed as necessary to prevent humanity from facing its own extinction.

### The journey so far:



1. Braintdance - go with your biology: a movement snack
2. Meditations - movement in stillness and in motion
3. Reflections - intuition, embodied awareness, and integrative learning



## Mathematical Resilience: Empowering Students with Math Anxiety

**Speaker:** Abdulvahap Yorgun

Abdulvahap Yorgun's workshop focused on understanding math anxiety, its predictors, and strategies to support students, teachers, and parents in addressing it. The session introduced the concept of **mathematical resilience** as a model to help reduce math anxiety and empower learners to approach mathematics with confidence.



## Power Dynamics and Trauma in Education

**Contributor:** Marie Pons



Marie Pons led participants on a journey into the hidden currents of power and trauma that flow through society—and often through our schools. She explored how educational institutions can unconsciously reproduce societal hierarchies, while democratic schools strive to create spaces where equality, empowerment, and harmony are possible. The session invited reflection on our own internalized power patterns and considered how we can consciously break cycles of trauma to support children's growth.

## Sociocracy and More...

**Speakers:** Dorianne de Groot & Ruud Van Middelaar



Imagine a space where every voice truly matters, decisions are shaped by listening rather than arguing, and perspectives can shift without conflict, this is the world of sociocracy. Dorianne de Groot and Ruud Van Middelaar guided participants through the transformative principles of sociocracy, showing how consent-based decision-making allows communities to act together while honoring individual viewpoints.

Drawing on over 20 years of experience at De Ruimte in the Netherlands, they also introduced holacracy and non-violent communication as complementary tools to create democratic, collaborative educational environments.

## Youth Social Projects as a Path to Democratic Participation

**Speaker:** Olga Kulesza

Olga Kulesza invited participants to explore how young people can move from caring about their community to taking meaningful action in their local environment. The workshop examined youth-led social projects within democratic education settings as a pathway to empower students as active participants in democratic society.



Drawing on real-life examples, participants reflected on the role of adults in supporting youth engagement, mapped students' journeys from awareness to action, and exchanged practical tools for mentoring and sustaining initiatives. The session encouraged sharing experiences, reflection, and left participants with inspiration and concrete ideas to bring back to their schools or communities.

# What Will The Future of Democratic Education Look Like?

**Facilitator:** Charlie Moreno-Romero



Charlie Moreno-Romero facilitated a panel discussion on the evolving landscape of democratic education. The session focused on envisioning the future of democratic schools, exploring emerging challenges, innovations, and opportunities for fostering participatory, inclusive, and student-centered learning. Participants engaged in dialogue on how democratic education can adapt, grow, and maintain its relevance in rapidly changing social and educational contexts.

## The Anti-Learning Culture

**Speaker:** Ian Cunningham

In this thought-provoking session, Ian Cunningham challenged participants to confront an uncomfortable truth: modern society has developed an aversion to genuine learning. Schools, universities, and institutions often perpetuate a system that fragments knowledge into rigid subjects, neglects moral responsibility, and overlooks holistic understanding. Drawing from his experience as a research chemist, Cunningham illustrated how the moral implications of scientific and educational choices are routinely ignored. He argued that learning should reconnect with ethics, curiosity, and the complex realities of the world. The session concluded with a call to move beyond conventional schooling and rediscover a culture of deep, systemic learning—if we are willing to listen





## Alternative Education and the Alternative School Network of South Korea

**Contributor:** Jeon Jeong-il

Jeon Jeong-il shared the remarkable two-decade journey of Malgeunsaem School, a pioneering institution within South Korea's alternative education movement. The session highlighted how the school has challenged conventional educational norms, fostering a learner-centered environment grounded in freedom, creativity, and community. Reflecting on twenty years of innovation, Jeon discussed both the achievements and ongoing challenges of building and sustaining an alternative school network, while offering a vision for the future of democratic and holistic education in South Korea.



## The Value of Democratic Education in Times of War

**Contributor:** Kateryna Botvinnik



Kateryna Botvinnik shared the story of a democratic school in Ukraine surviving three years of full-scale war. She reflected on how the invasion transformed their community and strengthened their commitment to empathy, solidarity, and democratic values. The session highlighted the power of education to foster resilience, peacebuilding, and collective strength even in times of conflict.

## Beyond Protest: Consequences of Missing Democratic Education and Paths to a More Participatory Public School

**Contributor:** Chiara Paganuzzi

Chiara Paganuzzi reflected on the state of democratic education within Italy's public school system through the lens of a student protest that escalated into violence and legal action. Using this case study, she examined how the absence of democratic practices can lead to conflict, disengagement, and weakened learning communities.



The session explored strategies for embedding student voice and participation into mainstream education, drawing inspiration from democratic school principles to envision more inclusive and collaborative public schooling.

## Measuring Democratic Education: How? Why? What?

**Speaker:** Juraj Mazak, representing Slobodna Skola



Juraj Mazak facilitated a collaborative discussion on developing tools to research and track the progress or actual levels of skills and knowledge in democratic education. Participants brainstormed what should be measured and how, engaging in hands-on reflection to shape practical approaches for assessment in democratic learning environments.



## Reclaiming Dignity: Democratic Education as a Pillar Against Girls Trafficking in Nepal

**Contributor:** Meeta Rai

Meeta Rai examined the alarming rates of girls trafficking in Nepal, highlighting how lack of education, especially for girls in rural and marginalized communities, drives vulnerability. She presented democratic education as a powerful tool to empower girls, fostering critical thinking, rights awareness, gender equality, and active participation in society. The session focused on how such education can prevent trafficking and help girls reclaim their dignity and future.



## Learning for Real: An Unschooling Diary

**Speaker:** Kiti Põld



In the presentation, Kiti Põld shared how her family chose to leave the traditional school system and embark on a journey of **unschooling**, documenting three months in Viljandi, Estonia, during which learning unfolded naturally through everyday life. They placed this experience in the broader context of society's strong trust in institutional education, noting growing stress and mental-health challenges among young people, and questioning why unschooling—full freedom to learn—is still often viewed with suspicion, even as homeschooling gains acceptance.

During the lockdown (March–June 2020), the speaker’s children—**Pihla (12), Vihur (10), and Piibe (7)**—followed their **natural impulses to learn**, engaging spontaneously in reading, crafting, building, filmmaking, and exploration, driven by curiosity rather than obligation. The speaker recorded their thoughts, quotes, and creative expressions, showing how education occurs in everyday life—in the kitchen, garden, forest, and even bedtime conversations.

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The experience revealed that children have **innate talents and interests**, waking up motivated and happy, and it positively influenced the family’s overall well-being. The book is presented not as a manual but as an **honest family story**, illustrating that **love, freedom, rest, and inner drive** may be the true foundations of education when trusted.

### Key Points:

- The presentation described a family’s choice to leave traditional school and try unschooling for three months in Viljandi, Estonia, documenting learning that happened naturally.
- It highlighted the tension between society’s trust in institutional education and growing youth stress, questioning why unschooling is often viewed with suspicion.
- During the lockdown (March–June 2020), the children — Pihla, Vihur, and Piibe — followed their natural impulses to learn, engaging in creative and curious activities without school pressure.
- The diary captured their experiences, showing that education occurs in everyday life and emphasizing the importance of love, freedom, rest, and inner drive as the foundation of learning.
- The book is an honest family story, not a manual, illustrating how children flourish when trusted to follow their interests.

## Democratic Education in Early Ages: Self-Awareness, Respect, and Participation in Safe Spaces

**Contributor:** Gabriel Groiss



Gabriel Groiss discussed how democratic education can support children under 10, exploring whether democratic schools can meet the diverse needs of very young learners, especially those without high-quality early childhood experiences. Participants shared experiences and ideas for accommodating different developmental stages, and envisioned what democratic kindergartens could look like. The session highlighted early childhood as a crucial stage for fostering self-awareness, respect, and participatory learning.

## Learning Differently: Self-Directed Education and Neurodiversity

**Speaker:** Dr. Naomi Fisher

Dr. Naomi explained how self-directed learning supports children that learn differently from the standardized school model. The session highlighted how allowing learners to follow their own pace and interests provides meaningful opportunities for growth, particularly for neurodiverse students, and why embracing these differences is essential for inclusive education.



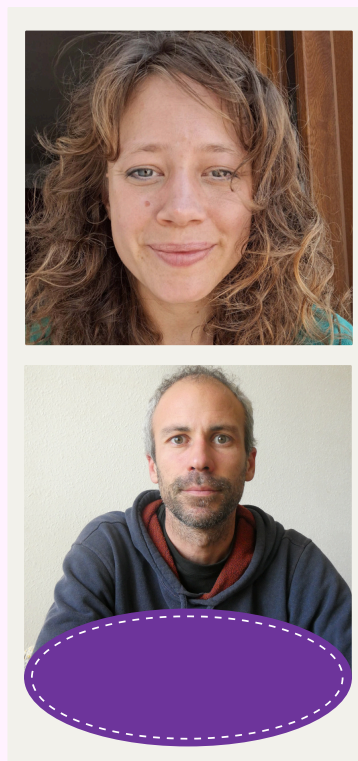


## A School to Follow Your Inner Spark!

### Discover a Project in the South of Belgium

**Contributor:** Aurélie Manneback & Raphaël Mellado

This participatory workshop invited attendees to explore Les Herbes Hautes, a parental-led homeschooling collective in southern Belgium. Starting from children's passions and impulses, the session focused on creating a daily life full of discovery, joy, and learning. Through movement, play, sharing, and reflection, participants reconsidered how adults can reconnect with this purpose, unlearn habits and break down barriers, learning both from children and the child within themselves



## Seeing Without Eyes: Learning in Dialogue with Our Inner Knowing

**Speaker:** Sabrina De Troyer & Karen Buts



This experiential workshop explored learning as a process of trust, dialogue and inner wisdom rather than predetermined goals. The facilitators invited participants to witness how children naturally access their inner knowledge through play and connection, and to reflect how adults can create spaces to nurture this innate awareness. Inspired by Gelukkig Kind, the workshop blended embodied practice, observation, and reflection to rediscover learning as a shared awakening.



# Most Schools Spread a Cultural Disease

**Contributor:** Don Berg

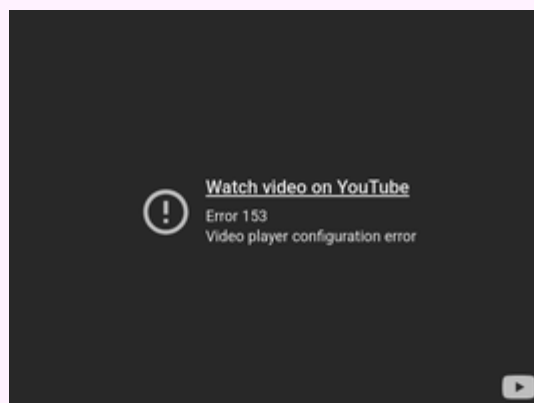
Transforming the global systems of schooling requires a story that can bridge the mythical, the scientific, and the historical. A story that can weave together diverse threads of activism, professional practices, cultural preservation, identity, psychology, and more. Come to hear a new take on how all our work comes together with the history of life on earth, the history of humanity, and the history of schooling. Don Berg brings a hopeful tale that puts it all into perspective and calls for strategic coordination of our efforts.



## Key Points:

- Transforming global schooling requires a unifying story that connects myth, science, and history.
- Education change must integrate diverse fields such as activism, professional practice, cultural preservation, identity, and psychology.
- The proposed narrative situates schooling within the history of life on Earth, humanity, and educational systems.
- Don Berg offers a hopeful perspective that helps make sense of how all these elements fit together.
- The message includes a call for strategic coordination across efforts to improve education.

You can view the presentation of Don Berg's talk on Youtube



**Website:** <https://www.HolisticEquity.org>  
**YouTube Channel:** <https://www.youtube.com/@DonBerg>



# Braindance – Go with Your Biology

**Contributor:** Marika Rein

- Short “movement snacks” based on Anne Green Gilbert’s Braindance method.
- Supports body–mind integration, coordination, attention, and emotional balance.
- Offered multiple times a day to help participants ground, reset, and enhance receptivity.
- Highlights the value of dedicated spaces and times for embodied practice.



## Meditations – Movement in Stillness and in Motion

- Guided meditations tailored to the group’s energy: either stillness or gentle movement.
- Focus on presence, grounding, stress regulation, and resilience (e.g., Earthing practices).
- Emphasizes the importance of integrating restorative, embodied sessions in educator training and conferences.

## Reflections – Intuition, Embodied Awareness, and Integrative Learning

- Exploration of intuition as a vital form of perception, beyond intellect alone.
- Encourages freeing oneself from conditioning, beliefs, and inherited structures to support democratic decision-making.
- Uses movement, nature connection, creativity, and emotional awareness as pathways to intuitive learning.
- Highlights how embodied self-knowledge enhances empathy, clarity, and responsible relationships with others and nature.



# CREATIVE ACTIVITIES AND GAMES



## Tie Your Blessing: Korean Jangmyeongru Craft Experience

**Contributors:** GOYANG FREE SCHOOL

Participants joined an interesting craft workshop to create their own Jangmyeongru bracelet, a traditional Korean talisman symbolizing health, happiness, and longevity. The session introduced the cultural significance of Jangmyeongru, historically tied around a child's wrist on their birthday to wish them a long life. Participants learned the symbolic meaning behind each knot and color while weaving a bracelet filled with personal wishes. No prior experience was required, only hands and heart.



## That Time We Made Decisions Together: Campfire Storytelling on Collaborative/Democratic Governance

**Contributors:** Will Gowen & Katrin Brait

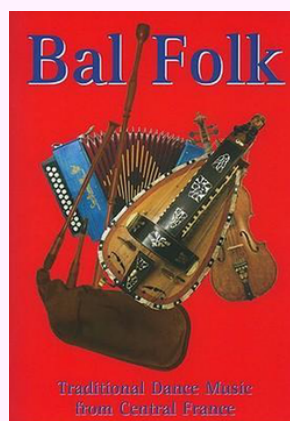


This interactive storytelling session focused on shared decision-making in educational communities. Participants gathered in a circle to share, listen, and learn from experiences with collaborative governance, workplace/school democracy, and collective intelligence. The session emphasized successes (what worked well and why) while fostering reflection and shared learning

## Bal Folk

**Contributor:** Folk Dance Group

This session offered a folk dance initiation, followed by a lively folk dance ball with live music. Participants were guided through traditional dance steps before enjoying a communal dance evening!



## Korean Playground Time: Learn & Play Bisukchigi

**Speaker:** Tien Tse Chu

During the conference, participants gathered outdoors to experience Bisukchigi (비석치기), a traditional Korean folk game once loved by children across Korea. The Goyang Free School team introduced the simple yet dynamic rules (knocking down a stack of stones by throwing your own) and shared the cultural history behind the game.



## Movie Screening – Documentary: Invisible Nation

**Speaker:** Tien Tse Chu



Invisible Nation is a documentary that tells the story of Taiwan, a long-colonized island striving to preserve its hard-won democracy, autonomy, and freedom from authoritarian aggression. The film offers a compelling portrait of Taiwan's first female president, Tsai Ing-wen, highlighting the island's ongoing struggle for political and social self-determination.



## Forum Theater

**Organizer:** Common Ground

Participants engaged in an interactive forum theater session, exploring real-life scenarios of discrimination in a school setting (bullying) and work settings (racism and sexism), through role-play. The workshop encouraged the spect-actors to play the role of the oppressed, oppressor, or bystander, while reflecting and collectively experimenting with solutions or ways to intervene when witnessing power dynamics at play.



## Deaf Cat Concert

Deaf Cat took the stage and offered a dynamic performance for all the participants. With a mix of post-grunge, punk and metal they electrified the crowd regardless of age! By the end the audience was buzzing, reminded how live music may bring people together.

## The Art of Hangeul on Korean Traditional Fans

**Speaker:** Goyang Free School

Participants engaged in a hands-on cultural activity, learning to write their names in **Hangeul**, the Korean alphabet, on traditional Korean fans. The activity celebrated centuries of Korean artistry, where fans were adorned with calligraphy, paintings, and poems, transforming everyday objects into personal works of art. Attendees created their own meaningful souvenirs while experiencing a unique aspect of Korean cultural heritage.



## Taiwanese Breakfast

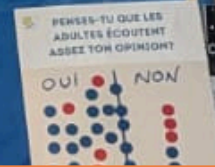
**Speaker:** TNNA Taiwanl

Attendees were welcomed at the Birch House Kitchen to savor a traditional Taiwanese breakfast. Beyond tasting local flavors, the gathering became a lively space for cultural exchange, conversation, and starting the day together with warmth and community.





CONNECTING  
FOR  
EDUCATIONAL  
CHANGE



# QUEST CONTRIBUTIONS

SESSIONS RUN, SPEAKERS, SUPPORT ROLES

## QUEST's Youth Advisory Board Members: Conversations on the Future of Democratic Education

**Speakers:** Mohini Söderling & Laya Auriya

As part of QUEST's Youth Advisory Board, Mohini and Laya participated in the conference as QUEST's ambassadors. Together they led a presentation sharing the early stages of their research on democratic education, inviting participants into a reflection on its impact. The session explored what it truly takes to support learners, the challenges encountered when stepping outside traditional systems, and ways to co-imagine grounded yet adaptable approaches for alternative education.





## Academic Panel

The academic panel took place on Sunday, 3 August, moderated by Martina Paone - Coordinator of QUEST- and brought together scholars from several countries to discuss current research and practices in democratic education in higher education. The session explored two main dimensions: current avenues of academic research on democratic education—particularly self-directed learning and participatory processes—and practical approaches to implementing democratic principles in teaching, curriculum design, and institutional culture.



Three invited panelists delivered a presentation followed by a moderated discussion and an open Q&A session. Firstly, John O Railly from Limerick University presented his research on negotiated curriculum and its application in the Irish Primary School curriculum. Secondly, Tabatha Carton from the University of Mons exposed her research on how to reconcile educational freedom with societal constraints, based on an in-depth study of democratic schools in Belgium. She explored the tensions between pedagogical autonomy, institutional requirements, and social expectation. Finally, Andreas Hinz explored his academic journey at the University of Halle, and the trajectory to broaden the space of discussion about democratic and inclusive education.

The panel also served as a platform for building international connections, exchanging ideas, and strengthening collaboration between higher education institutions committed to inclusive and participatory models of learning.



## QUEST's Member Forums



Since many of our members are part of the Democratic Education community and attend the conference every year, we have decided to hold three of our four member forums in person at this year's event. This strengthened connections within our network and helped us engage with potential new members, who had the opportunity to witness our assemblies.

### **MF Inclusion in Education**

At this year's Inclusion Forum we focused on students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and examined how education systems across Europe continue to marginalize the experiences of certain groups. We began by discussing the challenges educators face in motivating students who belong to non-dominant communities such as migrants, LGBTQI students, and Roma students, who often feel detached from school activities and are overrepresented in early school leaving statistics.

We also presented our DECUS project, highlighting its mission to decolonize European education systems. We introduced members to the tools, training, and resources developed within the project to support the creation of inclusive education plans. Participants were encouraged to share these methodologies with their peers and to reflect on their impact when implemented in their own classrooms.

Finally, we introduced the EU Child Guarantee, raising awareness of this initiative and its emphasis on inclusive education. We also outlined QUEST's policy work aimed at strengthening national implementation plans and promoting the adoption of practices aligned with those developed through DECUS.



### **MF on democratic education**

Inspired by the overarching objective of this conference to bridge traditional and alternative education philosophies and promote mutual learning and integrated approaches, we discussed the importance of scaling rights-based education both among practitioners and at higher policy levels.



During the forum, Rights Centric Education presented its Democratic Education Quality Assurance System, designed to ensure the high-quality implementation of rights-based education. In addition, our members shared the everyday challenges they face in democratic schools, particularly in contexts where democratic values are under pressure. These insights informed the development of our guidelines for educators in democratic schools, helping them address such challenges more effectively.

Finally, we emphasized the role of our members as ambassadors of democratic education within their local and national communities. This involves connecting with educators in public schools and participating in national advocacy efforts to secure recognition of alternative and rights-based pedagogies at the policy level. By doing so, our members contribute to advancing democratic education as a fundamental right for every child.

### **MF on Community and Citizenship in Lifelong Learning**

The Member Forum centered on the guiding theme “How society could benefit from democratic education inputs”. The discussion was inspired by Liliana Carrillo’s reflections on societal transformation driven by de-schooling, which invited members to reconsider the role of learning beyond traditional school settings. Participants explored how democratic education can create opportunities for all individuals to develop skills in participation, critical thinking, dialogue, and shared responsibility. These competencies help societies become more cohesive, inclusive, and adaptable while empowering citizens to engage actively in community and civic life and contribute to collective well-being.





## All YOUDEX activities



YOUth Democratic EXperiences is an Erasmus+ Project that explores how young people experience and shape democracy in their everyday lives. Through creative digital storytelling, and creative methods like art-based activities and a final Zine, participants reflect on their communities, their rights, responsibilities, and the role they take in being active citizens.

In August, YOUDEX participants joined the International Democratic Education Conference where they met with youth from all around the world and exchanged perspectives on how democracy appears in schools, families and communities.



Their days at the conference were filled with engaging events, including a student panel, arts and crafts sessions, and a comics workshop led by one of the participants. They also took part in a focus group on the Manifesto 25, which featured the online participation of its principal author, John Moravec. Finally, they organised a student panel where they provided a platform for youth from diverse backgrounds to exchange insights on how they experience democracy in their schools, families, and everyday lives.





# Outcomes, Feedback, and Reflections

The EUDEC/IDEC conference resulted in several meaningful outcomes, including new connections among schools, educators and educational organizations, as well as shared commitment to strengthening democratic education across cultures. Participants co-created ideas for future collaborations and explored ways to promote youth participation in education-related decision-making.

The feedback received both for the organization of the event and the quality of the content presented was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting this year's conference's open, inclusive, and intergenerational atmosphere. Many appreciated the balance between structured sessions and spontaneous, self-organized activities, which fostered genuine dialogue and creativity, as well as the dedicated spaces to children and youth.

A key factor in the success of the conference was the valuable contribution of approximately 40 volunteers, whose dedication was vital to the realization of this huge event. They supported in the cleaning of shared spaces, serving meals, guiding participants, and actively contributing to a wide range of activities, ensuring that the entire event ran smoothly and inclusively.

In reflection, the conference demonstrated the power of collaboration and co-creation within community learning spaces. The organizing team agreed that the flexible format, combined with the active involvement of young people, was fundamental to the success of the conference.



# COLLABORATIONS INSPIRED BY EVENTS

The conference sparked an important collaboration between QUEST, Rights Centric Education, ALLI asb, and EUDEC, who joined forces to amplify the voice of rights-based educational models on an international level. This partnership led to their joint participation in this year's Social Forum, organized by the United Nations in Geneva, under the theme:

**“The Contribution of Education to the Respect, Promotion, Protection, and Fulfillment of All Human Rights for All.”**



Together, the organizations highlighted how democratic education models serve as a powerful and practical approach that not only transmit human rights but also embed them both into their design and daily practices, showcasing successful initiatives, sharing best practices, and advocating for inclusive, participatory, and rights-centered learning environments.

This collaboration represents a significant advocacy step in raising awareness around democratic education and highlighting the power of education as a cornerstone for the respect and fulfillment of human rights worldwide.

You can check out the QUEST's full presentation at the Social Forum [here](#).







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