

schools500reformation – International Symposium

Soesterberg, Netherlands – 15-17 december 2016

For the third time, the **schools500reformation** network's steering committee – created by the German Lutheran Church (EKD) – organised an international meeting of representatives of protestant school systems. With a few members of RIEP (from Rwanda and Congo's democratic republic ; plus a member of the steering group, Gerhard Pfeiffer), I had the privilege to be part of it. I realised anew how much our two networks could mutually enrich each other.

We were once more superbly accommodated in a conference centre, the Kontakt der Kontinenten hotel, a former convent, located in Soesterberg, about 10' away from Amersfoort, a very pretty medieval town well known of tourists' guides. We went there on the Friday afternoon for a short visit.



The **schools500reformation** steering group, and particularly their initiators Annette Scheunflug, Birgit Sandler-Koschel, Henrik Simojoki, assisted by their team, and Wim Kuiper, our Netherlandish host, had prepared a very rich programme and led it in a most dynamic way.

The purpose of that meeting was the writing of a position paper common to all the schools of the network... and that's what we achieved! (the final version of it is in the process of being translated into several languages.)

We were 25 participants, representing 20 countries, plus 2 visiting "experts" and the 16 members of the steering group. A unique diversity! Fabulous conversations! A stimulating and inspiring opportunity! Each participant had beforehand been asked for a short contribution stating the following chapters : the **key challenges** of protestant education in a local and global context ; the **theological basis and standards** of protestant education ; the **pedagogical basis and standards** of protestant education ; the **quality criteria** at protestant schools. All those contributions, representing roughly a hundred pages, were given us in print on our arrival. *[If you read English, this document can be sent to you.]* The same chapter themes gave a structure to our work together.

Our programme was indeed organised as follows : a few general interventions, aimed in particular at stressing the continuity with the previous gatherings ; then four workshop sessions along the four themes, in which we could debate, deepen the reflection and eventually reach a formulation for the **position paper**.

This paper is meant for a variety of possible audiences : the heads, teachers, staff of protestant schools, of course ; the churches these schools are related to or even depend from ; but also international organisations concerned with education, like Unicef for example ; the school authorities of the different countries ; etc.

As for the vision it aims at exposing, it is multi-faceted : promotion of protestant schools' profile and identity in a global context ; encouragement of an interdenominational, intercultural, and also interreligious posture, as well as an inclusive approach ; stimulating relationships on regional, national and worldwide levels ; progress in the areas of solidarity, awareness and defence of protestant schools' interests.

This is a very ambitious program! But our work at the symposium was already in itself an important contribution to the potential development of the hundreds of schools represented in Soesterberg.

Here is a **sample of the issues debated** : in spite of our very diverse contexts, can we identify common challenges protestant schools have to meet ? can we, protestant schools of the whole world, balance our common theological convictions and our doctrinal differences so as to better support each other ? should protestant schools follow the evolutions of society, or counter them, anticipate on them, answer them as "the salt of the earth" ? how can the values and principles of truth, justice, "reformata semper reformanda" guide the quest for quality in protestant schools ?

We all shared one conviction throughout our discussions : weak theological and strong pedagogical foundations don't rate any better than strong theological and weak pedagogical ones ! Therefore the necessity of such an exchange...

Looking forward...

The **schools500reformation** network, launched for the Reformation Jubilee, will now turn into **GPENreformation** = Global pedagogical network joining in Reformation. The objectives remain the same : information, mutual support, common school projects, contacts, sharing of new ideas, lobbying... A team will continue to manage the site. An international council will moderate it. Ambassadors will play their part regionally and meet regularly. Our German friends have many very good ideas... and luckily a lot of means they can use for protestant education!

Let our networks keep in contact, they can certainly benefit from it...

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