

International Network Of Philosophers Of Education (INPE) Ninth Biennial Conference, Universidad Complutense Madrid, 4–7 August 2004

My Incredible New Philosophical Experience (INPE) in Madrid

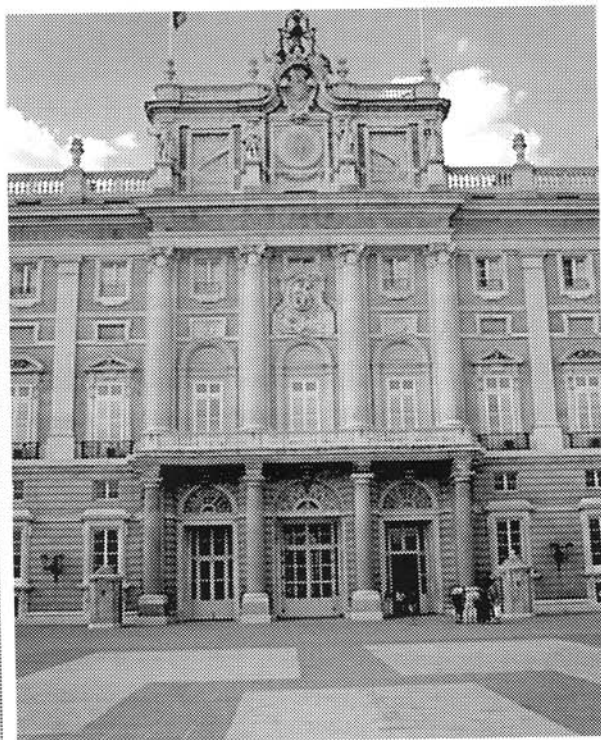
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It has been five months now since I attended the International Network of Philosophers of Education Conference in Madrid. This was a first time for me and I expect not my last. There are a lot of wonderful memories that I have brought back with me to Hawaii from this experience. And I've found myself affected in ways that have and will extend far beyond the event itself.

When I was asked by my neighbors and friends, "How was your trip to the conference?" my immediate response was, "It was wonderful. It restored my faith in the profession." Now, five months later, I can give some further reflections about what I really meant. My response obviates a certain perspective that reveals some aspect of where I am coming from. For my friends know that over the past few years I have had some experiences which have cast serious doubts in my mind about the profession. So I was carrying the weight of more than my luggage when I arrived late into the night.

I am not much for giving laundry lists of sessions and passing judgment about their quality so publicly, when I was only able to sample a smattering number of presentations. And it seems to me that it is really more a matter of professional interest and personal openness to new inquiries that provides individual levels of satisfaction in these sorts of matters. As with most conferences, there was a variety of sessions to attend, some more inspiring than others. Some better organized than others. Some producing more insightful discussions than others. This seems par for any conference course. But, there are

some features of the conference which really did create very positive overall impressions on me and left me wanting to come back in two more years. I think the most important of my experiences is related to my encounters with the conference attendees from all parts of the globe. For example, anyone would expect during the timeframe allotted to scheduled paper sessions that there would take place rich and interesting discussions about philosophical topics and possibly these would spill over into the coffee break period. But how often does this lively experience follow one out the door? How often do philosophical conversations, where participants



Royal Palace, Madrid



Views of Cathedral from the convent in Salamanca, outside Madrid

continue to probe deeper into a topic, inquire into each others long held personal beliefs, or spontaneously engage in creating knowledge, occur over a glass (or more) of wine and tapas at the dinner table or standing at a local bar? Well, maybe this is not that rare. But what about during a stroll through an art museum, intermittently between gazing on works of art, such as Velasquez's *Las Meniñas* and Picasso's *Guernica*, a Goya or Miro? Or, can you imagine such dialogues on a bus ride to a cultural site, such as the Royal Palace or the ancient city of Salamanca? Or, even on the metro as one is searching for that right turn or exit? Whether in dead seriousness or playful banter, philosophical conversations kept bubbling up when you least expected it.

Secondly, although many people chose to skip the INPE Business meeting, I purposely attended in order to see if I could find out more about the philosophy of the organization and the values of its members. What impressed me the most was INPE's effort to actually design and operate the conference to reflect certain pluralistic and inclusive values befitting the diversity of its membership. I have often seen organizations that continue to operate in highly traditional structured formats, rather cliquish, very formal in dress and unaccommodating. But for



Members of the conference in the Plaza de Mayor, Madrid



Yusef Waghid, Leslie La Grange, Penny Enslin

example, members supported proposals to make arrangements for some or parts of its journal and/or proceedings to be translated into Spanish, possibly other major spoken languages of the world, if not minimally the hosting country. It also has a second category of submissions for Working Paper Sessions, other than finished papers where professors may present their works in progress in order to get feedback from others who find similar interests in a topic. Both of these operational strategies enable the conference to really be seen as a gathering place of ideas and collegial sharing in furthering the growth of knowledge and professional development of the world community of philosophers of education. Similarly, it strongly supports and recruits graduate student participation and members from other disciplines.

Finally, I enjoyed what felt to be an atmosphere of familiarity in a sea of difference. I have experienced this at few other international conferences, and hoped to create

it at ones that I have managed on my own. This is where core members exhibit a sincere sensitivity to open communication, a welcoming attitude of inclusiveness of different points of view, and a friendly respect for known and unknown others allowing them to be who they are and say what they must say without disparaging tones or grand upmanship. I felt there to be a genuine spirit of generosity and empathy among the members in feeling concerned in looking out for each other (friend, stranger or even the disgruntled). And this was evident early on from the beginning submission and registration procedures in the personable

responsiveness and tone of the email messages from the conference organizers.

Conferences represent more than just opportunities to mark up one's C.V. or to take a vacation in some exotic place where one has never been. They are opportunities for learning, relearning, and unlearning. Memories, like conferences, are more than just states of recollection or escape. They can be reservoirs full of both illustrious and illusive states in capturing the sense of one's experiences. When they function to heal or restore our faith and hope in our profession, then they are worth pursuing at least a second time around.

ECER Conference 20–25 September 2004, Crete

Over 1300 delegates were in attendance at this year's ECER conference held in Crete, making it one of the largest European Education conferences to date. Perhaps it is the rise in popularity of the ECER in terms of sharing educational theory and practice within the European community, or perhaps it is the idyllic setting that enticed participants to attend. Rethymno is stunningly beautiful, located along the northern coast of Crete, with dramatic cliffs leading to the blue waters, with a mountainous range covering the interior. The temperatures were consistently hot and sunny, reaching 29C during the day. A tension became visibly noticeable at the offset of the conference of whether to attend a session or to enjoy the blissful Cretan experience around the island.

Given the number of delegates in attendance, numerous parallel sessions ran amongst the 24 networks from Wednesday to Saturday. Whilst the

variety was impressive and vast, the time allotted to each presentation compromised the quality of papers. As is always apparent at larger education conferences similar to AERA and BERA, presenters are given too little time to discuss and elaborate their points, and little to no discussion from the audience. Despite these practical constraints, the philosophy sessions had an apparent 'buzz' in the air, with critical discussions arising from the presentations.

The conference ended on a high note with David Bridges organising a philosophy supper on the Friday evening for all those that had the stamina to continue on with the fruitful discussions that they had enjoyed over the past few days.

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