

Declaration of the Global Connections Seminar XVIII held at the Gredos San Diego Buitrago Campus, Madrid, Spain, March 2017

Refugees Welcome

*Words displayed on a large banner on the Madrid City Hall
and seen by the Global Connections delegates while on a walking tour*

The rising voices of nationalism and protectionism in world politics today, and the continuing migration of millions of refugees fleeing conflict, reinforces the imperative of initiatives to promote global consciousness and working together across national boundaries.

Global Connections, an organisation of leaders in education, who gather annually for an experiential conference hosted by its participating schools, is one such initiative. Schools are encouraged to promote international perspectives and relationship building through their educational mission and core values statement. Each Global Connections Seminar, since 1997, has been a journey of experiential learning as school leaders engage and share insights and best practice.

Meeting this year in Spain (Madrid, Buitrago del Lozoya and Toledo), 57 delegates from 23 countries have been hosted by Gredos San Diego Cooperativa (GSD). The Seminar has engaged and connected within the theme *Transformations through cooperative learning experiences*. The host schools organisation has provided the opportunity for delegates to immerse themselves in a local, regional and national context, while initiating an international mindset and reinforcing personal connections between educational leaders.

For GSD, Seminar XVIII of Global Connections has provided an 'action research' opportunity. School leaders from diverse contexts have been invited to participate in influencing the organisation as it embarks on new strategic initiatives in international schooling and approaches to cooperative learning. In turn, GSD have indicated their willingness to share their knowledge, expertise and experience. Delegates have benefited from working cooperatively in small groups to engage in this action research and have deepened their own perspectives through multiple lenses.

Delegates have learned about the origins of the GSD as a cooperative structure in the 1980s: an organizational and financial initiative to pioneer private-public partnership in education. From these beginnings, eight GSD schools have been established in the region of greater Madrid. Cooperative members, participating as owners, have conceptualised a cooperative learning framework for implementation in GSD schools. Delegates have been impressed by the resultant culture of the GSD schools which promotes social cohesion and mutual respect within the community. The schools are on a pedagogical journey of intent to advance cooperative learning as the preferred tool of transformative best practice: a multi-layered 'pedagogical garden' has been planted.

Engaging with this journey has sharpened the thinking and insights of Global Connections delegates who seek to create optimal learning environments and student-centred processes in their own schools.

A further characteristic of the GSD educational model is that schools should make a difference to, and draw from, the 'social economy' of the local communities in which they are situated. Through daily activities, and through institutional partnerships with service providers in the wider GSD cooperative, Gredos San Diego seeks to stimulate revenue generation and job creation. This particular social and economic imperative challenges Global Connections leaders to advance the potential of transformative impact within and beyond our schools.

In addition to memorable visits to schools, GSD hosts have given Global Connections delegates fascinating insights into local culture and the Spanish context. Experiences have included the extraordinary ecology of the Buitrago countryside's ancient juniper trees; visits to historic religious, military and cultural centres; a remarkable celebration of football – the Real Madrid stadium; the imagination of Cervantes; the craft production of iconic MR guitars and an inspirational Spanish guitar recital by Raimundo Amador. Delegates enjoyed wonderful hours of Spanish cuisine, allowing opportunity for deepened conversation, happy connections and good fellowship. Seminar XVIII has truly been a fiesta of memorable educational engagement and experience.

As Seminar XVIII draws to a close, and reflecting on the particular priorities of the week's conversation, we commit ourselves to:

- Promoting and fostering internationalism in our schools – rooted in our local contexts and embracing a global reach.
- Building on established inter-school relationships and creating new ones across region and culture.
- Learning from cooperative pedagogical encounters, enhancing best-practice in engaged experiential education and ensuring teacher readiness for such opportunities.
- Widening and deepening the impact of our schools within the social economy of local communities.
- Acknowledging the cooperative model of Gredos San Diego, and advancing public-private partnerships which could optimize educational best practice in our own countries.