

University of East Anglia Hosts International Children's Spirituality Conference



The 12th International Conference on Children's Spirituality was held at UEA from July 1st – 5th in the Thomas Paine Building. Hosted by the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, the conference is held annually in universities around the world and conference convenor, Dr Jacqueline Watson, was delighted it was held this year at UEA. Eighty delegates attended from the UK, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, Norway and Ireland, and the conference was also supported by UEA students from EDU's PGCE, BA, PhD and EdD programmes.

The theme of the conference, which was partly inspired by the London 2012 Olympic Games, was 'Spirituality and Physicality: Crossing Thresholds', enabling keynote and seminar speakers to present research and workshops on a wide range of topics including sport, counselling, the environment, religious education, and Eastern practices, all in relation to the nurture and development of the spirituality of children and young people in education settings. Dr Jacqueline Watson, from the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, said:

"In England, all schools and teachers are responsible for the spiritual development of students, and globally academics and practitioners in education, health and social care are increasingly interested in supporting the spirituality of children and young people. But this is a challenging and sometimes perplexing field, relating to but broader than the religious, and strongly related, for instance, to spiritual concern with the natural environment. The conference invited academics, teachers and practitioners to share ideas about relationships between the spiritual and the physical and how these might be developed to transform the lives of children and young people."



Keynote speakers were drawn from PE and Sports, Counselling, and Spiritual and Religious Education, all areas of research within EDU. Dr Peter Campbell, from the Institute for BioSpiritual Research in the USA, was unable to attend the conference but gave his talk in the Thomas Paine Lecture Theatre through Skype, ably supported by fellow counselling academic, John Keane, from Ireland. Professor Ursula King, from the University of Bristol, who has written extensively about our human spiritual potential and its current essential links with science and the environment, presented her lecture in the Weston Room lecture theatre at the Norwich (Anglican) Cathedral. Dr David Brown, from Cardiff Metropolitan University, explored opportunities for spirituality in Physical Education and Sports, and Rev Dr Ann Trousdale from Louisiana State University, USA, who is also co-editing a book, *Global Perspectives on Spiritual Education*, with the conference organiser Jacqueline Watson, spoke about the importance of embodied spirituality for children and young people.

Delegates had the opportunity to visit local places of interest including the pilgrimage site of Walsingham, the Shrine of Julian of Norwich and Norwich Cathedral, and the Ringsfield EcoCentre, which, in sympathy with the conference objectives, aims to further spirituality, imagination, compassion, creativity and wonder, as well as community and celebration, and specialises in allowing children space for contemplation of the natural world and reconnection with self and others. The conference also included a guided tour of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Shiatsu taster sessions provided by members of the Shiatsu College Norwich, and opportunities to walk the UEA Santa Rosa Labyrinth.

The event was organised by the School of Education and Lifelong Learning in conjunction with the Centre for Spirituality and Religion in Education, and with further support from the Centre for Counselling Studies. The conference organisers, Linda Rudge, Director of the Centre for Spirituality and Religion in Education, and Dr Jacqueline Watson wish to thank all those who contributed to the success of the conference, and wish to especially thank the Keswick Hall Trust for its support.