



Education and Culture DG

STATEMENTS ON 'The innovative role of education in society'.

EUNEC Seminar

The Hague, 18-19 May 2009

1. The EUNEC seminar on the innovative role of education in society.

EUNEC

EUNEC is a network of education councils in the European Union. As a network, EUNEC brings together the expertise of advisory bodies and of the stakeholders and experts who are involved in the national/regional advisory processes. These advisory bodies give advice to the governments on the different European countries in the field of education and training.

What are these statements meant for?

EUNEC discussed the innovative role of education in society, together with experts from the European Commission and the OECD. The European councils gathered in The Hague and formulated critical remarks and statements on these issues.

EUNEC wants to disseminate these statements pro-actively towards the European Commission, the European Parliament, relevant DGs. EUNEC also wants to promote actions by its members at national/regional level. These critical remarks and statements offer an input for national advisory opinions of education councils. They should provide a significant input for reflection and action by relevant stakeholders in the field of education and training such as providers of education, teacher trade unions, social partners, experts in the field of education and training.

The seminar

EUNEC organised the seminar on the innovative role of education in society on the 18 and 19 May 2009 in The Hague, together with the Nederlandse Onderwijsraad. 14 countries were represented.

2. Statements

Introduction: Challenges for education.

Education, the system as well as the schools, the education institutions and the training centres, needs to emphasise and foster networking with other stakeholders: parents, families, and pupils. Education needs to pay attention to their diversity, their development, their well-being and the balance between individual and collective needs.

On the other hand, education feels the pressure of societal demands: what new skills do pupils need for life in the future, and not only for jobs in the future. In the mean time, education has to take care of its foundation and mission: to foster citizenship, a critical attitude, social inclusion and to learn pupils how to learn.

Societal dialogue on the mission of education.

Societal demands are multiple. As a consequence, there is a need for a debate on the relationship between the fundamental mission of education and the societal demands (e.g. economic recovery, social cohesion)¹. A dialogue among different interest groups has to be established: they have to build capacity, find unifying ideas and develop new strategies. Stakeholders have to be involved at European and international level, at national and regional level; parents and pupils should participate in school policy.

To be able to achieve these goals, a number of critical conditions can be identified:

- An innovative approach in the classrooms: the innovative concept of learning environments and the practice (recognise and give value into the formal system of the non-formal and informal learning; integration of ICT in the learning environments)
- Autonomy and accountability

¹ Economic crisis is very challenging for the future of education and training systems; we can see an impact on the demand towards education, on the objectives for education and on the available budgets. This challenge could offer opportunities for a more responsive education system if it is balanced with the foundations of education.

- Flexible approaches
- New competencies of teachers and trainers
- Involvement of other professionals in schools (care, guidance,..)
- Partnerships with parents, social partners...

There is no single answer: the answers for the different education levels will have to be coherent and specific. Lifelong learning demands a coherent approach over different transition moments in the education system. Concepts of labour market should be integrated in a global education approach fit for the specific education level.

The perspective of the learner

The perspective of the learner has to be at the heart of the debate on the future of education and training, at the heart of the policy and renewal actions: youngsters should achieve to their best ability and so enjoy learning. The present and the future situation of youngsters has to be taken into account by education.

Schools are meeting places of youngsters from different backgrounds: they bring the world into the school (e.g. youth culture; local – national – international – intercultural communities). Their well-being is important; schools have to foster their critical thinking; what youngsters learn should be transferable and flexible, and take into account the unpredictability of the future situation.

School at the centre of the reform debate

Schools are in the frontline of the needs of youngsters and of the community; they have a 'radar' function. Schools are part of local learning environments; schools are places where creativity and culture are treasured and developed, where youngsters learn to act creatively and to deal with changing environments. Schools have to deal with an overwhelming amount of care demands.²

² Statements from the EUNEC conference in Vilnius on 'The teaching profession': The great amount of expectations towards teachers and schools is a constant issue in all presentations and discussions. On one hand, this is a sign of trust of society in the added value of the education system, but on the other hand it means an overwhelming amount of expectations from:

- the society (economy, labour market, equity, pupils with special needs, migration,..)
- the international/European and national/regional policy makers
- new educational paradigms (learner oriented teaching, learn to learn, learning outcomes,..)
- stakeholders at a school level (pupils, parents, social partners, welfare system)

(...) society and decision makers should rely on the professional autonomy of teachers to decide on the concrete pedagogical consequences of the choices made.

To be able to take up these multiple tasks, schools need space, and trust from society and policy makers.

The role of education councils

Education councils have to put the 'big' questions on the agenda:

- Definition of the challenges, rethinking the goals and values
- A prospective approach : imagining the future
- Alternatives and feasibility of policy lines
- Implementation of policies and innovations: impact, wanted and unwanted effects: 'How will the ship sail once it has left the harbour'?
- Evaluation of policies and innovations: e.g. learning outcomes (statements EUNEC conference Madrid, June 2008)

Education councils can offer the knowledge basis (brokerage between researchers, stakeholders and policy makers).

Education councils must have their place in the national and European decision making cycle.

Implementation

Effective implementation is an essential phase in a change process; implementation is part of the innovation policy. This means

- Changing the classroom practice
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Evidence based working and sharing good practice
- Innovative practice (assessment,...)

Future work of education councils

During the seminar, education councils all over Europe discovered they share common priorities and questions. We should thus invest more in peer learning activities.

EUNEC has the ambition to play an active role in the European education policies, using the enhanced interest of the Commission for stakeholders.

Within the network, there will be a reflection on possible new benchmarks linked to the social role and the foundation of education, such as

- Self esteem
 - Empowerment
 - Creativity
 - Citizenship
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