

EDUCATION

Preamble :

This is the fruit of work carried out a few years ago by a group of members of VIVANT- Belgium, who got together to draw up a concrete education programme for VIVANT.

This programme may be useful also for other European countries seeking to create a "knowledge society" – a vain task without adequate preparation, a long-term vision and flexibility.

Unless education contributes to the citizen's feeling of well-being –on the intellectual level as well as that of feeling – it will always be "fighting a losing battle".

A culture that embraces Blaise Pascal's notion* of the human heart will stand a better chance of surviving and growing in a multicultural Europe which demands that "things work" (not to be confused with merely "performing", however efficiently).

The modular education proposed in this programme is designed to achieve this end.

In this, the role of teachers is as a reference for the young in order to acquire the behaviour needed, economically, intellectually and emotionally, in preparing for living in a culturally participative democracy.

We hope that this document may contribute to a better organization of education.

** The "heart" according to Blaise Pascal : The seat of perception of the "first principles of mathematics" (evidences) and of personal convictions (meaning of life)*

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THE VIVANT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Introduction :

Education in Belgium is on the whole of good quality and it is recognized internationally. But rapid social evolution means that certain pedagogic, organizational and financial aspects need to be reviewed.

Vivant is proposing institutional change that does away with unnecessary regulation, takes account of actual school communities and covers both education of the young and continuous adult education.

To realize this Vivant is proposing to abolish the tutelary relationship between education and the supervising ministry. Those who work on the ground are best placed to decide what is good for the young. But this does not do away with the need for legislation from outside the education community, granting guarantees and fixing an overall framework it must respect.

Vivant proposes that operational costs should be financed by means of education vouchers granted annually for each young person (and each adult ...). Teachers' salaries will continue to be financed by the State.

Part One : Vivant's socio-economic model and the present state of education in Belgium

Analysis of the present state of education in Belgium

1. Lack of motivation and its causes.

A. In the young :

- Mediocre academic results and an atmosphere of racketeering.
- Poor integration because of dress or social background.
- Choice of subjects imposed by parents (for example).
- A family situation in which a single or sick parent needs help from the child. (The child is often ashamed of talking about this.)
- A financial situation which prevents parents from paying, for example, the bus fare.
- Conflictual relations with some teachers.
- Extended absence of some teachers (on sick leave or re-training) who are not replaced. Pupils may then play truant rather than spend time being bored at school.
- Etc..

B. In teachers :

- Lack of recognition.
- Lack of motivation and absenteeism of certain pupils seen as an insult to the teacher's ideals.
- Disagreement with some changes in teaching routines. For example :
 - Reduction or abolition of homework.
 - Automatic promotion of pupils from first to second form in secondary school ... aggravated by regular interference from ministers.
 - Proliferation of pedagogic "theories" not tested by teachers.
- Serious deterioration in the respect necessary between pupils and teachers. Things were easier in the past when a pupil with problems went out to look for work. Today, with high unemployment, they tend to stay on longer at school.

2. The internal organization of the school.

School organization is subject to masses of regulation. For example :

The level of a school's resources depends on the number of pupils – not on the basis of a straightforward budget envelope corresponding to real costs, but according to the number of lesson-hours to be delivered depending on the authorized group-classes. This sometimes results in pupils being allocated to certain subject groups purely to avoid their closure and consequent loss of teaching jobs.

The "education system", owing to its extremely hierarchical structure and the regulations to which it is subjected, resembles a supertanker (S.S. Education) lacking the flexibility to navigate in difficult waters.

3. Parents opt out.

Not all parents opt out, but parenthood is not helped by the rhythm of life imposed on adults in today's society and the need to spend an increasing proportion of available time working just to make ends meet. The young are left very much to themselves and are confronted with a model of adults anxious about the precariousness of their situation and their future. One primary school pupil remarked: "When my parents have a problem my mother pops pills and my father reaches for the bottle."

In addition, parents, like schools themselves, are confronted with the multitude of interests and activities offered to the young outside the school. This represents a serious distraction from school work and vast expense for the family.

As evidence of this, the table below shows the relative importance of different items of expenditure in 2001 for a sample of 1,488 young people of various ages having pocket money to spend. The figures show the percentage of individuals in the sample who spent money on the particular item.

1. *Drinks, sweets, snacks : 57.3%*
2. *Saving up for an important purchase : 45.8%*
3. *Cassettes, CDs : 43.5%*
4. *Cinema : 33.7%*
5. *Gifts for others : 33.2%*
6. *Going out with friends : 29.5%*
7. *Periodicals : 26.9%*
8. *Clothes : 24.4%*
9. *Fast-food : 18.0%*
10. *Games, toys : 15.0%*
11. *Sporting activities : 13.0%*
12. *Scent, make-up, cosmetics : 12.5%*
13. *Electronic games or computers : 12.5%*
14. *Books : 12.5%*
15. *Saving up for holidays : 11.4%*
16. *Cigarettes : 10.1%*
17. *Theme parks : 8.3%*
18. *Transport : 6.4%*
19. *School materials : 5.8%*

(Now, in 2007, expenditure on mobile phones should be added to the list.)

4. The learning process.

A. The pupil's needs – difficulties encountered

- The objective of education is to further individual learning; but given the mass of regulations how can one achieve the organizational flexibility required for catering to individual needs?
- While most pupils reckon they know their rights, they are unaware of their obligations or have of them only a partial or incomplete idea. This leads to frustration and lack of understanding among certain pupils, who then rebel against what they see as injustice. With experience of living in the community the pupil usually gains this understanding, but it is then too late and rupture with schooling has taken root.
- Learning should not be only synonymous with pleasure found in studying favourite subjects – it also requires studying other subjects that at first sight seem less interesting. Pupils are not made sufficiently aware of this reality as they form an idea of what they have to achieve. Only rarely are they allowed to envision a personal project, for the short, medium and long term, which would enable them to understand better the correlation between certain subjects they consider boring or useless and the goal they want to achieve. It is this poor understanding of the long term and of the connexions between different, apparently unconnected, subjects which brings about the demotivation of very many young people, who then turn away from their studies and put television, fads and ephemeral happenings in the world at the top of their scale of values and list of interests.
- What interests young people is often seen as being in opposition to education. Art, the audiovisual, literature and sport often find no place in the school and are disconnected from the everyday reality of the young. Tastes will always be personal and rather than try to ignore them it would be better to bring subjects related to them into that reality, and base education on the acquisition of a critical, constructive and objective mind capable of dealing with the floods of data and demands with which the young are daily bombarded. Connecting in this way with society as the young see it would make the school a more convivial and integrated part of their lives rather than the remote world it is at present, unconnected with their reality.
- Eradication of rackets, of dishonoured contracts, of negative human relationships that become the norm. Educational establishments should be able to create and maintain a clean, convivial and secure environment in which acquiring the education offered would be the pupils' natural first concern. The child has two main windows on the world – the school and family. A negative climate in the school will give the child a negative and restrictive image of the world which will not create a desire to integrate into it ...
- The learning process should follow the rhythm of the child. Going too fast, for the sake of "performance", is like harvesting a plant that has only just germinated.

B. The teachers' needs :

- In order to know how to communicate their knowledge, teachers should be able to benefit from continuous training. This exists, but often leads to disruption in the school timetable and leaves certain classes to carry out tasks that only too often serve only to keep them occupied.
- Teachers deserve recognition and support in practising their difficult art and they too therefore need learning structures which maintain conviviality, continuity and understanding between the generations – between teachers of different ages as well as between teachers and pupils.

C. The school's responsibility :

- Every educational community has continually to keep itself capable of understanding new systems of management of time, people and cultural factors in line with the realities of the moment and of different situations.

That is a big programme, and the more difficult to achieve on account of the clumsy manoeuvres of "S.S. Education".

Vivant's proposals in the 2003 programme

1. Autonomy for schools in methods of teaching

Any discussion of education in our country (Belgium) turns to the question of regulation; for decades governments have tried to regulate education down to the smallest detail.

In the matter of teaching method public authorities should not intervene – or only very slightly. No general regulation can determine what is best for a given child or even a given group of children or adults.

Nonetheless, regulation is needed to provide certain guarantees and establish certain norms such as, for example, respect for the academic calendar, the principle of free education and the issuance of certificates of levels of education.

Judgments concerning teaching and education should not be made by politicians or the general public, but by the parents concerned and those employed in education, some of whom would be working in the Upper Council for Education.

- Vivant believes that schools should be freed from the tutelage of government. Schools of the future should depend from communities made up concretely of children, teachers and parents, whose duty it is to see that each child's right to education be respected.

2. A fairer way of funding.

A first step in this direction would be a new type of funding for educational establishments, followed by giving every citizen the right to choose between them.

- Vivant proposes that any child or adult wishing to follow or continue a course of study should obtain from the public authorities an education voucher. The voucher would be used by the parents of a school-age child or by an adult wanting more education to obtain admission to the school of their choice; it would then be up to that school to collect the money relating to the voucher from the appropriate body.

Such a system will work admirably in a society benefiting from the Basic Income which Vivant proposes, since both flow from the same logic. Everyone, regardless of age, sex, religion, etc., would be entitled to their education vouchers. Schools would then be freed from the influence of government, unions, or financial institutions.

Such schools will be the responsibility of teachers and the parents concerned, who, being present on the ground, will choose what is best for the children. Horizontal linkages between educational establishments that work together will replace the present centralized and hierarchical structures.

In this system government will play the role of intermediary and control rather than that of manager :

- a role of intermediary in the funding of the institutions,
- a controlling role to see that the institutions deliver the programmes they have promised.

3. Social promotion through education

Vivant believes that everyone, regardless of age, occupation or income bracket, should be entitled to complete their education.

4. Results of such measures

Education will become creative, being adapted to the concrete ground realities of local teaching. At the European level, the same things are not always taught in Madrid as in Brussels, and different approaches may be required; it is up to the government to control the efficacy of the school system and raise questions of convergence at national and European level.

Part Two : Proposals complementary to those in the Vivant Programme.

Vivant's criteria and views on the role of the State.

1. The organizational role of the State.

The Vivant Education Programme is characterized by its liberation of education from tight State control (greater simplicity) and a method of organization adapted to young people (the goal of equity).

Vivant's choice of freeing education from ministerial tutelage is aimed at bringing about a better adjusted and more efficacious educational system, being less severely crippled by the excessive weight of administration and by pedagogic theories, mainly formulated by ministers, which take no account of real conditions in different localities. Educational principles and theory must be invented and developed on the ground.

It is teachers, pupils and parents, recognized in their respective capacities, who are best placed, by working together, to reach toward that ideal of equity and efficacy, which all concerned with education desire.

And if organisational simplicity enables S.S. Education to get rid of useless ballast – then so much the better for it.

In the new organization, the State, through the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Enseignement* (Upper Council for Education), keeps the role of guaranteeing principles and frameworks which should define :

- The minimum standards required at each level of education, the academic calendar, the principle of free education and the diploma system for each level.
- The organisational principles appropriate for modular education adapted to local conditions. In this model, since classes will no longer be organized in year-groups, it will not be they that will determine timetables or teaching posts.

In this way there is a shift from the teacher as wage-earner (based on hours of classroom teaching) to the teacher as a professional with a mission. And salaries are determined in relation to the mission and the qualifications, flexibility and adaptability it demands. In this connexion, the salary distinctions between the types of diploma, from that of the pre-school teacher to that of the university graduate, will need to be redefined in accordance with the organisational reforms Vivant is putting forward. Just as the graduate will have a salary scale corresponding to a university education which will assure a broad spectrum of training, so the constant adaptability (guidance of the young) required of the teacher from pre-school level to lower secondary level will be reflected in another salary scale – quite equitably. In this way, freedom in the matter of teaching method is safeguarded within the framework of the concrete community of pupils, teachers and parents.

On both economic and educational grounds, Vivant favours the values of simplicity, efficacy and equity.

2. The role of the State in relation to educational systems

In any case, the State should act not as the tutor of education, but, through the Upper Council of Education, as its umpire.

In this role it should ensure that all young people be entitled to an education of good quality.

Public education will be organized by a "concrete community of parents, teachers and pupils" – which means an organizing body constituted democratically and supported by local government (the municipalities).

Public-sector schools will be organized along lines set out in a framework schema, thus facilitating the movement of pupils from one school to another, while their organization will be the responsibility of local government. This will facilitate the transition of all existing schools to the new system.

The facilities of public-sector schools, not normally used during the evening and weekends, may be used by those following evening classes, and their cultural and sporting infrastructure will be available to sports clubs, cultural associations, youth clubs, etc.. In short, the school as a physical entity will be turned into a place for public life and meetings, while its teaching role will be run under an autonomous tripartite organizing authority made up of parents/pupils, teachers and local government.

For parents and pupils such public education will be entirely free of charge. Parents will hand over to the schools the education vouchers of their children when they are enrolled in the schools (and thus become "shareholders" of a kind in the schools). Local government will ensure the continuous organization of the schools and provide teaching equipment and materials (books, exercise books, etc.) free of charge. Parents will thus have to spend less.

Another type of education – lay or faith-based – recognized by the State, promoted either by private initiative or by a religious organization, would be allowed to continue.

While public education should remain open to all philosophical or religious persuasions, lay or faith-based education should be able to introduce a particular philosophical or religious emphasis into its educational programmes and its culture. But this will not dispense schools from remaining open to other philosophies and religions.

For reasons of equity, freedom and respect for individual philosophical convictions, the State will pay the salaries of the teachers in all types of education – public, lay and faith-based.

For reasons of equity and simplicity, lay and faith-based education will have to respect the same framework schemas and organizational principles relating to modular and differentiated education as public education.

The construction and maintenance of the infrastructure of public education establishments is financed by the State, while lay and faith-based establishments rely on their own sources of finance. However, having regard to equity, respect for the sociological and cultural weight of each region and the right of every young person to an education of good quality, the State should underwrite the continuity of such infrastructure.

Furthermore, as is the case today, to enable communities setting up educational establishments to meet costs relating to infrastructure, they should have access to very long-term loans, made available by the State at fair interest rates.

Investing in continuous training is a way of guaranteeing the country's economic dynamism.

3. A framework law : compulsory education.

The obligation of compulsory education concerns in the first place parents or others responsible for children. They have the civil duty to place children in the best conditions for receiving the education indispensable for their development and integration into society.

An obligation also falls on the young persons who must follow regular schooling. In this connexion, they are called upon to develop intellectually and culturally so as to obtain either a regular diploma or another form of recognition of skills and level of autonomy attained.

Compulsory education takes effect from the age of 4 years.

4. A structure for progressive integration into society.

For the sake of equity, all young people should have the opportunity to experience different situations and activities which will equip them for passing from youth to adulthood. Here are some proposals to make this possible :

- Academic courses for half the time and, for the other half, activities that render the academic subjects meaningful. (A well-ordered head is better than a full one.)

This latter half-time could be devoted to :

- a. Individual research
 - b. Development of sporting, cultural and artistic activities
 - c. Progressive entry into adult life through work experience in companies or other organizations.
- Setting up a citizenship service which, while not compulsory, would extend the idea underlying half-time academic courses and lead to a diploma at the end. Citizenship service should help young people socialize better and discover their future professional orientation. It should last 9 months and require engagement for the full period. Its timing, at 18 years of age, coincides with the granting of the adult basic income amount (of €400 per month). The 9-month service period could take the form of social work (helping the needy), cultural work (museum guide), intellectual work (in archives), administration (encoding), medical assistance (work in hospital), assistance in schools (supervision, watchman), or, by default, membership of a citizens' guard helping the police with everyday tasks in keeping order in public places (on public transport, for instance).
For equity and simplicity, young people should be made fully aware of their rights and obligations, for that helps them prepare for adult life.
 - Introducing a training voucher available on request to citizens who have completed their compulsory education and wish to continue their training.

The organizational structure proposed by Vivant has the advantage of putting in place ethical criteria of work and social behaviour, which, by seeking everyone's advancement, create, right from the first day at school, social capital made up of imagination, creativity and service. Confident in this hope, Vivant here returns to its essential objective which is the blossoming of humanity in a humanist ecology. It augurs well for the future, for the micro-universe of the school, with its rights and obligations, is a reflection of the social, economic and cultural condition of wider society.

Part Three : the positive consequences of the Vivant model.

Based on the principle that simplification leads to better results, Vivant's model removes tax from work – thus rendering teachers' salaries three times less expensive –, finances social security by a tax on consumption, and is favourable towards consultation of the public and the referendum.

Once it is freed from government tutelage it is up to the education system to initiate measures based on reality – and the Vivant socio-economic model enables it to do so.

Here are the positive consequences, upstream and downstream.

Upstream.

1. For parents

- The Vivant system will give parents more opportunity to concern themselves with the education of their children and, if desirable, continue their own education.
- All citizens, with or without children, receive a Basic Income. This makes it easier for parents to remain at home for as long as they wish, if they prefer to do that rather than go out to work. No problem either for those who want to work part-time or take only temporary jobs: no more tiresome administrative battles, and they lose none of their entitlements to other benefits.

- When work is no longer subjected to taxation and social charges, there is no difference between work that is declared and that which is not, and changing work status poses no problem – working full-time, working part-time, or not working. Furthermore, as the cost of work goes down there will be more of it, including part-time work.

2. For the school

- Teachers' and others' salaries will cost schools one third of what they cost today and schools will be able to afford to employ the staff required to meet their needs on the ground.
- A simpler financing system will make possible joint management with flexibility.

3. For young people

- Tangible recognition of their value to society as they receive from the State a personal education budget (the school voucher), which they hand over to the school of their choice.
- This financial responsibility alone brings motivation and awareness of the "value of studying".

Downstream.

1. For parents

- The new organization of education will bring about more relaxed relations between parents and children, since both may become students.
- Education vouchers and the Basic Income together enable parents to meet their first obligations toward their children and thus remove from both parent and child anxiety about the future.

2. For the school

- The school will benefit from a form of organization and a cultural context adapted to reality.
- The school will have more resources at its disposal for stimulating and motivating the young, for society itself (with the Vivant model) again takes the initiative and builds up social capital.

3. For young people

- From their earliest years, children will learn that they will have to find activities which pay and which they like, and that the Basic Income is neither a sufficient income for living nor an unemployment benefit, but rather the foundation on which they can build for themselves a cultural and professional activity within, and for, society.
- They will be shown that the purpose of studying is not primarily to prepare themselves for a job, but rather to train themselves for life – their own life, which they will have to manage.
- The school will help them to manage their knowledge and their money, for the Basic Income is not simply for pocket money.

- Young people's learning processes will be able to take different forms.
- It will be easy for them to continue in part-time education while gaining work experience at the same time.
- Finding work will be simplified by the fact that work will not be taxed and that it will cost the employer less (one third). Things will be easier to arrange, for schools will themselves have the initiative in organizing them. It will thereby be easier to arrange mixed forms of education and training, which are more motivational for certain young people, because they teach something about obligations and regard for reality. And that leads to maturity of outlook.

Conclusion

For Vivant, work in the school should be based on human values and set free the imagination and ability to do one's thing. It should help the young to develop multiple skills and activities, which will later enable them to earn their living and enrich their leisure time.

Today, problems that parents and society are unable to solve are thrust upon the school. Under the new socio-economic system, schools, teachers, pupils and parents will have a better chance of defining their respective roles and of carrying them out.

Tasks and responsibilities will be more effectively shared between the respective actors :

- The teacher in his or her role in the learning process.
- The school in its new organization.
- Parents in a society with enhanced social capital.
- Pupils in those responsibilities that they will recognize as belonging to them.

Together, in a place of communal life and in their respective ways, all will be able to contribute to the success of the whole.

Vivant is thus for life, for harmony and for efficacy to the benefit of all.

Part Four : Concrete Applications.

Educational certificates and the coordination of programmes.

The role of the Upper Council of Education is limited to carrying out an objective examination of knowledge, putting all schools on an equal footing, which will allow diplomas to be awarded : it is the baccalaureate system. This has the advantage of restoring objectivity to evaluations, and, above all, allows teachers not to be simultaneously both trainer and judge of their pupils (respecting the democratic principle of the separation of powers).

The Upper Council of Education, as do the school mobility councils of today, should ensure that young people can move from one school to another without being hampered by differences in the types of education they offer.

While each school is free to choose how to take its pupils along the path of learning, the Upper Council of Education should act as an umpire guaranteeing respect for the rules of the game that ensure coherence in the whole system. (The Council should be composed of members drawn from the various subjects and different theories of education.)

Pupils will thus be evaluated in an external examination at the end of each level of schooling (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary). During the process pupils at each level will work within a given framework but develop their own rhythms. When they have reached the minimum level required, they may introduce other aspects into their studies. For example, pupils going for a basic diploma in humanities, may add special qualifications in mathematics, science, languages, computer science, literature – or other – according to their choice. These additional subjects open the doors to colleges and universities.

Unlike the French baccalaureate, with its different specializations, that of the Vivant model would represent the minimum required for a well-defined level. For example, at the end of secondary schooling pupils should :

- Be able to write without fault and to make resumes.
- Be able to write a reasoned essay.
- Have a medium-level passive knowledge of a second language.
- Have a certain level of general knowledge (literature, history, geography, science, law, economics ...)
- Be able to solve certain mathematical problems (resolution of equations ...)

In addition to this basic (obligatory) qualification, there would be (optional) specialized qualifications: Latin, modern languages, mathematics, literature, natural sciences, etc.. Universities would then define their entry requirements in the form, for example, "bac + specialist science" for admission to medical school.

What needs to be done is to set up democratically the Upper Council for Education which would be in constant touch with the world of education and independent of political authorities and would define the required end results of the education system, as well as the content of these required results. It would have special responsibility for the organization of examinations and the marking of papers.

Typical educational organization.

The education framework plan should make all schools "compatible" among themselves, so that pupils may change schools – and teachers also (employment flexibility).

All schools should work on the basis of half-day teaching, following the natural rhythm of the children. This would mean organizing :

- Theory courses in the morning
- Non-intellectual activities (mainly sports) at the beginning of the afternoon
- Practical intellectual activities in late afternoon.

Similarly, regard should be had to the rhythms of families, particularly when parents work; so children should be at school from morning (0800 hours) to evening (1700 or 1800 hours). And so that they are not left on their own from 1530 hours, as is the case today, parents who are free earlier

could go as volunteers to the schools their children attend and undertake supervision, studies or activities, etc., depending on their time and interests.

- Early afternoon activities could include : sports, gymnastics, swimming, dancing, ...; art, music, aesthetics (drawing, pottery, music, singing, ...); cultural activities (museums, exhibitions, plays, ...); community activities such as helping the aged, handicapped, etc.; crafts like woodwork, DIY, etc.. – the pupils would choose for themselves.
- Late afternoon activities could include : maths exercises, mother tongue exercises, debates, foreign language discussions, moral science studies (religion, ethics, philosophy), private study, extra lessons, reading or writing workshops.

A modular and differentiated system of education implies that theoretical courses take place in the morning (5 x 50 minutes) and that they should all be organized at the same time so as to allow pupils to follow subjects at the level and at the rhythm that suits them. Thus pupils will advance at their own speeds in the different subjects in order to meet minimum standards in each subject, going more deeply into the subjects that most interest them. In this way the more able will not be held back by the less able, while the latter will not feel left out.

Pupils will work to a "tutor", a teacher supporting them on their journey through the school system (in selecting options and projects, in solving problems that arise, etc.), and thus helping their overall development. As classes will no longer be organized in year-groups, pupils will select their own modules according to their interests and the level they are at (under tutor's guidance); the homogeneous age groups would remain only for sporting and other afternoon activities, under the responsibility of an educator.

Course modules would be grouped together under different headings or "families" :

- Cultural education : mother tongue proficiency, literature, theatre, poetry, rhetoric, philosophy
- General education : history (of events, of peoples, of ideas, of art, of religion), human geography, modern languages
- Scientific education : physics, biology, chemistry, physical geography, astronomy
- Civic education : institutions, politics, principles of law, economics, accounting and management
- Intellectual education : mathematics, classical languages

Within each "family" compulsory courses and optional courses will be defined. Each course will be divided into three modules : an advanced module (A), an intermediate module (B) and a basic module (C). Examination requirements will be : C for lower humanities and B for higher humanities. Tutors will be responsible for putting together a programme of courses with each pupil.

A differentiated system of education implies that pupils may find themselves at different levels in different subjects – a 15-year old might be in 4th for maths, in 2nd for languages, in 3rd for history, and so on. Pupils will be expected to satisfy the exams of the level they have followed (eg. advanced maths in the lower humanities diploma). Teachers will continuously evaluate their pupils and enter for examination those they think ready. Pupils who pass will move on; those who fail will start the module again.

When pupils change school they will find in their new schools the same range of modules in each branch. The title and content of each module must therefore be defined by the education authorities in a uniform manner.

Language teaching

Right from nursery school, games may usefully be employed to familiarize children with the sounds of other languages. And they should begin a second language from the first class of primary school. Parents will have the main say in the choice of this language, but Esperanto could very well be proposed as a language easy to learn and devoid of irregularities.

On this base, other languages, modern or classical, could easily be added. Priority should be given to the second (or third) regional language (Dutch in Brussels) or national language (German in Liège). It is easier to learn a third or fourth language than a second; once the knack of learning a language has been acquired, things become much easier.

At secondary level practice in the use of foreign languages should be given priority – debates, immersion courses, travel, exchanges with schools in Flanders or in other European countries ...

Higher education and continuous education

After their compulsory education people can choose, throughout their lives and in addition to their work, to undergo training for a particular skill (or intellectual or artistic pursuit ...), at any level.

Training vouchers may be obtained on request – distinct from school vouchers in that the latter represent a larger sum of money and are provided automatically up to the age of 18. Training vouchers will be valid for specialist training establishments and evening schools. Vouchers would be obtainable for subsequent years subject to good attendance record OR passing an exam OR presentation of course work.

For higher education, the voucher would cover the registration charge at present required for entry to high schools. Selection is already based on baccalaureate results and faculties are already undergoing change as a result of the Bologna directive.*

The problem for higher education is funding those who are still uncertain what to do. Vivant wants to continue allowing them the freedom to seek and to choose for themselves. To help them avoid rushing into unsuitable careers, introducing both citizenship service and career advisory services can be useful.

** Bologna directive : a European Union measure to work towards compatibility between universities in different member countries.*

Technical education and acquiring a trade

Learning a trade and technical education should no longer be looked upon as a second-rate education for those who fail to go through with general education – rather, it should be seen as a fully-fledged branch of education. Pupils in this branch would follow the same basic modules as the rest, the more intellectual modules being replaced by technical ones (under tutor's guidance).

In these cases the end of compulsory education would depend not on age but on obtaining a diploma in lower humanities plus a technical qualification certificate.

As is the case today, those over 15 would be free to study a trade in the afternoon ("apprenticeship") while continuing with general education modules in the morning.

Special education

1. Its diversity

Special education is designed to meet the needs of young people with special needs.

As a reminder, there are eight types and four forms (form 4 relates to those who move from special education to normal trade and technical education):

- Type 1 Slight handicap (form 3, insertion in the work place)
- Type 2 Moderate and severe handicaps (form 2 supervised work place; form 1 day centre)
- Type 3 Character problems
- Type 4 Physical disability
- Type 5 Sick children (hospital)
- Type 6 Impaired sight
- Type 7 Impaired hearing
- Type 8 Physical coordination problems

2. Problem analysis

The general public often thinks special education has been a failure. However, it often has outstanding success owing to its excellent adaptability. It puts high demands on teaching staff in terms of human qualities and teaching competence, which is not sufficiently appreciated.

The role of the Upper Council of Education in regard to special education should be to promote medical and psychological initiatives appropriate to the needs of the young people concerned. In the Vivant model educational establishments are liberated from ministerial tutelage and, under the supervision of the Higher Education Council, are free to adapt both organization and teaching approaches to particular conditions and local realities. This freedom will particularly benefit special education.

3. What is wanted

That special education should be fully appreciated in public opinion.

That there should be closer links between special education and general education.

That a new type of handicap should be recognized : severe emotional handicap (Type 9).

To be more concerned with prevention and to further develop special education at nursery school level – changes rendered possible with the organizational flexibility proposed by Vivant.

Invest more at this level – it is effective and equitable (equal opportunities).

4. Promoters

The initiative to set up special education establishments may be taken by the public sector or the private sector, but all establishments should conform strictly with appropriate medical and psychological regulations.

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