

Respond to The Commission Staff Working Document Schools for the 21st Century –

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From:

BBS – Europe,

School leaders,

European Citizenship Education.

The Netherlands

In the Introduction to this Working document respondents are invited to describe the actions that are necessary within their national context. We would like to answer the questions about the state of affairs about Dutch education and schools. BBS-Europe is a foundation of (ex) school leaders of schools of considerable size in the Netherlands with the shared feeling of urgency for European Citizenship Education. We worked together with school leaders from 27 European countries to formulate the Basic Knowledge about European values in education. (www.euro-source.eu the item “Basic Knowledge”.)

The final report on this issue was published February, 2007. (www.BBS-Europe.org the item “publications”.)

We contacted European school leaders because they are able to create possibilities in their schools; they are authorized to make decisions concerning the school plans and to put a step forward to a democratic and open atmosphere in the schools. We feel that there is no investment more desirable at the present than a good exchange of information about the modernisation of education between the European countries.

The Introduction states two general questions:

1. Identify what actions are necessary within their national contexts to ensure that schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st century.

The steps that need to be taken at the national level in order to ensure that good educational development occurs in the 21st century, means for the Dutch situation that the achievement of a better balance between knowledge and skills has to be worked out as well as the achievement of a better balance between general and subject-specific skills.

A further integration of the curriculum with fewer divisions between subjects and skills is an important challenge for the next few years.

A shorter workweek for teachers coupled with more opportunities for professionalisation is necessary.

2. Identify those aspects of school education on which cooperation at European Union level could help to support member States in the modernisation of their systems.

Some of the important contexts in which cooperation can be encouraged in European schools are in the first place the learning of languages. The use of ICT in schools where students learn to communicate with one another and learn to discuss and solve problems as a group has to be encouraged. ICT is an excellent possibility for the (supra national organized) dialogue between school directors from different regions of Europe.

Chapter 2. Development and challenges.

2.1 .Key competences for all

Question 1: How can the school be organized in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of key competences?

The idea of key competences is widespread at all levels of education in Holland; knowledge must be made applicable for both use in practical situations and as a source for theoretical questions on the final exam.

It is important that students experience the relationship between various subjects. For example, students can become more aware of how ICT can be of benefit in the study of modern foreign languages, or geography, or history, etc.

2.2. Preparing Europeans for Life long learning

Question 2: How can schools equip young people with the competences and the motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?

Life Long Learning has to do with learning how to learn. The goal is to make students more flexible and better able to deal with change. Students should become aware of the fact that life long jobs are becoming more and more a thing of the past. At the same time studying and working outside of the country are becoming more commonplace. The rapid changes in information technology also challenge a student's ability to deal with change.

2.3. Contributing to sustainable economic growth

Question 3: How can school systems contribute to supporting long term sustainable economic growth in Europe?

Schools must emphasize the importance of knowledge for the economy.

This will require historical, cultural and economical awareness of the student's own environment and the wider European setting.

It is important that schools communicate with businesses so that there is a good mutual understanding about what knowledge and skills will be needed by students in the future, and how apprenticeship can be best implemented. The aim being to promote stable economic growth.

2.4. Responding to challenges in our societies

Question 4: How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?

Schools can not solve the problem of poverty, but they can, in cooperation with other interested parties (churches, community centres etc) provide students with a structured learning environment where the necessary skills are made available. Schools should promote Life Long learning as an attitude that makes a successful career in society possible.

Schools should find a way to go along with diversity in a positive way.

Early school leaving is a very complex problem which should be solved, like the poverty problem, in cooperation with other social and business parties on a local level.

Schools can promote however good education for every one where ever they may reside and whatever their cultural or ethnic background.

2.5 A school for all

Question 5: If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards curricula, school organisation and the roles of teachers?

Schools can respond to requests by students for individual attention by streaming (working and learning in groups) and in some cases by encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning process. This could be summed up as “learning from and with each other” Students can become more aware of the different levels in learning (for example, theoretical vs practical knowledge). Students can also become more critical in their thinking about the world and about their own sources of information.

2.6. Preparing young Europeans for active citizenship

Question 6: How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with the fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?

Schools can create situations where students learn from positive experiences, from what they do well and are successful at. Good experiences could involve others elsewhere in Europe via ICT. Through the process of sharing knowledge, students can learn fundamental values and their importance in society. This is a process that involves teachers, school leaders, students and parents.

A democratic school organisation with participation of students is a vital part of the learning process.

2.7. Teachers – key agents for a change

Question 7: How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?

Schools must be given the facilities which would allow them to search for solutions with which they are confronted. Schools can share experiences with one another, when they have a common problem. Especially here, the subsidiary principle of the European Union is suitable. Local problems should be solved at a local level. This can be done in the following way:

- schools should analyze their own problems,
- schools in one country can share their experiences with one another or with other schools elsewhere in Europe,
- schools should make use of learning -centred teaching methods,
- schools should take time to reflect on their own experiences.

Sharing experiences is important in all these respects.

2.8. Helping school communities to develop

Question 8: How can school community's best receive the leadership and motivation they need to succeed? How can they be empowered to develop in response to changing needs and demands?

Students learn from good examples, which the school should provide. Students should become aware of the fact that democratic atmosphere in a school results in more involvement and better results.

School directors from different regions in Europe should share their experience in intercultural discussion groups. Training is needed to do so.

Involvement in democratic processes is a responsibility for everyone who is interested in the school, school leaders should encourage and stimulate the teachers to deal creatively with change and take initiatives. The educational inspectors should also encourage flexibility. In this respect we suggest that the Dutch inspectors share their experiences with their Finnish colleagues.