

Statement of the Network of European Psychologists in the Educational System (NEPES) to the Public Consultation “Schools for the 21st Century” by Marianne Kant-Schaps, Chair of the Steering Committee NEPES, Reply on the fourth question

NEPES is a **Network of European Psychologists (EPs) in the Educational System** under the umbrella of the European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations (EFPA, www.efpa.be) representing 32 Member States across Europe with about 300.000 members. NEPES has been founded during the last EFPA Congress and strives after the following main goals and main projects:

- to promote professional development by exchange and cooperation among Psychologists working in Schools and other Educational Systems in Europe
- to facilitate access to special psychological knowledge and experience of EPs for civil society and political decision makers
- to contribute creating an optimal learning environment for all learners in Europe

STRAND1: Mainstreaming and strengthening European EP Networking

- to provide an effective web portal for Educational Psychologists and their relevant partners in the Educational System
- to organise cooperative activities among Educational Psychologists

STRAND 2: Knowledge Building

- to share and compare Educational Psychology Policies through country reports and peer learning
- to share best practices through internet community building and organized activities
- to provide knowledge exchange mechanisms through International School Psychology and European Psychology Congresses

STRAND 3: Development of a cooperative data base for resource exchange

- to provide a European database of Educational Psychology Resources (Services, Best Practice, Information, Research) through internet communities of expert groups
- to network with other relevant partners in the Educational and Health System

NEPES can provide with its facilities and expertise in the field of EP across Europe support structures to pupils, parents, teaching staff, school administration and political decision makers in order to improve European Education and Development.

Why Educational Psychologists?

EPs play a prominent role in the educational system ¹ and thus in developing key competences. Being specialized on psychology in the educational system EPs make well founded scientific based and evidence-based contributions to different aspects of the topic

¹ ref. EFPA report 2001 [Psychologists in the Educational System in Europe](http://www.efpa.be); the International School Psychology Association has worked for the ‘Education for all’ Program of the UNESCO http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=33740&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.h, International Association of School Psychologists <http://www.ispaweb.org>; Crisis Intervention Programs in Schools have been developed by Educational Psychologists as a Comenius Project http://www.ispaweb.org/Documents/ISPA_2002_crisis_handout.pdf

“Schools for the 21st century”. Most of the essential issues mentioned in the ‘Work programme Key Competences for Lifelong Learning’ are in the centre of the work of EPs. Advice and counselling by EPs already is respected and requested in many European Union Member States in various ways. Two examples illustrate EPs actions improving education:

1. A national model : Finland (Arja Sigfrids, EP)

The Finnish education system works as an entity. Whenever pedagogical matters are considered as important, they are included in a psycho-social and political context. In other words the Finnish society requests from its schools to improve the instructional quality to promote students performance. This conception of quality education was also enhanced through research in Educational Psychology. Pianta et La Paro² declare that « *the relationships that children have with adults and other children in families, child care and school programmes provide the foundation of their success in school*” and they define readiness for school as follows : “*Children are ready for school when, for a period of several years, they have been exposed to consistent stable adults who are emotionally invested in them; to a physical environment that is safe and predictable ; to regular routines and rhythms of activity; to competent peers ; and to materials that stimulate their exploration and enjoyment of the world and from which they derive a sense of mastery. These factors alone would be better indices of readiness for school than any measurable aspect of child performance.*”

As the psychosocial context is involved in the conception of education in Finland, all children have free access to the school where their basic needs are filled. For example a warm lunch is served every day. This may appear as a trivial observation, but we understand that food and security are prior to education for human beings. If these basic needs are not filled it is an illusion to believe that education could progress.

The Finnish school system is probably the most efficient in the world for literacy. 100% of the children attending regular schools can read and write. It is also due to the strong involvement of school psychologists in the process of reading and language learning. In Finland as in most European countries, migrant and refugees families are numerous and the schools are ready to prepare their children in learning the language and the Finnish way of life. It is a bit more difficult for adolescents when they arrive and cannot read in their own language, but they receive the same support as the younger ones. They are also taught in their mother tongue as first language, Finnish being taught as a second language. Adults, men and women, may also benefit of the system.

Early prevention is also well organized. Finnish children attend the kindergarden at age 3 and regularly visit the day care centre where they meet doctors, nurses, educational psychologists and speech therapists. This mechanism of prevention helps most children in joining the regular school (at 7) and explains the high rate of school success.

For handicapped and children with special educational needs, inclusion has been generalized. Rehabilitation teams including EPs support the child in the regular class. In some cases, handicapped children who need specific medical and therapeutic support may be orientated towards special classes or schools.

School psychologists have also an important action in the field of training and psychological information for teachers, but also for parents and students. The recognized role of the school psychologist and his/her place in the educational staff is a factor of the quality education in Finland. The Finnish model could be used in Europe as an example of best practices in terms of support structures in the educational setting.

² Robert C.Pianta, Karen La Paro: Improving early school success. Educational Leadership 60-7 April 2003 The First years of school pp 24-29

2. Promoting school values among families of low economical status (Nicole Bailly,EP France)³:

In 1981, the French Government proposed a new concept, the Priority Education Area (ZEP for Zone d'Education Prioritaire). This concept was "to give more to those who have less" and offer more resources to some schools in order to improve educational conditions. The school psychologist in a ZEP near Paris contributed to an experience of work with parents of very low economical status in order to help them to become more familiar with the school culture and values and motivate their children.

Observation: If school failure is not fatal and if it remains unchanged year after year in some area of deprivation it is because everything has not been attempted, because analysis and research are not encouraged in the field. We have known for decades now, the role of family implication in the success or failure of children at school. The position of the school psychologist is of major importance to bridge the gap between these families with low economical status and the teachers most of them belonging to middle or upper middle class. This implies to articulate psychological, social, cultural, economical and political factors to change the relationship between the school and its users. It implies also to have time. This kind of action can be efficient on the long term by continuity in the work and a minimal stability of the professionals participating in the experience.

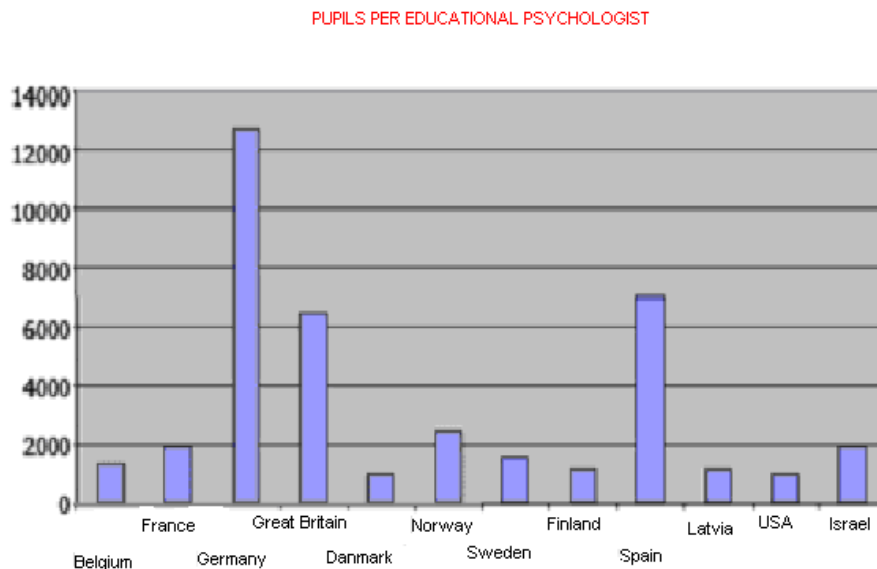
A meeting point at Chanteloup les Vignes In this suburb not far from Paris, a meeting point for families has been organized in a pre-elementary school. This successful work and co-operation between EPs, educators and the families has allowed to develop mutual trust and mutual respect. After long hesitations each actor felt it was possible to tell one's fear, one's misunderstanding, often one's anger. It is cross cultural work that has been done between people supposed to belong to the same nation, living in the same country. The efforts of all to listen to the others which is a rule imposed by the framework proposed by the school psychologist and the other members of the team, permit mutual trust and sometimes reveal to one or the other a feeling of communication that had never been experienced before. It is considered that what really makes the difference between pupils, in their relation with the school is not the ethnic and religious differences and the trauma of the migration but the economical situation that provokes behaviour of fight-flight, feelings of being a permanent loser, incapacity to take a personal decision, generated by social exclusion as a consequence of great poverty rather than cultural traditions. Even in difficult economical situations families that have maintained internal solidarities, and or have been able to use the official resources of the system are in better conditions than those who have lost or had never these network of solidarity. Bridging the gap between the school and these family is a difficult work, but when it has been done, families recover their self esteem, they have a better understanding of the school code and become able to help their children in overcoming the cognitive barriers generated by the social conflict between their parents and the school. EPs have worked to fill the gap successfully.

Health, learning and workforce are interrelated; they are mutually reinforcing each other. That is that on one hand EPs are recognized as valuable contributor to economical and educational development, on the other hand posts for EPs are fading away across Europe. This contradiction demands a strengthening of their position in order to be able to contribute to school improvement.

³ Nicole Bailly, 'Psychologist in a Priority Education Area, the Child, the Family, the School ... and the Cognition' in Le Journal des Psychologues n°201 October 2002. Developed version published in 'Cahier pratiques de Psychologie en Milieu Educatif', AFPS 2005

SITUATION OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN EUROPE

According to an EFPA survey May 2005 only 15% of psychologists work in the educational field. Because of historical reasons the development of EP is diverse across Europe. Not all of the European Member States have an organisation of Educational Psychologists. Some countries like Latvia with 66 % or Lithuania with 40% have a significant presence of EPs, whereas in some countries like Italy psychologists in schools are almost non-existent or very rare like in Germany with 3%, shown in the following table 4:



Results from a survey requested by the DG SANCO about Mental Wellbeing confirm the lack of psychological support in our European societies and this especially for young citizens. The survey suggests ‘that only a minority of those who sought help has received psychological treatment...that demand for psychological help and supply of treatment do not always go together. It can be noted that those respondents who presumably need the most information, i.e. those who have sought help, appear to find it more difficult to acquire it than those who at present are not in need of immediate help. This is especially the case in Slovakia, Hungary and Luxembourg.’ The paper highlights **‘considerable future research needs for coordinated EU studies across all disorders and age groups. These needs are most pronounced for the new EU member states as well as more generally for adolescent and older populations’**.

In conclusion, insufficient mental health has enormous negative effects on working life and social relations.’⁵ We are convinced that a strong presence of EPs expertise in the European Educational System (prevention, intervention, evaluation) contributes to an improved education and development in Europe. NEPES has facilities and expertise to give support to European Policies in Education.

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⁴ Source Seifried, BDP 2006

⁵ Survey in Special Eurobarometer, European Commission, Mental Well-being, May 2006