

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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BACKGROUND NOTE

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EC EDUCATION POLICY: PRIORITY TO ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education should be the priority field for educational reform in Europe, according to a report just published in Brussels. This strategy is chosen both as a means of overcoming the resistance of teachers to change, and because adult education is relatively new and less "nationally" oriented than education at high school or university level. The report also says that now that continuing education is a fact of life, the education of the 16-19 age-group should be considered the first period of adult training, rather than the last phase of schooling.

The report, requested by the Commission of the European Communities, is by Henri Janne, former Belgian Minister of Education and currently head of both the College Scientifique de l'Institut de Sociologie and the Institute d'Etudes Europeenes — faculties of the Free University of Brussels. It is based on Janne's interviews with 32 European educators and one American (James Perkins, President of the International Council for Educational Development of New York). Says Janne: "...in a society undergoing permanent change in the scientific, technical, and social fields, there is no longer any good vocational training which does not comprise a sound general training at all levels, and there is no longer any good general training which is not linked with concrete practice and, in principle, with real work."

The Community's Links to Education

The Community has been involved in education since its inception by provisions for vocational training and rehabilitation to enable workers displaced by economic change to adapt to new circumstances. Throughout the years, an awareness has grown of the links between education and the economy and of the need for continuing education. The Community has also been involved by its pledge to assure the right of establishment and the free movement of workers. This raises the question of universalizing "national" degrees and diplomas. Regional development, too, requires education to make it work.

The Community has also addressed education through its "European Schools" for children of Community officials. Faced with the problem of educating first six, now nine, nationalities, speaking different languages, to enter universities in their home countries, the European Schools developed a bilingual curriculum, teaching such "sensitive" subjects as history without a national bias.

It was not, however, until November 1971 that the national Ministers for Education first met as the EC Council of Ministers. Out of this meeting, there grew the Convention for a European University Institute in Florence, Italy, for postgraduate study of European integration. The Ministers also decided that a new approach should be made to the question of diploma equivalence, one of the topics explored in the Janne report.

Education in Western Europe Today

Teaching at every level has become mass teaching, Janne observed. Knowledge is expanding rapidly. Mass media have ended the school's monopoly over culture and information, and aware people are determined to get and to guide their own education. Complaints proliferate about the dichotomy between the education system and real life. There is a conflict between equality of access to education and the equality of access to professional life, between the employment of the educated and the satisfaction of their aspirations. These are among the reasons Janne reported for the lack of motivation among the young.

Education's current difficulties reflect the crisis of values in society at large, Janne concluded, a crisis marked by the clash of generations. To solve these problems, he suggested as a point of departure that: (1) European culture should be based on harmonizing the technical and the natural environment and on social relations which restore man's sense of influence over his own life: (2) European culture should be open to the outside world, implying that Europeans cure themselves of their sense of superiority. (3) educational objectives should be established pragmatically and pluralistically, with, not for, youth. Education should develop personalities, not merely fill minds with facts, so that graduates can respond and adapt in a changing world.

The Community's Role in Education

In accomplishing these broad objectives, Janne assigned the Community mainly the role of catalyst and harmonizer, strictly respecting national structures and education traditions. His suggestions included:

- the association of non-Community countries with Community initiatives, particularly educational exchanges
- concertation, at Community level, of member countries' participation in other international organizations dealing with education
- creation of an "Educational and Cultural Committee," composed of private educators, to give practical advice to the Community on educational proposals
- promotion of a "European Charter of Education," if the EC member countries decide that they have truly common objectives and an adequate feeling of "European specificity"
- the seeking of practical achievements and "avoiding ambitious but sterile concepts and speechifying"
- concentration on the areas of education mentioned in the EC Treaties and on merging fields, such as adult education, all from the angle of continuing education (Community financing of experiments in these fields was also mentioned.)
- the viewing of Community policy in the long-term and conceiving it in terms of forward planning.

"Finally," Janne pointed out, "...by the style of its policy, by its dimension, by the principle of the choice of its objectives, and by its term, the Community has a function which is compensatory and complementary to the national policies, however with effects, spontaneous or prudently intentional, of gradual harmonization."

Introducing the European Dimension to Education

On the introduction of a "European dimension" to education, Janne reported two dampening factors: (1) the traditional attachment to the historic nation-state and (2) the fear of creating a European chauvinism. For these reasons, he said, educational reform must be based on European practices, and education must be used to acquaint the European peoples with each other. Among his suggestions for Community action were:

- continuation of the "correction" of history textbooks by eliminating biased and misleading judgments
- consideration of the possibility of creating a Community level agency to produce or promote the production of all kinds of didactic equipment and materials to strengthen positive and well informed attitudes about Europe
- fostering linguistics teaching which focuses on the common structure of European languages.

Equivalence of Degrees and Diplomas

Noting that the multiplication of options makes studies more and more diversified, Janne concluded that the goal of agreeing on equivalence of degrees and diplomas looks more and more elusive. His study disclosed another means to the same end: eligibility procedures with guarantees which would "build up a system of 'case law' and as such relegate the formalism of present negotiations into the background." One possible procedure involved the appointment of an arbitrator in each country or an Embassy counselor to check on admissions. The procedure would resemble conciliation, but with the right of appeal to the European Communities Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Final degrees and diplomas (except for professions such as medicine) would be accepted as equivalent by all member countries, if mentioned in a Community list.

As a means of fostering student exchanges, Janne said that a number of the educators interviewed had mentioned the creation of consortia of universities for well defined disciplines. First and possibly second year bachelor candidates would be excluded from participation in them because of the problems of social adaptation involved in study abroad. Janne suggested that the Community should open a university cooperation and exchange service to promote the formation of university consortia by developing model statutes, subsidizing new consortia initially, providing information about them, and helping to create contacts.

NB. The 61-page Janne report may be purchased for \$0.40 from the European Community Information Service in Washington or New York.