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European Commission
Directorate-General for Education and Culture

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS PRESENTED IN SEC(2007)1009

First of all it is great that Directorate-General for Education and Culture has opened a public consultation on this important issue. And this kind of consultation is especially good in the spirit of Transparency Initiative.

Just to remind about Transparency Initiative ¹ it should be noted that there has been a public consultation based on COM(2007)185 ². The answers of COM(2007)185 consultation ³ are publicly seen and I propose Directorate-General for Education and Culture follow actively the Transparency Initiative.

The opinion part of this document is 4 pages in A4 size in 12 pt font size as was instructed in the instructions for this consultation. The annex 1 holds information of copyright, licence and disclaimer.

Best Regards,

Jukka Rannila
citizen of Finland

signed electronically

1 Transparency Initiative: http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/index_en.htm

2 The COM(2007)185 consultation: http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/revision/index_en.htm

3 Answers to the COM(2007)185 consultation: http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/revision/contributions_en.htm.

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OPINIONS

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

Answer 1:

This is a matter of belief. It seems that there is not yet proved to universally binding principles in learning. If there is an (or should it be said THE) answer this question would not even be presented. It is possible to believe that all people are born the same and it is only matter of raising and educating them in proper way. If it is believed that people are born with different ⁴ sets features ⁵ then there is different thoughts about raising and education. There is not yet found unified learning theory that would have been proved to be universally valid.

Therefore it seems to be quite difficult to get European-wide common understanding for elementary school ⁶ organisation models since there is not even common view of the guiding principle, i.e. learning.

Despite these problems we have to try to solve this with the best known, even extremely limited, knowledge ⁷. May be there could be some sort synthesis of the current knowledge about learning and the informed guess about best possible organisation. However knowing academic researchers there will be large and never-ending strife ⁸ without clear solution which means that administration has to guess anyway.

Good luck.

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

Answer 2:

This is a hard question.

This opinion has a mild assumption that it might be so that people have different sets of features – in this case skills. Development of external environment can create situations where some sets of skills are more valued than other. Since these valuations change in time and space it is hard to say exactly what should be taught in elementary school. This leads to the dilemma: whatever valuation is made for the elementary school there is always some group of children whose speciality gives challenges, i.e. elementary school is either too challenging or not challenging enough. And since they are valuations that means that thriving idea of elementary school systems is under the pressure of political process all the time.

What could be the opinion noting those certain problems? In this opinion it is presumed that

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- 4 World Health Organisation (WHO) ICD-10 disease classification gives a hint that it is might be possible that people might have different sets of features <http://www.who.int/classifications/apps/icd/icd10online/>
 - 5 A feature might not please as a term all people since it sounds like features of a machine.
 - 6 The writer is used to elementary school system in Finland, meaning basically the same education for cohort of children born in certain year.
 - 7 Here we do not continue discussion of detailing different sides of knowledge and creating knowledge.
 - 8 However being stubborn enough can sometimes mean that something new can be found.

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elementary school system in its current form concentrates only limited sets of valued skills. Is it possible to find solutions where elementary school systems could in a positive way help people to find their real talents? However it should be noticed that once again our knowledge is way too limited⁹ to understand this phenomenon. If the elementary school system can give a positive understanding persons real capabilities it can lead to situation where a person can navigate in changing external environment. In this theoretical exercise could a hypothesis be constructed that a person knowing all her/his capabilities could be an all-the-time-learning person when external environment changes.

However the previous theoretical exercise is very hard to implement in real life noting also that valuations are not in some cases¹⁰ based on facts. But in principle it would be nice to have persons knowing all her/his capabilities, not limited to currently known, giving possibility to further advancement in life after elementary school.

Knowing the real situation it can be said these ideas are nice but hard to implement in practise. And like it is mentioned in the working paper having special schools is not the solution since they lead to segregation.

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

Answer 3:

There is implicit and explicit assumptions in the introduction for this question. In the case of future studies it can be said that there are some assumptions about future: e.g. linear, evolutionary or transitional. In the question it seems to be linear assumption of future: how we can keep linearly growing economy. On the other hand in the introduction there was some thoughts about constant change which could be evolutionary assumptions also meaning challenges to sustain linearly growing economy.

However this opinion has a mild attitude that development in time is transitional. Like it was said before school system that it should help find persons to find her/his all capabilities. When in transitional point of development is reality it could be then easier to move forwards with those skills that are valued after transition.

In reality it is impossible to predict all transitions in the future and therefore knowing capabilities will help in transitional situations.

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?

Answer 4:

Well. The European Union has promoted an idea of removing certain barriers also barriers for free

9 The advancement of computer computing power, new breakthroughs in following activities of brain and research results of genetics combined is creating the situation where the basic assumptions of psychology and other related fields including learning theories are shattering all the time.

10 There is an interesting branch of research going on to find out hereditary of political attitudes. Studies on separated identical twins raised in different families are interesting when this issue is researched. However population of separated identical twins raised in different families is limited.

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movement of people. And then there is situation when people have really moved. Free movement is a great idea when concerning adult people who can be considered as sovereign persons.

Will that work when there is free movement of children, actually families, across the borders in Europe? As indicated in the introduction for question that is not that simple in the case of elementary school. As it can be seen there is many challenges, actually should be said problems, when this phenomenon has enlarged. It is not any more rare question previously concerning only limited amount of expatriates.

The introduction to question mentions hard statistics showing that nice ideas are not easily implemented in practise.

Is there other ways? The effect of school size should be examined very thoroughly especially in large ¹¹ cities. There are some mild indications that human mind can hold exact information ¹² of acquaintances for only limited amount persons and the remaining could be then handled with stereotypes. Based on this assumption large schools can mean too much units for a human mind which leads to using stereotypes. There should be also be clearer understanding what is the amount of these units of a average person in the elementary school and especially it should be examined is this amount smaller with children compared to adults. This could then lead to an estimation of good size of a school.

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?

Answer 5:

Referencing to previous question of overall number of units that human mind can handle this naturally leads considerations of class size. There has been many researches of the attention span, meaning the amount of people which an average leader can handle efficiently without falling into a chaos ¹³. So I wonder is the effect of class size already researched? At least in Finland there has been strife about this issue from time to time especially when some school is closed forever ¹⁴.

If is this already researched then it is merely of shouting slogans in the political process.

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

Answer 6:

11 Meaning that for example capitol of Finland, Helsinki with 564 521 citizens in 1 January 2007, is an example of large city. Some other readers might consider that as a small city.

12 The exact number is not known and there are some guesses. The most referenced example is the size of a company in army and it is quite often near 150 regardless of the nation. But the question is developing of this during adolescence.

13 Asking from parents they probably say that attention span is smaller with children than with adults.

14 This does not mean only countryside. There was some small citizen action in capitol area school districts when there was an idea of reduction of schools. However in the Finnish scale citizen action or demonstrations does not mean burning cars, destroying public and private property and blocking transport for days. That kind of action is considered somehow barbarian and non-productive in the Finnish context.

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Check answers 4 and 5.

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

Answer 7:

This is also related to school and class size, check answers 4 and 5. Is there is any research on this?

This is a valuation question once again. What is valued? There are many political values when considering the size of public sector. If public sector is meant to be small then it leads naturally to the question that why schools should be publicly funded. If there is valuation to keep certain sectors in the control of government or local entities it might also mean having schools based on public funding. Like mentioned before this valuation problem leads to pressure towards school systems based on changing political situation.

Is the profession of teachers is highly or lowly valued? Depending on this there will be different levels of applicants to institutions educating teachers.

Can this valuation of elementary schools and teachers be agreed on the European level?

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

Answer 8:

Well. Once again a hard question.

There should be clearer mechanisms to follow the well-being of pupils. Based on the observable fact that people are children only once and certain limited time there is not time to wait years for decisions in committees. The actions should be therefore quite fast compared to many other administrative process.

These ways to measure well-being of pupils should be invented and tested European-wide. I presume that there are quite innovative solutions in member states and also internationally. The best solution(s) should be found in the comparison. It is then question of efficiency and effectiveness and adjusting of administrative processes.

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ANNEX 1

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¹⁵ Based on the Finnish three-party system there is phenomenon called extreme-centre in Finland.