

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 29 (2002)
Heft: 5

Artikel: Education : "Facing reality"
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906587>

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What can be done to combat this? "One should examine the school critically and pay more attention to the parents, who are often isolated." According to the president of FAPERT, "parents are often poorly informed about the system."

If parents are unaware of what is going on, trust is soon lost. That is also true of certain business sectors which define their own appraisal criteria for apprentices. For Anne Seydoux "it's normal for parents to feel lost in these times of general uncer-

tainty, and there is no use in pillorying them."

"Whether parents give up or set demands, one should always listen to them," says Anne Seydoux. "Of course everyone has a special task to perform, but parents must be well-informed if they want to help their children." And the rules of conduct? "Children at school are preparing for life in society. So the school's role is more than the mere provision of educational materials. Instruction and personal development complement each

other. So it is important to create an open atmosphere where discussion is encouraged."

Then there is the political dimension, concludes the president of FAPERT: "With 26 different school systems, federalism has definite limitations. The systems, curricula and tools must be harmonised by linguistic region or even at a national level. We should also think about creating a federal department for public education." IE

Translated from the German.



„Facing reality“

According to Martine Brunschwig Graf, President of the Geneva Department of Education and Vice President of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education, the problems identified by the PISA report are nothing new.

Swiss Review: Did the findings of the PISA report on the average reading skills of children at state school surprise you?

Martine Brunschwig Graf: Yes and no, because the problems were already recognised before the report was published. We expect more detailed information on maths and science in the PISA reports of 2003 and 2006. I believe we need this instrument on a national and international scale because it forces us to face reality.

What is your recipe for improving the situation?

First I must point out that a number of nationwide measures have been implemented whose results will be announced at the end of the year. In Geneva we have decided to teach children how to read at age four. I am convinced that children should attend two years of pre-school – although there is no nation-wide obligation to do so, I believe these pre-school



years should be integrated in the obligatory number of school years. The sooner problems are identified, the sooner they can be corrected.

On the other hand we have carried out sweeping educational reforms based on a differentiated form of teaching which takes the learning difficulties of students into account. We have also introduced cantonal examinations in French and maths at the end of the second primary class as well as standard French examinations in the eighth school year. These instruments of cross-comparison should allow us to better monitor the way children's knowledge and skills develop.

Are there any indications that teachers are overworked in Geneva?

The teaching profession has undergone profound changes, and many teachers are ill-prepared for developing the required skills within a new concept. This is a general problem which necessitates a concerted effort, if possible at a national level. Teach-

ers for their part must exhibit mobility and flexibility in line with the trend in modern society. Their training should provide them with access to other careers if they wish one day to switch.

How can we combat the increase in poor performance and violence in the school?

Besides the many measures already initiated, I would remind you that schools, even if they are obligatory, do not simply have to put up with everything. If the rules are not respected there are sanctions to ensure an acceptable working climate for all.

So do we need to educate parents?

Some parents have a tendency to over-protect their children, sometimes even with the aid of lawyers. This is a dangerous attitude which questions the educational competences of the school. Other parents tend to delegate their own educational obligations to the school. I think schools should involve parents more, but within the limits of each individual's competence, profession and responsibility. IE

Translated from the German



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