

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

MEETING OF THE OECD EDUCATION COMMITTEE AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL

INVESTING IN COMPETENCIES FOR ALL

REPORT OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Paris, France, April 2-4, 2001

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Permanent Delegation of Canada to the OECD

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INTRODUCTION

1. The OECD Secretariat will provide a detailed report on the meetings. This report and all documents referred to below can be obtained by contacting the CMEC Secretariat or by referring to the OECD web site (www.oecd.org/els/ministerial/).
2. The following documents were prepared for this meeting:
 - DEELSA/ED/CERI/CD(2000)12 Analytic Report Parts 1-5
 - Part 1 Lifelong Learning for All: Policy Directions
 - Part 2 Lifelong Learning for All: Taking Stock
 - Part 3 Closing the Gap: Securing Benefits for All from Education and Training
 - Part 4 Competencies for the Knowledge Economy
 - Part 5 What Future for Our Schools?
 - DEELSA/ED/MIN(2001)13 Issues for Discussion
 - DEELSA/ED/MIN(2001)14 Draft Communiqué
3. The program of the meeting was as follows:
 - a. Consultations with the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC)
 - b. Forum on Information and Communications Technologies in Education
 - c. Plenary Theme 1 – Lifelong Education and Training for All
 - d. Lunch for Ministers – Trade in Services: Risks and Advantages
 - e. Plenary Theme 2 – Fostering the Necessary Skills in the Knowledge Society
 - f. Plenary Theme 3 – Developing Innovative Teaching and Learning in Schools
 - g. Adoption of the Communiqué
 - h. Lunch for Ministers – Promoting Positive Social Values in Schools
 - i. Press Conference
4. The forum and plenary discussions each lasted one half-day. Themes were introduced by the Chair, the Honourable Edelgard Bulmahn, Minister of Education and Research for Germany, who then invited a pre-selected country to lead the discussion on the topic, followed by two others who contributed their own specific contexts. The OECD Secretariat then reported on the discussions relative to the theme that had taken place

with BIAC and TUAC, and finally the floor was opened to all ministers, with the aim of avoiding long speeches and promoting lively debate. This aim was reached mainly during the lunch discussions and the discussion of Theme 3, which was chaired by the minister of education from Denmark, the Honourable Margrethe Vestager.

5. The Canadian delegation was led by the Honourable Elvy Robichaud, Minister of Education for New Brunswick. Her Excellency, Suzanne Hurtubise, Canadian Ambassador to OECD, provided valuable contextual information with respect to OECD and Canada. She hosted the first meeting of the Canadian delegation with a working lunch, where the objectives of the delegation (see Appendix 1) were confirmed and the documents for the meeting were reviewed. The delegation met each morning prior to the start of the day's work.
6. In response to a request from the Dutch minister of Education, Mr. Herman Loeks, Minister Robichaud met with Mr. Loeks and a delegation of four officials to receive information about a Dutch proposal for a network of six or seven countries, which they hoped would include Canada, on leading-edge thinking in educational technologies. The proposal would include sharing expertise and research by bringing together a small group of civil servants identified as experts in their field at the elementary/secondary and community college levels. The group would be results-oriented. Other countries that had been or would be approached were Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland. Mr. Robichaud indicated his interest and said that, once he had received more concrete information about the proposal, he would inform his colleagues and provide the Dutch minister an official response from Canada.

It was agreed that the proposal would be sent to the CMEC Secretariat and to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for follow-up in Canada.

3.a. Consultations with the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the Trade Unions Advisory Committee (TUAC)

On Monday, April 2, Chair Bulmahn held consultations with BIAC and TUAC. Most member countries were represented during the session; Ms. Lenore Burton and Mr. Richard Martin represented Canada.

Statements made by the BIAC delegates focused mainly on issues related to "Employability," or more specifically to the need to address the current and anticipated shortages of skilled workers due to high demands in the innovation-based businesses and industries. BIAC delegates were strongly supportive of lifelong learning strategies (which they also call "life-wide" learning) as a way to overcome the shortage of skilled workers. In addition, BIAC delegates pointed out that, in the context of the knowledge-based economy, companies will increasingly need workers with good generic skills, such as the ability to organize, conceptualize, work in teams, communicate, and use information resources effectively. For those purposes, therefore, BIAC recommended

that academic curricula give increasing importance to ICT skills while maintaining other basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, as core objectives of the education system.

TUAC delegates, for their part, expressed their readiness to contribute to and support innovation in teaching and learning. However, they also emphasized with the Education Ministers that constructive partnerships between the main actors — the ministers, the teachers and their unions — will be key to any future progress. Therefore, they called upon the Ministers to develop policies to ensure not only that schools are equipped appropriately and teachers are trained adequately for the knowledge-based economy, but also that policies are put in place to improve the practice of teaching and the management of educational institutions.

Finally, both groups expressed similar views on the need to recognize learning and access to the various sources of learning as an integral part of the life of all individuals and to find ways to recognize and validate learning in non-formal settings. On that last point, both groups noted that current credential systems have not kept pace with the needs of the changing environment and felt that in light of the increasing importance given to informal learning, ways to access and validate new methods of acquiring skills beyond formal academic institutions needed to be considered. This idea was echoed by Ministers in their discussion on the need to change some of the objectives of education and training in view of the changing skill requirements and the new technologies in the workplace.

3.b. Forum on Information and Communications Technologies in Education (ICT)

The Forum was attended by heads of delegations and two other representatives per country. Other members of the delegations were able to follow the discussions in a listening room equipped with a large screen and sound. Accompanying the head of delegation for Canada were the Ambassador and Mr. Raymond Daigle. The other members were in the listening room.

Professor Seymour Papert of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology gave the keynote address. Prof. Papert opened by complementing the OECD Secretariat on the background document and indicating that he would merely expand on the scenarios as described in that document. He maintained that education had no vision of the future, one in which children will learn different content and where resources and thinking need to be devoted. He argued that educators misunderstand the role of technologies and that the computer industry has not responded to educational needs. He also noted the paradoxical context of the explosion in information alongside the institutionalization of standardized tests.

He proposed that, in the case of schools, the computer industry should direct its attention away from improvement of hardware in favour of producing less expensive hardware that would allow all students to use their own computer for about \$10 per year. He also stated

the importance of teacher training in new technologies since students are generally more familiar and more comfortable with using technology than teachers are. There is a gap between what is happening in society and what is taking place in schools.

Jarl Bengtsson of the OECD Secretariat then provided an update on the OECD project on ICT: School Innovation and the Quality of Learning. The project covers six themes: change in educational culture; e-learning and partnerships; the digital divide; teaching and learning; the need to better understand what works; and student reviews of ICT (cuts across all other themes). The preliminary results bear the following messages:

- a) There is a huge market developing in ICT, an expansion in the number of students in distance learning, and an increase in public/private partnerships in ICT at the postsecondary level.
- b) There must be investment in teacher training and elimination of the digital divide, which is an equipment divide globally, but within OECD it translates as a learning divide, governing access and equality.
- c) In all countries there are innovative activities taking place, which require reflection on how to generalize good practice.
- d) More evaluation is needed of what works.

He concluded by saying that countries are continuing to update their information structures to connect all students and that teacher training is a priority. Korea and Iceland were then invited to provide context with respect to their countries. They referred to the importance of lifelong learning and how reducing the digital divide was important to maintaining social cohesion.

The discussion was then opened to the floor. Two interventions were made from Canada: the Ambassador asked Dr. Papert what could be done to narrow the gap between the advances in technology being made in society in general and what is taking place in schools, and also to comment on the gender gap. The response to the first question was that every student needs a computer, but the second question was not addressed at all. Minister Robichaud underlined the importance of continuing teacher education, both pre- and in-service.

3.c. Plenary Theme 1 – Lifelong Education and Training for All

The Secretary-General of OECD, Mr. Donald Johnston, opened the proceedings by stating the importance of education as the key to development in the new knowledge economy. He referred to the last meeting of OECD ministers of education where strong political support for lifelong learning was expressed and where three themes were explored: the gaps in providing lifelong learning for all (early childhood education, adult education and the digital divide); new opportunities and new skill requirements in the knowledge economy; and ways to attract teachers and raise their stature.

In the discussions with BIAC and TUAC on Theme 1, it was clear that initial education was considered the primary responsibility of governments, but that social partners have a right to influence curricula; learning in non-formal settings should be recognized, including in salary; and more use should be made of the skills and competencies of workers.

This session was divided into two parts:

- opening statements by three ministers of education
- open discussion

Opening Addresses

Opening addresses were given by the Minister of Education for the United Kingdom, Baroness Tessa Blackstone, by the French Minister of Skills Training, Mr. Jean-Louis Melenchon, and by the Portuguese Minister of Education, Mr. Augusto Santos Silva.

The UK Minister of Education reminded the group that certain conditions must be met in order to ensure the participation of citizens in lifelong learning. She stated that four key elements can help reinforce participation.

1. Governments need to enhance basic education for citizens, in order to provide them with initial credentials.
2. Lifelong learning must be at the core of education from early childhood.
3. There must be a focus on the quality of learning, starting in elementary schools, in order to improve students' literacy and numeracy.
4. Governments must work together with employers in order to raise their awareness of this issue with a view to cooperating with them.

The French minister for skills training began by stating that lifelong learning is a responsibility of government.

He added that the concept of lifelong learning needs to be built around the skills that adults should possess, being defined as an individual's knowledge and set of skills. Mr. Melenchon stated that governments needed to provide this right for the entire population, since lifelong learning acknowledges the dignity of the individual.

The French minister added that the recognition of this concept will require major investments and a mobilization of all the resources of a government. He stressed the importance of the recognition of competencies in this model, and as a corollary the

importance of the quality of the instruments to be used for such recognition. He pointed to the elements that are vital in such a system:

1. Initial training must be of high quality since it cannot be recouped through lifelong learning.
2. Lifelong learning for adults must be related to the development of technological competencies.
3. Lifelong learning must be supported by a system designed to recognize the skills acquired by adults through on-the-job and life experiences.
4. Credentials must be reviewed in light of current developments.

In conclusion, he stated that economic performance related to lifelong learning is not an end in itself, and that what matters is human development and sustainable development.

The Portuguese Minister of Education stated that lifelong learning involved many considerations, including the following:

1. Preschool education must be expanded in each country and made accessible as a core precedent for lifelong learning.
2. Higher secondary education must be expanded and education provided until the age of 18. Learning in both the general and vocational streams must be provided with additional options, and there must be a better match between the two streams.
3. The adult education system must be expanded, focusing on four strategic considerations:
 - creating a prior learning recognition system
 - reviewing the educational proposition in order to enhance its appeal and to promote greater diversity
 - reviewing credentials to relate them to competencies acquired, including ICTs
 - involving civil society and various social and economic partners in the creation of this system

Discussions

The ministers of education who spoke addressed the following themes:

1. What are the skills expected of adults? Recognizing the importance of ICTs, countries nonetheless experience difficulties in determining the essentials to be acquired. A

common thread remains — the importance of starting with initial training and ensuring mastery of the skills acquired at that level.

2. What will be the role of credentials in this new model? Several ministers stated that we need to go beyond traditional credentials and ensure that new credentials include the skills necessary to guarantee students' success in the postsecondary level or in the labour market.
3. Countries must create a comparative evaluation system based on recognized indicators and including as a minimum the following elements:
 - quality of basic education
 - the extent to which training is integrated with the work of other ministries
 - quality of specialized services
 - interventions in underprivileged sectors
 - training practices
4. The digital divide between countries remains an obstacle to be overcome. In this respect, action must be taken as follows:
 - An infrastructure must be provided to give access to both teachers and students.
 - New educational practices must be developed using computer media.
 - Teacher training must be provided.
 - E-learning must be expanded.

In conclusion, it appears vital that governments set ambitious targets for success and continue to focus on this theme.

3.d. Lunch for Ministers – Trade in Services: Risks and Advantages

Context

The lunchtime discussion dealt with trade in education services, from the perspective of the expansion of the market for training.

The following questions were asked:

- What benefits are expected and what threats are anticipated by governments in this area?
- How can students' freedom of choice be balanced with countries' needs?
- What are the skills required in the new knowledge economy?
- How can those skills be acquired?

The ministers of education from Australia and Norway opened the discussion by describing the situation in their countries.

Discussion

The Australian Minister of Education stressed the importance of student exchanges for his country. Each year, some 150,000 foreign students, including 55% from developing countries, enrol in Australian universities. These students bring in substantial currency earnings (8% of operating costs for the universities concerned). Conversely, 30,000 Australian students go abroad to study.

The minister stated that the interest generated by Australia is due to the attraction of learning English and also to a code of conduct guaranteeing the quality of training in his country.

The Norwegian Minister of Education pointed out that his country generously pays full tuition for Norwegian students abroad. Almost 3,000 Norwegian students are currently in Australia and the minister outlined certain conditions governing student exchanges in Norway:

1. requirement to learn English
2. requirement to return home to work
3. selection of candidates able to pay non-tuition costs

He concluded his intervention by stating that all governments are competitors in this field since the education market is becoming ever more lucrative.

Discussions

An open discussion followed these two presentations. The OECD representative to GATS, Mr. Metzger, director of the Trade Section, spoke first to point out that trade in education also has a legal framework and that liberalizing trade does not mean deregulating training. Trade in education must comply with certain requirements, including:

1. public accountability of policy makers
2. non-regulation
3. required recognition of standards and credentials issued by countries

A number of ministers intervened:

- The Japanese minister called for the establishment of international rules to govern educational exchanges.
- Germany stressed that governments need to ensure that studies abroad are recognized back home before authorizing exchanges, and pointed out that such exchanges can have negative effects on a country's culture.
- Denmark echoed the concerns of the German education minister and stressed the need to

protect a country's culture. The Danish minister also warned against reducing education to mere services.

- The United Kingdom minister pointed out that exchanges can also take place using information technologies, including e-learning. She admitted that this mode of learning is still novel and involves a number of potential problems, such as quality and standards, value of content, and production.
- The minister of education representing Canada, Mr. Robichaud, stated his agreement with his United Kingdom colleague and underlined the need for countries to create a legal framework in this area. This has yet to be done in Canada, although Mr. Robichaud informed his colleagues that his province of New Brunswick seeks a leadership role in this area and has already taken specific measures to control content from outside the province. He concluded by stating that he shared his Danish colleague's concerns about the potential effect of exchanges on a country's cultural identity.
- Switzerland noted the difficulty of learning languages and stated that the need to learn a second language as well as Spanish in addition to one's mother tongue is more and more evident. The Swiss minister also stated that his country intends to modify its scholarship system in order to promote learning of languages other than English.

Conclusion

Two visions of student exchanges were in evidence during the lunch discussion. The Anglo-Saxon vision is focused on economics and sees in exchanges a source of major economic benefits, while the Scandinavian vision tempers an awareness of financial benefits with a concern for the loss of cultural identity.

In summary, student exchanges:

- foster mobility
- offer students additional opportunities
- allow students to learn a new language
- promote innovation and creativity
- enhance students' employability

There are also risks in this area, however, especially domination of exchanges by a few countries, an exclusive focus on the English language, and a growing gap between rich and poor.

3.e. Plenary Theme 2 – Fostering the Necessary Skills in the Knowledge Society

An early intervention by Ms. Marleen Vanderpoorten, Minister of Education and Training for the Belgium Flemish community set the framework for much of the discussion that followed on this theme. Skills and competencies can be acquired in many ways and it is quite possible that the skills and knowledge needed in today's economy may not be acquired in the formal education system alone. A strong postsecondary system is necessary, but it is not necessarily sufficient to keep OECD countries economically competitive and democratically strong in the 21st century. Non-formal and informal learning are equally valuable. The concern is how to validate and recognize that learning.

Many countries are moving to find ways to assess and recognize non-formal learning, especially workplace training. France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Australia all made interventions sharing the progress they were making. Many of these countries are putting in place "institutes" that will be charged with assessing and then validating or recognizing the non-formal and informal learning that have occurred. Ministers did not want to reinforce "credentialism," but rather find other valid ways to recognize the learning that had occurred. Many countries are using occupational or skills qualification systems as ways to assess the learning that has occurred.

Ministers asked that the OECD help them in this endeavour. Research is needed on the best methods for evaluating or assessing prior learning and making the results credible (especially for employers as they recruit) and transferable for adults as they move from job to job, or from job to further formal schooling.

OECD is now in the early days of planning such a research program.

3.f. Plenary Theme 3 – Developing Innovative Teaching and Learning in Schools

Ms. Margrethe Vestager chaired this session with attention to creating an atmosphere of exchange and debate rather than simple information exchange. Her efforts were very successful, given the lively discussions and higher level of short interventions that focused on the topic.

The two lead countries were the USA and Ireland, with the European Community invited to speak on its own behalf. Ms. Susan Scalfani, the US head of delegation, spoke of high expectations for all students, use of student data, and the importance of early childhood education. The Irish minister spoke of the pace of change and what that meant for schools – increasing gap between rich and poor, the need to invest in education, reducing the dropout rate, schools as only one of many learning environments, fostering a culture of inclusiveness, partnerships as an opportunity rather than a threat, and the important role of the principal in leadership.

Ms. Viviane Reding, of the European Commission, spoke of the EC's e-learning summit in Brussels, which brought together educators and private sector partners. Subjects included

flexibility and exchange of good practice, new learning pedagogies, inclusiveness, creating knowledge networks and networks of ministers and school administrators.

Many countries provided other contexts for fostering innovation in schools. Australia added that the new context meant empowering parents and students to choose, and empowering the business sector to sustain links with schools. Finland talked about the need for diversity within integration and the need for increased funding for education.

The head of the Canadian delegation raised the issue of student/teacher ratios and whether any country had done any research that would assist in formulating policy around classroom numbers.

The Chair thanked Mr. Robichaud for his question and indicated that France had recently conducted research on the topic. She invited France and other countries to share their experience, which subsequently generated much discussion. France indicated that they were not able to report on the findings at this time. Japan said that they are trying to reduce class size from 40 to 30 students per class, even 20 for certain subjects. Mexico indicated it was an important issue for them, and Norway stated the importance of flexibility (small and large groups, teacher as guide, changing teaching to learning). This flexibility would also raise the profile of the profession. The US said that recent experience in California indicated that if class size cannot be reduced to 15:1, there is no effect; however, the California experience is less than two years old and it is not clear how the data would show this result in so short a time.

The US also stated that they had 5 years to prove that public education can work. The head of the delegation indicated that what was required was (1) to give teachers access to detailed data in order to individualize education, (2) to share best practices, and (3) to insist on accountability. When questioned by the Canadian delegation outside the meeting context about the meaning of the five-year deadline, the head of the US delegation indicated that the public education system was broken and that polls indicated that Americans would not wait any longer than five years for it to be fixed. Ms. Scalfani stated that they would not wait five years, and that if public education couldn't fix itself soon, they would bypass the public system. She said that private management firms were waiting to step in. CMEC and DFAIT should monitor the US process as it may have implications for Canadian public education in the context of NAFTA, FTAA, and GATS.

Issues of raising the status and morale of teachers and attracting new teachers were also discussed. Ireland and Poland had recently increased teacher salaries. Poland also spoke of introducing a voucher system to foster competition among schools and introduce a market mechanism. Hungary spoke of a lack of career opportunities. The chair made a reference to problems of gender equity and that for the most part directors and school principals are men. Canada's second intervention during this theme was to speak to issues of democracy, of revising teacher education programs, and of including teachers in the decision-making process. Mr. Robichaud spoke of the importance of renewing the relationship among

teachers, parents, and communities. The ILO representative indicated that a holistic approach to professionalization was required, not just salary adjustments.

The Chair summed up the discussion by saying that countries have different ways of dealing with the challenges, but all agree on redefining the teacher's role. She suggested that a good starting point was to respect teachers because "they get it right most of the time" and to consider what support ministers could give to schools, teachers, and children's learning.

3.g. Adoption of the Communiqué

Several countries, including Canada, made some suggestions for further changes to the communiqué. Only one suggestion was contentious and removed. (Germany had wanted a program identified in the text, but other countries objected to a specific mention in only one area of the text and reminded the Chair (the German minister) that other specific references had been removed.) Germany agreed to the revision. The final communiqué as adopted is attached as Appendix 2.

3.h. Lunch for Ministers – Promoting Positive Social Values in Schools

Sweden described a year-old research project they are conducting through three universities into how citizenship can be developed. They talked of the helpful role of the media in unveiling what was going on in schools (bullying and other forms of violence). The Swedish minister made it clear to participants that Swedish schools are endeavouring to foster respect, equity, and equality in students.

France confirmed that the phenomenon of violence was becoming more and more evident, even among very young pupils, and that it was important to address the problem from the very earliest ages. Schools must offer children the possibility to be in harmony with the whole self, not just intellectually, but also emotionally. Arts education (music, theatre) is a powerful tool for socialization and can contribute to non-violent solutions to problems. The solution is to have children learn very early on how to live together, and parents, teachers, and students need to work together to establish rules. It is an important subject both for success in school and for social peace.

The discussion was led by Portugal on the importance of a civil atmosphere and democratic environment in schools. The minister stated two principles: (1) the role of schools is to integrate people into society, not exclude them, and (2) the authority of teachers needs to be strengthened. Denmark agreed that the problem of bullying needed to be addressed in a direct way and a sustained effort was required regardless of the cost. The European Community identified two types of problem: the issue of misfits, and the creation of a subculture where violence plays a role in proving manhood. The US described three kinds of violence: loss of temper, gang violence, and violence that occurs in all-white, suburban affluent schools (Columbine, etc.). Differences among students

must be integrated and validated. In the US, the structure of high schools must be changed – large, homogeneous schools are problematic.

Minister Robichaud noted that Statistics Canada's research linking values of students reflects what is happening in families. He spoke of New Brunswick pilot projects involving mediation and parent committees, where mediators act between students, parents and community, and the school. He noted that his preferred approach was to involve all stakeholders and that students cannot be separated from their environment.

Japan stated that bullying had decreased because of an emphasis placed on moral (civic) education, in addition to an emphasis placed on extra-curricular activities. A school council system had been created in every school.

3.i. Press Conference

The OECD Secretariat and the Chair of the meeting held a press conference at which Canadian representation was not necessary.

Conclusions

The meeting provided an opportunity for ministers to engage in policy discussions and exchange ideas on innovative practice. The Canadian delegation made several interventions which were well received by participants and which contributed to stimulating the discussion.

Although the meeting began slowly and somewhat below expectations, the format of the meeting compensated by offering different discussion possibilities (forum, plenaries, lunches, dinners). The lunches worked especially well, as did the third plenary due mostly to the skilful chairing.

The CMEC Secretariat will forward a copy of the communiqué to all ministries and departments of education and will draw ministers' attention to the OECD Web site where the excellent documents that were prepared for the meeting are posted.

Appendix 1 – Objectives of the Canadian Delegation

1. Further CMEC's substantive interests and activities as they relate to accountability, quality of education, accessibility, mobility, and responsiveness to learner needs.
2. Promote OECD activities which focus on education outcomes, sharing information on best policies, promoting policy-related research, and collaboration with other major international organizations with an interest in education and training.
3. Support OECD project priorities related to:
 - a. Education statistics and indicators
 - b. transition from school to work
 - c. education policy implications of ICT
 - d. equity and lifelong learning
 - e. learning needs of adults
 - f. teacher preparation and supply
 - g. citizenship and social cohesion
4. Promote through bilateral discussions (formal and informal) the expertise and experiences of Canadian education authorities as they relate to the five themes outlined in 1. above.
5. Identify areas for potential collaboration with all traditional partners (Australia, France, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom, and United States of America) and with new partners (Chile, Korea, Mexico, and the Netherlands)
6. Promote Canadian expertise in large-scale assessment, use of technology, and teacher development.
7. Intervene in the discussions as appropriate with a particular priority given to:
 - a. Information and Communication Technology
 - b. Developing Innovative Teaching and Learning in Schools
 - c. Fostering Competencies for the Knowledge Society
 - d. Securing the Benefits from Lifelong Learning for all

Appendix 2 — **Communiqué**