

Training without excluding

Manifest 2005

“Everyone has the right to education”
(Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Our children go to school during nine years at least. Alas, all do not acquire the necessary knowledge and know-how to actively and successively enter their adult life. In Geneva, one of five 15 year old adolescents does not possess the written language capabilities to enable to know his citizen's duties - and to exercise his rights.

This is as unjust as it is absurd. A democratic society cannot exclude from citizenship, employment and culture such a significant fraction of its population. It is a question of peace and prosperity, justice and solidarity. In order to fight against social fracture, it is of common interest to raise the education level of all pupils, to stop school failure. Is this impossible? No. Many studies attest this fact: equality of achievement and success does not only agree with, but is even a condition of a raised global level.

This is why we want a school based on three principles:

To guarantee a basic culture: School must make it possible for all pupils to acquire solid knowledge, develop a sense of responsibilities and a solidarity commitment. This the first condition for providing real equal opportunities at the beginning of adult life and the road leading to citizenship, autonomy, employment and long-life learning.

To affirm the educability of all: Every child is different, but all of them can acquire this basic culture, provided that school takes account of their resources and their needs, makes use of a rigorous, differentiated, active pedagogy, trying to improve intercultural understanding and significant learning.

To exclude exclusion: All along compulsory school, effort must be directed on training, not on selection. Assessment should assist learning and help to inform pupils and parents about their progression towards school objectives. It should neither classify, dismiss, nor, above all, humiliate. It is thus necessary to aim at school for all, organized in multiannual stages, without selection or separate sections.

How can these changes be successful? Education must be a priority, fully assumed by the whole community. Geneva school needs a courageous policy, which gives itself the means of its ambitions. A policy which supports, coordinates and assesses local initiatives, by combining tradition and innovation instead of opposing them. This implies participation of parents, pupils, teachers and their associations. It also requires highly qualified professional teams, control of teaching effects and a critical use of research in education.

Geneva school is not as fair and effective as it could be, that it should be. As a solution, a populist law project proposes a radical change: stopping all innovative processes, maintaining selection, in other words, paralyzing the institution in old and obsolete certitudes.

We gather today to simply state our conviction: there is an alternative to fatalism and exclusion.

Geneva, May 2, 2005