



Manifesto

From the seminar of the New Education group **Education / equality/ emancipation** **Our Utopias for today's world**

<http://www.gfenlyonnais.fr/?cat=9>

Now is the time for choices.

Do we, teachers, creators, people involved in the social world, want to carry on with a school system that so often destroys minds as well as people, adults and children alike? Do we want to keep teaching methods and contents that never change as well as out dated selective assessments exactly as they are? NO.

Utopia is the cornerstone of the proposals we are putting forward for School and education.

Teachers should be utopians.

Sustaining hope and believing in the future is not a question of virtue but of social intelligence and courage. Keeping violence at bay, promoting empathy, creating environments where we can think and act together, being aware of the use or misuse of words, debating, are at the core of our commitment.

Without a school system that allows all the children and adults of our country to build a worthy future for everyone- without a school system that really looks for the opportunity to change- there is no sustainable way out, either on a political or human level .

It is no easy path, but we are already on the way. There are many teaching practices that show it, in France and around the world.

Mankind is One. Its diversity is its wealth. The phrase: « Everyone is capable » must guide our action, as teachers and as citizens.

FACTS

Everything is said, but nothing is done

Some double binds.

Organizing society, at the same time, by sorting these same children

We, as School stakeholders suffer from that schizophrenia. Owing to it, we can't fulfil our educational mission. Even if the situation is clearly identified by the research in education, it still carries on and on, school traditions being so deeply entrenched.

Paradoxically School has become an institution that needs failure in order to function. Qualification and disqualification are definitely linked, like both sides of a coin. It is necessary to disqualify some students in order to deem others qualified.

The school system has invented and developed a multitude of remedies and structures to manage all the evils it has itself created, but those remain inefficient, and the evil the school is supposed to be fixing is worsening instead. Indeed, these newly-founded jobs that have come about from these remedies and structures also require failure to ensure their survival. It is a vicious circle.

A hidden crucial stake

Thus, within our school walls lies that societal issue which is just as central as shameful: early selection excludes many from a future of « highest social places ». That categorization and selection is accepted because it appears to be legitimate.

The legitimacy in question

That legitimacy is constructed socially and educationally by the very process of children who are led to fail, and who internalize at an early stage the subjective belief that they are responsible for their own exclusion from certain classes, courses or prestigious schools. That devolution of responsibility has now gained many parents.

School thus manages that *tour de force*: to ensure that the academic failure it produces is ultimately borne by the students themselves and their parents. But none of those actors is aware of the phenomenon. The students' parents have total trust in what School promises.

Liberty, equality, fraternity, the values announced in the motto of French Republican School, are flouted by a selection that drapes itself with allegedly formative arguments: "the need for a rating", "the relevance of competition", punishment. Those arguments, in reality, reinforce social segregation by ranking all sorts of knowledge, cultures, and people.

Struggle

School failure, planned intrinsically to School, cannot be fought. Many school practices, because they are in accordance with the institution's recommendations, serve those abuses. Only too few activists can resist that segregating whirlwind. There's no other alternative than...disobedience.

However, there are non-selective practices and classes where children are not bored! Where they don't have "school pain"! Where there's fun in teaching and in learning. But since their success can only cause the system to collapse, they cannot be valued, let alone integrated. Those jubilant experiences thus remain too marginal to be widely disseminated.

For the same reasons, the search for pedagogical movements that experience an inclusive school and theorize their experiences, their achievements are systematically devalued and their words are repeated, misused and distorted. Like all the experiences that shake the system too much. There is not, either, a teacher-training, that would be an educating of pedagogues. Those practitioners-researchers are on alert to society and propose "practical theories" to educate children and adults in relation with the needs of their workplace. That deprives the School of valuable models of intelligibility of educational action.

There is an urgent need from the point of view of democracy to rewrite the current school contract, or Public School may well disappear.

Undo the present, invent the future

*Understand and analyse
to be able to put forward ideas*

It is difficult for the education system to break away from concepts that have dominated and still dominate in our societies: exploitation, slavery, forced migration, all kinds of authoritarianism, conflicts, wars and colonisation, sexism, racism, ethnic segregation, the refusal to examine different views of history, the fear of otherness.

Daring **to imagine utopia** is a necessary condition for building and rebuilding a free global society, liberated from the mistakes of the past. It is necessary above all in the education system, where we need to break away from ideas, opinions and beliefs that will negatively affect the future of young people, and replace them with more liberating ideas.

Our utopian vision, faced with long-lasting notions and arguments:

- **The belief that exclusion, discrimination and violence**, which prevail within Republican institutions, cannot be avoided.

Instead, the bet we make consists in setting up a context which can allow for mixed cultures and "creolisation" so that new forms of production (works, stories and relationships) can emerge – thereby reviving the past and building together a future to be shared.

- **The child seen as a weak and bad person**, bent on laziness, unable to think by him/herself, and whom nothing but authoritarianism, punishments and zero tolerance can make better.

Such a way of considering children, as well as our vision of school, learning and culture, have to be changed. We have to make sure that when knowledge is transmitted, humanist values are passed on at the same time, and that all people work democratically with the citizens of all cultures, without taking their given identity or outcast territory into account, without ranking them.

- **Fraternity, mixed up with compassion**, when helping and supporting the "deprived" is put forward, hence reinforcing and legitimating inequalities.

On the contrary, solidarity between all the actors involved in learning can alone enable the building up of fraternity, which is prevented by constant formal or informal moralizing.

- **"Equal opportunities"**, supposedly guaranteed by the School, is a social lie. It reinforces an unfair system by strengthening the idea that one's fate is "deserved". It bans any complaining or demanding since "all has been done" to give all a chance to succeed. This hoax relies on the assumption that **the successes of some and the failures of others** can be accounted for by "gifts" supposedly received by birth or by personal merit – or not.

We contend that such representations come from a mistaken view of what developing and learning involve, and from the inability to admit that success and failure are socially constructed.

Hence the urgent need to analyse together, in a critical way, the way social differentiating and ranking work, to (make all) understand the class violence which pervades schools and all institutions, favouring the reproduction of inequalities.

- **Cognition through explaining** is a conception implying that knowledge gets transmitted through explanation. Leaving the master's intelligence in charge of bridging the gap between knowledge and the learner's ignorance, such a conception validates inequality as simply obvious; it reinforces it, leaving knowledge at the hands of the dominant, while the dominated doubt their capacity to reach it and thus give up.

On the contrary, we have to value research and inventiveness, to create situations where fraternity is a key to emancipation, where intelligence is collective, where between learners and all the actors at school solidarity works within learning itself, where teachers are trusted to devise ways for everyone to learn together.

- **"Social skills"** is a new word for behavioural normalisation. Conforming learners into ideal beings: "naturally" punctual, regular, interested, "spontaneously" involved in school life, and luckily devoid of any critical sense.

On the contrary, we want to create spaces for thinking and acting where questions emerge from curiosity, making questioning a shared pleasure and learning something we do together.

- **Competition** is said to be a source of motivation. It encourages learning, makes efforts and sacrifices worthwhile, separating work from pleasure.

On the contrary, far from all forming and norming, we want work and pleasure to unite, through cooperation; we want discoveries to prevail, everyone's experience to matter, and empathy to develop.

- **Selection** is a system that encourages students to work for marks, rather than to acquire and develop skills and knowledge. It sets learners into competition and leads to dead-ends, for students,

particularly those from working classes, and for democracy itself.

- Distinguishing control and evaluation is an emergency, too. We must conceive evaluation as a way to help build meaning, as we analyse what has already been done and what remains to be done. We must stimulate critical minds; create learning

situations that allow teachers, parents and students to test the learning power of work done in an atmosphere of trust, without any fear of judgment; we must appreciate and value learners' efforts.

It is urgent, now, as we are aware and know all these things, to transform what we know, and what we believe in, into ACTION.

Ambition for School

Utopia in action

We are longing for an ambitious school of intelligence and equality for everyone.

A School of Reason and Realism: a plea to reason vis-a-vis the current loss of human potential, a plea to realism vis-a-vis the knowledge and practices which are needed to remedy it, and acknowledging and working with those who are already expressing these ideals, and who are quite willing to invest even more in this shared utopia, both in terms of learning and the development of citizenship.

A school that encourages and promotes curiosity, amazement, humour, original encounters, creativity, intellectual jostling, disruptive new discoveries, a school that develops courage to overcome fear, accepts imprecision and uncertainty rather than dogmas. A school that builds the motivation to learn, to question oneself, to debate doubts with others, to challenge the conventional.

A school that offers challenges, problems to be solved, difficulties to be overcome. A school that causes one's energy, one's intelligence and humanity to be mobilized, because that effort will cause doors-to-open, expectations to be surpassed, knowledge to be renewed, new skills noticed, unimaginable adventures discovered and ultimate emancipation.

A school that does not rank the objects it teaches, that refuses the cleaving between manual and intellectual, but, on the contrary, knows how to highlight, in every practice, human thought at work. A school that does not make knowledge dull, in the name of alleged neutrality, but that enlightens learners on the polemical nature of any break-through in the field of thought and knowledge.

A school where knowledge is shared, where there is joy in learning and constructing together. A school where one would walk in the adventurous steps of those who have paved the way, where one may embark on what is coming: the world that is to be transformed and built together.

A School that postulates educability for all, that supports and encourages excellence in everyone through cooperation, mutual aid and rigorousness. A School of equal instruction, not in words, but in facts!

That ambitious school of intelligence and equality, it is everyone's responsibility to build it.



