

## Speech of Mme Quintin at the Brussels Debate, 30 March 2009

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Brussels Debate- "**Beyond chalk and talk: Creativity in the classroom**"

#### Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow guests, chair,

I am delighted to be here, and to see our Brussels debates are still drawing a big crowd!

Last year, during the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, these debates were an excellent forum for examining all sides of the question of how we live together in a changing Europe.

In 2009, the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, the fundamental issue is: how to maximise the potential of every citizen, in a changing Europe, in a changing world?

#### The economic crisis

Recently, our world has been rocked by the economic crisis. The speed and depth of the crisis are unparalleled in Europe's recent history. From a comfortable position in 2007-08, when unemployment fell below 7%, its lowest in decades, the current picture is one of losing jobs, and losing confidence.

The crisis calls for immediate responses in the short term. But its shadow should not block our view of the longer-term challenges shaping our world. Globalisation. Technological change; demographic change; climate change... The challenges – and the opportunities – of shifting from a society that produces things to a society that produces knowledge.

Maintaining, and even increasing, investment in education and training is more vital than ever. This is how we ensure that the workforce holds on to and upgrades its skills, and how we equip people to take the opportunities that will arise as we start to recover.

#### Creativity and innovation paving the road to recovery

The crisis makes the input of skills, creativity and innovation into the economy and society even more critical than before.

We need to harness our knowledge, our creative faculties and our capacity for innovation to find new, sustainable solutions to get us through, and take us beyond, the present crisis.

The European Year of Creativity and Innovation sharpens this focus.

Our message is that **creativity is for everyone**. That creativity and innovation can be fostered and learned. That supporting creativity and imagination in education not only generates an ability to be innovative; it motivates and builds confidence too.

The challenge is to **design learning and working environments** that stimulate rather than stifle fresh and original thinking. That accept that not every risk succeeds, and that don't penalise experimentation.

This calls for a **new approach from the education world**, from schools, from teachers and trainers.

## New skills for new jobs

The Commission has been researching the new jobs of the knowledge society, and the new skills that will be in demand. Seeing into the future is a difficult art. And the crisis makes it harder. But our forecasts are already outlining how work is evolving – and how creativity is moving to the top of a desirable CV.

For a start, the nature of **work itself is changing**. The workplace will become less hierarchical, more collaborative. It will mean less routine, and more independent thinking.

More and more, people in the workplace will need '**know-how**' and **soft skills**: the ability to think creatively; to organise work independently; to work in teams; to communicate, with strong intercultural, language and ICT skills.

## Valuing creativity and rethinking education

If we are to prepare our young people so they can adapt to change, to work in jobs that may not even exist yet, we need to **rethink education**. We have to focus not on knowledge but on skills – on what we can do with our knowledge.

We have already begun the process of change. We have identified the **key competences** that people need to thrive in the knowledge society. Creativity underpins all these, whether it is creativity in mother tongue, in maths, or as a dimension of the entrepreneurial skills and cultural awareness everyone should have.

It is not easy to make room for creativity. We need to look at the school environment, and how our children are learning. How can schools switch from teaching a static body of knowledge to groups of pupils, towards more individualised learning that transmits the know-how and the appetite to learn that young people will need for work and life after school?

The role of the school leader will be fundamental, since this shift will imply changes in how the school is organised. Training and re-training teachers, so they have the right skills, will be a vital part of the process.

We do not expect schools to go it alone. We need **system creativity** too. Preparing for the future requires models and solutions that are based on **partnership** and cooperation.

Creativity; initiative-taking and entrepreneurship; cultural and civic skills – these skills are best developed in learning partnerships that extend beyond the school gate, involving business, cultural operators, community life.

The Member States themselves are partners in modernising education in Europe, learning from each others' experiences in a cooperation framework coordinated by the Commission. We are currently **renewing this framework** for the next decade. The Commission has added a new focus on stimulating people's innovation and creativity; this is one of the four strategic challenges that will guide the next phase of our common work.

We are also exploring with Member States the idea of a **benchmark** that would address how education systems promote innovation and creativity.

## Partnerships for lifelong learning

The positive friction of partnership is also a creative source: it brings with it a chance to break old moulds, to innovate and renew. This is why partnership underpins our wider strategy of lifelong learning, and why it is very present in our Lifelong learning funding programme for schools, vocational training, university and adult learning.

Better communication between **business and vocational training** will cut down on wasteful skills mismatches. It will help us equip people with the creative and lateral skills for tomorrow. And it can help promote innovation in the workplace.

Our **university-business forum** has opened a dialogue on how university education can help or hinder the flexible learning that prepares graduates for a fluid labour market: looking at curriculum development, entrepreneurship, lifelong learning, knowledge transfer and mobility.

University-business partnerships are also a vital conduit for turning ideas into innovation. Europe is good at producing knowledge; but less good at using it, at solving the **technology-transfer** puzzle.

Let me highlight another message of the European Year. That innovation is not produced by single-minded, solitary inventors. Innovation is sparked when many talents work together.

This partnership of talents is the backbone of the **European Institute for Innovation and Technology**, that we discussed at our last Brussels Debate. The EIT brings together the best brains in education, research and business to boost Europe's innovation capacity, transforming knowledge into marketable products.

## Conclusion

Creativity may be hard to pin down; but it should never be boxed in. People never stop learning. Improving skills through non-formal learning –involvement in volunteering or community life; in theatre, or arts or sports – can be one of the most rewarding and most creative experiences. The world of non-formal education may be able to teach our formal systems something about drawing out people's creative abilities.

I hope so. And I hope our European Year will provoke this kind of creative interaction right across the education spectrum, and beyond, with public authorities, with business, with civil society. To lay the foundations for a new approach, for a Europe renewed by its creativity.

Thank you.