

**As the 7th Framework Programme for the integration of the European Research Area and the Bologna Process' efforts to ensure a European Area of Higher Education begin to converge, an inherent conflict is becoming evident** (expressed in the tension between opposing concepts like economic competitiveness – social cohesion; excellence – equal opportunities; comparability/standardisation – innovation, personalisation, flexibility). **At the root of this conflict are certain unquestioned assumptions at the heart of both processes.** The clarification of these assumptions is essential to an understanding and evaluation of the goals of FP 7 and the Bologna Process and of the means by which they aim to achieve them. **Both processes have failed to recognize that a sharp decline in written literacy and the underrating of the study of the humanities is undercutting their efforts.**

- I. The Theory behind the Words: Three Unquestioned Assumptions at the Heart of the Bologna Process – Three Questions We Should Ask Ourselves<sup>1</sup>
  - A. *What can we know?* What is meant by a **knowledge-based society** and why is this goal incomplete? (true knowledge requires sound judgement: sound judgement cannot be produced, created or transferred like information)
  - B. *What should we do?* What is **social cohesion** and how is it to be achieved? In other words, what is the "glue" that makes us stick together? (values, virtue, and the underrating of the humanities)
  - C. *What can we hope for?* What is the **quality of life** these processes are aiming at – more of the same (growth based economy, consumerism, material wealth), or something else (dynamic equilibrium, sustainable development, intellectual and cultural advancement)?
- II. The Means to achieve the Ends

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- A. Bologna process: Comparability or self-deception? The economic origin of the credit system and the need for radical school reform
  1. Loss of written literacy: a threat to civilisation and to culture, but also to scientific research and innovation

The level of ability/performance in written expression has fallen drastically in the past 15 years as a result of a number of factors, including the explosion of electronic communications technology, internet and electronic entertainment industry. Writing, however, as an intellectual ability, a skill and a "craft" (vjestina) is not only the basis of civilisation, but the foundation for sustained reasoning, analytical and problem-solving

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1787<sup>2</sup> (Hamburg: Meiner 1956) B 832f. : "The entire interest of my reason (both theoretical and practical) is united in three questions:

What can I know?

What ought I to do?

What may I hope for?

The first question is merely theoretical... The second is merely practical... The third: if I do what I ought, what may I then hope for, is theoretical and practical at the same time... For all hope concerns happiness, and is with regard to the practical and to moral law the same thing, as cognition and natural law with respect to theoretical knowledge of things."

ability, and creativity – not only in the humanities, but in all other areas, as well: natural science, technology, business, education.

2. Mistaken ideas of reform: More knowledge does not ensure competency; it's what one can do with what knows that makes the difference

The credit-hour came into existence as a time-based reference for measuring academic achievement in American universities and colleges (Carnegie Unit: secondary school achievement; Credit or Student Hour: collegiate) "not an organic, naturally occurring entity, but ...an invented artifice", intended to standardise educational "output" and faculty workload in order to improve academic and industrial efficiency (cf. "The History of the Student Credit Hour," Jessica M. Shedd)

Without genuine reform of the school and university education system, requiring greater pragmatism, providing more time for active learning, application of knowledge content to problem-solving, both of which are best developed by learning to express one's thoughts in writing – attempts to streamline programs of study using the credit-point system will remain cosmetic, superficial, ineffective and counter-productive.

Comparability/standardisation of study programs must not replace an individual, personalized, "enterprising" and project-based approach to learning. Good reasoning is the only sound basis for this type of learning. Sound judgement and sustained reasoning can only be developed by learning to write well. This type of learning requires more freedom, more time, a more individualised approach than is available in the present school, university system in Croatia.

Cf. *The Report of the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools and Colleges: Writing and School Reform*. Including "The Neglected 'R'. The Need for a **Writing Revolution**". College Board, May 2006.

## B. FP 7: Selling us short?

1. Economic competitiveness: an end in itself?

The *European Charter on Human Rights* (Ch. I, Art. 1) states that human dignity is inviolable. Human beings are not "capital" to be invested. Ch. II, Art. 13 states "The arts and sciences shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected." This includes freedom from pressure and undue influence from the desire for material gain. Science and research must not be "commercialized," though improved knowledge and innovation may benefit the development of economic competitiveness

2. Coming unglued: the negative effects of advertising, entertainment industry, consumerism on our image of humanity;

Increasingly, advertising presents us with an image of humanity contradictory to our own values as set forth in all relevant documents concerning human rights. **The greatest danger of indoctrination today stems from the unquestioned and largely unregulated influence of the advertising industry on us and our children, which promotes an ideal of beauty that is purely physical, a picture of the human being as consumer, as self-**

**indulgent materialist, as primarily or exclusively sexual, as primarily/exclusively in need of entertainment/pleasure.** This is diametrically opposed to our own obligation to protect our children, our families, the rights of parents to ensure education in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions. **LEARNING IS NEVER VALUE-NEUTRAL. We need a consumer protection agency concerned directly with the negative effects of advertising on us and our children and able to lobby for legal protection from those effects with our state and international legislative bodies.**

3. The myth of total communication (attention deficit and inarticulateness)

Studies have shown that the ability of children to concentrate, develop sustained thought processes sinks in proportion to increased exposure to electronic communication and entertainment forms. My own experience in education confirms this fact. Unregulated exposure to the internet, computer and video games is leading to an increasing variety of mental illnesses and addictions among children and adults. No warning of these dangers is provided by the manufacturers. Falling ability to concentrate, loss of syntactical ability undermines communication, social skills, school performance, intellectual advancement and mental health.

4. The demise of good writing and the imminent threat to democracy, human rights, social cohesion and sustainability it poses

The basis of representative democracy is good problem-solving and argumentative ability. These require a highly developed capacity for written expression. **Analytical and problem-solving ability, rhetorical ability and ability to develop sustained argument, articulateness, eloquence in speaking is developed through writing. The ability to innovate presupposes the mastery of the discipline or craft – in any field involving research or political responsibility the discipline or craft of good written expression**

**The structures of democratic and just government are endangered by falling articulateness of individuals, by their inability to clearly identify and describe issues, present arguments on the basis of given data and circumstances, describe and defend a position, formulate a solution or plan of action, apply knowledge from research and legal codes to the resolution of pressing issues, individual cases – and by their inability to perform these tasks in written form.**

III. A Radical Challenge

A. The Forgotten "R" and the Reform of the Higher Education System in Croatia

B. Sound judgement and complex learning processes: Less is more in a knowledge-based society – less required subjects, less material, more time for writing, more personalisation, customisation of learning, more choice, more time to reflect, more time to play.

Ad 'A' and 'B':

In a letter to the Croatian Ministry of Education and Sport from April 1998 I wrote:

"On the whole, I believe that Croatian pupils are required to attend classes in too many different subjects. In the American elementary and high school system, no more than

seven subjects are studied at the same time, sometimes less. Some courses are optional, and some may be taken – at the pupil's choice and with the permission of the parents – on a "Pass/Fail" basis (no grade), for example, physical education, music, art, wood or metal working, home economics. I am not saying the American system has all the answers, but in many ways its approach is more pragmatic. Even in Europe, pedagogues are beginning to recognize that a child can absorb only so much knowledge, that it is more important to teach a child how to work with what he knows, than to make him learn by rote information he could find in any reference work on the subject. Memory training and substantial knowledge in science, math, history, language and literature *are* essential, but they are not enough. Students must be given enough flexibility and enough controlled freedom of movement to be able to develop their creative skills. Only then can they learn to *apply* their knowledge and *innovate* with it. This is of vital importance not only for the students themselves and their personal development, but for the future cultural, economic and political development of the Republic of Croatia.

My impression of the Croatian school system at the present moment is that it accomplishes just the opposite. From the fifth-grade on, or even earlier, pupils are burdened with too much material, too many subjects. No, or hardly any **selection** is available to pupils, which would allow them to **limit** the number of classes they attend to a **reasonable number**. Reducing the number of hours a week spent in each subject is **no solution**. It only increases the amount of material a student must master at home. The number of hours pupils must spend on homework, however, is already disproportionately high. Children need time to relax and to play, if they are to be able to apply themselves effectively to schoolwork[NB: I do not think playing computer, video or internet games fulfill this need MEZ 2007-03-29]. Many pupils' solution to this otherwise insurmountable problem is simple: get by any way you can, even if it means cheating, lying, plagiarizing or other forms of deceptive behaviour. This is education for dilettantism.

I have had the privilege of observing some of the results of the Croatian school system in the work of my students, many of them extremely bright, at the program of Croatian Studies. Though on the whole articulate and fairly well-informed on general themes, most of my students lack basic research skills, are unable to formulate a research topic, define a problem, argue cogently or even compose a paragraph, much less a coherent essay on a specific subject. Such skills are learned and practiced in the United States at the high school level, and writing a research or thesis paper according to specific guidelines (including observation of the accepted standards for citing one's sources, something which even some recognized scholars here have yet to learn) is a fixed part of the 11th grade curriculum: most of my students, though alert, interested and intelligent, **all of whom had excellent grades in high school**, have never developed the skills necessary to be able to formulate their thoughts in writing. This unfortunate circumstance, however, if not rectified, will necessarily exclude them in their future careers from participation in scientific research and debate at the international level. My personal conviction with respect to this state of affairs is that "less is more"! We need to *reduce* the number of subjects required at the school (and the university) level while *maintaining and improving the quality* of work done for each subject and *differentiating* the forms that work may take. A more pragmatic, hands-on approach to learning is urgently needed. The emphasis of school education must be on developing

the pupil's **powers of critical reasoning**, his **ability to think imaginatively**, and his **ability to develop his arguments** and **express his thoughts** orally *and* in writing."

Although the Ministry agreed in principal with my arguments as presented in this letter, nothing substantial has since been undertaken to implement the kind of reforms I proposed. As a result, the situation of the majority of our pupils and students, and the problems addressed in the letter quoted above, have not improved, but worsened.

C. Values, Virtue and the Need for the Humanities: The Values upon which the EU and UN Charta on Human Rights, as well as the Constitutions of the Democracies of the Developed Countries are based are only to be understood by ongoing study of the humanities – which are different in character from the natural sciences and technologies, but whose study is essential also to these.

The goal of improving economic competitiveness cannot be economic competitiveness. A growth-based economy cannot be the goal of improving economic competitiveness if we are to take on the challenge of restoring balance to our natural environment, ensuring preservation and fair distribution of fundamental natural resources, eradicating poverty, ensuring peace and the preservation of human culture and civilisation in all its rich variety. *What* we produce, *how* we produce it and *why* we produce, what we produce, are questions not to be evaded in the race to become a "knowledge-based society." The goal of economic advancement is not just the securing of basic material needs – or the ever more exaggerated and luxurious indulgence of real or imagined ones, to the neglect of the cultivation of a genuine ideal of humanity – but the advancement of *human culture* and the realisation of a just world order, both as the sole guarantor of basic human freedoms and the sole basis for the realisation of world peace.

The Challenge:

- **Halve the number of required subjects (school and university), double the time students spend developing their ideas/opinions/arguments/investigative reasoning in and by writing** (creative, problem-oriented, academic) **in all subjects**; allow more choice (facultative subjects, pass/fail, independent study); build flexibility into the law
- **Halve the number of courses taught, double teacher salary per course, time spent tutoring**
- **Make professional formation/continuing education in writing mandatory for education professionals in all fields**
- Create a **codex of objective standards** (not only numerically, but conceptually determined, including honour code), but **allow freedom/flexibility** for teachers and students to decide how best to achieve/demonstrate standards
- Offer **practical writing courses as part of continuing education ("life-long learning")** programs (writing cover letters for a job application, reporting an event, giving directions, expressing and arguing one's opinion, formulating texts for the purpose of local advocacy, writing a personal letter, journal, creative writing); establish intergenerational tutoring projects involving established writers (eg. senior citizens) and school/student groups
- Link literacy in information technology with **development of grammatical, logical and rhetorical ability**, as well as articulateness and style in relevant fields of interest and/or research; apply available software solutions to support writing instruction

- Found for the purpose of professional formation and improvement and promotion of writing and problem-oriented, creative, innovative and critical thinking at all levels a pan- and interuniversity **Writing Center** (The Institute for the Advancement of Clear, Critical and Creative Thinking – Writing Project)
- Found for the purpose of study, preservation and promotion of the values which form the foundation of a "society based on knowledge *and sound judgement*" a pan- and interuniversity, interdisciplinary **Humanities Center**
- Improve *transnational comparability of degrees*

*Writing is a complex process. Time spent learning to write **well** is time spent learning to **appreciate and comprehend** complex data and processes, developing one's ability to **formulate clearly for oneself and others** a complex set of relationships forming the basis of any given problem or issue, predisposing oneself to **discover innovative approaches** to problem-solving, and creative approaches to the **communication of one's insights**, including the **identification and articulation** of existing problems, the causes, principles and values involved in their production and resolution, the **effective presentation of one's views and arguments** and **appropriate dissemination of one's research results**.*

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