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The social deprivation of teachers in Italy, Belgium, Cyprus, Libya

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A training theory on pedagogic instruction

International studies emphasize at least four roles of teachers. These are: fulcrums of innovation and builders of their own identities; creators of thought and culture; and those who transform what they teach into the results of their pedagogic instruction (see J. Dewey 1933; K. Lewin, R. Lippitt 1938; G. Petter 1967; R. M. Travers 1983; G. de Landsheere 1986; Chistolini 2001; M. Laeng 2003; L. Corradini 2004). Of these four roles, the one referred to in this paper is the last one cited, which we will attempt to better specify for the purpose of the study being proposed for common thought.

Teachers cannot be separated from the subjects they teach and the communication derived from this teaching is the driving factor in changing both the scholastic and social systems in which they work. Teachers use the subject being taught to inform, divulge knowledge, create understanding and relate to others. The teaching method is the tool through which teachers construct continuity between the generations; but in order to achieve this construction, they need to appreciate the act of constructing and its production of culture. Culture is the spirit that unites peoples of past and present times, not a simple imitation of already defined forms (see J.G. Fichte 1794; W. Dilthey 1883). The romantic key to interpreting culture and civilization and that which characterizes the mission of a European teacher is developed on the existentialism of the 20th century, from which the systems of daily life, narration, autobiography, and cultural ethno-anthropology originate and that influence teaching without depleting their perspectives. In each country, the State defines the scholastic model teachers are to follow (see N. Hans 1949). In both totalitarian and democratic countries, the socio-political character of the country conditions the school system and defines the tasks of the teachers. The democratic make up of most countries in the world is the guarantee of everyone participating in decision-making, thus teachers establish their margins of freedom according to the ethical values that inspire how they hold classes (see M. Blondel 1936).

Teachers' transforming of what they teach into the results of their pedagogic instruction means that the subjects they teach are cultivated by the knowledge produced by society; the teacher grasps that knowledge and interprets it, giving words and shapes to things, people and situations. In the work of training to think and reason, the teacher introduces the perspective of development of mankind and proposes educational experiences inspired by a sense of social justice, non-exclusion from culture and the freedom to learn.

Lifeless subjects come alive thanks to teachers who transform them and, in transforming them from something dead into something living, improve education as pedagogic instruction.

In order to carry out this transformation process, teachers train by doing field research and, through this research, nourish the faculty they teach, making it come alive. Research becomes the teachers' training materials. There is a deficiency of significant examples of this point of view. What we do have mainly concerns research of teachers with alumni, research of teachers interviewed by research companies, and teachers used as examples for surveys on schools.

The university reacts to this deficiency by proposing that teachers do research, discuss the results and produce the necessary changes in the teaching methodology.

We linked the period of university study to the period of working in the profession in order to permit the simultaneous study of an identical phenomenon delineated in the social image of the teacher.

Participation in research on social recognition of teachers in four countries has shown that teachers are willing to do research and learn from research, using the results for mutual discussion and the social revival of the role of teacher. Even when interpretation of the data raised positive and negative reactions, it was ascertained that dialogue among teachers is the first step towards working up a philosophy for stimulating their teaching.

The hypothesis of the social deprivation of teachers

The actual process of democratising clashes with the globalisation process. The former proposes the expansion of participation and overcoming of social injustice; the latter tends to standardise cultures and traditions and even languages. Democracy gives everyone a voice, oriented towards pluralism. Globalisation groups everyone together and eliminates the distinctiveness of the populations.

Teachers and students live within these processes. Teachers are the result of democracies of the last 50 years and students are the result of the globalisation of the last 15 years.

Europe and the World are shifting towards a new lifestyle, outlined by educative university systems and school curricula. National education policy is more and more based on international agreements made by the EU or reports coming from OECD or UNESCO. Not only the agenda of the minister of education but also those of headmasters contain the implementation of global issues like equal opportunities, inclusion or attention for minorities in education (Verkest, 2004, 2005).

Teachers are searching for traces of common identity in multicultural societies; they instruct skills and efficiency, but also positive communication between populations and nations throughout the world. Through their instruction, teachers enlarge on the imports of citizenship being experienced at school and in society.

There is no appropriate social recognition of teachers' work that corresponds to this task. Even when teachers are highly qualified, the social and political appreciation of their role and mission is low. The gap between social needs and professional qualifications leads teachers to accrue feelings of incapacity to fulfil the requirements of the scholastic and social system, the expectations of the students and their parents' wishes. This gap

generates the social deprivation of the teachers. Let's talk about social deprivation in the sense of lack of social consideration of the professional status of teachers.

Recent results of a Belgian research project in primary schools (2000-2006) investigated the external pressure or workload on teachers who execute more and more diverse tasks, without having sufficient time and resources. More and more teachers summarize this tendency of lack of time or resources by using words as 'de-skilling' and ' de-professionalisation'. The real 'source' of the workload of teachers is 'the compelling call to change' (Ballet 2006) by others: government, social developments, but also local organisations and parents. Teachers filter changes through their personal beliefs and perspectives. The researchers detected three working conditions that have an important mediating role towards the calls for change. So the 'working consensus' (Klechtermans 1999), the collegial relationship among the team members, and the role of the school principal and the official school council can 'buffer' the changes or reinforce them.

Teachers and school councils have several different visions of the school's workplace conditions like collegiality and autonomy (Clemens 1999). Certain forms of autonomy and collegiality have a far more positive influence on teachers' professional development than others. Another Belgian Research study revealed five categories of professional interests: material, organisational, social-professional, cultural-ideological and self-interests.

The target of micropolitics at schools is to realise the wishful conditions and to censure the conditions of work that are not compatible with the policy of the school (Kelchtermans 1994, Ballet 2002).

The general hypothesis of social deprivation is defined in line with five analytical areas useful in forming the following indicators: concept of school work; the teacher's identity; rapport with the socio-political system; philosophy of the reference education; moral aspects of the profession.

The first analytical area concerns the social consideration of the teacher's job; this consideration is high at school, but drops when faced with the world outside.

The second area concerns the low social consideration of the role of the teacher as a critical and open–minded intellectual; the teacher is an executor of homework rather than a creator of education.

The third area concerns the identity of the teacher who is seen more as an obedient servant or executor of curricula or the passive exponent of textbooks than a person who proposes innovations, fresh projects or attractive alternatives to the system of local policies in which he/she works.

The fourth area of analysis relates to the philosophy of education followed by the teacher; this philosophy tends to be the one most common in the social system in the country where the teacher instructs. On this point, we believe teachers in Italy and Cyprus are rather idealistic, as opposed to socialistic in Libya and, in Belgium, more conservative, not in a political sense, but as regards maintaining accredited teaching

traditions. Too many changes in the field of education in Belgium evoke a question coming from the teachers and school principals: 'am I (still) a good teacher or school principal?' An important criterion for this kind of competence is 'doing justice to pupils and parents'. Justice in terms of learning outcomes and wellbeing.

Since many changes are justified as answering children's needs pronounced by the parents, teachers experience them as imperatives and feel they cannot neglect them.

One teacher gave some extra comment in our questionnaire: let teachers be teachers. A pre-school teacher wrote: 'Are we made to be 'super nannies'? Several beginning teachers remarked that they are pushed to be promoter of a textbook driven curriculum. So they feel themselves more conservative than progressive. The challenge is that the agent of change must be the teacher, not the books or materials.

Also the powerlessness against problems on a socio-emotional level has increased. One teacher expresses this in his questionnaire: 'we need our holidays to relax from all the troubles in and around the school'. Another wrote: 'we have too much "paper work" maybe it would be better to follow a course on accountancy'.

Educational reforms have intensified the work of teachers and directors, adding huge burdens to a job, which is already very demanding. Teachers are continuously promoted to do professional learning. On the one side this should help them to deal effectively with all the challenges they face, on the other side the adagio sounds 'if you do not change for the better you get worse.' (Hargreaves 1997).

The fifth analytical area identifies the existence of the same moral references in the four countries: care of childhood; collaboration and cooperation between school and parents; improvement of teaching methods; attention to school efficiency; and concern about the educational process.

Sample group and questionnaire

The idea of the social deprivation of teachers was verified in an empirical study done in four countries, with different numbers of persons interviewed: Italy (1265), Cyprus (40), Libya (45), and Belgium (72). The inquiry previously concerned two other sample groups of teachers in the USA (180) and Poland (147) (see S. Chistolini, E. Wołodźko 2005) compared to the Italian sample group that is still considered the original reference group of the inquiry.

The 42-query questionnaire was translated into Greek for Cyprus, Arabic for Libya and Dutch for Belgium.

From the standpoint of demographic variables, the sample group is mainly composed of elementary school teachers for Belgium, secondary for Libya and Italy, and middle for Cyprus (see graph 1). Regarding sex, only Libya has mostly male teachers (see graph 2). By age, the Italian sample has teachers who are generally older.

Graph 1 – Distribution of the sample groups be school (%)
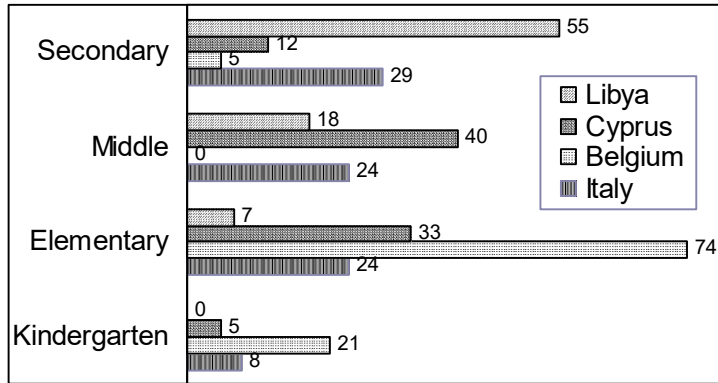
Graph 2 – Distribution of the sample groups by sex (%)
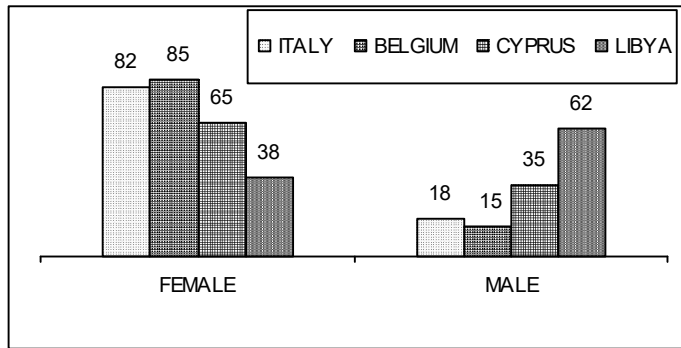
Graph 3 - Distribution of the sample groups by age (%)

Professional profile of the teacher

Why does a person decide to teach? The reply to this question clearly separated Europe from Africa in the sample group (see graph 4). Countries with similar economies and social matters were closer: e.g. Italy and Belgium. Cyprus' recent entry into the European Union shows an indication of the beginning of its assimilation into Europe. As regards Libya, one u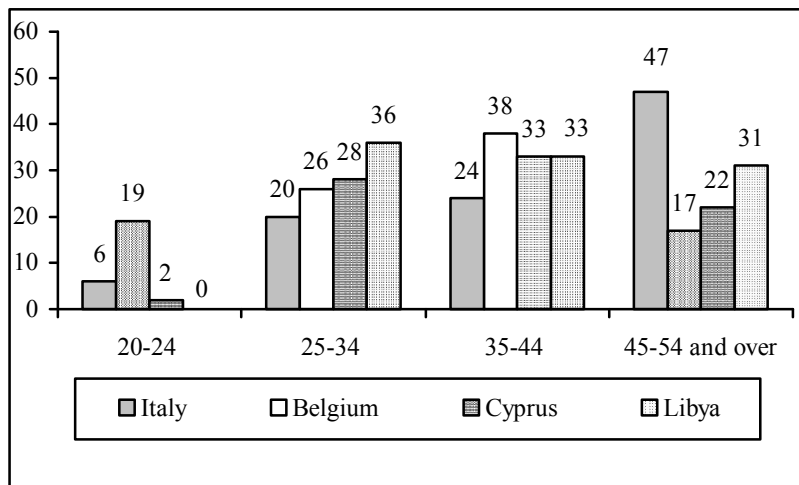nderstands that cultural and social reasons are primary in choosing the profession as compared to emotive and ideological reasons.

In Italy, Belgium and Cyprus the choice of teaching is a question that mainly concerns the person, his/her feelings and beliefs. In Libya the choice is determined more by the social responsibility that teaching implies.

Graph 4 – Reason for choosing to be a teacher (%)
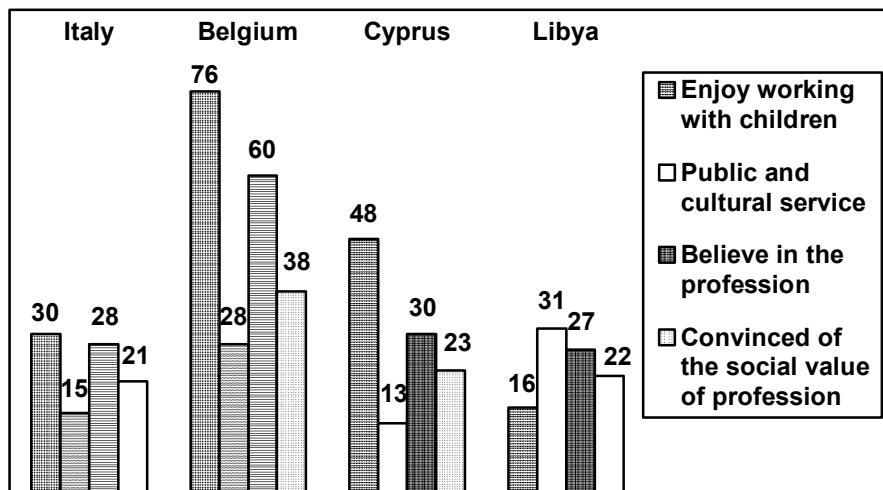
As regards the social communication of their roles, Italian and Belgian teachers are divided in considering their work the simple execution of tasks (Italy) and the assigning of an educative value to the profession (Belgium) (see graph 5).

On the other hand, Cyprian and Libyan teachers are more similar in giving importance to teachers as citizens who have chosen this profession to perform a relevant social function. The political factor affects the Mediterranean culture, which recalls the ancient Greek tradition (Cyprus) or the modern concept of the socialist State (Libya).

Italian teachers tend to use relations with the students to their advantage, whereas teachers in Libya, Belgium and Cyprus have more regard for relations with colleagues and students' parents (see graph 6). This factor may explain the reason for the low social consideration of teachers in Italy and thus the high social deprivation registered in Italy on a national level as well as on a small sample in Vercelli (268 subjects), a city in the northern part of the country.

Graph 5 – Who are today's teachers (%)
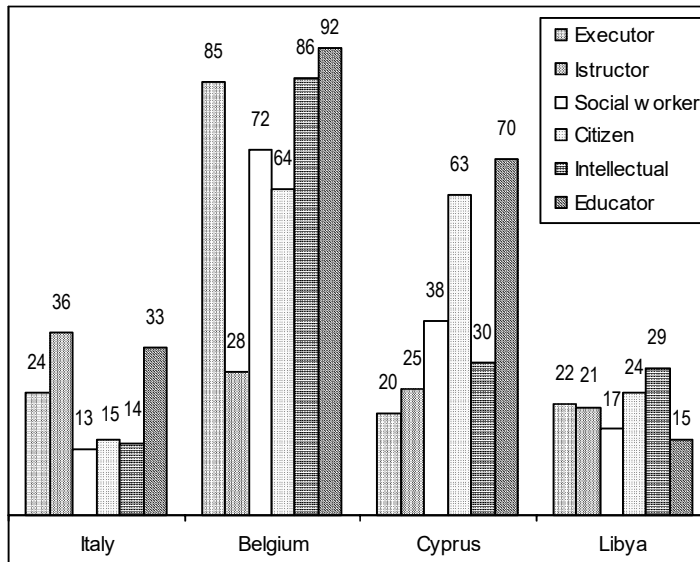
Graph 6 – Satisfaction with school relations (%)

SATISFIED?	Italy	Belgium	Cyprus	Libya
Students	62	65	50	27
Colleagues	46	69	53	60
Parents	29	64	48	40
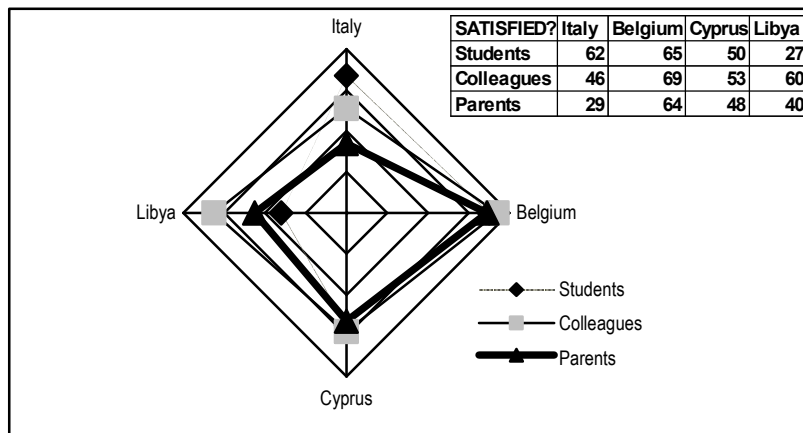
Graph 7 represents the situation of social perception of teachers in all sample countries treated in this and in previous inquiries. Without prejudice to the due differences in sampling, in Belgium the social prestige of teachers is among the highest, while Italy and Cyprus have to work more to increase the social consideration of their role, by raising prestige and lowering the level of social deprivation. Beyond doubt, Italian teachers experience the highest level of social deprivation, which can also be explained as a scant tendency to form social and political organisations (see graph 8).

Among the factors that help raise social prestige, teachers indicate: teaching skills; cultural preparation; the capacity to relate to the students, parents and community; and the importance of considering teaching a profession. There is general agreement on these factors among the teachers from the various countries.

Graph 7 – Social standing of teachers (%)
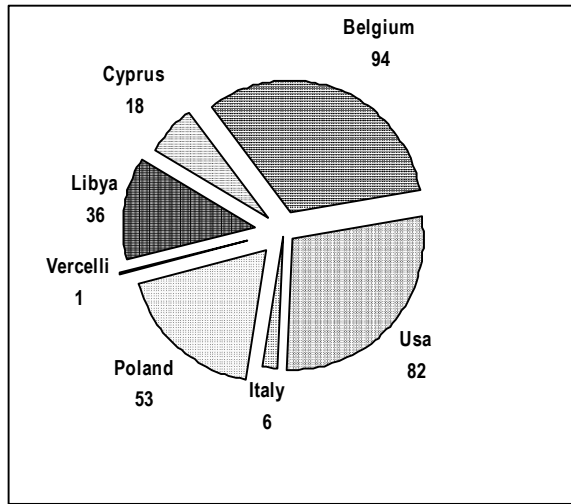
Graph 8 – Participation of teachers in organisations (%)

Towards the new philosophy of citizenship

The study highlights a dissimilar level of social perception of the teaching role. Teachers experience their profession by either perceiving greater devotion to the community, as in Belgium and Libya, or feeling separated from a social context that does not appreciate their 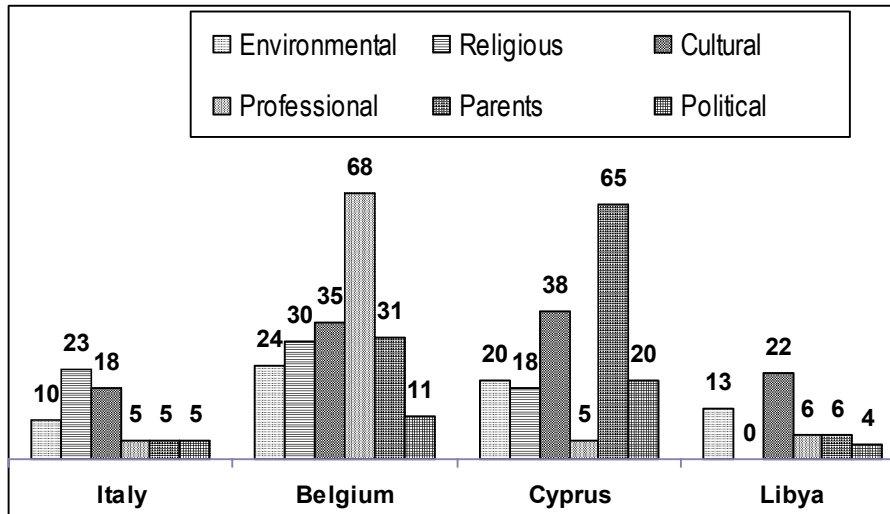work enough (Italy, Cyprus). Despite this double standard, it is clear that, in the four countries concerned, the question of teachers belonging to the community becomes fundamental for the commitment to the profession and success of the educational process. It is not enough to feel part of society; it is necessary for society to send messages of acknowledgement of the role and show trust in teachers who base satisfaction in their work not only on relations with the alumni (Italy), but also on relations with their colleagues and the students' parents (Belgium, Cyprus, Libya).

At this time, Italy is the country showing the least appreciation in the social sense of the profession. Within the margins of the inquiry, the reason for this can be attributed to a low degree of attention paid to extended social relations with colleagues, families and local organisations. Italian teachers invest in their qualification and, if well prepared, do not concern themselves enough with showing, outside the school, what they are capable of doing. However, this fact also lends itself to another interpretation. Perhaps Italian teachers are not interested in showing their abilities outside the school, which does not help society in deciphering the skills of teachers enclosed within their faculties.

Libya and Cyprus are revealed as two countries that are particularly interested in reading the profile of the teacher. In Libya, a teacher, the majority of who are male, is principally considered an intellectual engaged in shaping critical awareness and a citizen who is open to the social responsibility of his role; in Cyprus, a teacher is, first of all, a person who contributes to the education of upcoming generations and a citizen who has chosen to teach in order to perform a relevant social function. In Libya, criticality stands on public recognition as content stands on appreciation in Cyprus. The perspective of a socialist State is compared to the perspective of a State that is still strongly idealistic. In Libya, a person has a social value before an individual value, whereas in Cyprus, the political situation of the split of a small country in two can only be sustained by cultivating the idea of a change to come that will bring families together again. The idea of a better future bolsters the hopes of younger generations.

From this point of view, Italy and Belgium find themselves in two opposite situations. The realism in Italy corresponds to a certain conservatism in Belgium. Not only is there a practical separation between educational and political conservatism, but Gramsci and later Hirsch also declare that there is an inverse relationship between educational and political liberalism. Educational liberalism is a sure means for preserving the social status quo, whereas the best practices of educational conservatism are the only means whereby children from disadvantaged homes can secure the knowledge and skills that will enable them to improve their condition (Hirsch 1996, Gramsci 1949,1971). In Italy, teachers risk being excluded even more from belonging to the community, feeling themselves forced to perform tasks like a common worker who earns a living by teaching, rather than participating responsibly in the social growth of the school. In Belgium, on the other hand, the opposite situation is encountered: the distance between the teachers interviewed there and the image of the teacher-worker in Italy is quite

evident. The realism in Italy is derived from the ascertainment of the low social reputation of teachers who end up carrying out their jobs without even believing in the possibility of generating substantial improvements in their working conditions. The conservatism in Belgium is the result of the confirmation of the social importance of teachers who carry out their work surrounded by a feeling of trust and therefore do not perceive any obstacles from society. In Belgium, teachers are the educators of the younger generations, thus confirming the traditional role that society fully recognises.

Until 1960 Belgian male teachers combined their studies at the teacher college with their profession as sexton, organ player or surveyor. Most of them were even active members of religious and cultural organisations. So the perception of a male teacher was and still is that of an omnivalent person and a good and honest citizen with a great involvement in society. Teachers are still asked to participate in counting the votes for the elections or to be chairman of an election place. Male students have more possibilities or chances to find a job quickly than their female colleagues.

Belgian researchers embedded the conservatism in the religious context of the school. 75 % of all schools are catholic schools. In the near future there will be more investigation in the statement: Work should always come in the first place, even if this means less leisure time. Teachers want to have more 'expressive work orientation' and this is in combination with responsibility, creativity, development of their own capacity, and teamwork.

Most of the school reforms in Belgium are situated in the context of 'special needs for pupils' and that is the reason why teachers want to accept this challenge. So they take up more tasks and have more meetings to support pupils and parents. The risk of losing their status as a 'good enough' teacher is always on their mind (Ballet, 2005, Burggraeve 2004). To survive all kinds of social reforms teachers strain the call for reforms by giving meaning based on their personal ideas or perspectives. This process involves reflection on an individual's philosophical foundation and a certain level of self–determination.

With respect to the hypothesis of the social deprivation of teachers, in all of the countries surveyed, this question has a certain relevance in building up a feeling of belonging and both schools and societies will have to commit themselves to this aspect.

To feel one belongs to a community is the starting point for building up significant, long-lasting social ties. The social fabric is reconstructed through communication among the people who live together and decide to contribute to the progress of humanity by investing in schools and families. The politics of a State directed at well-being foresees the participation of citizens who have matured their public spirit for the common good. Families and schools are the fundamental units in which one learns to love one another, help one another and be united in order to then carry these feelings over into the vaster social framework. The complexity of family life and the vulnerability of young people gives teachers the status of a third adult.

It is possible to suggest that there are three categories of adults related to young people:

- Loving and concerned parents, who want the very best for their children;
- The consumer society itself - not at all loving, but concerned to profit from the desires of the generation of young people and
- In between these two, a relatively rare third type of adult, often as loving (sometimes even more loving) than the parents themselves but not concerned with profit – for example, the reliable youth leader or the approachable teacher. They do not sell goods, and they simply offer values. Without such people, education is not possible - certainly not social initiation. These people take care of the world of the inner life - the internal bruises and injuries, seeing how many of those in the first and second world (who may often sympathise with the third and the fourth world) are lonely deep inside -their outward commitments may have destroyed their inner warmth (Versteylen, 1991). Teacher and pupils can become each other's partners in dialogue, in which the central element is not the transfer of knowledge, but the interaction between learners and subject, not least making visible the teacher's own cultural background (Verkest 2003).

Under the influence of policy makers students, children and parents nowadays are 'clients' and the teachers become more and more 'sales officers' in a company and co-operate on a 'social contract'. This is one of the reasons for social deprivation. The task of educating in this sense is up to the teachers and greater social recognition of their role will surely be of benefit; through receiving trust, they can transmit hope. It is a teacher's task to 'heal' or 'mend' the world by searching for those fragments of hope and rescuing them, one by one in stories (Sacks 2005).

The new philosophy of citizenship is that of the reciprocal understanding of the overall values in which each person can recognise his/her belonging to a common totality. Most changes in our educational organisations occur without the reflection and participation of parents and pupils. Schools neglect the voices of parents and pupils and this is an important factor in the promotion of active citizenship. Most of the educational changes are, from the pupils' perspective, non – participatory. More and more schools are interested in European projects like Comenius and in Belgium there is a tendency for schools to 'show' their activities of cooperation with some 'special groups' to the local community by using the press.   The international comparison of shared issues raises the awareness of common belonging to a worldwide community. The process of belonging is sometimes infected by consumerism. The greatest potential benefit for teachers is the emergence of educative communities (Goodlad, 1994). Instead of feeling isolated, teachers who become a part of these communities and participate in professional developments become members of a larger sustained community of educators, which affords them the opportunity to encourage and support each other's efforts.

A humane future develops in a climate of peace and freedom. Peace, the result of agreement between persons of good will, and freedom, the drive towards the development of people who communicate, using the language in which they can best express their humanity. This idea of citizenship of a person originates in schools, with teachers who have experienced firsthand the meaning of belonging to a community, of human communication, and the agreement among peoples. Belonging, communication, agreement, these form the structure of reciprocal understanding of common values, first

of which are the values of justice and awareness, justice of being and knowledge of
doing.

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