Brussels Studies

La revue scientifique électronique pour les recherches
sur Bruxelles / Het elektronisch wetenschappelijk
tijdschrift voor onderzoek over Brussel / The e-journal
for academic research on Brussels

Notes de synthèse | 2009

Education in Brussels

Synopsis, CFB No. 5

Het onderwijs in Brussel

L'enseignement à Bruxelles

Rudi Janssens, Donat Carlier and Piet Van de Craen

Translator: Mike Bramley

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/brussels/923>

DOI: 10.4000/brussels.923

ISSN: 2031-0293

Publisher

Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles

Electronic reference

Rudi Janssens, Donat Carlier and Piet Van de Craen, « Education in Brussels », *Brussels Studies* [Online], Synopses, Online since 19 January 2009, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/brussels/923> ; DOI : 10.4000/brussels.923

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R. Janssens, D. Carlier, P. Van de Craen

Translation: Mike Bramley

• **Rudi Janssens** is a lecturer within the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at the VUB and a senior researcher within BRIO. Publication: Janssens, R. (2007). *Van Brussel gesproken. Taalgebruik, taalverschuivingen en taalidentiteit in het BHGt, Brusselse Thema's 15*, Brussel: Vubpress. For more information about Rudi Janssens and VUB-BRIO, please see www.briobrussel.be

Contact : Rudi.Janssens@vub.ac.be – 02/629.25.82 – 0497/18.88.57

• **Donat Carlier** is the Secretary-Coordinator for the Advisory Commission on Job Training Education of the Brussels-Capital Region (CCFEE). Publications by the CCFEE are available on their web site: www.ccfree.be. For more information about Donat Carlier and the Consultative Commission for Training Employment and Education in Brussels, please see www.ccfree.be

Contact : d.carlier@ccfree.be – 02/371.74.34

• **Piet Van de Craen** is a Professor within the TALK department at the VUB and a founding member of the European Language Council. His research focuses on multilingualism and multilingual education. Publication: Van de Craen, P. al et 2008. 'European multilingual language policies in Belgium and policy-driven research'. In: K. Lauridsen & D. Toudic (eds) *Language at Work in Europe. Festschrift in Honour of Wolfgang Mackiewicz*, Göttingen: V&R Press, 139-151. For more information about Piet Van de Craen and VUB-TALK, please see www.vub.ac.be/TALK

Contact : pvdcaen@vub.ac.be – 02/629.26.65 – 0475/32.07.09

Conference-debate:
26 january, 19.45

KVS
Rue de Laeken, 146
1000 Brussels

This paper focuses on the situation of compulsory education in the Brussels Capital Region. Schools are not isolated entities within which the learning process takes place and can not be viewed separately from the metropolitan environment within which they function. In order to gain an insight into this complex issue, the relationship between both can be summarised by four aspects: the political-institutional context (the organisation of education), the pedagogical-educational process (what is taught and how, in what circumstances and with which expected result), the demographic-geographic situation (the population for whom education is organised), and the social-cultural context (urban development) (Verlot, 2002). Although these different aspects are strongly interwoven, this division provides an interesting means by which the actual situation in Brussels is looked at more closely and by which the observations and the formulation of problems are made clearer. Finally, a number of political options are proposed.

Due to the extent of the problems, the higher education and vocational education sectors are not examined here. They are addressed within topics such as 'Brussels as a city of knowledge' and 'The Brussels employment market'.

I. Observations

1. Political-institutional context

1. Brussels education does not exist. Education in Belgium is the exclusive concern of the communities, resulting in two totally independent educational structures in Brussels, respectively regulated by the French and Flemish Communities. Brussels schools have approximately 230,000 pupils in compulsory education. French-speaking education accounts for almost 80% of the pupils, with Dutch-speaking education accounting for 17%. The other pupils are distributed among the European and international schools which also function completely independently from both subsidised systems. There is no structural link, consultative umbrella organisa-

tion or even a limited form of systematic collaboration between these various entities.

2. Various municipalities (in this case, Elsene, Etterbeek, Ganshoren, Oudergem, Schaarbeek, St-Gillis, Ukkel and Watermaal-Bosvoorde) only organise French-speaking education.

3. The complex model of organisation is also responsible for a complex finance system within which the funding of pupils differs considerably, depending on the language group that the school belongs to. The Flemish Community provides 22.7% more funding for a primary school pupil than the French-speaking Community, and 18.1% more for a secondary school pupil.

2. Pedagogic-educational context

a. Social-pedagogical aspects

4. In contrast to Flanders and Wallonia, the Brussels Capital Region has a larger number of pupils that are not in their age-appropriate class. It is mainly the pupils that actually live in the Brussels Capital Region that accumulate a significant learning deficit which continues to grow through their secondary education.

5. The number of pupils from Brussels within French-speaking special needs primary education (type 8) because of learning difficulties (such as dyslexia, dysorthography, dyscalculia, etc) is significantly higher than in Wallonia. A similar phenomenon does not exist within the Dutch-speaking education system.

6. In Brussels, proportionally more pupils follow an ASO (General Secondary Education) path within both the French and Dutch-speaking education systems than in Wallonia and Flanders respectively (see graphs 1 and 2).

7. The number of pupils that leave school without a diploma is significantly higher in Brussels than in the rest of the country. Whereas in Belgium as a whole, 17% of young people aged between 20 and 24 do not have a secondary education diploma, this figure rises in 2007 to 28% in Brussels (see table 1). It is therefore not surprising that the number of young people in Brussels between the ages of 18 and 25 that have already left the education system without a secondary education diploma and that do not undergo a training is approximately 24%, whilst the 'Education and Training 2010' Lisbon accords proposed a benchmark of 10% (source: Employment market survey, data: Agers-DRI-IWEPS).

8. Despite the previous observation, the number of highly-skilled people in the Brussels Capital Region is significantly higher than in the other regions. This number is actually increasing, although less strongly than in the rest of the country. Whereas the number of highly-skilled Belgians increased from 23.8% to 28.1% between 2000 and 2007, Brussels experienced an increase from 31.7% to 35.2% (Source: Employment market survey, figures: Agers-DRI-IWEPS)

9. Where successive generations benefit from the educational level of the previous generation, young people in Brussels are lagging behind the other regions. Where the oldest generation of Brussels residents has the lowest number of low-skilled people, the youngest generation has the highest number (see graph 3).

b. Language and education

10. Despite the apparent multilingualism of the city and its inhabitants, a bilingual educational order is maintained together with language legislation based on a Brussels with French and Dutch-speaking population groups, which no longer reflects the current linguistic situation. With the exception of the European schools, the only teaching languages that are used are either Dutch or French.

c. Pedagogic guidance

11. Both the French and Dutch-speaking education systems are experiencing a personnel problem. It is difficult to find appropriate personnel and the turnover is significantly higher than in the other regions. Available positions in the French-speaking system can not be filled and in the Dutch-speaking system 58.5% of primary school teachers and 56.0% of secondary school teachers leave their job within 5 years (Source: De Morgen: 17/06/2008, based on a parliamentary question).

3. *Demographic-geographic context*

12. Approximately 16% of pupils in the French and Dutch-speaking education systems in Brussels come from outside the Brussels Capital Region, mainly from Flanders (around 13%). On the other hand, there are far fewer pupils from Brussels who go to school in Flanders and Wallonia. The profile of the pupil population in Brussels schools differs significantly from the profile of the Brussels pupils.

13. Brussels is not only characterised by a high degree of diversity, but it also has a high degree of spatial segregation. Approximately 30% of pupils within compulsory education in Brussels live in an impoverished neighbourhood. This goes hand in hand with educational segregation which threatens to cause a polarisation with an overrepresentation of ghetto schools and problem schools on the one hand, and more elitist schools filled with rich Brussels residents with peers from Flemish and Walloon Brabant on the other (CCFEE, 2008). Furthermore, the European and international schools also attract a very select public.

14. In 2000, there were 46,000 pre-school age children living in Brussels, 66,000 primary school children and 66,000 secondary school children. By 2020, the number of pre-school age children is expected to rise by 45%, primary school children by 35% and secondary school children by 27% (Source: Federal Planning Bureau, 2007)

15. From the 1960s up to the present day, Brussels evolved from a bilingual city into a multilingual multicultural city where more than a quarter of its inhabitants are foreign nationals, half of which are European, where 24% of inhabitants are younger than 20 (Source: Mini-Bru, 2007) and where the diversity of languages has significantly increased with French as a lingua franca, despite the fact that it is the sole home language within which only 56.8% of the present population grew up (Janssens 2001, Janssens 2007). It is also these young people with their diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds that can be found in the Brussels schools. The effect of this is that in the Dutch-speaking education system, where the pedagogic approach is aligned to pupils with Dutch as a home language, only a minority actually speak the language at home (see graph 4).

4. *Social-cultural context.*

16. The social situation in Brussels is alarming, as demonstrated by the following figures: 28% of the Brussels population live under the poverty line, compared with 8% in Wallonia and 6% in Flanders. 27% of Brussels residents under the age of 18 live in a family affected by unemployment, compared with 18% in Wallonia and 8% in Flanders. The Brussels Region, just like all large international cities, is characterised by a clear polarisation between a large group of poor people on the one hand, and an overrepresentation of very rich inhabitants on the other. The PISA survey shows that the educational system compounds this situation.

17. Whereas the average youth unemployment figure for the EU-15 is 17%, this figure is 35% for the 15 to 24 year olds in the Brussels Capital Region (compared with 31% in Wallonia and 12.5% in Flanders) (Source: OECD country reports, 2007).

18. Whereas schools are divided according to denomination and language specification, this is by no means the case for the young people of Brussels who live in a multilingual and multicultural environment that on some levels contrasts with the values and ideals that are passed on in the schools.

II. Questions-issues

1. *Political-institutional problems*

1. Reliable primary data is of paramount importance for both pursuing a policy as well as for sound scientific research. In Brussels, such data is either fragmentary or not present. The French and Dutch-speaking education systems gather their own data in their own way, which makes it difficult to gain an overview of certain evolutions or to tackle common problems. A first step was taken in the assertion of compulsory school attendance. A comparison of the statistics showed that it was not possible to check whether compulsory school attendance was being observed by 6000 pupils, so the ministry called on the help of the municipalities to check this out. This impulse is not present for other problems. Swapping of data about specific problems has an ad hoc character and only relates to the exchange of data. In order to develop a real educational policy, other permanent consultation structures between the different educational entities also need to be created, including with the municipalities.

2. Education funding remains a problem, especially considering the large number of pupils in the Brussels Capital Region who require special attention. Apart from that, education is also confronted with capacity problems and with often outdated school buildings, although the Flemish Community is now taking extra measures regarding school infrastructure. These problems require additional investments.

2. *Pedagogical-educational problems*

a. Social-pedagogical problems.

3. The problem with education in Brussels is not to do with a lack of performance, but the selection of pupils that leads to a polarisation with elite schools on the one hand, and concentration schools on the other. This situation is a reflection of the spatial segregation innate to cities with large groups of foreign inhabitants. Such effects are compounded by the free choice available on the Brussels education market due to the high concentration of schools in a certain area within which people can easily move. This allows parents to make strategic choices, increasing the competition between the schools. Unlike in Flanders and Wallonia, parents are able to choose between educational institutions from both communities. The waterfall effect also plays a role here (see Nouria Ouali and Andrea Rhea, 1994) in that parents are more likely to transfer their children within the ASO (General Secondary Education) system - twice if necessary - rather than choosing for technical or vocational education. In this way, the educational segregation in Brussels takes the form of a double polarisation, both socially and ethnically: children of blue-collar workers and immigrant children end up in the weakest schools, often in technical and vocational education where the quality of education is usually lower, where lessons are taught by less-qualified teachers and where the atmosphere is not really conducive to optimal learning.

4. Consequently, a large number of pupils complete their secondary education without a diploma and the learning deficit of Brussels pupils is significantly higher than in Wallonia and Flanders (see graph 5). On the basis of the present evolution, there are no indications that the gap will be closed in the short or mid term.

b. Language and education

5. Language education in Brussels prefers not (*toevoegen*) to make use of the available richness. The idea is maintained of Dutch-speaking and French-speaking schools within which there is no room for cross-pollination. This serves no benefit to the educational learning process, particularly in vocational education where insufficient attention is often paid to the necessity and possibilities of language education.

c. Pedagogic guidance

6: The difficult educational situation means that teachers are also less inclined (*weglaten: to want*) to work in Brussels schools because (*weglaten: the classes*) in Wallonia and Flanders (*toevoegen*) they are not usually confronted with such diversity in the classroom. Little attention is paid to how to cope with this metropolitan reality in their training and the drop out figures speak for themselves. Due to the shortage of teachers, the precarious situation of some pupils is increased, as (*weglaten: it is*) those schools with the most 'difficult' pupils (*weglaten: that*) are the least popular with potential teachers.

3. *Demographic-geographic problems*

7: Just like other cities, Brussels is characterised by impoverished neighbourhoods and an inherent overrepresentation of people with a lower diploma level. The fact that the educational level of young people strongly correlates to that of their parents illustrates the fact that the level of education is still carried over from one generation to the other (see map 1) and (*toevoegen*) that the social mobility of education in Brussels is rather limited. The large number of inhabitants in impoverished neighbourhoods particularly makes this problem even more urgent.

8: Residential segregation also causes a polarisation process between schools, whereby the large group of schools between 'black schools' and 'elite schools' fears 'falling' into the first category and they therefore try to select pupils according to their social background. The process, in which parents – despite the abilities of their children – prefer to opt for 'white' ASO (General Secondary Education) schools than 'black' technical or vocational schools, compounds the waterfall system within education (Donat Carlier 2008). This mechanism also widens the gap between the home language and the school language within the Dutch-speaking educational system.

4. *Social-cultural problems.*

a. Education and duality

9. One can generally propose that the disparities in the education system are fuelled by the duality between rich and poor in Brussels society, but that they also further compound this duality, both socially and ethnically as well as between the different generations.

10. It is striking in the European context that the difference between the school achievements of the first and second generation immigrants in Belgium is small, but the gap with the autochthonous pupils is one of the highest in Europe (EU-Groenboek, 2008). The lack of educational qualifications for part of the Brussels youth inhibits their social mobility via the employment market. Language education

also undoubtedly plays an important role here, but education is not the only factor that explains this development (see for example Devillé, 2008). Phenomena such as the discrimination of immigrants in the recruitment of employees, the requested over qualification for certain jobs, part of the middle and high income classes fleeing the city, the impact of commuter work, new migration, restructuring on the work floor and other socio-demographic factors also contribute to this situation.

b. Education and the employment market

11. There is no unambiguous relationship between education and employment. In many respects, the situation on the employment market gives a distorted picture of the education situation in Brussels. A number of mechanisms have already been outlined above that make it difficult for a proportion of young people to find a job, even with the same educational qualifications. This leads to this group becoming demotivated and choosing for generally less valued curricula. More structurally, the high demands of the Brussels employment market further intensifies the inherent competition between schools for the stronger pupils. The atmosphere in the schools with the weakest pupils in turn leads to a shortage of appropriate teachers. The fact that a large number of highly-skilled people who are trained in Brussels leave the city and that new, skilled or unskilled immigrants take up residence in Brussels means that the link between the quality of education in Brussels schools and the high unemployment figures is to some extent no longer black and white.

12. The large group of Brussels residents with a low level of education contrasts with the high demands that are made of employees within the Brussels service sector. This creates a combination of high unemployment and a large number of unfilled job vacancies in Brussels. The additional vocational and language training programmes take centre stage within the recent action plan against youth unemployment in Brussels (Government of the Brussels Capital Region, 06/02/08). At the same time, this remediating approach draws attention to the shortfalls in the educational field, with the lack of bilingual personnel being a significant problem for several company managers (Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2006).

c. Education and diversity

13. Nowhere else in Belgium is the gap between the home environment of children and the world of school as great as in the Brussels Capital Region. For the large number of immigrant children, neither the home language nor their own cultural background is used as a standard within education. In the Dutch-speaking education system (see Kris Van den Branden, 2007) but also in the French-speaking system, it is mainly seen that these pupils often have context-dependent, cognitively simple, every-day language skills, but that they have difficulty in making the switch to decontextualised, cognitively complex, scientific language skills. Furthermore, there is also the problem of the use of the children's home language and the question of whether or not there is a place for this in mainstream education. Little attention is paid to the cultural background of pupils. These factors should also be given a place within education in some way as they form the foundations of children's identities and enabling them to function as a citizen in the Brussels society.

III. Policy options ¹

This final section focuses on the possible political options that may lead to solutions to a number of the problems that have been presented. Due to the abundance and complexity of these problems, only a number of general options are presented here. It is not possible to propose a unique political way of thinking based on scientific research, particularly on the political-institutional level, and as there are several possibilities, several political decisions are possible.

1. *Collaboration and restructuring of the educational landscape*

1. A first condition for achieving an integrated policy is having a sound insight in the various education problems. Such scientific research is very scarce and most research is restricted to either Dutch-speaking or French-speaking education, which is logical considering the way in which educational research is funded. The (Brussels) government needs to create the possibility for funding research for researchers from both communities working together on the different aspects of education (e.g. via Research in Brussels). For example, urgent topics in this area and where further research is essential include research in inclusive education, the effects of the pupil population on the performance of pupils and the school, the role of home languages on pupils within the educational setting etc.

2. In management terms, structural administrative collaboration between both the Dutch-speaking as well as the French-speaking education systems is a first essential step. Problems such as absenteeism and capacity problems must first be solved in this way. This also implies that data collection be synchronised and that as well as school data, personal data about the pupils needs to be retained and exchanged.

3. Further structural collaboration is necessary in order to reach fundamental solutions, where all the entities in the Brussels education field are involved: both language communities, VGC (The Flemish Community Commission) and COCOF (The French Community Commission), European schools, municipalities but also the Brussels Region and the societies and organisations of the Brussels civil society. This does not mean that a common structure needs to be developed, but that depending on the problems, the entities that are specifically involved are able to work towards finding a solution in a structured way. The subsidiarity principle also counts here which can hold back the regionalisation of certain aspects of educational policy, such as the location of schools and the infrastructure. Other problems, such as how to tackle teacher turnover, require school boards to have higher levels of autonomy.

2. *A better social mix in Brussels schools*

4. Collaboration is also important in order to pursue an effective policy of desegregation and to close the social gap between schools. A better social mix within the pupil population is essential here. The priority admission policy in the Dutch-speaking education system provides a stimulus for this, but its effect is limited. Specific initiatives and proposals have also been launched within the French-speaking education system, such as inclusive education that aims to achieve a high level of

¹ This third and final section is not supported by Donat Carlier (CCFEE).

general education up to the age of 15 or 16, an admissions policy that must guarantee a better social mix, the 'broad school' that works structurally with other social and educational entities within the direct school environment and the idea of the 'bassin scolaire', collaboration between concentration schools and elite schools in such areas as immersion education.

3. *A different language education*

5. There is a simple way to make education in general, and more specifically language education, more appealing whilst at the same time aligning it to the reality and also giving pupils a cognitive bonus. In the European context this is the so-called multi-lingual education, also known as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning; EMILE in French: Enseignement d'une Matière par Intégration d'une Langue Etrangère). This is where part of the curriculum is taught in French or in Dutch (or in many cases in other languages). The results achieved in Brussels and Walloon schools, where this approach has been used for some time, are evident in six aspects: (1) the knowledge of the target language is better than in the traditional education system, (2) the knowledge of the mother tongue is better than in the traditional education system, (3) subject knowledge is better than in the traditional education system, (4) attitudes and motivation regarding the school and the 'other' are better than in the traditional education system, (5) a demonstrable cognitive bonus is created that can be discerned through maths and language tests, and (6) the organisation of the brain in multilingual people is different than in monolinguals and perhaps indicates a better aptitude for learning (see Van de Craen et al 2005a, b, 2007a, b, c; 2008). Several factors refer directly to the numerous problems that have been outlined above and transcend the remediating character of a number of well-meaning educational initiatives of the past decades that only seem to have had a limited effect.

The different options that have been presented here form a stimulus for better education for the children of Brussels. However, negotiation is needed urgently. Because of financial, pedagogic and organisational circumstances, education currently does not succeed in breaking down the inequality between the young people of Brussels, but actually compounds this situation, and neither does it succeed in aligning the qualifications of young people to the needs of the Brussels employment market. These developments occur on top of a 'demographic time bomb'... the educational capacity in Brussels will need to increase by around 50% within a period of 20 years. The challenge is 'immense'.

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Appendices

Graph 1: Distribution of pupils in secondary French-speaking education within the Brussels Capital Region according to the different types of education (2nd & 3rd grade), in 2003-2004

Source: Educational statistics / Calculations: CCFEE

Graph 2: Distribution of pupils in secondary Dutch-speaking education within the Brussels Capital Region according to the different types of education (2nd & 3rd grade), in 2003-2004

Source: Educational statistics / Calculations: CCFEE

		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Brussels Capital Region	M	66,9	63,7	70,7	73,2	71,4	69,2	68,3
	V	71,8	74,7	79,7	74,4	73,6	73,9	74,7
	T	69,4	69,5	75,4	73,8	72,5	71,7	71,7
Flemish Region	M	82,3	83,5	81,1	82,3	81,5	84,3	84,9
	V	88,2	87,8	86,4	87,7	88,8	88,8	88,9
	T	85,2	85,6	83,7	84,9	85,1	86,5	86,9
Walloon Region	M	74,6	73,9	74,3	74,5	75,1	73,3	76,4
	V	84,5	82,9	83,2	83,3	83,1	84,1	81,7
	T	79,5	78,3	78,7	78,9	79,0	78,6	79,0
Belgium	M	76,9	77,6	78,0	78,9	78,4	79,1	80,4
	V	82,0	84,7	84,6	84,8	85,3	85,6	84,9
	T	79,4	81,1	81,3	81,8	81,8	82,4	82,6
EU-27 (2001 to 2003: EU-25)	M	73,5	73,7	74,4	74,4	74,9	75,0	75,4
	V	79,0	79,5	79,3	79,9	80,2	80,8	80,8
	T	76,3	76,6	76,8	77,2	77,5	77,9	78,1

Table 1: Percentage of young people aged 20 to 24 who have successfully completed their higher secondary education (compared to all 20 to 24 year olds)

Source : EUROSTAT, DGSIE, Employment market survey

Graph 3: Percentage of people that have only achieved a lower secondary diploma according to age - 2007

Source : Employment market survey, 2007 / Calculations : CCFEE

Graph 4: Evolution of pupils in Dutch-speaking compulsory education in The Brussels Capital Region according to language background

Source: Educational Statistics Flemish Community Commission

Graph 5: Evolution of the number of years learning deficit of 25-30 year olds from 1921 to 2001 according to region.

Source : Christian Vandemotten – Pierre Marissal, IGEAT-ULB

MAP 1. Level of education

(taken from: Kesteloot C. & Slegers K Onderwijs. In Welzijns- en gezondheidsatlas van Brussel-Hoofdstad 2006, Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn Brussel-Hoofdstad,)

Source : INS General socio-economic survey 2001.