

EXCLUSION / IMPRISONMENT / EXCLUSION: A VICIOUS CIRCLE ?

Mr Chairman
Ladies and gentlemen,

I work for the French Ministry of Education. I am a school inspector, the kind of person that sits in the back of the classroom writing miles of notes and then reporting about the teacher's competence or incompetence in his / her teaching job. In this respect, the teachers I assess are eager to know where they are situated on the scale which goes from incompetence to efficiency. Doing so implies being respectful and fair and most of all being able to use the right words, beyond any cultural or linguistic differences.

During the first few weeks I spent in this all-American college I attended way back in the sixties I kept receiving all sorts of invitations from each one of the campus sororities, asking a so-called "Jean-Michel" to please join the events and parties organised for female newcomers – *Jean-Michel* could of course only be female in this very traditional American institution.

This is definitely a boy's name in France, a fact which points out the very subtle changes and shifts that have taken place between our Romanic and Germanic languages, the result being that a *Jean* in the USA is a *John* in France and a *Jean* in France is a *John* in English speaking countries. I don't know if this makes any sense to you. It doesn't make any sense to me either, but I think this example points out how much proper language is an issue, in an international context as well as in the specific context of prison education.

The words you choose reveal who you are. Everyone wants to be part of the mainstream and teaching performances that are assessed as below the normal standard are felt by the teachers concerned as if they were excluded from the mainstream.

What I mean to point out here is the fact that there is a very thin line between exclusion and inclusion, between exclusion and the breaking of the law. Our aim it is, it seems, not only to provide learning opportunities for those behind prison bars but also to restore the personal image of people whose name has been linked to a rather negative course of action and to contribute therefore to breaking this vicious circle which pulls back to prison those who, for reasons we are trying to understand, commute between exclusion and imprisonment .

I am basically not a specialist in prison education *per se*. I have nevertheless a responsibility and an interest in prison education for 3 reasons:

1. prison education is an extraordinary laboratory in the field of education science. It is the place where I would like to observe practices that might be exported outside prison.
2. prison education needs the support of the educational system: prison educators need someone they can speak to and refer to about ways of improving their practice and problems that might arise in their daily practice.

3. prison education in France is managed by the Ministry of Education which organises the teaching, both academic and vocational, which means that my involvement is a government request.

I think education in prison is a give and take thing. Prison students have a right to the best possible education. And we can only benefit from what we observe in prison about the learning process.

The views I am going to express reflect my own opinion about what I have been able to observe in the prison classroom. So my views are the ones of an outsider and must be taken as such. I would hate to infringe on the territories of the numerous and learned specialists I have had the pleasure of listening to at this conference.

My presentation will rest on three main points.

First I'll say a few personal words about exclusion. Second, I shall describe what we are trying to do in my country to fight exclusion before it is too late. Third I shall list a few of the positive things I have seen done to insert the person in prison back into society.

THE POOR AND THE ILLITERATE FILL OUR PRISONS

It is no easy task to tackle a topic like the one I was given. Being excluded from the mainstream of society amounts in fact to being excluded from life. We all know about the bare facts: social exclusion might indeed lead to delinquency and to prison and it often does. It is easy to describe this spiral of exclusion and I'll say a few words about it. But it is not my purpose today to ponder on what the harsh reality is. It is my purpose today to try to replace the modal *might* into a *must not*. For it is our responsibility as education specialists and prison professionals to give practical, feasible answers to the question Can this vicious circle be broken?

Economic exclusion

It is a well-known fact that exclusion is economic first. We all know what the statistics are: it is the poor and the illiterate who are in prison.

They are in prison because they could not cope with the pressure of living in a society based on materialistic values. In an age of scientific penology, we can only confirm that we can not do away with prisons. The problem is that prison continues to generate more ethical, social, psychological and economic problems than it solves.

I can think of no society that would not bear in itself the seeds of exclusion. Exclusion is economic first because crime finds its roots in unemployment and homelessness. The North-South divide, mass migration from rural areas to the city of opportunity, the technological revolution that has taken the world by storm, those events have had desperate side-effects.

It is the ones who cannot adapt to those changes - those whose education is not up to the demands of our economic systems - whom we often find behind prison bars.

But this is nothing new. At this stage, I'd like to illustrate this with two examples: the story of Cain and Abel and the preamble to the American Declaration of Independence.

The story of Cain and Abel tells us two things:

- one, exclusion is a potential threat to humanity: Cain only killed Abel because he felt excluded from the love and recognition he felt he deserved;
- two, Cain's exclusion is the result of an economic change in the history of mankind : among other things this story is about the clash between the nomadic tradition and the farming tradition. Changes – over very long periods of time – breed exclusion because there are those who cannot adapt to the changes or there are those who resist the changes and lose their so far traditional ways of making a living.

It is interesting to notice that this story usually quoted as an illustration of man's evil ways is in fact a story of exclusion as much as the story of Adam and Eve is another story of exclusion from a paradise of bliss and happiness.

On the other hand, let me refer to the American Declaration of Independence which is the first political document I know of which refers very precisely to the responsibility of the state as far as the welfare of its citizens is concerned, with a specific reference to exclusion, for what else could the Founding Fathers of the Republic mean with this concept that « all men are created equal » and that all men have basic rights among which and foremost we find life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

The democratic values we believe in today are summed up in the concept that the state's purpose is to implement those very rights and to make every effort towards not excluding the ones who do not from the start benefit from hereditary social advantages. It is interesting to notice the differing political attitudes between the United States and France, for example. In the United States, personal failure is considered as the result of a person's inability to cope with the demands of society and also, to a certain extent, of this person's failure to respect God's law as explained in the parable of talents. Exclusion therefore is in a way the logical consequence of one's limitations. In Socialist France it is the State's responsibility to compensate individual shortcomings, hence the high taxes and numerous programmes aimed at relieving the problems that would inevitably lead to exclusion.

The thing is if you're not inside you're outside. We all know that being outside is the worst that can happen to you socially, mentally, physically.

To put it simply, why should I respect the law of the group if I am in no way part of the group? Why shouldn't I join a group whose law I make mine because this group recognizes who I am?

Cultural exclusion

Exclusion is also cultural of course. When you're economically out access to education becomes all the more difficult. It is those who have no access to education who suffer most from exclusion. And I must admit that school often reinforces that class divide.

Our prisons are filled with poor people, yes, but those poor people are the ones who have been denied proper access to education. In France, almost one third of the prison population are illiterate. About 60 per cent of our prison population aged 25 / 50 have reached a level of education which goes no further than primary school.

The issue today is access to information and culture. The European Commission's White Paper on Education and Learning states very clearly that on a global level we are heading towards a society divided into those who know and those who do not. Those with no access to education will be left on the side of the road.

We seem to have reached a stage where those who were born in the right place and with the right genes are the lucky ones. The others we meet in the streets as homeless or in job agencies as unemployed or in prison as offenders or criminals.

A matter of values

What is at stake therefore is I think the values we believe in - the writers of the American Declaration of Independence would have said the *truths* we believe in. My approach to breaking the spiral of exclusion is moral first. It is only once we have decided what society we want to live in that we can decide what political organisation we need and what aims we set for our educational system.

Three people out of four live in an urban context in France today : we are facing the danger of transforming our cities into ghettos with the wealthy middle-class living in districts protected by private militia surrounded by the so-called inner city high crime areas.

If the way we organise society cannot go without exclusion, then it is only a political decision which might reverse the odds. I am not advocating a Robin Hood policy - take from the rich and give to the poor - but I can't help believing that the answer is political first - and what is politics without any reference to values?

The answer to breaking the cycle of exclusion is to be found first in the way we fight the culture of second best, of people expecting less.

The answer is political in the way we organize our educational systems. It is also political in the way we tackle the issue of integrating our numerous migrant minorities - people who have helped reconstruct the country after WW 2 and were lured away from European countries first, then from North Africa and now Central Africa.

The issue is giving access to education to all and provide them with the best possible education within the public system.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF EXCLUSION THROUGH EDUCATION

Now what is the involvement of a country like France in breaking the cycle of exclusion?

Basic principles

The basic principles I am going to mention rest on the our definition of what we call the school of the Republic, *l'Ecole de la République*.

1. We believe that those who have been disadvantaged by birth or social ills must have the good teachers and the best facilities in order for them to reach academic excellence. We already give more to schools set in the poorer districts (in France, inner schools represent 11% of the total) : we help them for example create priority networks of primary and secondary schools where teachers are better paid, where classes are smaller and the equipment more easily available than elsewhere.

2. We believe in parity of esteem between the academic path and the vocational path which means creating a vocational baccalaureate alongside the academic baccalaureate and transforming vocational schools into high tech places where industry and education can define common policies of mutual training and employment.

3. We are aiming at putting an end to the practice of streaming students in the secondary system and of heads organizing elite classes. The basic idea is that the individual student is at the centre of the educational system and has thus the right to an education giving equal opportunities to all.

4. We would like to promote the idea that our students need role models. That is why we encourage our schools to set up partnerships with institutions whose excellence is recognized such as theatres, sports teams, Nobel prize winners, theatre companies, the Council of Europe, etc.

5. And finally we must tackle the very serious problem of violent behaviour within the school premises through close partnerships with justice, the local police, town councils. For example, we have set up teams of educational emergency units who rush to a school calling for help in matters of violent student behaviour.

But organising the system is one thing, giving quality contents and setting up safety nets is another matter.

A qualification for all.

Among the numerous programmes we are conducting at the moment, I'd like to mention the following two:

1. A rehauling of academic programmes of study. We need to establish what a student needs to know today in order to succeed in life and to adapt to the numerous jobs he'll be offered. We need to set up a common core that will give both the cultural aspects of things and also help the student to understand the world he lives in.

2. Implementation by law of insertion programmes for the 16 - 25 age bracket. There are results already: 73 % of those who have benefited from this programme have succeeded in getting a job.

These insertion programmes give a second chance to those who are on the verge of dropping out. Our idea is to

- spot those who are potential drop outs;
- offer them an alternative education in schools adapted to their needs and aims;
- organise a network of partnerships with local industry, town councils, the regional political and cultural institutions in order to support the needs and problems of the students and educators involved.

One such programme, *New Chances*, is targeted at this 16/25 age bracket, the most fragile of our young people, and is aimed at fighting exclusion through tailor made programmes of study and innovative educational initiative.

This programme will

- assess the student's personality and needs
- provide for individual tutoring
- train for a job qualification
- increase training opportunities through partnerships with industry
- open up to Europe through mobility programmes.

3. Making it compulsory for schools to organise Education to Health and Citizenship Committees that involve partnerships with the local police, medical and social services, the local transport companies, etc.

The problem is that the educational system is under pressure. Today, our institution is asked to pass on knowledge, of course, but also to integrate the children of mass immigration, to cure social ills, to train for a job, to educate, to pass on a number of values we, as a nation, believe in, to assess results and thus compare a student's performance to the national standard.

We are having a hard time facing these numerous and different jobs at the same time. We need to find a means of involving parents again in the educational process. We also need to open our

schools to their immediate environment, to the district the school is set in so as to make it a meeting place for the local community, for example.

I was travelling the underground the other day. Lots of people in my carriage. Suddenly two teenagers, a small one of about 13 and a rather big one of about 17 pick up a fight right in the middle of the rush hour crowd. People get pushed about. No one reacts as usual. I look at the two and ask them to cool down. The younger one immediately disappears into the crowd. The elder one turns round to face me: "I do as I please", he says. "No", I reply, "you can't. There are limits". "No limits", he says, "He's my little brother. I can kill him if I wish to. And I can do the same to you".

There *are* limits and it has become our job as educators to set the limits. Fighting exclusion also implies teaching respect of the law.

Ironically, our educational system enforces exclusion since those who do not respect the law of the school are punished, of course, but also ultimately expelled or excluded: excluded from a lesson, from school, from society.

The fact is that passing on moral values such as abiding by the common law and respecting your neighbour are shifting from the family circle to the educational institutions and we educators have not yet been prepared for this task, at least not in the country I live in.

Breaking the spiral of exclusion is our concern before delinquent attitudes set in. No political nor social system is perfect but it is any government's duty to balance the odds.

BREAKING THE SPIRAL OF EXCLUSION BY REFORMING PRISON

We must also have a closer look at the way imprisonment breeds exclusion because you do get branded once you have served a prison sentence: Once a thief, always a thief.

In other words let us ask ourselves what can be done, what must be done, to prepare those deprived of freedom for their later insertion and increase their chances of breaking their personal spiral of exclusion?

As I said, I am in no way a specialist in the field of prison education. I have had the opportunity of observing a number of classes behind prison bars and I would like to share a few thoughts with you.

I was first astonished by the number of people who are in prison without being sentenced to any prison term, mainly people being investigated. I was also struck by the fact that putting people in prison was still the most common form of punishment today. And of course, looking at the figures of recidivism, I can only question the efficiency of this method. On the other hand, it seems to be a well accepted fact that prison has never been a strong deterrent to crime. The death penalty also has in no way reduced crime statistics.

So before talking about a few improvements I would like to suggest about prison education, I would like to say that you need not keep everyone in prison for punishment. In some ways

keeping someone in prison for petty offences is no way in keeping with the image we have of a society living in the 21st century.

Reform the system

So why not reform some aspects of the system and promote things like

1. a reduction of the investigation period (50% of inmates). In 1999 in France 41% of inmates were waiting for their trial, roughly 21 000 people;
2. alternatives to custody: mandatory rules of conduct, surrendering of documents, bail
3. alternative sentences: discontinuous detention, community service, tagging, offender-victim conciliation projects.

Prison education in France - basics

I would hate to repeat the very interesting and comprehensive proposals about new challenges in prison education made four years ago by Robert Suvaal, Educational Adviser, Ministry of Justice, The Netherlands at the EPEA Conference. I do agree, prison education does make a difference. But *what* education are we to offer if it is our aim to help the person in prison break their cycle of rejection?

I can only speak about the few things I know about education in prison in France. Our basic principles are the following – the avowed aim here being to dramatically reduce exclusion after a prison sentence.

1. Fight illiteracy

This is a basic concern. France has started an illiteracy programme for the 20 000 or so people in prison who are not literate. That means hiring 350 full time teachers and 750 part time teachers.

Number of hours taught in 1999: 350 000 a year

Number of prison students 1999: 30 000

These people are given another chance to get an education.

2. Organise the partnership between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education.

This was made official in 1995 through an Agreement stating that the Ministry of Education would provide its know how to organise education in prison by

- a. Setting up so-called prison educational units organised on a regional basis managed by Principals and teachers who remain under the authority of their own Ministry but cooperate with the Ministry of Justice which provides for rooms, books, etc.

- b. Addressing the prison student's personal needs and offer an education that leads to a qualification or to a personal betterment
- c. Positioning the student at the start and defining a route for progress, negotiating the tasks, setting a precise action target
- d. Giving each student a competence based personal portfolio which records courses attended, progress made and results achieved.

What this partnership has been instrumental in achieving is that now

- prison education is organised and monitored by education specialists who bring into the prison system an outsider's outlook
- learning to read and to write in prison has become a national concern
- there is now a tight educational network between prison education officers
- vocational training is on offer everywhere.

BREAKING THE SPIRAL OF EXCLUSION BY REFORMING PRISON EDUCATION

Organising prison education on a national level does of course not solve all the problems we have to face.

Among the improvements I would like to see - things I have read about, things I have observed and which might be considered as good practice - I would like to briefly quote the following, without getting into details. I think the workshops will provide ample time for this.

1. We need more and better cultural programmes.

We need to introduce the prison student to the real thing. For example, I would like to see art clubs piloted by professional artists. I have read about this very interesting experiment in a South African prison where puppets were a powerful means of communicating within as well as without prison walls.

We also need to emphasize the importance of the written word : people in prison - and this is why they must be literate - want to write about their life behind bars. They want to write for a purpose. So let's encourage the prison weekly or monthly, let's encourage people to write about themselves in diaries, in poems, in stories that could be printed and even published in the local newspaper.

France has a long tradition of including a compulsory philosophy course to all upper-sixth students. Teaching philosophy to prison students - if philosophy can at all be taught - is a means of introducing this specific public to the roots of the culture they live in. I believe strongly that debating on matters as important as *Who am I? What is freedom? Who is my neighbour?* is a strong means of restoring self-esteem and of pacifying the long hours spent in the loneliness of the prison cell.

Concerning teaching techniques, I would like to consider 6 ideas that might help improve what I have had the opportunity of observing.

2. Teaching in prison is a laboratory for new teaching techniques.

Teaching to prisoners is a great opportunity to learn about the learning process. There are things teachers can do which I would describe as common sense: give up frontal teaching, explore teacher / student monitoring, explore new ways of organising lessons, get rid of the idea that learning is a matter of time, develop self management strategies, etc.

What we need is a system whereby what is experimented in prison will benefit teaching outside prison walls. I believe our approach in France is far too elitist and contributes in no small way to the class divide which is reinforced by education.

From a conservative, teacher centred approach we need to move on to a learner-centred approach. We also need to divide our teaching time into separate modules, each such module being given a precise objective.

3. Teach languages with a purpose.

In the survey I monitored in 1998 I wanted to understand in what ways the foreign language lessons I observed (mainly German, English and Spanish) were effective and made sense to the prison student.

What I saw was

too much grammar (33% of the classroom activities)
too much reading and very little speaking and writing
too much French in the classroom
a Question / Answer teacher centred approach.

According to a poll I conducted, prison students learning a language said they did the language course mainly to

- a. escape routine
- b. open up to the outside world
- c. prepare for an exam
- d. maintain previous language skills
- e. prepare reinsertion

Clearly, the first motivation here is the escape a language lesson can provide within prison walls. I am fully aware of the fact that the language classroom is an artificial world since you speak with a different voice and you often don the personality of a character who is not you, but this is exactly what we need in then prison classroom, which then becomes a launching pad for a new life and helps towards acquiring the language skills needed to survive in the outside world.

I only wish language teachers would be aware of how much they are instrumental in this rehabilitation process which leads from exclusion to inclusion. Any teacher who starts questioning himself about the sense of his teaching will dramatically change his / her approach.

4. Get the best teachers

We cannot provide the best education possible in prison without hiring the best possible teachers. This is something I would like to stress particularly. What I have observed is the fact that

- it is no easy task to find teachers willing to teach within prison walls
- those we finally hire often accept because of the financial incentive
- they are not what I would consider the best of them. Teachers in prison must not repeat in the prison classroom what they would traditionally do in their classroom outside prison walls.

Hiring the best possible teachers not only means trying to attract them through better financial deals - that's I think part of the game - but also refusing to organise what I'd call life term teachers. Teaching in prison requires people who will be able to translate their experience outside prison to what they're experiencing inside prison walls. We need people who are still active teachers in the community and who are in no way committed only to prison education. My experience is that professional prison teachers are too soon oblivious of what is going on in educational matters and forget that they are the link between the exclusion they know about and the insertion they are working for.

Therefore I would recommend hiring people who are known for their professional excellence which means interviewing / screening potential candidates, organising their training and setting up a network in order for them to be able to communicate at any time with their colleagues and education officers who are in charge. What we need is mature people with a gift for communication and with an ability to reflect on what they're doing.

5. Train prison students for *real* exams.

I have noticed the drive in France to help prison students sit for exams that are not the real ones. We have set up in my country a series of diplomas that are copies of the real national diplomas. For example, our national baccalaureate, which is the secondary school leaving certificate after a 7 year secondary education grants its laureates entrance to university. Any university. There is no such thing as an official university entrance exam. Parallel to this baccalaureate, you can also sit for a sort of Canada Dry baccalaureate which is not a diploma but which enables you to have access to higher education. It is this latter exam that prison students sit for.

I am not saying that we should get rid of the possibility to offer entrance to university to those who could not follow the normal route. But I see the danger here of maintaining amongst prison students the illusion that they have reached their goal. Instead of inventing new routes specifically for those with learning disabilities we need to invent ways of helping them to reach the norm.

6. Do not forget the standard level

What is at stake here is the way we assess academic results achieved in prison. We naturally tend to be more lenient with prison students but we are not rendering them any service. This is the problem any valuation system has to tackle: assessing the personal level a student has reached and confronting this level with the norm which the national exam often represents. I think we need to be very firm in these matters, as firm as when the respect of the law is concerned. It is the prison student's right to know where he stands and to realize what further work needs to be done to reach the norm.

7. Introduce a follow up policy

It is of primeval importance to set the few measures I have mentioned within the broader organisational structure of the prison system. The prison student's promotion is at the core of our work but let us not forget that if it is our objective to fight exclusion behind prison bars and to prepare the student for insertion within the mainstream, we need to implement a few simple measures.

We need much more networking within national and international boundaries. Networking means communication between educators: in-service training, exchange of best practise, meetings with those people who are in charge of slow learners or young people with educational handicaps or the illiterate. The challenges facing educators are the same within and without prison.

We also need to keep track of what's done be it successful or not. Prison education in France has its newsletter - which generally records best practice. I would like to see educators exchanging lesson preparations, observing each other's actual teaching practice, thus opening the prison classroom to team teaching. What better way is there to fight exclusion than through opening the classroom whenever it is possible?

The second simple measure I would recommend everywhere because it is effective, easy to implement and inexpensive is the individual education portfolio which I have already mentioned, a sort of individual progress report which would belong to each prison student, describe their initial assessment, the aim they are pursuing, the exams or qualifications they would like to acquire, the lessons they have attended, the results they have achieved. This passport would also say a few things about the prison student's efforts, the way they participate in class life, etc. The advantages are numerous: we give the prison student an identity, we try to bridge time gaps and educational gaps and we maintain a positive purpose. Of course, this passport would report about where the student stands as far as the norm is concerned. This would also solve the problem of irregular hours and the frequent breaks in prison attendance because of visits, illness, trial, etc.

The third measure is more of an institutional kind. I believe prison educators must not be left without the support of their educational hierarchy. As I said, we need people who are go-betweens between what's going on outside in matters of education and who breathe some fresh air into what is practiced in the prison classroom. They need to be supervised, helped, assessed, promoted. If prison education is to be an element in the fight against exclusion, then it is our duty to evaluate what is being done and to produce official reports so as to express satisfaction with successes and advice for failures. What I am referring to here is quality control in matters of prison education.

CONCLUSION

This has taken much longer than I thought. So forgive me for making my conclusion short. If we are determined to fight exclusion before it is too late, outside as well as inside prison walls, then we need to keep in mind the following points and

- Fight exclusion with the best possible education provision outside and inside
- reinforce the link between inside and outside
- Exert quality control at all levels
- Set high standards any time: in the educational field as well as in the moral field
- Keep track of what's done to share and discuss what has worked and what hasn't.
- Promote team work at all levels between
 - prison administration
 - prison guards
 - social services
 - medical services
 - probation officers
- Always centre our teaching on the learner
 - 1 lesson
 - 1 objective
 - 1 assessment
- Open up to the outside world.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen for your very kind attention.

Jean-Michel MERTZ
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