

WORD OF WELCOME ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE
DEPARTMENT FOR TEACHER TRAINING

Daems, Fr.

Vice-president of de Departement
for Teacher training - UIA

Dear colleagues,

I am glad to be able to welcome you here on behalf of our educational department. Let me start by excusing prof. De Corte, the chairman of our department, who was unable to be present this morning.

This congress is important for our educational department for several reasons, upon which I intend to dwell some moments, even though in congresses I do not like introductory speeches, welcome addresses and the like.

Nevertheless I would like to draw your attention to a few points that seem important to us.

First of all, there is the fact that in 1985 in academic and other circles, the term 'technology' almost automatically seems to trigger off the world of computers. This is somehow symptomatic, at least for the western world. If we go back, say some 15 or 20 years, the term 'technology' would have evoked quite different concepts in the world of educationalists. We would have thought of radio, television, movies, tape recorders, language laboratories, chemical or physics laboratories and the like. If the term 'technology' nowadays seems to trigger off the notion of computers and of a computerized society, this must be indicative of the impact that computers have in the presentday world, or at least indicative of the importance that educationalists are inclined to confer to computers in education.

I would hope that this congress will not simply equate technology and computers. The abstracts that I have read, made me confident that quite a number of participants are not willing to make such a simple equation.

Moreover, I do hope that those sessions that will be devoted to computers in education, will be critical, i.e. that they will not worship a new god called 'micro'.

In the second place, as the vicechairman of our educational department, I would like to stress the fact that our department is particularly interested in technological developments and their impact both on schooling and on teacher education. It is by no means mere fortune that work group no. 6 will be coordinated by two members of our department, prof. W. Decoo and prof. G. De Corte.

Right from the beginning of this university in 1972, our department has been paying much attention to educational technology. It is part of our teacher training curriculum, and this holds for students of all backgrounds: positive sciences, social sciences and the humanities. We have quite some equipment for our students to train. Moreover, developments in educational technology, including computer assisted learning and instruction, are integrated in several courses. To this may be added the fact that attitudes towards technology and a technological society are a topic in some of our courses.

Some moments ago I was a bit critical about computers in education. This does not refrain me from pointing to the fact that in recent years some of our department members have been spending quite some time and effort on educational software. We know that a lot of educational software that is currently available, is often of rather poor quality in terms of principles of the learning process. Faced with such a situation one might do some abstract research on the qualities of educational software. Some colleagues in our department respond in a different way. Their approach consists in developing some software themselves, thereby demonstrating in a pragmatic way the characteristics of high quality software. I am thinking for instance of software that is being developed for language courses, notably French as a foreign language and Dutch as a first language.

Finally, I would like to point out that some research has been done on the way education should be improved in order to bridge the gap between school and a society that is rapidly growing more and more technological.

I have a third, more personal, reason for being glad to have the opportunity of welcoming you.

This third reason is related to the fact that I am not a proper educationalist, but rather a mixture of a linguist and an educationalist. Quite a number of colleagues in our department are in a comparable position. They are linguists, social scientists, biologists, etc., who are particularly interested in merging their own discipline with educational science. In other words, they try to bridge the gap between school disciplines and educational sciences.

They, or rather we, believe that the quality of schooling and education cannot improve, unless new educational views are thoroughly, not just superficially, integrated in the various school disciplines and in the practice of teachers.

Therefore, I would like to express the wish that the congress participants, and more specifically the speakers, keep in mind that educational innovations are often unsuccessful because no sufficient attention has been paid to the implementation of the innovations in actual class and school practice.

But since this congress takes the comparative perspective, I am confident that we will be able to learn from each other's experiences.

Therefore I wish all of us a very good congress.