

MR. JUAN ALONSO BRAVO, DIRECTOR OF THE «HUERTA DEL REY» CENTRE IN VALLADOLID, ORGANISER OF THE XIV WORLD COUNCIL FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN (WCGTC), HELD IN JULY 2001 IN BARCELONA, TO PRESENT THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE COUNCIL AND TO ANALYSE THE EDUCATIONAL DIFFICULTIES FACING GIFTED CHILDREN (715/000111).

Mr. PRESIDENT: We move on to the next item on the agenda.

At the request of Convergència i Unió, the Catalanian Parliamentary Group in the Senate, don Juan Alonso Bravo, Director of the «Huerta del Rey» Centre in Valladolid, and organiser of the XIV World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, held in July 2001 in Barcelona, will address the Commission to present the conclusions of the Council and to analyse the educational difficulties facing gifted children,

I would like to apologise and thank you for your patience, as we are already running short of time.

Without further delay and when the slide projector is ready, Mr. Alonso Bravo, who has shown so much patience and kindness, will have the floor to commence his address, for which he will have approximately 20 minutes (Pause).

Mr. ALONSO BRAVO (Director of the «Huerta del Rey» Centre in Valladolid): Thank you, Mr. President. Firstly, I would like to apologise for the few minutes' delay in preparing the projector.

I would like to thank Mr. President and the members for their invitation to be here today and to share with you the conclusions reached at the XIV World Council for the Education of Gifted Children and, at the same time, as requested, offer an analysis of the current situation concerning the educational problems facing these pupils. A printed copy of all the slides to be shown has also been made available to you, and I feel this will help to convey the information more rapidly. I have also brought with me ten copies of the Council Programme which are available for the Senators of the Commission.

The «XIV World Council for the Education of Gifted Children» was held in Barcelona. The Council is held each two years in cities renowned throughout the world and this was the first time it had been held in Spain. In the documentation which I have provided you with you can see the make-up of the scientific committees, comprising professors from various Spanish as well as overseas universities.

The Council was well attended, with the presence of no less than 54 countries. This surpassed the previous figure in terms of numbers and representation from various educational authorities, mainly from Europe, Latin America and Asia. 279 papers were presented, which is a considerable amount, in addition to which there were 20 symposiums (later I will go on to look at one of these in detail). The size of the event was reflected by the fact that 12 parallel sessions were held. The programme followed a fairly unusual schedule for Spain: from seven thirty in the morning to five thirty in the evening, after which there were meetings of federations, associations, and so on.

As I have already mentioned, one symposium –which may have been organised a priori with that intention—was entitled International Educational Policies for Intellectually Gifted Pupils, during which we were fortunate enough to be honoured by the presence of Senator Josep Varela, here today, who kindly accepted the invitation to take part and whose talk, I must confess, proved a most valuable contribution.

Those taking part in the symposium were people involved in different areas of the world of education. They included a mother, since parents play a key role in this field; Carmen Cretu, a teacher and General Director of the National Centre for Teacher Training in Rumania; Mr. Joao Ary was unable to attend; Mr. Josep Varela was kind enough to be present representing the European Council and as member of the Commission for Culture and Education; Luzimar Camoes, a teacher representing the Brazilian Ministry of Education, and Mrs. Susan Morgan-Cuny, a representative of the Council of Europe, specifically the Secretariat of the European Social Charter.

If we start by mentioning gifted children, fully recognised in various legislations not only within the Spanish educational system but also in other educational systems, significant support came from the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1994, in which there were three points that we felt to be of vital significance and importance for their repercussion on educational systems, obviously including Spain. Firstly, teacher training, both initial and on-going training. Secondly, one of the points which was highlighted within this recommendation was detection at an early age by experts, in other words as soon as possible in their schooling, and thirdly, educational strategies, not only in terms of adopting the correct approach in each individual case but also by developing adequate material for teaching and educational psychology.

That was back in 1994. Eight years on from the report issued by the Cypriot Member of Parliament, Hadjidemetriou, the conclusions and recommendations arising from the previously mentioned symposium and the Council's conclusions to the Commission for Education, Science and Culture of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe are as follows.

First conclusion: Although legislation in the different countries does recognise the education of these pupils, it fails to pay sufficient attention to them as pupils with special educational needs. Believing that these gifted children can fend for themselves is a serious mistake, as these children and young people need various services and support.

I have brought with me a little evidence to highlight why we need to insist on this point. The graph you can see here shows one of the results of research carried out in a PhD which was awarded the Accésit prize in 1995, for Pedagogical Research and Teaching Experiences, an award conferred by the Ministry of Education and Science and the General Council of Doctors and Graduates. This work reflects how diversity also needs to be recognised amongst gifted pupils. Taking into consideration merely psychometric levels, and I say merely, as there are many other aspects that cannot be left aside, we can see the huge differences in terms of inability to adapt at school in this specific case, coupled with problems of maladjustment at a social level. There is one section that we wish to stress, namely that of social restriction, in other words peer relations, relations with other pupils,

and friends.

All too often, the kind of education they are given proves tedious to them, as a result of which they take a dislike to school. Lack of investment in education that is tailored to meet their needs from an early age leads to them acquiring inadequate or non-existent study habits. Research shows that under achieving at school can be seen in early infancy, since they learn differently and require special schooling.

As regards the issue of specialised schooling, our educational system reflects the importance and need for adaptation in the teaching syllabus, yet in practice this is rarely put into effect. Acceleration should be common amongst these children, even if it is a measure to be adopted only in exceptional cases, like having to take a year again can be. Acceleration enhances cognitive, social and emotional development. Parents of gifted children, often due to a lack of special attention, threaten to take their children out of school, a step which I not only consider inappropriate but also a dreadful mistake.

In the light of this initial conclusion, we would make the following recommendation. Laws not only have to be passed, they also have to be enforced. Article 29.1 of the 1989 Convention on Children's Rights, ratified by Spain in 1990, stipulates that children's education must be aimed at enhancing their personality and skills as well as their mental and physical capacity to the greatest possible extent.

The second conclusion, following recommendation 1248 of the Council of Europe, 1994, is the need for these pupils to be identified at an early age. Between 1997 and 2001 large scale research work was carried out based on an early detection system published by the Ministry of Education in Spain, and is one of the most significant contributions to the standardising of criteria and concepts on the definition of intellectually gifted children.

The second contribution of this international research was the validation in six countries, including Spain, of the empirically based Screening Test for the early detection of intellectually gifted children aged four, five, and six. This is a simple, efficient and inexpensive scientific method enabling detection of intellectually gifted children from underprivileged backgrounds.

The second conclusion has led to the following recommendation: it is vital to continue work in the area of awareness raising and training not only for those working in education but also those experts involved in the early stages of attention to children (paediatricians), who play a crucial role in the monitoring of children's development.

As we have pointed out, carrying out a Screening Test on four, five and six year-old children for early identification of giftedness on a regular basis should be mandatory. This will allow detection of intellectually gifted from underprivileged backgrounds, and should also be included in monitoring scales used by paediatricians.

Third conclusion: psycho-educational material for these children continues to prove insufficient and is frequently not used in the classroom. Insistence should also be made on the correct use of assessment tools, which is a crucial point. This leads to the following

recommendation, namely the need to develop and apply psycho-educational material for these schoolchildren. We also need to insist on the training of qualified experts in the diagnostic assessment of these schoolchildren.

Fourth conclusion: it is essential to take into consideration an understanding of the diversity of these pupils. In psychometric terms, as was clearly evident from the results of the research work into adaptation or lack of adaptation both at school and in society, intellectual capacity ranges from an IQ of 130 to over 200, with all that this implies at the assessment or educational level. It is vital to take into account the existence of gifted children with associated disorders, whether they be referred to as learning difficulties, attention deficit, physical problems, hyperactivity, or whatever.

In the light of this fourth conclusion, and given the diversity of these pupils, the recommendation is the need for educational diversification, a widening of possibilities in terms of flexibility. The setting up of special classes could even be considered. Research is of vital importance, as is training in detection by qualified experts together with socio-educational action, catering to both the associated problems as well as to the intellectual giftedness of gifted children.

Finally, by way of a fifth conclusion, any educational programme depends to a large extent on teaching staff. Without adequate training, whether initial training or further training, teachers often show a lack of interest and even hostility towards these pupils, whereas in the case of teachers with the correct training and experience in working with gifted children, a clear improvement born of a better understanding could be seen in their attitude towards these children. A study undertaken in our country between 1992 and 1996 involving 2032 subjects, who were students undergoing initial training, as well as teachers and members of teams (psychologists and educators), revealed that the attitudes of both students undergoing training and experts in the field of education towards these pupils, changed as their knowledge and awareness increased. Royal Decree 696, which laid out various directives and subsequent resolutions creating a legal framework, which had been lacking to that point, was to play a crucial and decisive role in this change of attitude. Recommendation five stipulates that it is essential to raise awareness and provide permanent basic training for experts in psychology, education and paediatrics for an understanding of these children.

By way of a summary I would like to stress the decisive role played by the use of educational opportunities for these pupils. Studies into intellectually advanced children in primary school education show how, as a group, in adult life they continue to be significantly well ahead. Yet, what is true for a group may not be so for all individuals. Opportunities at school and in terms of guidance, economic and social conditions, and the changing role of women all have a significant effect on these results. All children deserve to love school and to have the chance to make the most of their possibilities.

That brings to an end what I have to say. I wish to thank you once again for affording me the opportunity to briefly outline to you the conclusions of the XIV World Council, together with its impact, since, as I pointed out earlier, 54 countries were present, in addition to many educational administrations from various councils as well as the Ministry

of Education, and likewise the conclusions and recommendations which we as a group feel to be most important, based on the salient points emerging from the famous 1994 Council of Europe recommendation.

Thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mr. Alonso Bravo, for explaining an issue of which we have all heard but about which we know less than we should, namely the matter of gifted children which, as we have seen, has its problems as well as its positive side.

I am now going to open the floor to the spokespersons. First to speak will be Senator Varela, at whose request Mr. Alonso Bravo appeared.

Mr. VARELA I SERRA: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Thank you very much, Doctor Alonso for your explanations and for having organised so splendidly the Council in Barcelona, which you referred to. The main interest in your presence here today lies in what is both the future and current situation concerning this issue. With regard to this, I would like to put a few questions to you in order to see how this commission may help in dealing with any problems that may arise.

Firstly, I would like to know how many pupils are involved in Spain. For instance, you previously provided us with some figures giving an idea of the scale of the problem. A smaller number does not mean of course that the problem is less important. We are more trying to get an idea of where we stand. In short, what percentage of the population is affected by these difficulties for gifted children? Secondly, to what extent are the policies applied in Spain in line with European policies or is our approach quite different to other countries on this issue? I would be grateful if you could comment on this aspect and tell us in your view which country is adopting the best approach and which country we should perhaps follow in dealing with the difficulties involving gifted children.

Thirdly, you mentioned a point—I think it was in the conclusion to 2—of a Ministry project on early detection. Has this project led to anything solid? I have been in touch with an association in Catalonia which deal with these issues and they suggested to me that it would be a good idea to hold a meeting of experts from all over the country to establish precise and standardised criteria for accurate detection. Do you feel that such a meeting of experts from all over the country to standardise criteria would prove useful? Has such a meeting been held? Although if they have put it to me, I feel sure that it is either because it has been held or they consider it necessary.

Fifth, to what extent is the Screening Test applied, as I have many reservations about your suggestion concerning the setting up of special classes. I am no expert in the matter, but I am averse to the idea of special classes for gifted pupils and would be grateful if you could justify why you recommend them.

Nothing further and thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENTE: Thank you very much, Senator Varela.

Senator De Boneta offers her apologies, as she has had to vote in another commission. Senator Acosta is absent. Senator Bildarratz Sorron has the floor.

Mr. BILDARRATZ SORRON: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Members of the Senate, I would of course first like to thank Doctor Alonso for his contribution because, as the President of the Commission has pointed out, although we do reflect on the question of special educational needs, and so on, we tend to focus on the same sector and it seems that gifted pupils are not dealt with or perhaps not to the same extent as other pupils in the matter of special educational needs. We have taken note of the recommendations made with regard to applying the laws, training, the need to carry out Screening Tests, the development and application of psycho-educational material and raising awareness amongst professionals.

I would just like to raise two questions, the first of which follows on from Mr. Varela's question. In addition to knowing where we stand, I would like to know if any data is available as to in what percentage of pupils this is not detected or is detected late, when practically nothing can be done, and when giftedness is usually detected or at what age the first signs appear.

The second question is somewhat more general. I do not know if you have had time to familiarise yourself with the proposed law on quality, but I would be interested to know if you could give us your initial impression, whether you feel that it might solve some of the problems we face or at least whether these problems may be addressed. For example, and following on from Mr. Varela's reflection, whether special education classrooms are necessary and important or whether what we are dealing with is specific support for specific situations at specific moments in order for the pupil's social maturation to be attained in a normal situation, and so on. In short, I would ask you to give your overall appraisal of the proposed bill on quality.

I have nothing further to add and would like to thank you once again for being here and for the documentation you have provided us with. I wish to add that we are also here to offer you any support you may require. Thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Senator Bildarratz.
Representing the Grupo Entesa Catalana de Progrés, Senator Sabaté has the floor.

Mr. SABATE BORRÁS: Thank you very much, Mr. President, Members of the Senate.

On behalf of my group, I would of course like to begin by thanking Doctor Alonso for being here and for bringing us up to date with the conclusions of the recent Council held in Barcelona.

Without wishing to sound repetitive, I would join with the two previous spokespersons with regard to the question of how common this problem is, as this is a concern we all no doubt share. Mr. President earlier mentioned that this is an issue we have all heard of but about which we know little, a view to which I subscribe, and I feel it would be important to know what kind of figures we are dealing with.

From the conclusions of the Council and from what little I know about the issue, it would

seem that the educational system is not suitably adapted to cater for the needs of gifted children. Faced with the bill on quality –which has also been referred to and which is the challenge we must all face in legislative terms, and which will mean that this country's educational system will undergo reform once again in the months ahead—and from the position of our Group, who feel that there might be a certain step backwards with regard to what the LOGSE reform law meant in terms of syllabus flexibility, the question is what recommendations would you make with respect to this and what needs should be reflected in the bill so that acceleration may be introduced smoothly. It occurs to me that gifted children may be attended to in centres where there are specialised teams of educational psychologists who can provide personalised attention. Yet, the most difficult issue is surely the question of syllabus and the acceleration to which you referred as one of the Council recommendations. In short, the question is what elements should the proposed bill on the quality of education include so that this syllabus acceleration may be implemented in order to cater to and find a solution for the needs of this group of pupils.

Finally, a third question. You said that representatives from all the sectors involved took part in the Council --Senator Varela referred to the fact that he has been in touch with one association--, my question is whether you know how many associations there are currently working in this field.

Our Group has no further questions. I would like to thank you once again for coming and for the information you have provided us with.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Senator Sabaté.

Senator Fernández Zanca now has the floor on behalf of the Socialist Group.

Mr. FERNANDEZ ZANCA: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Mr. Alonso, I wish to welcome you here and thank you for your presence and for the light you have shed on these pupils who really are pupils with special education needs. Although they may be at the other end of the scale, they are indeed children in need of help, which they sometimes do not receive.

My colleague, Senator Sabaté spoke of syllabus adaptation, which does not in fact occur. I would also like to point out that it is not done for other pupils with special education needs, of whom there are fewer, at least judging by the figures mentioned in the previous communication. I feel sure that these adaptations are not carried through.

There are two or three points from the conclusions that drew my attention. In the first, I agree with Senator Varela. Special groups may prove beneficial to the intellectual development of children, but do they benefit their social and emotional development? Is the same also true of acceleration? Are there any studies to prove its usefulness and therefore advocate its introduction? Finally, the first conclusion states that there are parents of gifted children who threaten to take them out of school. Are you aware of any instances in which this has happened amongst young people? Nothing further and thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mr. Fernández Zanca.

Senator Abejón Ortega now has the floor on behalf of the Popular Parliamentary Group.
Mr. ABEJON ORTEGA: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

On behalf of the Popular Parliamentary Group, I wish to thank you for your presence here today in the Senate and I congratulate you for the work you have been doing in Valladolid in support of this increasingly important group of pupils, parents and relatives affected by the problem. I would also like to congratulate you for your talk here today and for the organising of the Council.

Our Group, who have been working on this issue for quite some time, wish to stress that it is time to devote a specific article of constitutional law to gifted children or those with above average intelligence, something which we should be thankful for. Following on from this, I would like to ask whether more advanced legislation exists in Europe and the rest of the world with regard to this proposed bill on quality, which aims to air a situation that exists in schools and requires specific treatment in terms of the measures that need to be taken.

Secondly, the problems have been clearly detected. From the area in which I am involved, which is education, I can say that the problem is not so much one of detection, since in infant, primary, and secondary school but above all at an early age, there are guidance teams who detect this phenomenon. Therefore, it is not really a question of detection but rather the subsequent question of addressing the issue. Thus, the real doubt is how to deal with these pupils when one, two or three are detected in a school, and this is where I feel the various parliamentary groups differ. I would be interested in your view about it being approached not so much in the classroom but in special centres due to the difficulties involved in having expert teaching staff qualified to deal with a small number of pupils in each centre. We have to be realistic, but that is how it is. I'm not saying that they should all be put into one separate classroom, but we can not expect specialised centres to cater for all the cases, given the wide diversity that exists. That is why I would ask you if you have analysed the possibility of setting up in the various provinces centres specialising in this type of students and if teachers should also be specialised in catering for these pupils.

I would also like to know what progress has been made in informing and dealing with parents who may, I feel, be as complicated to cope with as pupils, as regards what to do with a pupil who may go unnoticed in school and lead a normal life. In relation to this question, I would like to know what percentage of pupils go unnoticed in this respect or are considered normal, in other words are gifted but lead a normal school life. In short, in those percentage figures which my colleagues have requested, what percentage of gifted children, are normal and can thus lead a normal school life and, by contrast which cases do not enjoy the desired integration? I do not wish to detain you any longer, although I might on an issue that undoubtedly concerns and fascinates us all.

Thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Senator Abejón.

Doctor Alonso Bravo now has the floor to respond to the suggestions and questions raised by the senators.

(Alonso Bravo) DIRECTOR OF THE «HUERTA DEL REY» CENTRE IN

VALLADOLID: Thank you very much.

I will attempt to answer the questions raised in chronological order, although some may overlap. In statistical terms and bearing in mind typical deviations with regard to the average, the percentage of intellectually gifted pupils ranges between 2.2 and 2.6 per cent. These figures are not only valid for Spain but reflect the situation at an international scale. To this percentage we should add those who possess some specific talent, on whom no data exist. Only in certain Autonomous Regions, such as Andalusia and so on, has any type of study been performed. However, it is impossible to quantify the number. What is true is that the figure usually quoted ranges between 2.2 and 2.6 per cent. We can conclude that the number who go undetected is the difference between the 2.2 per cent of pupils at school age and the number identified in the various Education Authorities in the Autonomous Regions.

With regard to legislation I was fortunate enough to be involved in the drafting of Royal Decree 696/1995 which, from my point of view, is adequate, and which could be even better if we add those areas that can be improved. The question lies in one of the points you raised and which I feel became fairly clear in the overheads and slides, namely that one thing is the law and another is its application. Experience has shown us that in certain instances this has been put into practice whereas in many others it has not.

A question was also raised as to which other European countries have better legislation, and to be honest I am proud to say that very few have better legislation than we do, not only in Europe but also in the whole world. I would also point out that the 299 papers presented on the occasion of the Council in Barcelona, gave me an insight into current legislation in Taiwan, in Korea, and so on, and I think that at the legislative level we can be proud, and even satisfied if we are able to improve it. It is a matter of putting these proposals into practice, both those reflected in the Royal Decree as well as other legislation on the issue, assessment, how psycho-pedagogical evaluation is to be performed together with resolutions in terms of flexibility, acceleration programmes, and so on. I have to confess that our legislation is very good, and is hard to improve, but we must be aware of the fact that we should perhaps highlight the area of disabilities rather than giftedness. We are conscious of the situation in the field of disabilities and we know only too well that there is a long road ahead and that it is hard to sensitise public opinion. If this is a difficult task in the area of disabilities, why shouldn't it be so in the area of intellectual giftedness? The truth is that our legislation is good and –as I have tried to reflect in my presentation—over these past eight years we have been working on various points of the European Council recommendation. I think it is now up to us to insist that it be put into practice, a task which I feel is by no means beyond us.

As I mentioned when talking about slide number 13, the early detection project was in force from 1997 –when it was published by the Ministry of Education—to 2001. Guidance teams in Spain initially put it into practice in the Autonomous Region of Cantabria and the results were published in various scientific journals, and channels of communication amongst experts, although not to such a great extent amongst the media. The reason why this project was run until 2001 was because it was later validated in other countries and whereas it finished in Spain between 1999-2000, in other countries it was undertaken later. I am

talking about countries that have even undergone political turmoil at certain moments, and so on, such as Mexico and more specifically, Guadalajara. It is also currently being applied in Mexico DF and has concluded in the former Yugoslavia, at a difficult time politically, as it was carried out during the war, which led to it being discontinued. It has also been applied in Rumania, Colombia –more specifically in Medellín--, and so on. Its importance lies in it having been validated in different countries, including underprivileged classes and high-risk groups, in other words children living on the street, or to put it another way cannon fodder. Next month it will also be implemented in certain Central European countries such as Switzerland, Austria and Germany, where they are quite interested in the issue after having analysed the scientific results obtained.

As regards the almost unanimous question of special classes I should point out that including these special classes does not mean that I am either in favour of or against them. I mentioned them simply because they are one of the educational strategies used. In much the same way as accelerations or adaptation of the syllabus are other alternatives, special schools or groups can be included. We are not in the least interested in creating elite groups. It is merely a question of having a flexible and open educational system that can cater for this type of pupil. Not all gifted children may be adapted to acceleration, to give an example, and likewise, the possibility of creating a special group does not mean that all gifted children have to go to special groups as each child is totally different and, as you will have seen, we have only analysed psychometric parameters at the statistical level. There may well be intellectually gifted pupils, with very similar intellectual levels yet totally different in terms of personality, motivation, and ability to learn. Therefore, they are likely to require a different educational approach, thus highlighting the need for a flexible and open system that can respond to individual needs.

As regards another of the questions raised, related to acceleration, I should point out that until quite recently this strategy was not available, it simply did not exist. First recognition of flexibility came in 1997, but if we speak in scientific terms without forgetting the political dimension –please forgive the interruption--, which is where I think we should all start from, acceleration was neither a good thing nor a bad thing prior to the existence of the law, in 1997. Nor has it been a good or a bad thing since the existence and recognition of the 1997 law thus far. If I previously mentioned the importance and significance for an educational system of including various educational possibilities, and different educational responses, the same is true of acceleration but in a more specific way, in that a pupil may be accelerated. This means that if prior to 1997, bearing in mind the individual educational needs of that person, we felt acceleration to be necessary, we would likewise consider it necessary today, irrespective of whether or not there is a law. The difference is that previously there was no experience in this area in Spain which meant that we had to refer to mainly American, French or German scientific bibliography. Today we have our own experience in Spain, and experience shows us that –in fact we are carrying out a study throughout the whole of Spain, although we are yet to obtain any results, as it involves large scale research over a long period— the results we are achieving reflect that school as well as social adaptation of pupils who have been accelerated is very good. This means that we no longer have to resort to bibliography in this field from outside of Spain, but that we can define our own situation in terms of accelerations which, as I say, is critical.

In order to achieve success in personalised attention in education –as for example in the case of acceleration—we must know what child we are talking about, as not all gifted children will benefit from acceleration. Of course, if we know through exhaustive assessment what child we are dealing with we are far less likely to make mistakes when it comes to providing a better educational response, and in this case I would include the question of acceleration.

One point which I do feel needs to be taken into account, within the question of acceleration, is that of deadlines. As you are well aware, there are currently clearly defined deadlines ... (forgive me if I turn away for a moment) which, on many occasions, due to red tape or because some document is mislaid or something is forgotten, unfortunately mean that something which is much more important than mere paperwork, namely a child's education, can not be carried through. I would bear in mind these deadlines, which are perhaps too strict, as they are laid out in the 1997 Resolution, and I trust that they will be considered from now on.

There are a growing number of associations in Spain, even at the provincial level, and not just at a regional or national scale with the existence of the confederation, but also at the provincial level. One thing is clear in this regard. In technical terms, of specialists, and with reference to what we convey to public opinion and parent associations, it is essential to know whether we are talking about the same thing, in terms of definition and concept of what a gifted child is. For those of us involved in the field this is not a problem. In fact the early detection project, as you have seen in slide 13, what it did do –after large scale research- was to standardise criteria and definitions, since what we were seeking, among other objectives, was to offer a standard definition of a gifted child –as we do in the area of disabilities—for the gifted child in Colombia, in the United States, in Russia and in Spain. There need not be significant differences in this regard. The definition is I think fairly clear in scientific terms. What happens on many occasions is that many other concepts become tangled up and, why not mention the media who often use terms such as genius or prodigy, which do no good whatsoever to those of us working in the field of intellectual giftedness. I feel that there is agreement when it comes to adopting a response to the question, as to what the concept is, and that no further discussion is needed in that regard.

On the subject of those deprived of schooling, I have heard people commenting on it, although I have not been told directly, but I have heard about it indirectly--, and I think it is shocking. I don't think that there is any need to go that far.

The last point that needs dealing with, and which does not overlap with the others is the important issue of teaching staff. This matter has been addressed in Valladolid since 1990 – and I say Valladolid as it was the first university school of teacher training in the whole of Spain to offer the subject of Psychology of the Gifted--, and we must try to ensure that it is offered in all teacher training schools –so-called at the time when the subject was not taught at any other teacher training school. That is the situation concerning basic training. Tremendous strides have subsequently been made in teacher training schools and faculties such as Psychology and Education Sciences, where related subjects have gradually been included. Master courses together with postgraduate courses and PhDs have also appeared. There are several universities in Spain currently engaged in PhD work into the subject of

intellectually gifted pupils, highlighting the fact that important progress is being made in the field. In fact one of the last slides I referred to, number 22, shows how between 1992 and 1996 research work was carried out among a large group of 2 032 people. Between those years, in 1994 to be specific, mention was first made of a Royal Decree, which appeared in 1995, and we witnessed commitment, a change in attitude amongst teaching staff in general, among teams involved, psychologists, and so on, as a crucial factor in the legal introduction of this Royal Decree.

I think I have managed to cover all the questions raised, some of which as I said, overlapped. I would of course be only too pleased to answer any further questions. Thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Doctor Alonso Bravo, for your enlightening words on the matter. Don't be concerned about having briefly turned away. As the old saying goes, ladies don't have backs. Well, neither do those appearing here. (Laughter.) The floor is now open to individual Senators who wish to raise any specific questions. Would anybody like to raise any points? (Mr. Varela requests permission to speak.) Senator Varela has the floor.

Mr. VARELA I SERRA: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I would first like to ask whether you are linked to other associations in Spain and what that link is. I would also be interested to know your view on the suggestion put to me by a Catalanian association, about the need to hold a meeting of experts from all over Spain to establish precise and common criteria that will allow equally accurate identification. Finally, I would like to know what relation you have with the Ministry. For instance, were you consulted over the drafting of the bill on Quality? Thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Senator Varela.

Mr. Alonso has the floor.

(Alonso Bravo) DIRECTOR OF THE «HUERTA DEL REY» CENTRE IN VALLADOLID: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Yes, I omitted to address the question concerning criteria for identification.

With reference to the links amongst associations, based on their right to exist that can not be denied, with some of them it is quite easy to establish contact, and so on, but, as happens in all walks of life, I am not personally in touch with others, nor do I wish to be so, as I do not feel them to be creditable. I think my view is fairly clear on this point. This creditability is clearly gained by offering a sound scientific approach based on serious objectives and interests.

As regards the matter of criteria for identification, a 1996 Ministerial Order reflects criteria for psycho pedagogical assessment, in other words, what each report should include, diagnosis or whatever we wish to call it to confirm that we are carrying out a sufficiently detailed assessment, to know what child we are dealing with and what educational response we can provide.

I would underline, that is where we should start or where we should aim for, depending on how we view it. The success of the work we are doing with these pupils should be based on detailed assessment, and I would like to stress once again the Order of 14 February 1996, which reflects each of the points in detail. Yet, what in fact occurs? Quite simply that this is not carried out. Very little assessment is actually performed. However, the fact that this is the case does not mean that we should not pursue this aim. One is a professional in a specific area and even if one does not totally agree, cannot, or does not have the time or means, one must strive for that goal. Nevertheless, if we were to draw up a report which was not serious, in inverted commas, it would lack any scientific precision. Just as I earlier mentioned the concept and definition of intellectual giftedness, I should add that criteria for identification are clearly defined. What occurs is that people fail to interpret these as they should.

Thank you very much.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Doctor Alonso Bravo, for your presence at this Commission, in which you have shed more light on what is an extremely interesting topic, from the practical as well as scientific viewpoint as, although scientific criteria do exist, it appears that there are certain associations who do not adhere to them. We are grateful therefore that you have been able to clarify many issues and I feel sure that the Senators of the House are satisfied with the explanations.

I would like to thank you once again for being here, and we hope to see you again in this Commission.

With no further business to attend to, I declare the session closed.

The time being thirteen fifteen hours.