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Having been one of the key organizers of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) he now has the full responsibility for preparing and conducting the forthcoming CONFINTEA VI scheduled to be held in Brazil in May 2009.

WHAT STAKES FOR THE WORLD FORUM ON LIFELONG LEARNING

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Introduction

Today's world, characterised as it is by ambivalence and contradictions, is experiencing a period of profound transformation comparable to that of the industrial revolution. Knowledge is playing a distinctive role in this new revolution. New ways of developing and applying it are constantly being found, and knowledge today is simultaneously a raw material and a product, a means of transformation and an outcome of the new economy. In the face of the critical issues and challenges with which our society is confronted, lifelong learning has become a vital guiding principle.

The Delors Report published in 1996 is the most recent authoritative international document on lifelong learning. It captured widespread attention with its disclosure of the by-now famous pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Now that lifelong learning has emerged as the key to economic and social participation and personal fulfilment, however, further pillars of learning are required in order to reflect society's ongoing and overarching need to cope with the permanent transformations with which they are faced.

In the light of these developments, the first World Forum on Lifelong Learning provides a welcome opportunity to update the Delors Report, steer the creativity of all the key actors involved, and mobilise political support for a new course of action.

The title of this presentation is “What Stakes for the World Forum on Lifelong Learning?”. After a brief review of how the notion of lifelong learning evolved and how it is linked to knowledge societies, an attempt will be made to highlight its holistic nature. The social and humanistic factors involved will be taken into consideration, without, however, ignoring the economic aspects, as lifelong learning is essential to ensure economic competitiveness at the global level. It will show that lifelong learning provides competencies that enable individuals not only to live and participate in everyday life and society as a whole, but also to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing world. The acquisition of new competencies, attitudes and values is a complex process that is both lifelong and life-wide, and embraces a broad variety of formal, non-formal and informal learning settings. Lifelong learning also entails “unlearning”, the process of deconstructing obsolete knowledge values and attitudes. Hence, there will be an emphasis on the need for a new curriculum design as well as co-operation between learning modalities, content types and their respective focus and levels. This will lead to an analysis of the need to recognise and validate non-formal, informal and experiential learning – the foundation of the lifelong learning strategy – in the same way as traditional established formal learning.

This document will conclude with a call to update the Delors Report by revisiting the pillars of learning established therein in the light of new and emerging challenges, and by putting forth a proposal for the addition of new pillars of learning.

1. Evolution of the concept of lifelong learning

The roots of the lifelong learning concept can be traced back many years. Indeed, the concept itself is in fact a rediscovery of accepted wisdom that has been adapted to a new context.. The idea of learning from birth to death has its roots in ancient times and was shared by many societies and religions.

The term itself, however, gained currency following the growth in education after World War II. It grew from notions such as “fundamental education”, “continuing education”, “basic education” “permanent education” or “recurrent education”. At no point did UNESCO equate any of these latter concepts – even that of basic education – with minimal education, but saw them as a foundational element of all learning and an essential part of further and lifelong education.

The idea of lifelong education was crystallised in the 1972 Faure Report¹, which was seen as a turning point and the start of a period of optimism in international education policy. It was recognised that education was no longer the privilege of an elite, or a matter for one age group only. Instead, it should be both universal and lifelong. Essentially, this meant moving to a humanistic, rights-based and holistic view of education. In 1996, the concept of lifelong education was replaced by “lifelong learning” or “learning throughout life”, as advocated by the Delors Report.² Together with the Faure Report, the Delors Report acknowledged lifelong learning as one of the guiding and organizing principles of educational action and reform, as well as a notion which is integral to a meaningful human life as a means of equipping people to tackle and anticipate whatever challenges they may face throughout their lives.

In 1997, CONFINTEA V underlined the importance of social transformation and empowerment through the acquisition of fundamental skills, competencies and knowledge. It established a holistic understanding of adult learning and education within the perspective of lifelong learning.

Subsequent initiatives, such as the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, the United Nations Literacy Decade, and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, stressed the importance of lifelong learning as a key to the 21st Century.

Following its adoption of a forward-looking Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the EU is now developing practical and concrete tools to implement this concept. It is also working to promote favourable conditions, by establishing political and legal frameworks, mobilising resources and

¹ Faure, E., 1972, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, Paris, UNESCO.

² Delors, J., 1996, *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Report to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, Paris, UNESCO.

formalising citizens' entitlement to lifelong learning. The objective of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme for Community Action in the Field of Lifelong Learning (2007-2013) is to foster interchange, co-operation and mobility between the Community's various education and training systems, thus enabling them to develop into a benchmark of quality for the rest of the world. Movements such as "Learning Cities, Learning Regions, Learning Communities" are vivid manifestations of the growing movement towards and support for lifelong learning. Similar and even more profound holistic policies encompassing social work, employment related skills and learning for leisure and enlightenment are to be found in Japan, Korea and the Nordic countries.

The World Bank supports a programme of lifelong learning that views the concept as indispensable to the emergence and handling of knowledge economies. Similarly, one of the aims of the recent drive for post-primary and post-basic education has been to improve policy frameworks, and thereby encourage a diversity of institutions, programmes and procedures that permit everyone to access education – whether to acquire and improve their skills for the world of work or simply to satisfy a desire to learn for whatever purpose.

In May 2009, CONFINTEA VI will take place in Belém, Brazil. One of the main objectives of this conference will be to push forward the recognition of adult learning and education as an essential enabling factor for lifelong learning, thus consolidating the paradigm shift that took place in the wake of CONFINTEA V.

2. The link between lifelong learning and knowledge societies

Today, we talk freely of knowledge economies and learning societies, yet for many countries, literacy and basic education remain major challenges.

We find ourselves confronted with the question: what is knowledge? The Oxford English Dictionary³ for example, defines it as " i) expertise and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject, ii) what is known in a particular field or in total". Hence, knowledge is accumulated through a series of interactions

³ 2007, Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press

with others (school, family, society media, peers, etc.). It is both intimately linked to and a direct consequence of learning.

A knowledge-based economy relies primarily on the use of ideas, intelligence and data rather than physical abilities. It also depends more on the application of technology than it does on the exploitation of raw materials or cheap labour. Today, knowledge has become one of the new economy's raw materials. A learning society is by definition a more holistic version of a knowledge society. It creates, shares and uses knowledge for all its transactions with the intention of boosting the prosperity and well-being of its individual members. Human beings' capacity for knowledge, thought and conscience is what makes them unique and lays the basis for their entitlement to rights. In turn, fundamental rights and freedoms are and will always remain the foundation of knowledge societies. As the UN argues, "the knowledge economy can be designed, built and practiced. The knowledge society has to be lived"⁴.

According to UNESCO's definition, "A knowledge society is a society that is nurtured by its diversity and its capacities"⁵. The acquisition of knowledge and skills through education and learning has never been more essential than it is today. For UNESCO, the construction of knowledge societies opens the way for the process of globalisation to be humanised⁶. Yet in order for knowledge societies to develop, an education system based on a global, open and flexible approach is needed. Hence, the vital importance of learning throughout life again becomes clear. In the context of education and lifelong learning in general, human rights entail improving, enlarging and deepening human capabilities and granting entitlements to all. A right is effective only when its underlying values are appropriate, observable and verified. Furthermore, its effectiveness depends on the presence of four key conditions: acceptability, adaptability, accessibility and availability⁷.

⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005, *Understanding Knowledge Societies*. In twenty questions and answers with the Index of Knowledge Societies, New York, UN.

⁵ 2005, UNESCO World Report, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, p.17, Paris, UNESCO.

⁶ Communiqué of the Ministerial Round Table, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, held during the 32nd session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, 9-10 October 2003 §2, Paris, UNESCO.

⁷ Friboulet J. J., et al. (eds.), 2006, *Measuring the Right to Education*, Zurich, Schluthess/Hamburg, UIL, p.33.

3. The holistic nature of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is not a fiction, a utopian idea or a mere piece of rhetoric. Lifelong learning is a continuous process, present in all periods of life, and in all cultures, societies and religions. It offers opportunities to communities, individuals and organizations by making them capable of handling knowledge, values and competencies confidently and effectively, and of contributing to their creation and transformation.

Norman Longworth offers a definition of lifelong learning that is based on the needs of individuals or groups and the processes that make lifelong learning important to them in all situations. He points out that lifelong learning is a continuous process of support, enabling individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding that they need in order to lead confident and fulfilling lives⁸.

Adopting lifelong learning as a new paradigm for education and learning in the 21st century does not equate to adopting a slogan or opting for an abstract “edutopia”. It implies defining the kind of learning content, modalities and goals that are called for in each particular context, and for each individual learner or group of learners. The idea of lifelong learning for all must indeed apply to ALL, irrespective of age, gender, social conditions, or phases and modalities of learning. It means viewing the human being as a whole, and looking at life in all its manifold aspects. It centres on combining learning and living both a) vertically, i.e. to comprise an individual’s entire lifetime from birth to death, and b) horizontally, i.e. to encompass all aspects of a person’s life, including all modalities and levels of learning environments through which an individual passes – family, community, study, work, leisure, formal, non-formal and informal

⁸ Longworth, N., 2001, “*Learning Communities for a Learning Century*”, International Handbook of Lifelong Learning, p. 592, Part One, Part Two, The Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

education system – and all means of learning – face-to-face, self-learning, open and distance media, and so on.

There are three, broadly prevailing misconceptions about lifelong learning that must be dispelled: Firstly, lifelong learning is neither a new concept nor a system for rich and developed countries only.

Secondly, lifelong learning is not limited to adult learning or higher-order learning in secondary and higher education. It concerns children, youth and adults engaged in all forms of education. Thirdly, lifelong learning is not linked merely to academic education, vocational training, employability and the world of work; it also entails active citizenship, social participation, leisure, self-fulfilment and learning for pleasure and enlightenment.

Yet if lifelong learning is indeed such a useful and forward-looking concept and framework, why are current policies so timid and why is practice falling behind? Why is UNESCO not developing and disseminating a model of replication? The answer is that UNESCO has not created a uniform schema of lifelong learning, nor can there be a uniform implementation strategy for all countries to follow. In spite of the recurrent features and core acknowledged characteristics of lifelong learning, there cannot be a “common definition” of the term for the simple fact that systems vary not only over time but also between regions, countries and different fields of study. Hence, cultural, linguistic and national diversity, local education history and learning traditions must constantly be borne in mind and respected.

4. Developing key competencies: the need for a new curriculum design and co-operation between all forms of education

Lifelong learning helps individuals to take responsibility not only for themselves, but for others as well. The holistic nature of lifelong learning allows individuals to develop competencies so as to perform confidently and with ease the roles required of them in different settings, such as being able to lead full lives as family members, friends, workers, employees and entrepreneurs, members of society, citizens of nations and, ideally, world citizens. In addition, current social and economic realities in both developed and developing countries, including the increasing role of ICTs, demand new, wider and more complex competencies, such as the ability to think critically, cope with rapid

change, remain flexible and solve problems, among others. It is only when equipped with these capacities that they will be able to grasp and deal with both the enormous potential available, and the rapid transformations which are currently taking place.

Almost thirty years ago, in 1979, the Report to the Club of Rome⁹ came up with what was at that time a new kind of learning that could be both “participatory” (learning with others) and “anticipatory” (learning that looks ahead and solves expected problems in new ways). The report referred to this as “innovative learning”¹⁰. The greater complexity and faster pace of our lives today make both anticipation and participation essential. There is a need to change the way we organize ourselves, solve problems and deal with the world around us. Decisions must be taken faster than ever before.

Anticipation is the ability to face new situations, deal with the future, make plans, evaluate the consequences of decisions and actions, and create new alternatives. Participation is characterised by co-operation and dialogue. Participation also implies the ability to work together and learn with and from one other. We could consider that it is the right and obligation of every human being to be equipped with these and other key competencies in the knowledge societies of today. Lifelong learning can help to promote and cultivate the competencies mentioned above, as well as help individuals to live and create social cohesion within an inclusive and democratic society, free from extremism.

It is for this reason that curricula and related elements such as policy, the delivery and training of personnel, and monitoring and evaluation should be designed, developed and formulated in such a way as to enable the development of human rights such as tolerance, democracy and inclusion. In order to allow the development of a variety of competencies and at the same time respond to the diversity and needs of the various learners, curricula must be open and flexible, tailored to reflect changing needs and demands, and geared towards a range of learner target groups. These are criteria that cannot fully be met within the realm of traditional education systems.

⁹ Botkin, J. W., et al., 1979, *No Limits to Learning. Bridging the Human Gap*, Report to the Club of Rome, Oxford, Pergamon Press.

¹⁰ Botkin, J.W., *op .cit.*, p. 12.

Competencies can be acquired and developed through a diversity of learning situations and institutions (home, school, community, workplace, leisure activities, etc.), educational modes (face-to-face interaction, self-learning or self-directed learning, distance and open learning, etc) and media (books, computers, games, etc.). Here, we must underline the significance of ICTs as an important factor of lifelong learning, as these technologies now affect many facets of our lives.

Hence, non-formal and informal modalities play a vital role in lifelong learning alongside more formal approaches. Connecting learning worlds, bridging education and learning levels, integrating content and valuing all kinds of learning and training achievements: these are the essential aims of lifelong learning. The next step, of course, is to ensure that the outcomes of lifelong learning are adequately recognised and validated.

5. Recognising and validating lifelong learning

As lifelong learning values all kinds of learning experiences, the learning outcomes should be recognised and validated independently of how, where and by whom they are acquired. The question of how to achieve this has developed into an issue of considerable importance at the level of international educational policy, as recognition and validation benefit individuals who are out of the school system or have never received any traditional and accredited schooling by encouraging and empowering them to exercise their right to education and become lifelong learners.

In collaboration with different regions and specialist organizations, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and the French National Commission for UNESCO have carried out a large international survey covering some 50 countries, and started work to set up an International Observatory on country policies, approaches and assessment tools pertaining to the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal, informal and experiential learning experiences. Meanwhile, OECD has launched the “Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning” (RNFIL) programme, and the European Union has developed a comprehensive recognition and validation system as part of its Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013), which unites four separate programmes: COMENIUS (formal school education), ERASMUS (higher education), LEONARDO (vocational training) and Grundtvig (non-formal adult education).

Nevertheless, there is still a widespread lack of awareness of the importance and pervasive nature of non-formal and informal education. An in-built mechanism of recognition, validation and certification for all kinds of formal, non-formal and informal education must be part and parcel of lifelong learning. We must emphasise that a system of recognition and validation of this kind would bring essential benefits, not only for individuals but also for society as a whole, in terms of equity and social empowerment, as well as in the area of economic productivity. In addition, it would both eliminate “dead ends” along the road to education, training and learning, and ease the transition between different modes and levels of education and training, thereby making learning more flexible and facilitating the inclusion of the disadvantaged. Furthermore, the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning could succeed in ensuring that all education policy documents make reference to lifelong learning, thereby laying the foundation for educational provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts.

6. Updating the Delors Report

The Delors Report, “Learning: The Treasure Within”, recognised that lifelong learning is an essential means of equipping human beings to live meaningful lives and meet whatever challenges they may face along the way. Taking into account the decisive influence of the world markets and the ways in which the world of work had changed, the report reflected a rights-based, humanistic, transformative approach to learning. It underlined the need to foster skills and attitudes that would enable people to overcome their religious and cultural differences and coexist peacefully, while at the same time linking learning to shared human, moral and ethical values.

In our fast-changing world, even a key document with the relevance and prescience of the Report of the Commission on Education for the 21st Century chaired by Mr Jacques Delors must be updated to capture recent changes and meet new demands. In addition to the four defined pillars of learning, the meta-pillar “learning to learn” emphasised in the report should become a standalone pillar. Furthermore, two additional pillars that adequately reflect the constant flux and forward momentum of the modern world should be considered - namely, “learning to change or transform” and “learning to become”. These new pillars involve developing a range of abilities: working out how to tackle new tasks; transferring competencies to new situations; analysing and organising the knowledge acquired; deftly handling the relationship between the general and the particular;

relating knowledge to action; taking risks; directing and re-directing change; adapting rapidly to change; and dealing with societal transformations in order to face the challenges ahead. “Learning to learn” is both the foundation of lifelong learning and the responsibility to continue learning. “Learning to change” is a means of casting a critical eye on the status quo with the aim of changing the current situation to ensure a better life. “Learning to become” encompasses all learning outcomes, thus enabling us to develop beyond the individuals we already are.

There is one further reason for reviewing the Delors Report: while it centres on why lifelong learning is important, it fails to ask what it is important for. It focuses on the foundational nature of learning. Yet we must look deeper still and discuss the issue of a foundational curriculum. The crucial question with which we are faced today is: how can a curriculum respond to the demand for key competencies and anticipate necessary changes?

Conclusion

Lifelong learning is the only comprehensive system whose nature and vision respond to the needs of ALL learners, and which addresses learning in its totality (modes – situations). It is people-centred and human rights-based. It focuses on equipping individuals with the competencies they need to face everyday tasks and challenges, and to be good and productive workers and employees.

As lifelong learning includes all sectors of life, its potential for transformation is immense and far-reaching: it can help alleviate poverty, combat inequality and extremism, foster inclusion, promote world peace, and encourage people to live decently as human social beings who understand and respect themselves and others, tolerate diversity and are always open to dialogue and new perspectives.

In view of all this, it is now crucial that lifelong learning be considered the moral duty of every world citizen, and it is high time that it is accorded the recognition that it merits and is made an integral part of all educational policies.

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