

Sylvia Schmelkes del Valle

***What education do we want for what kind of society?
Let us give ourselves the means to fulfill our ambitions***

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Madame Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, ladies and gentlemen – greetings to all:

It is my great pleasure and privilege to welcome Sylvia Schmelkes del Valle, a talented sociologist and a renowned international expert in research on education and development, who has a great deal of varied academic and life experiences at the national and international levels.

She is a colleague and friend from Mexico and thus our Latin American homeland, and a true citizen of the world. She could say, as the Roman poet Terence put it: *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*, or “I am a human being, I consider nothing that is human alien to me”.

She started and developed her extraordinary career in the Center for Educational Studies (Centro de Estudios Educativos) in Mexico between 1970 and 1993. This unique and rich background can be appreciated in the most diverse areas of education: Formal and non-formal education, Basic education, Higher education, Literacy, Youth and adult education, Teacher education, Education and the world of work, Popular education, Education and values, Education and human Rights, Education reform, Intercultural and bilingual education, Quality of education, Evaluation of education, and I have to stop here because this description could be extended almost *ad infinitum*.

Proof of what I am saying is her plentiful and diverse bibliographic production –more than one hundred and fifty publications between books and articles– and her participation in and contribution to an almost endless number of meetings, seminars, workshops, congresses, *urbi et orbi*. Her works have been published in five languages.

Against this background, it is not surprising that she was called upon to exercise functions as adviser to the Secretary of Public Education in Mexico (1996 to 2000) and shortly thereafter as General Coordinator of Bilingual Intercultural Education (2001 to 2007). Nor is it astonishing that she took up the role of member (since 1997) and thereafter Chairperson of the Governing Board of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2002 to 2004).

Sylvia also served as Director of the Research Institute for the Development of Education of the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City (2007 to 2013). Since 2013 she has served as President of the Governing Board of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE).

At the international level she has been a consultant –among other organizations– to UNESCO, UNICEF, the Organization of American States (OAS), and OECD.

And as if this were not enough, Sylvia was awarded the Comenius Medal from UNESCO for her career as a researcher in 2008, having received previously other prizes, including the Universidad Iberoamericana's Tlamatini award in 2003 and the María Lavalle Urbina award in 1998.

Sylvia's work and life are the expression of what I call an *agonistic vision* of life, in other words, the art of struggling. Yes, of combatting for life, the good life. Because whoever is aware that we are not born as full-fledged human beings but that each of us has to become a human being, knows that he or she has to come to grips continuously with him- or herself, with others and with the environment, not thanks to violence, but with tenderness and respect, that is: with diligent love. Because love means deeds, not good reasons or sweet words. Because "doing is the best way of saying". Because what this is all about is to make a masterpiece of our lives and, consequently, to contribute with others to do the same. We create ourselves with each other, not against one another. "Love is a better master than duty." (Albert Einstein)

Sylvia's struggle as educator is that of somebody who has dreams –*I have a dream*– to making a practical reality of the principles and values clearly stated in Article 1 of UNESCO Constitution: truth, justice, freedom, solidarity, beauty, courage, integrity, human dignity, equity, mutual respect and... peace. In other words: The development of the whole person and of all persons.

Sylvia, thank you very much for sharing with us your dream that is a real challenge to move from word to practical, creative and diligent action. That is why you have called your intervention: "*What education do we want for what kind of society? Let us give ourselves the means to fulfill our ambitions*". As Edmund Burke said: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing".

Then, we must remember that: "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little". We can't expect different results if we do always the same things.

Sylvia, your speech will be followed and complemented by the intervention of our dear friend, colleague and member of the Management Board of the World Committee on Lifelong Learning Pierre LANDRY, who took the initiative to launch and chair the working group that has produced the report: *Lifelong Learning for All to Face the 21st Century Challenges*.

Sylvia, we are pleased to have you here and I shall now give you the floor.