THE MAJOR PROJECT OF EDUCATION in Latin America and the Caribbean

Summary

Presentation

Work - oriented education for youths and adults
Enrique Pieck

Literacy: access to the written culture, education and information
Judith Kalman

Language, power and quality of education
Juan Casassus

Challenges and tasks confronting chilean education at the beginning of the 21st century
Fundación Chile’s Education Programme

UNESCO and the dawn of a new millennium
Koichiro Matsuura

Index of articles published in the 1982-1999 period

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Presentation

In concert with the dawn of the year 2000, the Major Project of Education (MPE) in Latin America and the Caribbean, is running out its plotted course. The event also marks the final days of the Major Project Bulletin a publication which since 1982, and through 50 issues, has steadfastly contributed to disseminating not only the objectives of the Major Project, but also, the various regional topics and issues that have gradually emerged as progress towards the proposed educational objectives was being made.

Educational change has been particularly important in the 90s. However, any attempt to examine UNESCO’s contribution to this process would necessarily have to date back to the late 70s, for a great deal of the region’s accomplishments are part of the programmatic and action framework of the “Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean” (MPE). The Project, originally commissioned by the Ministers of Education and Ministers responsible for Planning and Economic Matters who met in Mexico in 1979, was approved in 1981 at the 21st meeting of UNESCO’s General Conference, and programmed to last until the year 2000.

Perhaps the MPE’s most distinctive accomplishment, is having successfully created a space of regional encounter for countries at different levels of economic, political, and social development, at a time when UNESCO was the only United Nations Agency involved in the educational sector, and bilateral co-operation agreements between Latin American countries, assistance programmes with European nations, banks and other institutions, were neither as prevalent nor as diversified as they were in the late 90s.

The main task entrusted to the MPE, was to clearly define the role played by education within the framework of developmental policies designed to eradicate poverty, by promoting the assertive role of the public sector in educational matters as an inductor of society’s collaborative efforts and initiatives.

At the request of the Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean and with the financial support of the Spanish government, UNESCO is presently conducting a participatory evaluation of the 20 years of basic education in the region, and of the view education will have at the beginning in the 21st century. The idea is to promote the effective participation of the countries in order to produce a prospective panorama of the region, identify the challenges and priorities that will have to be surmounted during the first 15 years into the millennium, the strategies that will be required, and the role UNESCO is expected to play in this new scenario.

This evaluation has not been intended to serve as a compilation of the myriad activities undertaken by UNESCO or by the various participating countries. Rather, its purpose is to analyse the progress made both in the region and within
the individual countries, towards meeting the MPE’s objectives. The aim is neither
to measure nor predict, but to describe, study and interpret educational policies,
the evolution of the MPE, and the initiatives UNESCO has undertaken, with the
purpose of orienting future decision-making processes.
Through more than 250 articles appearing in the Major Project Bulletin,
UNESCO’s Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean has
endeavoured to be present - from a gamut of topics - in the educational debate,
anticipating and encouraging reflection, and thus contributing to the enrichment of
the regional milieu.
In time, these papers have become part of the region’s educational development,
making a concrete contribution to the formulation of new paradigms in this field.
The top priority the governments of the region have assigned to the large-scale
and timely—exchange and diffusion of educational innovations, has governed the
actions of the MPE Bulletin. It is by virtue of this mandate and considering the
reception our Bulletin has had in educational circles—schools, universities, the
teaching profession—and in the political world, the Regional Office of Education
has renewed its commitment to continued collaboration through a new publication
intended to replace the Major Project Bulletin. Thus, the finalisation of the
Bulletin becomes the initiation of a new dissemination effort which, harnessing the
rich accretion of experience acquired through the years and conceived in a
modern format, may continue to advance educational knowledge and reflection.
It is only fair to point out that the publication of the Bulletin has been made
possible by the voluntary contribution of the government of Spain to the initiatives
of the Major Project, support which has been pledged to the new information
stage, due to begin next April.
This last issue of the Bulletin presents the contributions of the following authors:
Enrique Pieck “Work-oriented education for youths and adults”; Judith Kalman
“Literacy: Access to the written culture, education and information”; Juan
Casassus “Language, power and quality of education”. Also included in this issue:
“Challenges and tasks confronting chilean education at the beginning of the 21st
century”, an article prepared by Fundación Chile’s Education Programme; the
address delivered by Koichiro Matsuura on the occasion of his installation as
UNESCO’s new Director General, and a list of articles spanning the publishing
cycle of our Bulletin.
WORK - ORIENTED EDUCATION FOR YOUTHS AND ADULTS

Enrique Pieck*

(...) no, we can neither guarantee national nor global levels of well-being or participation, unless we first turn our attention to the second nation and rescue it from oblivion, misery and exclusion.

(Carlos Fuentes: Towards an inclusive progress)

Among the criticisms levelled at youth and adult education, probably the one most often brandished involves its ineffectual contribution to improving the lot of marginalised groups, the very recipients of this education. Presently, any Adult Education initiative not directly linked to productive work, is certain to stir widespread scepticism. The challenge is colossal, particularly considering the countless experiences that floundered, and a trajectory that has emphasised academicism at the expense of the technical-productive, and occupational dimensions. Under these circumstances, precious little room has been spared to address the demands that originate from the workplace, from production activities, from political participation and from the eradication of exclusion and social inequity (Weinberg, 1994). In the field of adult education, occupational training remains the orphaned child, while literacy training and basic education have been assigned much greater importance (García Huidobro, 1986).

Interest in a work-related adult education, dates back to the 50s and 60s at a time when UNESCO’s recommendations in support of “basic education” and “community development” were forcefully propounded. Both these strategies were particularly concerned with orienting educational actions towards the fulfilment of basic needs and the resolution of the economic and social problems of the communities. However, their application was riddled with problems, and their limited achievements seemed to reflect these circumstances. Several social, economic, and political factors had a bearing on both programme implementation and their potential impact (see: Gajardo, 1984: 96).

This state of affairs has given rise to a number of questions regarding the capability of youth and adult education to help improve liv-

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1 Some of the elements used in developing this section have been borrowed from Pieck (1966).

2 The experience afforded by Mexico’s Cultural Missions programme will endure as the convergence between education and the workplace. Here, the community’s social and economic reality, became the axis around which the formative efforts of the multi-disciplinary team of “missionaries” unfolded.
ing conditions among the destitute while it has contributed, in turn, to keep alive the challenges presented by Latin America’s increasingly deteriorating economic climate.

The dissatisfaction brought by the meagre results of youth and adult education, has led to a decision to incorporate occupational training into programme development activities. This decision was the result of a growing awareness that, in Latin America, the Education imparted to young people and adults (EDJA) is inextricably linked to poverty, and that an illiterate individual is basically an exploited and excluded indigent (Latapí, 1985). The “Regional Basic Adult Education Project linked to productive employment”, an initiative that sought to expose the limitations of Adult Education and stress the need to foster income-earning opportunities among the destitute, represents a remarkable effort towards the promotion and strengthening of work-related education for youths and adults (EDJAT) in Latin America. This initiative was subsequently tapped by OAS-PREDE as the basis for the Multinational Project on Occupational Training: priorities for the period 1995 - 2000 (OAS-PREDE, 1988).

More recently, the advancement of a work-related EDJA seems to fall in line with the latest modifications to the concept and tasks inherent to youth and adult education. According to García Huidobro (1994), these changes echo the motions set forth at the Jomtien Conference, the UNESCO-ECLAC proposals, and research findings on popular adult education. Thus, interest in a “work-related education for youths and adults” is nothing new. Today, however, given the urgent need to obliterate the scourge of poverty spreading among vast sectors of the population, it has become a priority area of educational programmes.

The essential problem

No man’s land

Acknowledging the fact that technical training-occupational training-among the lower income sectors is practically non-existent, constitutes a first step in the long road to solving the problem posed by a “work-related education for youths and adults”. This situation, is the result of two specific absences: as regards adult education institutions, the employment issue - not having been granted a high priority status - has been all but excluded from their curricula; in the case of professional training institutes, the fact that their study programmes have been targeted mainly at the formal labour market –rather than at marginalised groups–, has caused technical training initiatives to be conspicuously absent among the underprivileged. Furthermore, given the dearth of resources at their disposal, non - formal education programmes - the so called non formal non vocational education - when and if present in rural and marginal - urban areas, have failed to provide adequate occupational training (Pieck, 1991; 1996ª; Stromquist, 1988).

There would seem to be an interspace accountable to no one between both educational strategies –a no man’s land, if you will– wherein the benefits of occupational training have eluded a growing number of lower income citizens: a counterposition is evident between education for the poor and education for development, between a rationale traditionally oriented to survival and to assistance, and another whose nature and sole raison d’être is work. A “work-related education for youths and adults” demands the articulation of both educational supplies. In a way, it requires the formulation of a new rationale, where two seemingly countervailing views are allowed to dovetail; where strategies that permit the combination and articulation of methodologies and perspectives are allowed to converge, so as to trigger the productive potential of adult education programmes, thus reinforcing the presence and impact of vocational training institutes in poverty - stricken areas.4

3 The presence and incidence of professional training institutes in underprivileged sectors is limited and of recent data (see Pieck, 1998).
4 Honduras’s Education for Work Project (POCET), clearly exemplifies this kind of articulation between the Ministry of Education and the Vocational Training Institute (INFOP).
**Women and EDJAT**

Women, particularly those of the lower income sectors, represent a very special group on the “work-oriented education for youths and adults” agenda; hence, the importance of highlighting their unresolved issues. Women account for a large percentage of the population who, owing to the subordinated social and productive role Latin American society has imposed on them, have found their social, economic and productive participation greatly curtailed.

There are also a number of cultural barriers that restrict women’s access to specific labour market sectors, causing their participation to concentrate around a few traditional activities. Furthermore, stereotyping is not absent from the labour market; it is the case of women who enrol in economically dead-end programmes, such as hairdressing.

In a large number of countries, the strength and potential women represent in terms of developing economic and productive activities, as well as their actual social and educational influence on the family unit, are often overlooked. In this respect, the impact EDJAT programmes may have on women’s social and economic performance, could prove a determining factor. Examples abound of the enormous possibilities nestled in this sector of the population in connection with the viable scaling up of a number of productive activities that characterise the daily routine of marginal sector women. Likewise, there are remarkable experiences of the effect small economic endeavours have on women’s sense of empowerment, the desire to make their voices heard, and to occupy their rightful place in society (REPEM, 1995).

In many countries, it is not uncommon to find that the only technical training opportunities opened to this sector of the population are limited to non formal non vocational education. These programmes are basically low quality courses that focus primarily on domestic work, and do not teach productive skills or prepare women for accessing the various labour markets. Occupational training programmes for underprivileged women fail to improve their work status; they bring about small—if any—changes manifested through the undertaking of modest economic initiatives intended to somehow alleviate their condition. Clearly, these programmes are much more valuable to these women in that they represent an educational alternative that offers their participants a chance to socialise and break away from their daily grind (Pieck, 1996ª).

Along these lines, it would be important to evaluate EDJAT programmes targeted at women, and introduce modifications that could change traditional orientations and impinge on the different dimensions of their daily lives. This is to be accomplished through the incorporation of curricular programmes that support productive, reproductive and emancipatory aspects, that is to say, programmes that promote the development of productive activities and decision-making attitudes, and allow women to set themselves apart from the patriarchal family. The idea is to accomplish small changes in their working lives that may further them along the road to greater autonomy (Stromquist, 1988).

**The EDJAT context**

Nowadays, preoccupation for a “work-oriented education for youths and adults” is niched in the midst of a dichotomous world where globalisation and polarisation co-exist (UNESCO, 1997ª). In fact, this exemplifies the case of a single process having two dimensions. On the one hand, the mutations of the labour world resulting from the advent of new technologies and production patterns, demand that youth and...
adult education plays an unambiguous role in the formation of skills and attitudes that may help insertion into the labour market and facilitate social mobility. On the other, spiraling unemployment, a precarious labour market and endemic poverty levels, have assigned this educational sector the essential function of imparting to young people and adults, men and women, the skills that will allow them to become productive members of society; in developing countries, the idea is not just finding employment but also guaranteeing sustenance for all.

Today’s concern with this work-oriented education for youths and adults appears to unfold between two scenarios: the process of globalisation and technological development, and the backdrop of poverty characteristic of Latin American society. Both have important socioeconomic implications which will determine new challenges for adult education and, in turn, will lead to rethinking its philosophy and practice.

*Globalisation and technological development process*

This scenario is characterised by transformations in the labour world and the development of modern technologies and production patterns that call for new skills and attitudes, as prerequisites for insertion in today’s labour market. The universalisation of exchanges, the globalisation of technologies and the accelerated tempo of information technology, have resulted in an unprecedented access to information that demands new skills and poses new challenges at the workplace. The restricted access to these enormous windows of information and knowledge borne by vast sectors of the population, has given rise to blatant—and new—expressions of exclusion whereby literacy is now defined as the ability to read and write fluently, be proficient in a second language as well as in scientific and mathematical knowledge, and adept at information technology. These attributes will have a direct bearing on the new employability requisites, placing them dangerously distant from the reach of individuals living in underprivileged sectors.

These developments unsettle the very foundations of the productive scaffolding and the labour market, as well as those of the education system, creating the urgent need to redefine their roles, strategies and perspectives. General education and occupational training are no longer antagonistic, while the formation of citizens and workers are now intertwined. To be prepared to cope with change and accept permanent learning, and to adapt oneself to a society built around knowledge and be competent in it, have become essential conditions for social interaction and everyday living, for living in democracy, and for employability. Seen in this light, adult education takes on a completely new dimension; that of an instrument with a tremendous potential to grant the vast segments of the excluded and marginalised, access to the knowledge and skills the new world scenario demands (Silveira, 1998).

*Social inequality and exclusion*

Poverty, precarious work opportunities and rampant unemployment, are some of the salient traits defining this scenario. Within the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, preoccupation with achieving a work-oriented education lies essentially among the underprivileged; the largest sectors in our societies. The importance of attaining such a link has been assigned singular precedence particularly where the population living in destitution grows increasingly larger and finds itself mired deeper in poverty.6

In these sectors of the population, the world of work takes on specific connotations which

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6 In absolute terms the number of persons in Latin American and the Caribbean living under poverty conditions is greater today than ever before. One out of four indi-
are precisely the characteristics that should define an instructional programme keen on meeting the basic learning needs of the various spaces. Work acquires a particular meaning in marginal areas, specially in rural areas, where it is closely linked to the physical environment and to survival strategies. In this distinct setting, incorporating productivity becomes a major challenge, while it involves wide sectors of the population –specially in rural and marginal urban areas—, that demand a relevant education that may resolve their particular economic insertion needs.

From the perspectives of these two scenarios, technical training in underprivileged sectors should focus on:

- becoming adapted to the various contexts found in marginal areas and responding to their needs; that is, elaborating a relevant and high-quality educational supply;
- facilitating access to the new skills and technological literacy with a view to promoting employability among the low income sectors, and avoiding the emergence of further social exclusion processes.

The question that should be asked is, what role are educational agencies playing in terms of heralding the changes taking place in the labour world? To what extent are they, in turn, addressing the specific realities and needs of the low income sectors? How does adult education intend to contribute to the solution of the real needs of these sectors, and generate conditions conducive to their productive incorporation?

In developing countries, a possible answer to these questions and any reflection on the different alternatives opened to a “work-oriented education for youths and adults”, will necessarily have to stem from a critical analysis of the principles of neoliberalism and free market economy. From this perspective, a strong argument could be made of the social and economic discrepancies—the sharp contrast between modern sectors endowed with state-of-the-art technology and vast poverty areas—, that have resulted from the implementation of economic policies which have effectively widen the social gaps and excluded large sectors of the population. In this context, a “work-oriented education for youths and adults” would represent a commitment made to the excluded in terms of finding answers adaptable to the new setting: the idea is to put the economy at the service of society, and certainly not the other way around.

Employment rates can not be expected to increase in the absence of growth, nor can human resources be efficiently inserted into the labour market in the absence of stable and decent jobs. Growth, as well as human resources development, become so much smoke and mirrors in the absence of clear development strategies that go beyond the transience of a specific government’s term of office. In the absence of steady economic growth to guarantee employment, and if the labour skills being imparted do not ensure effective insertion in the labour market under dignified and equitable conditions, it matters little if the proposal calls for an integrated professional training system or a grass roots occupational training structure that allows intermediate exiting options. An EDJAT-inspired strategy, must work on the assumption that most people graduating from training programmes will have a hard time accessing the formal or informal economy, and hence the need to elaborate alternative EDJAT strategies conceived from a new vision of the philosophy and practice of adult education.

individuals - some 123 million people - live on a dollar a day. While the proportion of the extremely poor has diminished, compared to 40 years ago the number of destitute persons has doubled. Studies conducted by ECLAC reveal that in the early 90s, approximately 200 million Latin Americans - 46% of the total population - had not been able to meet their basic needs, while 94 millions (equivalent to the total population of Mexico) - 22% of the population - lived under conditions of extreme poverty. Among developing regions, and in addition to the poverty issue, Latin America has the dubious honour of exhibiting one of the world’s most skewed income distribution curves (ECLAC, 1994; 1997).
A new vision of EDJAT

Significant learning and lifelong education are bringing important conceptual changes to EDJAT. These changes, in turn, have been triggered by the minimal presence of EDJAT programmes in the low income sectors, the obsolescence of their proposals, and the consistent mediocrity of their results in time. Latin America has felt the urgent need to reformulate the concept and practice of a “work-oriented education for youths and adults”, a need that reflects the redefinition and reformulation this educational modality is undergoing in our countries. It would be very difficult indeed to sever EDJAT from such topics as democracy, civil rights, and local development, issues that have acquired growing importance in the wake of political and economic processes that have scarred many of the region’s countries in recent years.

It would be equally difficult to visualise EDJAT activities detached from flexibility, articulation and integrality, the very criteria that will allow adapting its actions to the new exigencies of the educational demand, and guarantee an effective response to the needs and expectations of the various populations (Londoño, 1995). Consequently, its conceptual changes are inserted within the self-same redefinition process affecting today’s youth and adult education.

This particular need to expand the EDJAT concept, is the result of recent conceptualisations and practices contributed by new actors, which must be acknowledged and incorporated into the activities of adult education. At times, our view would seem to be restricted to what youth and adult education ought to be, rather than to what it actually is; this fact has limited the reformulation of concepts and practices starting from our accrued experiential wealth. Therefore, reformulating concepts in this field of education implies the incorporation of non formal experiences in the spheres of health, civic and communal activities; it also implies –aware of the diversity of experiences in the areas of work, health, and social organisation and participation– overarching the conventional relationship between adult education and the ministries of education. Therefore, the theory and practice of an adult education rigidly dependent on the ministries of education is no longer tenable. In its place, rather, an adult education underpinned by the concept of integrality as a vital component of the study programmes, and one that will allow addressing its impact and integrating –fusing, as it were– into its development the initiatives of other schools and organisations.

Along these lines, the notion of “lifelong education” for all, represents a vision more in keeping with the new realities. Within this vision, the various spaces a person experiences throughout his life (home, the school, the street, the workplace, the survival strategies, the rural spaces, the cultural groups, etc.) become educational-formative spaces. This conception argues strongly for a new curriculum where the various civil society organisations and the State have an active participation, and where the different learning acquirements generated by an individual’s multiple lifetime insertions and trajectories, are given its legitimate value. The idea is to acknowledge the educational potential of the different spaces and assess the value of their contribution—in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills—towards the social and productive insertion of every person. Viewed in this light, work takes on a new value both as an educational building block, and as a process inherent to everyday living.

The adoption of this new concept entails the need to translate the implications of these changes into the national and local contexts. While every region and country is being affected by globalisation and technological transformation, their impact and implementation will be different depending on the particular country’s economic reality, its availability of human and financial resources, its educational traditions and its political and cultural climate. It is important to keep in mind that in the Latin
American context a “lifelong education” becomes useful and relevant only to the extent that it represents a philosophy and practice consistent with prevalent levels of poverty and exclusion.

From the vantage point of educational modalities, a work-oriented education demands acknowledging and identifying the mechanisms that will guarantee an educational continuum that, starting in basic education– where the new codes and essential skills for “employability” are imparted –and continuing on through the life of the individual, will be capable of effectively integrating school-acquired or professional knowledge, as well as the specific training associated with adult education. This will ensure an education that along with providing life skills imparts the knowledge, attitudes, and abilities required for a succeeding as a social and productive agent.

This continuum, starting in the home, must stretch uninterruptedly to encompass structured and systematic educational programmes, occupational training –both in the formal and informal sectors–, community action, etc. Thus conceived, a work-oriented education emerges as the necessary mechanism to articulate the demands of economic development with social equity and promote the integration of all social groups and sectors, guaranteeing that everybody acquires the necessary skills for a successful performance in both the social and the labour realms.

EDJAT in CONFINTEA and Brasilia

The agreements reached at CONFINTEA (UNESCO, 1997b) on adult education and work, give evidence of the deep concern the present state of inequality, social exclusion, growing globalisation and technological development, has given rise to. These agreements clearly reveal the need to involve EDJA in the economic sphere of the peoples, in the various productive insertions and the different work spaces. Said agreements address the need to:

– Recognise the right to work and to a work-oriented adult education. Along these lines, the right to acknowledge the right of all people to a gainful occupation and the promotion of diversified employment modalities and productive activities, were particularly stressed. The importance of instilling into the student population labour market skills that have a positive influence on the mobility and participation in the various employment models, along with the need to acknowledge informal learning modalities, represented another topic of interest.

– Commitments were made aimed at facilitating access by the various social groups to a work-oriented adult education. In this area, emphasis is placed on the importance of addressing the needs of independent, informal sector, and migrant workers, as well as those of women, in their various occupations. The need to take into account the equality of the genders, the cultural and age differences, and the importance of health and security, was also underscored.

– Lastly, a proposal was made in the sense that the content of a work-oriented adult education ought to be diversified to include topics related to agriculture, natural resources, healthy nutrition, civic rights, and supervisory training. In all these areas, the need to respond to women’s needs was emphasised.

Several important aspects of these agreements warrant further discussion. On the one hand, gender would appear to have permeated every phase of the debate highlighting the importance assigned to women in a “work-oriented youth and adult education”. Additionally, the need to impart skills not exclusively associated with the labour market and the importance of recognising the various viable means of earning a living and the different productive activities, represented a vigorously mooted point.

A third major aspect of the debate has to do with a characteristically stunted labour supply—the target of adult education efforts—, a fact that calls for reformulating the concept of work
and designing alternative strategies. Finally, the underlying conviction that an EDJAT oriented to the underprivileged sectors, currently constitutes a priority, and finds expression in the proposals for actors and labour opportunities different from those that have traditionally been emblematic of the formal market. All these aspects represent new approaches that underscore the current commitment the EDJA has made to the labour world.

These conclusions were, in turn, retrieved at Brasilia’s Preparatory Meeting: “Global learning for the 21st century. The new challenges confronting the education of Latin America’s young and adult population”. The priorities set forth in the ensuing document follow from the problems EDJAT is currently tackling in Latin America and are, consequently, particularly relevant to the region. These priorities allude to the need for:

- Systematising experiences as a way of deriving lessons in methodologies, interinstitutional strategies, curricular design, etc.
- Reformulating the educator’s profile in order to respond to the new emphasis on education.
- Rethinking and understanding work-related adult education in its widest sense and not circumscribed to the vocational training domain. Hence, the need to reformulate and elucidate the task assumed by schools in connection with the need to link adult education to productive activities.
- Formulating interinstitutional strategies designed to facilitate articulation initiatives between adult education and vocational training.
- Designing programmes and strategies that cater to women’s economic and productive needs, giving due consideration to the place occupied by women and the role performed by them within the underprivileged segments of developing countries.
- Elaborating methodologies and curricular designs that include informal knowledge, everyday living and work activities.
- Institutionalising participatory schemes among the different programmes and institutions.
- Assigning value, within technical and pedagogical mechanisms, to the concept of labour skills; the utilisation of applied methodologies (problem solving, teamwork) and non conventional pedagogical modalities (interactive instruction and distance education); the concept of education by modules and flexible educational grids.

The merit of these priorities, is that they stem from a region-wide problem associated with a “work-oriented youth and adult education”, and point to what in our countries is perceived as essential action loci. As a result, they have set the general guidelines to orient future actions and political initiatives in this area of education.

**Work and education - theoretical premises, emergent topics and reflections**

The following section, addresses some premises inherent to the field of “work-oriented youth and adult education”. It is intended to establish different departing points, many of them common to the nature and activities of youth and adult education.

The non-fulfilment of many of these premises has made their reiteration necessary and led to their reinforcement through learning methodologies available only in the last few years. Traditionally, these premises have been supported by an obsolete practice, research findings and lessons derived from accumulated experiences in this field of education. Many of these premises found expression at the subregional EDJA encounters and contribute to confirm their relevance as basic premises in this particular field.

**EDJAT and how it relates to poverty**

In Latin American countries, “work-oriented youth and adult education” is a topic that must be visualised through the prism of poverty: in fact, in these countries, the percentage of the
population living below the poverty line constitutes a majority. Within these contexts, adult education is inextricably linked to poverty and it is defined on the basis of this relationship. Nowadays, an education detached from work and from a person’s economic needs and activities, is very difficult to fathom.

Poverty and exclusion are regarded as the key issues associated with the implementation of a “work-oriented youth and adult education”; thus the importance of giving every proposal a developmental nature, and incorporating it into a political and ethical project. From this perspective, it is important to reinforce popular economies, examine the possibilities these poverty settings might offer, and rethink the concept and practice of work and employability.\(^8\) Whereas the formal market may place restrictions to labour insertion, the informal sector and the productive activities that characterise it, may provide potential spaces capable of revitalising the productive capabilities inhibited by global market forces.

The market concept that prevails today tends to underestimate the richness of these spaces, while disregarding and shrouding society, diluting it, and causing it to lose its specificity. The diversity of local products and activities, and informal skills is lost in a market concept that bears no relation to—neither defines nor includes—the myriad activities that make up the daily social interactions in the informal sectors.

Thus, a commonplace proposal today would propound reflecting on a “work-oriented youth and adult education” from a general perspective that considers the “precariousness”\(^9\) of this labour supply, and the role women and children typically play as part of the work force of these deprived sectors.

\(^8\) Employability: the possibility an individual has (measured in terms of competencies) of successfully inserting himself / herself in the labour market.

\(^9\) Precaiousness: understood as dependent upon uncertain and/or unstable premises.

Cross-overs

A “work-oriented youth and adult education” strategy will necessarily lead to consider other dimensions. These are precisely the elements that provide quality and richness to the various programmes, and result in the launching of differentiated formulations and schemes.

A number of dimensions move transversally across the EDJAT field. Among them, gender and the young—probably the most important ones—, although practically all of them are interrelated to the extent that it becomes difficult to mention one without alluding to another. For example, an occupational training experience for young indigenous women, brings to mind the relationship between adult education and the labour world, the young, the gender dimension and the indigenous and peasant worlds. Nor would it take a leap in logic to relate this experience with local development and the citizen, for both these dimensions are the result of an educational – productive process in a specific context.

It also evokes the natural relationships established by these “work-oriented youth and adult education” experiences with the new literacy and basic education concepts implicit in this type of educational experience (Hautecoeur, 1996). Work, however, represents a central dimension, the axis around which other dimensions revolve. The work dimension subsumes the content of an educational activity which encompasses different target populations (in this particular case, women, peasants, indigenous people, etc.), develops in the different contexts (rural or urban communities), and—owing to its orientation and nature—has a positive impact on the natural development processes of grass roots economies (local), and on the exercise and strengthening of a civic conscience.

This crossing-over of dimensions in the EDJAT field leads to reflect on the weight a specific programme may have over the other dimensions. Moreover, it portrays EDJAT as a global and multidimensional activity and points
to the impossibility of addressing a given dimension as an isolated factor without anticipating its impact on the other dimensions.

Work specificity and employability in underprivileged sectors

In underprivileged sectors, concepts such as work and employability have connotations of their own. While the formal labour market formulates specific demands to the educational system, in the informal sector (among those living below the poverty line) work—and the needs it sets forth—is narrowly linked to the daily vicissitudes of the individuals. Seen in this light, occupational training is more closely aligned with productive activities—their survival strategies—or with those which are doable and result from the nature of the context, than to the need to train in order to satisfy the demand of a formal market or respond to the exigencies of technological development as dictated by modernity.

A “work-oriented youth and adult education” programme for the poor is not concerned with educating for the formal labour market, since the training needed here is quite different. The objective is not to prepare the individual for competition in a restricted labour market, but to impart skills that may prove relevant to the local context and consistent with his/her needs.

In a context marked by globalisation and technological development, work takes pre-eminence over employment; in underprivileged sectors, it implies the need to master life skills which take into account the diversity of work spaces as they occur in everyday living. Any definition of the notion and practice of a “lifelong education” must stem from the very context of poverty—that characterises most Latin American countries—in which they are immersed. Thus, the concept of lifelong education, which encompasses the skills that will make productive insertion possible, eradicate social exclusion, help improve living conditions, and allow individuals to occupy their rightful place in the social order, becomes subordinated to our realities.

This being the case, a lifelong education must offer programmes which, by harnessing the individuals’ daily work activities and linking them to strategic economic activities, may help upgrade the modest economic insertions emblematic of these sectors, and articulate them with various support mechanisms. As a result, the concepts of work, employment and employability associated with these sectors, will have to be challenged and redefined. In these scenarios, the notion of employment flags and becomes subordinated to the concept of work understood as the myriad productive activities people engage in, irrespective of any links to the formal labour market. Hence, the relevant contents of a “work-oriented youth and adult education” are truly found in everyday living. For its part, “employability”, translates into the odds of accessing labour opportunities, and generating the conditions (skill acquisition, organisational and financial assistance, etc.) that will make engaging in a productive activity a viable proposition.

Technical training per se is not enough

As a specific “work-oriented youth and adult education” strategy, technical training is not enough, for it does not create employment opportunities or productive activities, nor guarantees improved living conditions for the population. Clearly, the objective is not to have a trained but unemployed population, or to promote initiatives for the sake of bloating the statistics with the number of courses imparted.

When it comes to generating occupational training alternatives in deprived areas, offering specific courses, that is, short technical courses which prepare the individual to engage in a modest trade or access the beginning levels of the formal labour market, seems to embody the appropriate strategy. These strategies centre around the potential of the course itself, while the productive insertion of youth and adults is abandoned to the whimsical forces
of the market. In fact, given the restrictions imposed by the formal labour market, the objective of this type of programme is to improve the “employability” of young people –particularly– who have neither the schooling nor the basic or technical skills that would ensure their successful insertion in the labour market (Jacinto, 1995).

A low quality training supply that imparts mediocre skills for typically marginal occupations and produces graduates with equally mediocre professional profiles, has precious little to contribute. Technical training activities divorced from the notions of human advancement and quality of life enhancement, becomes an assistance - oriented educational supply, or one designed as a social contention strategy. Conversely, a formation scheme closely associated with basic education and properly focused, becomes an important component of employability.

To reiterate, training by itself does nothing to generate employment, for it requires additional support and institutional articulations so the odds of improving the productive insertion of the low income population are improved. It also needs to focus on the strengthening of economic activities that originate from the informal sector, from the traditional activities of the population, and from the very nature of the rural environment. Clearly, training can not be severed from the various processes, for it is tightly bonded to them. It is impossible to separate training from the spaces it is supposed to affect; in fact, these spaces will define the features the training initiative will have and provide the measuring stick with which to measure its impact.

This emphasises the need to know who is being trained and to what end: what is the productive apparatus of the country, what type of industry will receive the worker, and what is the degree of specialisation required (a general purpose worker or a highly specialised one). In this regard, training people for non-existing posts or through the use of obsolete technology, is an ever-present risk.

**Theses in support of an EDJAT**

This section proposes a number of theses in an attempt to set out favourable conditions for developing a “work - oriented youth and adult education”. These are not the premises alluded to earlier, but conclusions that may prove useful in the formulation of strategies, a listing of *sine qua non* factors that may contribute to build an EDJAT that may genuinely –and positively– impinge on the work space and improve the living conditions of the denizens of poverty - stricken areas. The idea is to go beyond the trodden path and examine– albeit at a basic level - the hows: that is, the proposals that– in the light of accumulated experience, research findings, and the submissions issued at CONFINTEA and other regional events - may define the guidelines for a new EDJAT practice.

**On - the - job training**

Given the limited capacity of modern economies to incorporate large numbers of youths and adults into the formal labour market, a technical training strategy targeted at deprived sectors, must strengthen its ties to grass roots economic endeavours.

The technical training supply offered to the underprivileged should not be limited to providing skills associated with the technologically - savy sectors, but should focus mainly on catering to the educational needs that result from the economic and productive activities of the population and from the characteristics of the local contexts. In order to be effective, technical instruction must have an on - the - job focus and respond to the specific training needs that follow from the various problems associated with these modest business undertakings10 which, in a large number of cases, represent survival strategies of vast sectors of the population living in deprived areas and pre-

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10 Micro undertaking: small economical activity.
dominantly active in the informal sectors. This could well be the case of milk producers willing to venture in the production of dairy products; artisans seeking technical and commercial advice; peasant women looking for financial assistance to launch modest business endeavours; social organisations requiring technical support in the management of projects such as ecotourism, etc. While these unpretentious economic ventures are not likely to stave off unemployment, they will open spaces of social participation, and offer people genuine avenues to live their civic lives in a different way (Chourin, 1996).¹¹

Specifically, the purpose is to elaborate strategies designed to construct economic units starting from very modest efforts by residents, albeit, not exclusively; in fact, it is essential to transcend them. Survival strategies, define a starting point on a trajectory aimed at building development choices. This presupposes articulating EDJAT with the spheres of popular economy, local development projects and cooperative movements in order to reinforce and promote educational programmes that foresee such productive projects as self-employment programmes, and small businesses.

A training programme that successfully integrates the nature and the potential of the work carried out with the participation of different segments of the population, and in the different social strata, leads to an evaluation of the characteristics of the target population and to formulate the profiles of outgoing students, keyed to the productive needs of the local contexts. It also leads to co-ordinating the programmes with local development proposals, so that the training supply may be sensitive to the nature and needs of the various spaces. Therefore, curricular contents must be related to local management, participation, small businesses, self-sustaining development processes, and activities derived from communal circumstances and experiences. Likewise, the curricular structures adopted must be modular, flexible and adaptable to the needs of the different groups of participants.

In this context, self-employment has been deemed a key alternative in the face of the restrictions imposed by the formal labour market on graduates from occupational training institutes. However, self-employment is not without limitations of its own, particularly when it comes to the younger population where variables such as age, inexperience, low levels of schooling, and lack of capital, happen to run counter to a successful outcome. It is imperative, therefore, that all such training programmes have the backing of a curricular model that may contribute to raise the level of qualifications, deliver sound managerial skills, improve the profile of its graduates, and provide them with the support required to effectively generate employment and new sources of labour. In this regard, and taking into account the limiting factors associated with the context and the profile of the target population, there is an urgent need to elaborate creative proposals that link young men and women to work spaces and help promote the development of alternative sources of self-employment. The resulting interinstitutional links, by supplementing and providing support - capital and human resources - to the different initiatives, would greatly contribute to the concretion of this task.¹²

**EDJAT and local development**

EDJAT’s natural involvement in local development follows from the earlier thesis. A strategy directed at the creation, strengthening, and

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¹¹ This orientation does not negate the right and the need of underprivileged people to acquire new skills, it simply underscores the importance of offering training initiatives that take into account the nature and the potential of the work carried out in these sectors.

¹² Mexico’s Scholarship Programme for the Training of Workers (PROBECAT), encourages young people to spend some time working at small artisan businesses. The idea is to acquaint these potential labourers with the production process, and work out a possible contractual agreements.
development of the economic and productive activities of the underprivileged is necessarily geared towards - sustained by - the concept of local development.

Local development strategies embrace the notion of equity, a fact that explains the attempt to incorporate a “work - oriented youth and adult education” into projects that encourage the setting in motion of social and economic alternatives for the poor. It is important, in this context, to sustain this interest in educating from the human development perspective, and thus lay the foundations for a different quality of life. Consequently, EDJAT must be inserted within an inclusive logic capable of revitalising the spaces occupied by the underprivileged, and one that incorporates their activities as well as their peculiarities, their knowledge, and their labour culture.

The following are some conclusions derived from the existing relationship between a “work - oriented youth and adult education” and local development:

– At the local development level, it is crucial to rely on local proposals and resources which may foster organisations and networks for young people, professionals and researchers. This would facilitate self - management as well as the regional management of education, and the opportunity to interrelate the action of every economic - productive project undertaken in these spaces. The collaborative participation of public and private institutions in local and/or regional development programmes which target low income sectors and make use of local labour, is just as important.

– The importance of elaborating programmes from within the very communities –with a view to “empowering”13 them–, so they may take upon themselves the responsibility for designing and developing their own programmes, can not be overemphasised. This is a vintage lesson left behind by many experiences in the area of youth and adult education in a context of communal development. In the relationship between EDJAT and local development, the building of a power whose foundation is made up of a collective of socially, economically and politically influential individuals, emerges as a clear objective. If the principles of learning to live together and being enterprising are adopted, the fact must be acknowledged that today’s labour and market forces follow a rationale that has proven antagonistic - even hostile - to these orientations.

– The importance of programmes that are part of development projects. Past experience is very compelling in terms of the different impact of programmes inspired in comprehensive development strategies which are, in turn, mediated by community organisations (Schmelkes, 1988; and Zúñiga, 1994). In such cases, formative action goes beyond the level of concrete skills and attempts to impinge on basic skills so as to stimulate the creation of productive community development projects.

– The curricular contents of EDJAT programmes should be identified taking in consideration not only the demands made by individuals, but also based on a dialogue with and research on the demands formulated by society, both with organised groups, and communities lacking formal organisation. Moreover, the supply and demand relationship must be strengthened keyed to the characteristics of the labour world.

Learning to be enterprising

The supply of training programmes in deprived sectors must be conceived within a “learning to be enterprising” context. Pursuant to this rationale, the strategy is intended to empower the modest economic endeavours, the small business ventures of enterprising individuals, and in many cases, the survival strategies. The idea is not to abandon the activity once it is off the ground, but, rather, take it beyond self - subsistence, beyond the realm of economic supplement, strip it of its passive quality and

13 The term is used to mean an enhancement of the people’s capacity to negotiate, participate, and interact socially.
insert it into a context of productive project developments. The objective is to produce a training supply whose activity is premised on common sense, and on the need to recognise that training alone is not enough if the goal of the training interventions is productive development.

“Learning to be enterprising” means precisely getting people to develop skills that will allow them to start, empower and develop economic and productive activities, regardless of size or line of business. However, emphasis is not placed on the need to develop a business that may prove successful in the current context, but, rather, on the need to develop the individual’s capacity to undertake personal initiatives which are both creative and empowering, in an economic climate characterised by constant transformation.

The important point here, is that people ought to be able to visualise the evolution of their small business undertakings, and have command of, at least, minimal developmental strategies. Hence, the significance of having these small business projects overseen by institutions devoted to their promotion and evaluation, and which are well-positioned to contribute specialised elements of support.

**The integral dimension of projects**

An EDJAT-oriented strategy, must be based on an integral view of the population’s economic and productive activities. Meeting a project’s immediate demands (e.g. loans, specific courses), will hardly accomplish anything in the absence of a diagnosis that can provide an integral solution to the problems affecting the various projects of a specific population. In this regard, addressing these projects from the dimensions of organisation, production, commercialisation, technical processes, accounting systems, division of labour, etc., regardless of the size of the particular undertaking, takes on paramount importance. In some cases support may come in the form of technical assistance to small operators, in others, it may translate into accounting services for projects under consolidation.

As a result, technical training and a “work-oriented youth and adult education”, are transformed into a training-consultantship effort which approaches potential projects from an integral perspective. That is to say, it offers not just an immediate response to a project’s technical or economic need - to a “felt” need - which does not guarantee that the support lent or the funds provided will be efficiently used, but rather, it becomes a response based on an integral analysis and diagnosis of the economic and productive activity, and results in an improvement plan designed to contribute solutions capable of propelling any business pursuit in the direction of an economic development project.\(^\text{14}\) The integral perspective of EDJAT activities, evinces the insufficiency of technical training initiatives, specific courses, and funding efforts, taken as isolated components.

This basic premise - the integral view of projects - has been conspicuously absent from the development of technical training programmes targeted at deprived sectors. This has resulted in a supply that elicits no interest beyond the boundaries of the course itself and, on occasions, bears little relevance to the promoted courses.

**Institutional articulations**

If the previous thesis is accepted as valid, one is also bound to acknowledge that the “work-oriented youth and adult education” supply must be supported by interinstitutionality. Interinstitutional co-ordination is the factor that guarantees that the various programmes will have a positive impact on the development of economic activities, and will improve the target populations’ living conditions. It is through

\(^\text{14}\) For the past five years, Mexico’s Integral Quality and Modernisation (CIMO) programme, has been promoting an integral training-consultantship strategy, which has have striking results in the social sector.
co-ordination initiatives with finance, commercialisation and organisational institutions that the knowledge acquired via training will lead to productive insertion and the creation and development of small business endeavours.

Interinstitutional co-ordination, is the power behind the manifold possibilities of technical training and the mechanism that allows to supplement it with activities in the areas of health, housing, basic education, certification, etc. Aware that resources are scarce and that youth and adult education does have a limited scope, the participation of ministries of education and labour, women organisations, youth, peasant and labour union groups, entrepreneurs, lending and marketing agencies should be actively sought so as to develop co-ordinated strategies and derive new learning from the different experiences. This kind of interinstitutional co-operation becomes particularly important when it involves various targets populations, such as: hospitals, jails, rehabilitation centres, etc. Additionally, it contributes to the homogenisation of the EDJAT activities pursued by these institutions.

The following, are some conclusions associated with promoting the interinstitutional nature of EDJAT activities:

– Working at the interinstitutional level requires developing negotiating abilities and consensus-building skills, as well as the capability to construct short and medium term scenarios that allow the systematic incorporation of the methodological diversity developed in the different areas embraced by youth and adult education. Thus, interinstitutional work implies knowing how to manage these co-ordinated efforts. Owing to the historically individualistic and assertive nature of public and social institutions - to a large extent responsible for inhibiting interinstitutional co-operation - there are relatively few experiences in this area. As a result, the actions generated by each of these institutions have been scattered, the resources allocated to them inefficiently used and the learning produced generally poor. If collaboration among institutions is conceived as a strategy capable of redefining the role of youth and adult education in the labour world, such administration-management knowledge becomes ineluctable.

– While interinstitutional articulations must be inserted within the framework of public policies, they should not be contingent on political decisions, but, rather, be defined by the concrete needs of a specific community, and by the characteristics of its productive project. The project’s nature and potential constitute the starting point to galvanise institutional collaboration in the various dimensions covered by the project.

– The financial aspect becomes essential if the objective is to address and implement economic and productive alternatives among the underprivileged. In the absence of funding, the implementation of programmes designed to promote self-employment, skill improvement programmes, young people’s business undertakings, co-operatives, and small businesses, have little chance of succeeding. The role played by funding agencies in terms of areas of involvement, type of programmes, orientations and evaluation mechanisms, must be clarified. Clearly, programmes that benefit from this kind of support - or promote links to materialise it - have a real comparative advantage and a greater impact on the development of productive projects.

– When working at the interinstitutional level, the materialisation of agreements with the State, civic society and the business sector, becomes particularly important so that the duplication - or dispersion - of actions and competition among institutions, can be avoided. Furthermore, the allocation of scant resources that could otherwise be used more efficiently, is thus prevented.

At this level of co-operation, it is imperative that the State provides support to successful NGOs or, alternatively, to those actors working with segments of the population that have been hit the hardest in terms of diminished income levels and quality of life. In this context, relevant co-operation with NGOs would
probably include promoting sustainable processes and official accreditation schemes as well as the creation of strategies designed to facilitate the incorporation of their occupational training programmes.

In this regard, NGOs of several countries have been known to work in co-operation with the government, and collaborate in non formal training activities for workers—some are authorised to certify labour skills— in order to optimise the effectiveness of the programmes. On occasions, NGOs have served as mediators between the individual demanding a particular service and the government institution offering basic and occupational training programmes. These clearly represent support and co-ordination strategies with the involvement of NGOs, where the State plays a constructive role as the impelling force of the experience.

**Learning processes and skills certification**

Inherent to the work conducted in the informal sectors, are important and viable propositions that propel education in the direction of productive spaces. Thus, in terms of a “work - oriented youth and adult education”, it is important to focus on the learning that takes place in the informal sectors, keeping in mind that the knowledge receptor and transmitter mechanisms operating in these sectors, are different than those that typify the formal system (Posner, 1995). Along these lines, EDJAT must acknowledge a number of skills and information - different literacy concepts and practices - which have proven both successful and vital to the survival of these groups (Hautecoeur, 1996).

The certification of competencies in the informal sector of the economy—the new significance attached to informal learning and modern literacy concepts linked to life strategies— becomes a facilitating mechanism to access other levels—continuity— of the technical training system. By making insertion into the labour market and the development of employment and co-operative employment viable propositions, it has widened the educational horizon of this segment of the population. Hence, labour skills recognition represents a main requirement for better EDJAT programmes. In this regard, the role played by labour unions is particularly important since they have a comparative advantage when it comes to validating knowledge: their closeness to the labour markets—both formal and informal—, their familiarity with skill requirements, and their power as a social group, place them in a privileged position as actor and interlocutor in matters involving occupation and training.

**Improving the quality of non formal education: no need to start anew**

In a large number of developing countries occupational training initiatives for the underprivileged are limited to non formal (non vocational) education, a marginal modality of instruction which can not be regarded as genuine occupational training. Its programmes involve courses of a domestic nature (cooking, manual arts, beauty-related) or trades (carpentry, blacksmithing), and are imparted to low income groups usually in rural areas. While these programmes do contribute with a grain of salt to palliate the harsh economic conditions that prevail in these communities, and may prove interesting for some women (mostly), men, youths and adults—, they lack the elements that could turn them into authentic mechanisms for productive insertion and enhanced quality of living. Their curricula have been the object of probes and accusations which have centred on the “appropriate” role women must play in the labour world and, consequently, on the suitability of the teaching

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15 The Chile Joven Programme, illustrates an interesting example of this type of co-operation. In it, programme development was delegated to a network of accredited organisations which included secondary schools, occupational training centres and universities.
and learning programmes imparted to them in the area of technical and professional training.

These programmes clearly exemplify the branch of adult education which seeking to improve living conditions went as far as promoting occupational training initiatives. However, it is precisely the marginal nature of these programmes that has prevented these courses from acquiring the required level of quality, and from becoming legitimate sources of occupational training.16

An interesting feature of these programmes is their location at the fringes of two educational domains: adult education and occupational training. They lie on the borderline that separates what constitutes occupational training from what does not, a fact that may lend the efforts needed to go from one side to the other—as part of a EDJAT quality enhancement strategy—a certain amount of appeal and viability. Their advantage is that they will not have to start from square one.

These programmes already have some of the physical infrastructure, teaching staff, accumulated pedagogical experience and the broad support of the population. In fact, they represent one of the most popular and widely disseminated programmes among the young and adult population of deprived areas. Consequently, they can be valid alternatives which could somehow reach out to those living in that “no man’s land” represented by today’s occupational training in the poorer regions.

Raising the quality of these programmes entails an interinstitutional effort that involves the revision of learning programmes, curricular models, teacher training initiatives, and an improved infrastructure. This would facilitate improving the profile of graduate students and generating articulations that ensure continuous technical training and developing productive activities backed by financial, business, organisational and marketing assistance.

As a rule, these programmes go no farther than imparting the courses. Because they lack the strategies and support that could give rise to organisational and productive experiences, they are unable to harness and put to use the knowledge and ability acquired by their participants. Interinstitutional collaboration could facilitate a redefinition of the potential these programmes have, specially in terms of the social, economic and political projection of underprivileged women. Moreover, these programmes through their relationship with the various institution—health, initial and basic education, nutrition, etc.—, rather than serving a merely social and political function, would take on a real significance as a legitimate, relevant and useful educational supply for rural and marginal - urban women (Pieck, 1996ª; Jayaweera, 1979; and Stromquist, 1988).

Diversity and quality in EDJAT

A key assumption a “work - oriented youth and adult education” must make is that poverty is heterogeneous and that, consequently, the actions implemented among the vulnerable groups—youths, peasants, women—must be specified, differentiated and prioritised, which implies adopting a strategy based on territoriality where differences can be identified even within these smaller groups. The needs and expectations of women between the ages of 15 and 19 will be different than those in the 20 to 24 age group. Additionally, these differences will be magnified when the gender, locality (urban, rural), ethnic origin and level of schooling variables are factored in, with clear repercussions on possible programme orientation and objectives.

Therefore, if the learning experience is really about empowering the individual, then defining the different profiles of the target population becomes a crucial step. An homogeneous supply runs the risk of being irrelevant to the needs of many, which is why plan-

16 Not surprisingly, the courses with the higher number of enrolments involve dressmaking, weaving and manual arts, a fact indicative of a predominantly feminine student population, and of a marked interest in household - related courses (Pieck, 1996).
ning the curricular and pedagogical model and the programmes’ objectives and guidelines, is a must.

For the sake of diversity, a “work-oriented youth and adult education” must offer a range of options that takes into account the different expectations of the population. These options must be customised for:

– youths who have dropped out from secondary school and wish to have a trade;
– unemployed individuals from both sexes, who have had work experience and wish to further their education or opt for self-employment;
– unemployed adults willing to upgrade their educational level;
– women heads of households who require training and support to embrace an economic activity;
– people seeking certification in order to access the formal labour market; low income youths in need of quick training for rapid insertion in productive activities; individuals looking into secondary education options linked to working opportunities; etc.

There are many different situations which become even more numerous when one considers the various possible contexts.

It is therefore increasingly important to have a wide range of options available in the different spaces; that programmes have built-in links to higher education alternatives; that the profile of graduating students is upgraded and conferred on the basis of integrality; and, that the low income population has access to multiple points of entry to and exit from the different technical training systems.

This requires a fairer distribution and articulation of the various “work-oriented youth and adult education” opportunities, as a strategy for eradicating social exclusion and thus breaking the cycle that foreordains that those with the most will have access to the best. Along these lines, EDJAT programmes have a twofold mission:

– helping people upgrade from the shanty to the computer;
– contributing to the survival of the population.

In other words, the idea is, on the one hand, not to exclude the poor from accessing the new competencies, to offer those who are willing the opportunity to become inserted in the formal labour market, or, alternatively, to move on to higher levels of education. On the other hand, the idea is to provide elements that will allow the low income population to address their productive insertion needs based on an educational supply sensitive to local needs, and consistent with the work characteristics of these groups.

The importance of focalisation as a key feature of EDJAT programmes, follows from these twin functions. A strategy inspired in a “work-oriented youth and adult education”, entails planning the occupational outcome of the low income population by channelling a high quality educational supply towards the development of local economies and the fight against poverty; this, in turn, requires that these programmes facilitate a continuous flow into higher levels of either technical training or formal education. In this respect, the proposed strategies emphasise the need for teacher training initiatives, investments in suitable infrastructure, and the concretion of agreements with the business sector, as mechanisms to secure access to cutting edge technology and to flexible curricular structures designed by the communities themselves.

In a context of globalisation and technological progress, the new labour scenarios demand that a “work-oriented youth and adult education” builds strong ties to the various educational spaces in their various modalities and at their different levels. Some reflections on a diversified supply intended to strengthen the education-work link of the different educational strategies are given below:

– Develop different modalities of work-education in the different educational spaces, through the association of occupational training with basic education, secondary education, literacy
learning, productive programmes and reflection components. 17

– Promote the advancement of technicians at the secondary level, while orienting secondary education towards occupational training. Additionally, the importance of furthering the basic technical knowledge imparted at the secondary level in the different technical specialities of technological institutions, must be stressed.

– Strengthen the links between the various teaching institutions of the educational system so as to facilitate accreditation and move toward higher forms of certification within the formal tertiary education system.

– Galvanise participation by other actors (universities, labour unions) in matters pertaining to occupational training and reinforce their links to technical training institutions. At the university level this could be accomplished through the social services departments, or the labour unions themselves, which are naturally linked to the labour world and to the specific educational needs generated in these spaces. 18

– Integrate the formal education, vocational training and higher education systems, through general education laws.

– Promote bilateral agreements among institutions (for example, between the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training Institutes) so that work-oriented adult education graduates may further their secondary and tertiary level technical studies.

– Articulate basic education and technical training through courses imparted at work centres, that encompass both dimensions. In turn, associate both aspects with the promotion of productive activities. 19

– Promote alternating school-community programmes where basic education is combined with occupational training for adults in the areas of their preference. 20

– Make adult education and work programmes part of local development projects, in particular municipal projects that allow diagnosing needs. 21

The educational dimension of EDJAT strategies

The complex contexts of the ever-changing labour world demand institutional answers that go beyond the producer, the specific needs of the labour market and those of a particular company. In this respect, educational initiatives must be oriented towards the generation of new social demands based on the identification of people’s needs and the strengthening of

17 In countries like Cuba, regular education is compatible with adult education. Basic, technological, and higher levels of education are effectively linked to adult education while the entire educational system is geared towards work (productive work and intellectual work). Nicaragua is also drafting the General Education Act with a view to integrating formal, technical and higher education modalities. There are agreements in place that facilitate the transfer of graduates from the adult education subsystem to technical (basic and secondary) education.

18 It is the case of vocational training institutions that channel their economic-productive programmes through competent technical organisations (in the areas of design, tourism, etc.).

19 In Honduras, this type of articulation between the State and the country’s NGOs made the link between basic education and occupational training possible. To this end, a permanent adult education centre was created, based on the groundwork laid out by the now defunct POCET (Education for Work) Project. Another such initiative is illustrated by Chile’s Basic Remedial Programme for Workers, which guarantees 8 grades of basic education for employed workers with incomplete schooling. Participants to this programme are the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, labour unions and the chamber of commerce.

20 Honduras features such a programme, as does Mexico, Study Centre for Rural Development (CESDER) and Paraguay, Education, Training and Agricultural Technology Centre (CECTEC).

21 Mexico’s INEA, is reformulating its basic education programme for adults; the objective is to form adults capable of both discharging their duties and obligations as citizens, and improving their insertion in the labour market. The assumption is made that basic education must help a human being to meet his/her basic needs, such as housing, food, etc...as well as basic learning needs: arithmetic, reading and writing, teamwork, decision making, etc.
of their ability to participate actively in social and economic spheres (UNESCO, 1999).

Predicated on this principle, the “work-oriented youth and adult education” programmes targeted at the low income sectors, might riskily promote policies inspired in the diversity of the demand and basically designed to provide answers to immediate needs. EDJAT formulations have to be conceived as long-term actions which transcend the strictly instructional dimension - including productive insertion - and become formative strategies closely tied to the acquisition of basic competencies, the formation of civic values and the promotion of social participation. In “work-oriented youth and adult education” programmes, the educational aspect is found in the following dimensions:

– In the presence of the formative context throughout the project, in order that programmes may go beyond its purely technical nature, contribute to the development of basic general competencies, help the individual in his/her decision making process, and in the utilisation of skills in the various contexts. Seen in this light, EDJAT must not only foster a labour culture (Weinberg, 1994), but must also be visualised as a formative activity in the realm of human rights, the exercise of civic rights, and in matters concerning gender. It is precisely at the crossroad between education and work, where the difference between training and formation becomes clearer. The former, possessing largely a technical content concerned mostly with the transmission of skills narrowly linked to the world of work; the latter, emerging as a concept that fuses the world of work and the world of education; that is, an all-inclusive concept which emphasises the educational-formative-element of what essentially are technical activities. Thus, the formation concept, if it aims to go beyond the economic and productive realm, should incorporate the educational domain into the work sphere, and set the direction a “work-oriented youth and adult education” should take.

– The educational dimension of a “work-oriented youth and adult education” is reflected in the participation of the population along the production process. It projects educational activities as a series of potentially transforming actions which, in themselves, imply educational practices. This participation, as the challenges that accompany their modest economic endeavours are gradually overcome, somehow ensures the growth and strengthening of the population living in deprived sectors. In this regard, EDJAT programmes must respond not just to the needs of the people and the characteristics of their particular setting, but they must also rely on the participation of the population in every step of the formulation and instrumentation of such endeavours. The educational strategy, along with developing the necessary individual and collective skills that will guarantee self-management of the projects, must ensure that the people involved will assume such projects under their own responsibility. While the business dimension of economic and productive activities may suffice in terms of the immediate economic objectives of the project, it does not contribute to the existence of an alternative development model, thus the importance of the social dimension as an essential component of these undertakings. Viewed from this perspective, an EDJAT strategy must take into account life-building elements, community work, and the creation of solidaristic relationships.

– The educational dimension is secured to the extent that other dimensions that contribute to enrich and project it beyond the field of tech-

22 Chile’s Technical, Humanistic and Agricultural Centres, propounding an integral technical and humanistic formation, are examples that closely resemble this approach to education and work. Organisation-wise, and owing to their rural nature, these centres contribute a core model and a much narrower connection to the community’s needs and problems. This is precisely where the educational dimension that should underpin any adult education-work project, must play an essential role.
Work-oriented education for youths and adults / Enrique Pieck

Technical training, are incorporated into the curriculum. This may be accomplished through the inclusion of such topics as: health, nutrition, early stimulation, sex education, etc. which supplement a “work-oriented youth and adult education”, and infuse it with the educational character these interventions must have. Such supplements to the curriculum are the result of articulations with institutions from the various sectors (health, housing, economic development, education, etc.) which cause curricular content to transcend the realm of what is strictly training and have a positive impact in the formation of participants.  

This notion of curriculum has to do with the need to combine practical and humanistic contents, with particular emphasis on those linked to social development, ethics, citizenry and gender. The objective is to balance the development of productive skills with attitudinal changes and value formation and make it compatible with them. Thus, just as occupational training programmes must respond to an economic and productive rationale, they, too, must represent proposals that facilitate the integral development of the individual and allow for social mobility.

Underlying these three dimensions is the importance of envisioning productive projects as a means rather than an end. Hence, the need to understand them in terms of their potential as spaces of social participation and as loci for exercising democracy. It is essential to approach them from the standpoint that the scope of formative action goes well beyond the development of economic or productive endeavours, and visualises them as spaces of social and economic incorporation and expression that must be experienced as part of and reinforced with educational activities affecting other domains. That low income youths and adults have a voice in society and a role to play within it, is mainly the result of having seized the opportunity to be part of a productive endeavour - the fact that they have successfully inserted themselves in a work space, whatever it happens to be; otherwise, they will find themselves excluded and at the fringes of social action. Consequently, it is through productive insertion that people can engage in social interlocution.

Basic education as part of EDJAT strategies

Lastly, it is important to recognise that technical training is but a supplement of general education; it can not –nor is it intended to– replace it. In fact, any educational programme linked to work and targeted at the low income sectors, must include general or basic education, as an instrument that will open new horizons of understanding, welcome new concepts of literacy and novel methods for handling basic skills. Clearly, however, general education must find its niche in the new scenarios, notions and practices characteristic of our modern labour world and rely on technical education systems that impart skills that may prove relevant to these scenarios and to the dynamic forces of the new labour market.

Future actions and the level of public policies

One of the objectives of the regional follow-up meetings to CONFINTEA, was to contribute to the design of strategies intended to incorporate a work-oriented youth and adult education into the public policies of a country. A second area of interest involved proposals intended to strengthen the bonds between youth and adult education and work opportunities. Some of the propositions set out during these meetings - the very same that provide the foundations for strategies, policies and activities in this particular field - are given below:

– Acknowledge the importance of traditional popular education in the elaboration of public

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23 A case in point is Cuba, where manual arts courses are supplemented with sex education courses.
policies associated with a work-oriented youth and adult education. The experiences accumulated in this area of education represent a vast source of lessons at the level of methodologies, strategies, curricular design, institutional articulations, etc., which must be systematised for they represent an important contribution to the design of alternative strategies.

– The need to produce new teacher training programmes follows from the expanded scope of EDJAT and its new role. The new curricula must incorporate a number of skills and knowledge that may help define the role EDJAT must assume before the economic and productive needs of the low income sectors. The new profile educators must have, demands the design and implementation of academic events that encourage reflecting on the curricular content and strategies of these training programmes.

– Integrate research as a main component of EDJAT. The idea is to think of research as an on-going programme intended to impart knowledge and provide the components of strategies designed to develop EDJAT’s full collaborating potential in matters of social and economic development. Some of its plausible study areas are represented, among others, by the various contexts, priority groups, methodologies, curricular models, institutional articulations, and modifications to work practices.

– Systematise experiences in order to analyse specific articulations between adult education and work. This would allow the subsequent dissemination of approaches and technological innovations adopted by any of the various sectors (public, business, educational, NGOs). In this respect, retrieving the diversity of common experiences, lineaments and orientations that may facilitate co-ordinating EDJAT’s actions and articulating them with the public policy level, becomes an absolute must.

– Create a network of programmes, institutions and specialists active in work-oriented youth and adult education initiatives and thus contribute to its strengthening at the various levels: individuals, policy, local contexts, etc.

– Set up a permanent regional, subregional and national forum, where different experiences are analysed and their orientation, methodologies and beneficiaries discussed. This type of space may yield the bases for debating public policies and disseminating EDJAT practices and principles. This, in turn, would help create favourable conditions for follow up initiatives designed to prevent programme insularity and facilitate their adoption by the various communities.

– It is important that “work-oriented youth and adult education” policies are linked to full employment policies, and that they, in turn, incorporate the labour problem from the perspective of the underprivileged. In this regard, the local design, management and planning of the curriculum—incorporating commitments and practices—, as well as the need to articulate policies with the various economic and productive endeavours generated in the local context and in the vast informal sector, represent crucially important conditions.24

24 In Bolivia’s case, the establishment of an Adult Education Council where the State and civil society are represented, public policies are defined, and the responsibility for their follow-up is equally shared, has been recently proposed.
LITERACY: ACCESS TO THE WRITTEN CULTURE, EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Judith Kalman*

“The task of revealing a practice, of examining its rigorousness or lack thereof, is a theoretical task, a theoretical practice”
– Paulo Freire

Full comprehension of the present state of literacy, understood as a means of accessing written culture, would require a historical account of the programmes and projects undertaken by the various governments and civil society since the 60s. The emergence and proliferation of popular education, and basic adult education services, and an ongoing debate on the role played by education as a poverty-eradicating strategy and a life-enhancing instrument for the underprivileged - whether owed to its intervention in changing the social structure or to its insertion in the existing economic structure - , are the elements that underlie the evolution of literacy programmes.

This trajectory, however artificial, begins in the 60s, for not until the second half of this century - with the creation of the United Nations Organisation and some of its education and development agencies - is illiteracy conferred institutional status, and international programmes are launched with the objective of attaining universal literacy. Additionally, coinciding with UNESCO - sponsored Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP), two other extremely successful programmes, make their debut: Cuba’s literacy campaign (a by-product of its revolution), and the Black People’s literacy campaign, a movement that spread throughout the Southern states in the wake of the civil rights conflict that affected the United States during that period.

In contrast to these campaigns inserted in well-defined political and social processes, the EWLP represents an international initiative explicitly designed to combat illiteracy, much as if it were a vaccination campaign intended to eradicate a plague from the face of the earth. The idea was to bring the written code to populations which had limited access to it –or lacked it altogether–, thus delivering a lethal blow to illiteracy.

In the 60s, the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) advanced literacy learning and basic adult education as one of the first steps on the road towards societal development. Its analysis of poverty and “backwardness”, is based on the premise that traditional societies tend to encumber progress and that education is one of the key strategies that

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will allow making the transition to a modern society where the State shall assume the role of development agent promoting industrialisation and the expansion of services. This period is characterised by massive rural - urban migrations and an educational system focused on incorporating vast numbers of the population into the social and political processes and the economic structure (García Huidobro, 1994).

A further illustration of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity which permeated the social reflection of the times, is found in the theories about the literate and the non-literate, inasmuch as they were attributed different characteristics. The ones were capable of abstract reasoning, the others were restricted to the realm of the concrete; the ones were “progressive” or modern, and the others primitive. Seen from this perspective, oral and written language had little in common (Goody and Watt, 1963). One of the consequences of this conceptualisation was the observation that literate individuals (those who could read and write) were usually found in countries which exhibited a certain degree of development (the development model was at the time - and in many cases still is - industrialisation); ergo, the reasoning went, if only those who could neither read nor write would simply become literate, every problem associated with social, economic and political inequality, would vanish in thin air. Consequently, literacy became symptomatic of a strategy that would effectively achieve the social equality, lifestyle, and level of development everybody hankered for.

Without going into an in-depth analysis of this view, a necessary observation is that those who promoted literacy learning as a solution to a very complex problems tended to attribute, to what was interpreted as a characteristic of all industrialised nations (a population 100 per cent literate), a cause and effect relationship (in an industrialised country, a vast majority can read and write, therefore, reading and writing are the main causes of industrial growth or, at least, essential ones). This line of reasoning spawned various conclusions and recommendations, among them, one that set a minimum literacy threshold (at 40 %) for countries aspiring to become developed.

In short, this first period is characterised by a direct link between literacy - basic adult education and the individual and collective potential for development. It was argued that literacy would bring about the cultural enrichment of the peoples, greater access to the labour market, and increased participation in democratic processes, and, in terms of economic development, prosperity and social and political stability.

By the early 60s, the international community propounds a New International Economic Order to govern the North - South relationship and thus guarantee a more equitable development. Again, adult education - seen as a key instrument to achieve the sought after level of organisation and development - emerges as an important strategy to meet the countries’ basic needs. However, the results of the large-scale literacy campaigns soon prove disappointingly low, mainly because the literacy and post-literacy processes are much more complex than originally anticipated, and their thrust as catalytic agents of development much weaker than expected. A dependency theory which advances that the causes of social injustice should be sought in the economic realm and not in the traditional forms of organisation and culture, emerges as a counter-current to development advocates. State-sponsored educational initiatives follow the same trajectory of the earlier decade, and popular education - incensed by the blatant failure of the governments to meet the educational needs of their citizenry - makes its triumphant entrance.

From its very beginning, popular education erupts as a dissenter of the State and its political, social, economic and educational policies. It stresses the ideological nature of educational actions and points to the role played by formal education - in keeping with the educational theory prevalent at the time - as a reproducer of ideologies and as an instrument at the ser-
vice of social transformation. Inspired in Paulo Freire (1970), popular education disseminates the tenets of a liberating education throughout the continent and gives rise to several unprecedented experiences.

García Huidobro (1994, p. 27) writes that during the 70s and 80s, the term “popular” is identified with “an explicit political option with a clear social class connotation. It involves an alternative proposal seeking to place education at the service of social reform so that the lower income groups may become subjects/actors aware of the structural transformation of society and prepared to participate in it”.

This period is characterised by popular education initiatives which basically respond to two scenarios: on the one hand, organisations concerned with the critical economic situation affecting the population, and aggravated in several countries (Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Peru) by the presence of military dictatorships. On the other, two major literacy campaigns are launched: Cuba’s in the early 60s, is markedly successful in its attempt to teach reading, writing and the use of the written language to the entire population; and, Nicaragua’s, which despite a tremendous effort in this direction neither reaped the desired results nor gained continuity. Regrettably, Nicaragua is still afflicted by a high rate of illiteracy.

Bhola (1988), in an attempt to systematise the educational actions of the three decades in question (60s, 70s and 80s), summarises the two dominant views as follows: formal adult education assigns education an economic function intended to promote the incorporation of adults into the industrial domain, while popular education regards it as a consciousness-building tool at the service of the majorities, and aimed at promoting social transformation.

It propounds that while the right demands an adult education that fosters the development of human resources the left criticises the lack of context specificity that characterises the student population targeted by official programmes. As a result, mainstream and popular education became effectively dissociated during the 80s. Consequently, we are pitted against two paradigms ideologically linked to the very organisations and causes that account for their origins.

**Characteristics of adult education**

Basic adult education has been the mechanism favoured by regional governments to mitigate educational overage from a compensatory standpoint. For example, Brazil offers a two-cycle basic education programme that provides the student with the equivalent to 8 years of schooling; Costa Rica, Panama and Honduras offer primary education programmes consisting of four levels comparable to six grades of regular primary schooling; Peru offers primary adult education programmes and the basic cycle of secondary education. Mexican researcher Pablo Latapí (1988), proposed the following classification of adult education policies at the national level:

- Think of literacy as the beginning of adult education; post-literacy as a transition towards basic education. These three moments (literacy, post-literacy and basic education) constitute a single process while basic education is the objective every adult aims at. Latapí offers Ecuador as an example of a national literacy programme where post-literacy is considered equivalent to the first years (through third grade) of primary school.

- Think of literacy, post-literacy and basic education as distinct events (regardless of the fact that a large number of adults are expected to move from one to the other). For example, in Colombia three different programmes are promoted: literacy, primary adult education, and permanent technical training initiatives.

- Make available manifold proposals so that the adult selects the one most sensitive to his/her needs. Brazil’s EDUCAR programme, offers diverse alternatives simultaneously, giving the adult the opportunity to take the course which best meets his/her needs.

Latapí also observes that the funding mechanisms for the different programmes may vary.
In general terms, every government uses its own tax revenues and supplements its budget with international donations, national lotteries, and allocations from labour unions or resources from international agencies.

According to Schmelkes and Kalman (1996), there is consensus among scholars that the educational compensation model has failed to fulfill the learning needs of the adult population. Messina (1990), observes that effective demand for this type of service is practically non-existent among adults, and that the largest concentration of enrolments is found among urban youths. This study, as well as others, underscores the irrelevance of basic adult education contents, stresses its dissociation from essential needs, its weak focus on employment and self-employment, the encyclopaedic and vertical nature of the curriculum and the teaching methodology - which seems transplanted directly from primary school - and its lack of insight into the specific composition of the target population. In fact, García Huidobro (1994) has characterised this educational modality as a “poor education for the poor”.

Based on adult education research conducted in several countries, it may be concluded that adult education uses teaching practices - which in most cases include traditional methodologies relying on repetition, individual work and the promotion of isolated skills - markedly antagonistic to the adult learner. Adult education initiatives, favouring a study programme patterned after the conventional school curricula, in the best of cases, attempt to link the so-called basic skills with programmatic activities associated with such topics as health, work, family and community. The substantial cultural gap between this modality and the orientations and experiences of the adult learner, often results in the inability of these students to make use of their own learning potential. Adult education is characteristically centralised and homogeneous and tends to transmit the official culture in total disregard for communal culture.

Broadly speaking, adult education operates on borrowed resources: teachers and schools. Teachers are insufficiently trained, their salaries are low - or non-existent as in Mexico’s case - and, as a rule, they are quite unhappy about their working conditions. In synthesis, basic adult education is a marginal activity within the educational system (Messina, 1990, p. 1-29). Owing to its diminished importance, adult education has traditionally been the first casualty of budget cutbacks, aggravating even further its already precarious situation (García Huidobro, 1994).

Perhaps the Achilles heels of adult education, perceived as an initiative which is “neither utilitarian nor necessary for the community”, is its lack of social credibility (García Huidobro, 1994, p. 37). This is partly due to the enormous amount of achievements (development, prosperity, democracy, employment, health, cultural enrichment, etc.) it has been expected to deliver. Several problems associated with certification add to this scenario: the predominant certification relies on school-like mechanisms (grades or cycles) or, sometimes, it is of the vocational type delivered through training programmes. As a result, few adults ever obtain such a certification, thus exacerbating its inefficiency as perceived in the social spheres.

**Characteristics of popular education**

Popular education has been civil society’s answer to the educational void left by ineffectual government programmes. Rivero (1989, p. 13), summarises the process as follows: “A fair number of literacy programmes spurred by non-government actors have emerged in response to the lack of initiative and inefficiency shown by the State. These, have two things in common: they represent dissenting points of view and constitute alternatives to those propounded by the government. They manifest the traditional tension between the State and civil society, stretched taut by the control-seeking and exclusionary attitudes of
public agencies, and the tendency on the part of the NGOs to view the State in a flat and biased light, ascribing to it all the flaws of anti-popular management. While mainstream literacy programmes have worked to redeem themselves before the people, and to find regulatory mechanisms through massive projects, the NGOs operate at the local -predominantly rural- level, emphasising a kind of literacy effort that may positively affect small power structures”.

Popular education has undergone important changes in recent decades. In the 60s, its expansion was achieved mainly through literacy projects; in the 70s and 80s, it identified itself with political awareness processes, and presently, in the 90s, it concerns itself with projects involving the environment, cultural diversity and social dialogue. Despite these variations, its educational mission - getting adults involved in their own processes and, through the formation of social actors, improve the individual and collective quality of life - has not flagged.

In contrast to the adult basic education promoted by the governments, popular education is distinguished by its heterogeneity in terms of programmes and organisation. It has been the vehicle of tremendous efforts to provide support to the adult population of popular sectors in their daily struggle to survive, through their active participation in the solution of their own problems. In this regard, its educational strategy - getting adults involved in their own processes and, through the formation of social actors, improve the individual and collective quality of life - has not flagged.

In terms of its methodology, popular education emphasises the ethical and political dimensions of educational processes, promotes the active participation of its members and values popular “non-recognised, non-hegemonic” knowledge; through this strategy, it makes a commitment to social transformation processes (Cendales, 1996). In most cases, popular education purveyors pursue several objectives simultaneously (Rivero, 1993; p. 128):

- Find solution to problems associated with survival and quality of life (housing, health, education).
- Undertake actions connected with social change as a medium and long term vision.
- Contribute to the formation of social actors in the popular milieu.

Popular education programmes, start from the analysis of everyday problems, their implications and repercussions. The idea is to materialise horizontal relationships between the players through dialogue and collective reflection. Álvarez Díaz (1995, p. 310), describes the teaching/learning process of popular education stating: “one learns to relate the practices and new ideas with the ways each person thinks and acts” while attempting to generate “changes in the conceptions and ways of acting, that is, in individual and collective behaviour”. In this sense, action becomes the pivotal point of popular education.

Conceptual refinements associated with access to the written culture, education and information

A literary review of this subject reveals major conceptual reforms of adult education which are manifested through changed views of literacy, post-literacy and adult basic education. As recently as 40 years ago, each was thought of as an independent unit following a
set sequence: literacy learning came first; then, in order to reinforce literacy acquisition, post-literacy programmes were implemented and, finally, adult certification was sought through basic education mechanisms. Two main concepts underlie this view: first, it was assumed that literacy represented a fragmented process where learning was seen as dissociated from the writing system, and from learning how to master it. Thus, an individual could - supposedly - learn to read and write in a vacuum, independent of the communicational context of the use of written language. Currently, this fragmented view has come under fire before the need to rethink the educational task carried out with adults on two narrowly related planes: meeting basic health, nutrition, housing, and employment needs, and developing their personal and social potentials. This revised objective of adult education, will demand a new definition of literacy both in social as well as individual terms (how to achieve it and use it, and how it relates to the context it is inserted in), and a redefinition of the purpose of basic adult education. In working meetings this reformulation was advanced in terms of access to the written culture and to education, where “access” was understood to form part of a complex social category.

In the 60s, the prevalent reading/writing teaching methodology, was inspired in the principle that the written language represents a direct transcription of the oral language, and that writing followed an autonomous path detached from the social world. Educational programmes where control over transcription rules - that is, tracing letters and assigning sounds to each - was stressed, were based on this construction (which also incorporates a mechanical version of learning). Reading and writing teaching sessions, consisted of presenting to the learner isolated syllables which he/she would come to master through repetition and copying and through the use of sentences like “grass is green” and “daddy draws ducks” read out loud. Basic adult education followed exactly the same pattern: in the area of language it taught (and expected the student to learn) spelling rules, parts of speech, punctuation rules, paragraph structuring, parts of a letter, etc. It was assumed that this information would be integrated by the student when he/she - as user of the written language - used it orally or in writing.

Nonetheless, the miraculous transformation from “illiterate” to “literate” did not occur as expected: the massive local and multinational campaigns undertaken during this period met with failure. Illiteracy was not eradicated, and the propounders of this educational strategy were compelled to confront the limitations of their design. At the same time, theoretical discussions and research made an important about face: a fruitful period of qualitative investigation on the use of written language in the various social contexts, gets under way, along with a redefinition of the relationship between oral and written language, and the narrow link between writing and the context in which it is used.

The development of educational, psychological, anthropological, sociological, and linguistic research initiated in the 60s, has increased in extension and complexity at warp speed since then. Space limitations prevent its in-depth analysis; therefore, only key points will be presented here, highlighting the basic changes without going into their development or evolution. At the risk of conveying a caricatured account of the growth materialised in this field of education, the following lines attempt to compare - albeit succinctly - the vision of adult education and literacy predominant in the 60s, with that of today.

**Literacy and its psychological and social consequences**

Towards the late 60s, when the failure of literacy campaigns becomes widely acknowledged, a renewed interest in literacy and its psychological and social consequences becomes evident. A work strategy intended to analyse and challenge several aspects of the written language, gets underway. Questions are
put forth such as what is literacy and at what point is a person considered literate. An innovative proposal at the time - fully in effect today - is the study of the written language through field work and its use in real-life situations. In the past two decades, research efforts have seriously questioned some of the values, beliefs and effects associated with the literacy process. Thanks to studies on the use of the written language and the role it plays in the various cultures, it may be concluded that there is no such thing as a single, generic type of literacy impervious to its context, but, rather, a range of plausible uses and social connotations which revolve around the concept of a written language. In short, what this does is change our view from the singular concept of literacy to one of multiple literacies, thus acknowledging the plurality of the phenomenon.

The written language is rated differently in the different societies and cultures, while its uses also vary. In this regard, the need to conceive literacy as a social practice - practice understood as a reiterated action - rather than as a set of abilities and skills, has been formulated. In other words, literacy occurs not just as the result of using writing to transcribe, produce or understand a text, but from the manifold and diverse ways of using it in communication and social exchange. In this sense, the focus of attention is shifted from the text to the human entity, the reader and writer.

The pioneer work of Scribner and Cole (1981) in this area, should be mentioned. In the late 70s, the authors conducted a study of the Vai people, a trilingual population of northern Africa, who have adopted three different writing systems. A large percentage of the Vai, is Moslem, while Arabic represents their religious language; the vernacular is the Vai and it is extensively used in everyday living; English, a colonial language is the official language and the language of instruction in schools. Each of these languages has a distinct alphabet: the Arabian alphabet is different than the English alphabet and Vai - created by missionaries and widely disseminated among males - is made up of syllabic units.

This research yielded astounding findings which contributed importantly to the theoretical reorientation mentioned earlier. Only two of these will be addressed here. First, usage of the written language varies from one context to the next, and what may well be considered valid and acceptable in a specific situation, may not be in another. For example, the Vai people recite the Koran as part of their religious activities, using the written text as a memory aid. Their reading follows an index, and prevents overlooking important religious chants. Most Vai do not use Arabic to communicate among themselves, for it is a language associated mainly with their religion. And, even those who speak it can not “read” it in the way we tend to think of reading, since it is written in classical Arabic, a form markedly different from contemporary oral Arabic.

The gathering of evidence linking the context of acquisition to the type of literacy acquired, represents another valuable contribution. They observed that the Vai who learned reading and writing in English at school, developed written language uses associated with formal schooling methods, such as: identification of parts of the speech, the writing of “objective” concepts, and the use of lineal reasoning. Those who learned to read and write Vai from their neighbours and relatives in informal settings, used the written language for communicating: signs, personal letters and logbooks. This led Scribner and Cole to regard written language as a social practice where the use of writing technology, skills and abilities converge with social knowledge.

The previous example emphasises the social nature of written language and the essential role that interacting with others plays in its acquisition. When adding the practice dimension, it becomes evident that literacy learning is a much more complex process than simply learning how to trace letters and assign sounds to them. Over and above the mechanical transfer of letters and their sounds from one who knows to another who does not, literacy requires a conceptual development of the writ-
ten language: what is it, how and when is it used, who is it used with and to what end.

Clearly, this conceptual complexity has caused the traditional social, political and economic effects associated with literacy, to come under questioning; however, the social role played by literacy initiatives - inasmuch as they represent an essential communicational device of modern society, and to the degree that the unequal distribution of power and opportunity hinges largely on the condition of literacy, or illiteracy, of the individuals - is still widely acknowledged. The importance of literacy acquisition and its status as a basic learning need have not been challenged. The fact that we live in an educated society and that the mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic represents an essential tool if we are to participate in the social realm and continue to learn, have never been a matter of dissent. Likewise, the causal relationship between literacy and the development of abstract cognitive abilities, has weakened considerably in recent years. Today, literacy is not regarded as the minimal condition required to develop said abilities, but, rather, emphasis is placed on the fact that non-writing cultures do have the abilities formerly attributed only to individuals endowed with reading and writing skills. Furthermore, literacy - along with such variables as the possession of certain material goods, the socioeconomic structure, and the political organisation - is considered a catalysing agent of the development process, but no longer the single factor responsible for it.

**Redefining basic categories**

Just as the definition of literacy has undergone changes in the wake of research breakthroughs, the following basic categories have also suffered modifications:

**Literacy and post-literate**

Owing to the complex nature of the literacy learning process, its narrow relationship with the learning context and its intended uses, both the conceptual division as well as the practical separation of these terms are being increasingly scrutinised. In fact, numerous scholars and a fair number of activists have been enticed to accept the futility of thinking of literacy acquisition as the mandatory first step of the educational process. There are a number of educational processes and expressions more closely aligned with what has been termed “post-literacy initiatives” than with the needs of rural and indigenous communities (Picón Espinosa, 1987) or even with those of some urban areas. In this respect, literacy must be linked to the basic needs and interests of the adult population. Perhaps it would be wiser to think of literacy as a need arising from the problem-solving process or from the promotion of the satisfaction of needs and not, as has been the trend, as an indispensable tool to attain it. In this connection, literacy - understood as social participation through the use of the written language - can be promoted as forming part of broader activities where reading and writing represent important resources for achieving specific objectives.

**Illiteracy**

Before the 60s, it was claimed that life prior to becoming literate was devoid of culture. According to this conception, the illiterate individual was thought of as being excluded from the social structure, and literacy as the strategy designed to rescue and integrate him into society. Recent research findings, however (Fingeret, 1984; Gowen, 1994; Kalman, 1999), reveal that illiterate individuals and poorly educated adults, do not have a diminished self-image. Public stereotypes of illiterate individuals portraying them as dependent, incompetent, incapable, weak and failure-prone, come up against the fact that adult “illiterates” have had reading and writing experiences, and have a concept of its use, and functionality (Kalman, 1999). Currently, qualitative research on the subject has provided ample evidence that indi-
cates that there are few people in the world who have not had any contact whatsoever with reading and writing. The notion that literacy programmes are intended for individuals who are total ignoramuses who can not writing or do not know the uses of writing, does not reflect today’s social reality (Street, 1993).

UNESCO’s World Conference at Persepolis (1975), marks a turning point for adult education, to the extent that the concept of what constitutes an illiterate gradually begins to change. No longer would they be considered empty vessels demanded to be filled, but persons endowed with reasoning abilities, profound labour experiences, and a strong sense of individual and collective responsibility (Kalman, 1989). Research studies (Scribner and Cole, 1983) have corroborated, that adult illiterates are persons worthy of respect, individual, intelligent and capable of engaging in abstract thinking. A literacy programme is far better off if it assumes that the knowledge is there: that educators accept that they are working with competent adults who operate in complex social settings and require a wide range of intellectual and social skills. Despite this modern view, in our society illiterates are discriminated upon, not only because they lack the ability to write, but also, as the result of the prejudices with which society has branded those who can not read or write.

Functional literacy

The expression “functional literacy” was coined in the mid 40s in an attempt to describe the minimal levels of education desired for the black population of Southern United States. A decade later, it begins to be disseminated by UNESCO as an “official” term. Gray (1956), describes a functional literate as a person who has acquired reading and writing knowledge and skills that allow him to participate in all those activities characteristic of his literate culture or group. Later, the concept of sustainability will enrich this definition: literate persons must be able to continue to use what they have learned and, therefore, continue to learn. In 1965, a modified concept of functional literacy is adopted at UNESCO’s World Conference: “literacy, more than an end in itself, must be regarded as a means of preparing human beings to play social, civic and political roles”. Such a definition transcends the rudimentary notion of literacy which satisfied itself with teaching people to read and write. It is claimed that the very process of learning to read and write must become an opportunity to acquire information, knowledge and experience for immediate application in improving the individual’s quality of life.

More recent definitions of functional literacy describe it as the necessary practice of the written language that will allow the individual to engage in needed or desired transactions that require reading or writing abilities. Thus viewed, literacy does not represent a set of isolated skills, but, rather, a process for developing the usage of the written language that derives its meaning from its own capacity of being used. Access to information is not limited to the physical availability of printed documents, for it also implies accessing these materials, and incorporating them into specific social situations; taking advantage of opportunities to interact with other readers and writers, and using reading and writing as a communicational device intended to resolve felt needs.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the nuances that have enriched the meaning of “functional literacy”, it is still widely used to denote a condition inferior to that which the full mastery of the written language implies, and has become synonymous with the lowest threshold of knowledge characteristic of an “employable” and potentially productive individual (Levine, 1982). Predicated on the idea that literacy has a direct bearing on greater productivity, social participation, and the cultural integration of marginal groups, governments and international agencies regard functional literacy levels as indicators of socioeconomic development. However, in recent years
this conventional conceptualisation has been challenged, casting doubts over the existence of a competence threshold, and if such a thing existed, the form it would take. Ethnographic studies reveal that the functionality of the written language is largely dependent on the context it is inserted in. Lodoño (1990), observes that functional literacy in Latin America must be analysed from two different perspectives: from the vision of a modern society that requires reading - writing, and mathematical skills; and, from the perspective of transformation, and search for alternative models of culture, economy, education and society.

In subregional working meetings, the debate on literacy has revolved around the importance of abandoning - once and for all - the mechanistic view of literacy acquisition, in favour of an increasingly more complex formulation which accounts for its multiple modalities, uses, meanings and insertions in the various social contexts. These are the ideological and action lines adopted in this area of education, and the basis for proposing a collective reflection aimed at reconstructing the educational programmes for youths and adults (EDJA), so as to guarantee their access to the written language, education and information.

**Major challenges and tensions: myth and reality**

During CONFINTEA V, Hautecoeur (1997) pointed out that “literacy has been founded on a myth that is still very much alive (p.75)”. Such extraordinary virtues and powers as progress, development, freedom, training, equality, democracy, and prosperity have been attributed to it. The analysis presented in previous pages, explains how this view gave rise to a profound dichotomy: progress and modernity on the one hand, and backwardness and primitiveness on the other. Be that as it may, research findings and field work experiences have taught us that literacy can not be conceived as an “all or none” phenomenon: true, it is an important component of development, but by no means the only one. The use of written language, of reading and writing skills in communication, also implies its insertion into social and power relations: learning the alphabet will neither change the social organisation nor asymmetric situations.

The major challenges confronting modern educators can be summarised as follows: first, gaining appreciation for the complexity of the literacy learning phenomenon, insofar as it occurs simultaneously on the individual and the social planes; second, understanding that, owing to its dual nature - individual and collective -, letters and sounds *per se* are not sufficient to grant access to the written culture; and, third, accepting this complexity and no longer visualise it as an obstacle to the educational process but as a resource and a challenge.

This transformation may be, at least partially, achieved through a redefinition of educational practices and a thorough revision of the literacy being currently promoted. At the working sessions of subregional meetings emphasis was placed time and time again, on the importance of linking the written language to broader objectives. These objectives can be practical, that is, associated with the satisfaction of material and immediate needs; social, associated with a better understanding of the world around us and our place within it; economic, inserted in productive or developmental projects; and, aesthetic, seen from the perspective of enjoying the language, and of developing possibilities of self - expression. Thus viewed, every project involving education and sustainable development, health, the citizenry and every programme designed to work with youths, excluded populations, women, migrants, and indigenous peoples, could be a potential opportunity to expand written language acquisitions.

In terms of fostering a fairer distribution of the written language, perhaps a major challenge would require that we paid less attention to the written code and its conventions and focused more closely on the language as written and on the written culture. Such a redefini-
tion would imply embracing cultural policies that create opportunities for accessing the written language, and the adoption of practices and - specially - situations where programme participants coexist with readers and writers. It would also imply creating the necessary conditions for the communities to participate in their own elaboration of culture, and making the required funds available.

There is a growing tension between the need to provide educational opportunities and the social demand for certification. On the one hand, young people and adults wish to earn a basic education certification while, in numerous cases, it is a prerequisite to embark on further education and/or training opportunities. However, until now, adult basic education has been nothing but a poor imitation of the basic education imparted to children: namely, overburdened with academic contents, removed from the adults’ accumulated knowledge, designed for uninterrupted attendance during prolonged periods of time, and evaluated through examinations. Each of these aspects, becomes - in most cases - obstacles to certification, while in failing to achieve certification youths and adults relive the memories of their earlier school failures, exclusion and lack of access, as personal and individual shortcomings. This method of producing and supplying education to young people and adults, is also at cross purposes with the widely recognised need to base educational strategies on immediate contexts and to take advantage of the educational resources and circumstances offered by the local supply. The contradiction evidenced between the curriculum and a central mechanism of certification, demands a creative and innovative solution which must meet three basic objectives; comply with the social requirement for accreditation, satisfy the personal desire to hold a certificate, and make room for local projects and proposals.

A problem directly linked to the aforementioned, follows directly from the serious budget limitations that characterise EDJA initiatives. While political rhetoric would seem to indicate a certain interest in and commitment to the aims and objectives of EDJA, this field of education lacks what could be defined as a solid and steady funding scheme. Such renowned authors as García Huidobro (1994), Rivero (1989, 1993), Tedesco (1991) and Cendales (1996), coincide in that the present state of EDJA can only be explained in terms of its location in the globalisation process and the ensuing economic crisis: for a large number of the countries in the region, the crisis has translated into austerity or “adjustment measures” which have had a direct bearing on social spending.

While current economic policies favour the accumulation of wealth by a limited sector of society, the majorities grow poorer, contributing to a skewed access to education and to a severe retrogression, when measured against the advances of previous decades. This retrogression has resulted in diminished public spending in education, a fact that asphyxiates any possibility that educational programmes obtain the necessary resources to train specialised personnel, create local projects, adapt spaces, develop and purchase material and equipment, etc. At the same time, potential demand grows, to the extent that the crisis also erodes the “capacity of the family unit to absorb the educational cost and guarantee good living conditions so that their younger members may take full advantage of the existing supply” (Tedesco, 1989, p. 9).

**Technology: food for thought**

Technology, touted by all as playing a particularly important role in today’s education and development processes, has given rise to this last tension. It is essential that the nature of technology be carefully examined, since there is a strong tendency to think of it as a homogeneous and mythical whole, much like literacy in the 60s. A first point of reflection would require establishing that “technology” as such has no life of its own, but is a composite of different scientific breakthroughs that
contribute to the enrichment of known educational, productive and communicational practices. What this means, for example, is that computers may help us write more efficiently, but they do not replace our knowledge and procedures when creating, editing and putting together a document.

While technology can cause certain activities to evolve, this does not necessarily mean that every single task making use of cutting edge technology will require a higher level of education or mastery of the written language. Levine (1991), observes that some semi-technical posts may require the operator to read messages appearing on a screen, and to record information using a keyboard, all of which demands a higher level of understanding and a more skilful handling of the written language, in addition to a certain familiarity with techniques and procedures. By contrast, in those offices where computers can save and reproduce form letters, and allow secretaries to correct them by using built-in spell check features, the need to master the structural components of the language may be diminished. Hence, the impact technology may have on the workplace is not even-sided, since in some cases it will demand new skills while in others it will not. This will depend largely on which particular sector, labour market, type of business, and modernisation phase the individual gets involved with.

Modern technology is offering new devices to expand the range of educational alternatives and, to the extent that the various technological possibilities are channeled towards education, its knowledge will percolate into the population allowing the people to learn about their uses and potential - although this learning is not essential to acquiring a broad-based literacy or to access knowledge. Contact with the different information, communication and interaction systems - electronic mail, video, electronic bulletins, interactive conferences - that are built-into education and training programmes, will contribute novel learning, although they will also pose new educational problems; for example, the mastery of a second language. However, the use of technology is not in itself a guarantee of quality: broadly speaking, literacy and adult education software have shown little creativity and a great deal of mechanisation. We must not lose sight of the fact that the new devices neither replace nor reform those already in existence, but they simply infuse into them new life and enrich the communicational practices. Much of the information contained in data banks is anything but new, it is just organised differently. In short, there are no technical solutions to the central problems posed by reading, writing and mathematics acquisition: the challenge education confronts still is how to link these disciplines to the broader organisation of knowledge.

The essential problem of literacy understood as the access to written culture, education and information

Some observations were made between the Hamburg and Brasilia agreements in reference to literacy learning, access to the written culture, basic education for youths and adults, and access to information. The main points are given below:

Establishing youth and adult education as a human right

Several resolutions have defined literacy and youth and adult education as a human right, and as one of the major strategies leading to a more equitable and just world, and to a more participatory society. Seen in this light, for those youths and adults who have been denied the opportunity to access literacy and education during their early years, it can not be considered a compensatory action, but, rather, the fulfilment of society’s responsibility to guarantee education for all. The urgency to expand the education supply to indigenous peoples, women, migrants, peasants and rural and urban youths who have been historically excluded from formal education and its institutions, and
the intention of incorporating their particular views to the different levels of decision - making, planning and educational action, are clearly stated under this point.

This is the same perspective adopted in the Final Report of the Regional Preparatory Conference for the V International Conference on Adult Education held in Brasilia (January 1997), to link literacy to “access to the modernity codes”. The Report recommends

Promoting a revision of the concept and content of literacy from a discontinuous action set to a rigid timeframe, to a broader conception of actions inserted in a continuous and lifelong basic education process” (p. 20).

The Hamburg Declaration (1997), reinforces this trend taking it one step further.

“Literacy, conceived in general terms as the basic knowledge and skills required by all those who inhabit a fast evolving world… and as a the basis of all other knowledge demanded by our daily existence … and, furthermore, as the catalysing agent for social, cultural, political and economic participation” (14).

Today’s definitions stress the link between reading - writing and everyday living: in this view, literacy is not just a catalysing agent for social participation, but reading and writing per se represent ways of participating in the world. In this respect, the functionality of reading and writing is articulated with situations that call for specific uses and, consequently, the learning processes must be subordinated to these required uses, whether they are labour - oriented, administrative, religious, political or aesthetic (among others). In other words, confronted with a vision of the written language it becomes evident that functionality varies from one situation to the next and, in fact, it is not learned outside its very own context of use (including the classroom). Any well - intentioned educational effort designed to begin by addressing the deepest felt needs of the population, and thus construct a programme which is relevant to both youths and adults, would have to place the teaching and learning of reading, writing and arithmetic, within a thematic context that is both real and urgently needed.

This is precisely the sense given to literacy nowadays; a long and continuous process which has a beginning but no end. It is clear that literacy is not limited to the dissemination and acquisition of the writing code, but, rather, it is intended to achieve a fairer distribution of education, the written language and information. Being skilled in reading and writing implies having the ability to participate in social situations where using the written language is substantially important; it means reading and writing as a method for communicating with others, for learning, for knowing and for expressing oneself. Hence, literacy and post - literacy can no longer be considered a lineal process, where the individual first learns the letters and subsequently how to use them. We know now that the written language is a set of practices referred to specific contexts which vary in form, meaning, usage and objectives, according to specific situations.

Consequently, the challenge adult education confronts today involves adopting reading and writing practices according to the communicational and social participation needs of youths and adults. Modernity codes do not refer to the letters or numbers per se but to the different uses and meanings these have in a world where information is exchanged in a blink of an eye. Where ideas speed by, and where conditions governing work, family, socioeconomic and political organisation, are in a constant state of flux.

Acknowledging the multiplicity of practices - understood as the conjugation of technologies, social knowledge, and skills, required to read and write in a specific situation - associated with the written language, is equivalent to opening the education and literacy floodgates. What we used to think of as a purely technical problem - learning which letter goes with which sound - we now recognise as a complex process which entails getting inserted and participating in the social and individual world through the written language. Human
interaction regains its place at the heart of the educational and pedagogical debate: just as one learns to speak from listening to other human beings who speak and listen to one, reading and writing is learned through the interaction with other readers and writers. This has enormous implications for the development of new programmes, particularly when EDJA depends to a large extent on voluntary workers who may themselves be - or not be - seasoned users of the written language. The training of educational agents capable of working from this perspective is a priority, as set forth in Brasilia’s document, when stating the need to “develop initial and continuous training programmes that will allow their participants to assimilate this approach to education, and empower them to launch renewed educational processes”.

Briefly: our present challenge is to propose public policies and take the required actions to facilitate a fairer distribution of the written language, education and information, while seeking to guarantee the right of youths and adults to an education through the creation of viable educational opportunities unfolding within the context of their own lives. Guaranteeing access to the written language, education and information means, first and foremost, inserting reading, writing, the search for information and its technologies, and the exchange of ideas and practices, into multiple spaces and in manifold ways. Thus, and to the extent that this knowledge is genuine, focused, and aimed at materialising the attainments set out by the youths and adults themselves, it will become truly relevant.

Reminding the states of their responsibility to act urgently and staunchly in response to current educational demands

The Hamburg Declaration offers important guidelines and suggestions on educational policy directed to youths and adults; among them, proposals to improve programme funding, management, and efficiency. The Declaration emphasises that the responsibility for educating falls not only to the governments, but also to the State, an entity that must act as leader and mediator with civil organisations, in order to find solutions to current challenges. It also underscores the priority governments should place on the elaboration of their own policy and budget planning. It is imperative that youth and adult education programmes secure operating mechanisms that grant increased autonomy to local communities in terms of decision making, budget allocation, and organisation of educational projects.

The Hamburg document states that education “is not only a right, but also a duty and a responsibility owed our fellow - man and society as a whole. Along with recognising the right to a lifelong education, conditions must be created to promote the exercise of this right. Neither the governments, nor the various organisations or institutions will be capable of single - handedly solving the problems posed by the 21st century (p. 14).

Given the need to “create the necessary conditions”, during the three scheduled working sessions, analyses and discussions focused mainly on defining the concept and status of “access”, in order to understand it as the convergence of political conditions and a political will. The following questions were raised:

How can we understand the concept of access to the written culture, education and information?

What are the material and social conditions that will guarantee its attainment?

How is the relevance of educational programmes linked to the construction of access? How is it linked to other processes as quality and equity?

Which educational and cultural policies tend to favour access to the written culture, education and information?

An important conclusion derived from the three subregional meetings, states that access is achieved through the harmonious interaction with other readers and writers, and the opportunity to share with them situations where
reading and writing occupy an important place. Inasmuch as the written language represents a poorly distributed social good, where some segments of the population have myriad resources and opportunities at their disposal while others have practically none, the interaction between literate and non-literate individuals becomes a critical element in any literacy project. Thus viewed, access has to do with the possibility of advancing significant learning, the use of the written language and its technological and cultural devices in specific situations, and reading and writing as a mechanism of active participation and recognition as a reader or writer. Having access implies acquiring new contents and information, and learning to present and display them relevantly and opportunistically.

Ensure the high quality of adult education and that it responds to the needs of the population

Many of the proposals that emerged from the Hamburg and Brasilia conferences - which were later retrieved at the subregional meetings - contain specific references which more closely address the problems associated with teaching, learning, educational content, training of educational agents and their relationship with a variety of situations, contexts, objectives, and users characteristic of adult education in the modern world. The idea is to link the population’s needs to vital concerns in the areas of health, the environment, access to information, housing and labour.

Literacy leaflets have stirred a bit of a controversy: while for some leaflets are necessary and useful and, as such, must be designed and elaborated before actually beginning the literacy activity, other suggest that these materials - if and when they are needed at all - should emerge from the educational process itself, and be the product of the experience of the very programme participants. In connection with literacy methodology and materials, it must be borne in mind that the text represents the natural habitat of words; consequently, the methodology as well as the materials must respond to a pivotal question: is the isolated word the best place through which to access the written language or do we need to create a social space for it?

Future paths and horizons: the new discourse and innovative actions

Among the interventions of participants from the various countries two types of innovations were prominent: first, in connection with public policy proposals and their goals and, second, in connection with some specific projects already submitted. Some of these are given below with specific reference to the countries. Space restrictions have limited the described contributions, to the more salient or innovative.

Three innovative projects: from the State, from civil society and from educational research

This section analyses three examples of innovative projects submitted at different times during the subregional meetings. Most participants presented programmatic proposals in terms of national policy goals and objectives, and reiterated the need to make special training available in order to systematise their programmes. The observation was made that although systematisation is considered a crucial component of most projects, the lack of time, resources and training, relegated it to a secondary level of importance. This results in a scantiness of papers dealing with innovative projects, their successes and limitations. However, in some cases, recent innovative experiences were presented, three of which are described below.

From civil society. Uruguay’s Medio Abierto (Open Medium) Literacy programme is conducted outside schools and within the community and family space. The project has been organised by the NGO “El Abrojo” located in Montevideo, and for the past five years has
targeted the Casavalle community, consisting of marginal migrant urban population, and characterised by a high rate of school failure and poorly educated parents. The NGO participants analyse this problem from a focal perspective (the recent migration to the city, unfamiliarity with the area, fear of the surroundings); and from a local perspective (the area exhibits one of the higher rates of repetition in the early school years, schools are overcrowded, and practically all of Casavalle’s teaching staff is made up of young, inexperienced teachers, not specially trained to work with populations at risk).

The project seeks to disseminate and promote literacy efforts, among two distinct lines; among children and among their adult caretakers. This second action line involves essentially the mothers who, as a rule, are women who have not had access to the written language. The objective is to bring both parties together - mothers and sons - as participants in the literacy process, thus transforming mothers into supporting elements of the children’s teaching-learning process taking place in the home, the context wherein the family normally interacts. The intervention proposal is intended to create an educational context in the home. It describes the role of educator performed by the mother, the mechanisms that are deployed when it is time to teach, and provides the tools that will empower them to teach the fundamental notions that will reinforce the development process of written language. The idea is to generate in the midst of family unit a set of everyday actions conducive to the creation of an educational environment, based on written language practices in the community, the school and the home.

From the State. The government of Bolivia comments on its publication “A Borderless Government”* (1996-1997), a recent experience involving indigenous adults who, until now, had not been the beneficiaries of specific programmes. A first phase called for the participation of community facilitators in the promotion and implementation of a Literacy course. These facilitators lived in the participating indigenous communities, were bilingual (Spanish and the local language), and had been trained through a participatory teaching methodology which makes use of the medium’s written resources. This programme was not restricted to the use of a specific leaflet or reader. Instead, each working session generated brief sentences and texts in indigenous and/or Spanish language, cued to the studied subject. The course was not restricted to a pre-established time frame, so participants kept on working until they felt ready to read and write.

From educational research. Mexico is encouraging a line of research on what adults have learned about the written language and mathematics from their daily lives, and through normal usage. These studies emphasise the condition of poverty, exclusion and oppression under which these adults live, and how it relates to the knowledge they generate. What adults know, how this knowledge is displayed and utilised, and how their practices grow and diversify, can only be understood from within the social and cultural context.

Mercedes de Agüero is conducting a study along this line of research, intended to explain how adults generate, elaborate, represent, systematise and exchange strategies designed to solve everyday mathematical problems. The study focuses on the measurements, estimates and other calculations house painters must make during their work. The data compiled by the researcher was the result of having shared many hours of close interaction with these painters during their labour activity, and the information derived from ethnographic surveys of their daily chores. Preliminary findings reveal that the problems painters must confront are solved through mathematical representations and operations supported by a solid conceptual basis, and solutions that go beyond the operational alternatives offered by formal education.

* Gobierno sin Fronteras.
Judith Kalman, a researcher at Mexico’s Advanced Research and Study Centre (Educational Research Department), is currently conducting a study on written language knowledge and practices exhibited by women with little or no formal schooling. The project centres on the written language knowledge the participating women have accrued through the years, and the various practices utilised to resolve the social demands inherent to the use of written documentation. A qualitative study carried out in two fringe communities, has identified an unexpected wealth of documents, procedures and practices associated with material written by these women. Preliminary results show that women use a variety of resources to solve written language situations, they address and become familiar with the written code in different ways, handle a large amount of documents (official, trade, electoral, collective, political, etc.), interpret written documents, and exhibit written language practices which are definitely part of being literate today (record-keeping, signing documents, using documents in defence of their rights, etc.).

Conclusion: public policies and summary of comments

A Latin America agenda of public policies and actions designed as a follow-up to CONFENTEA V, was one of the prime objectives of the working tables. The conclusions are briefly summarised below:

Because literacy represents a basic right and, as such, it is inserted in the broader field of human rights, literacy acquisition must be addressed as a specific task, as a cultural task which encompasses every aspect of social life.

Literacy should become a State policy and form part of a national development project. A major consideration is that, in order to guarantee the quality and sustainability of literacy initiatives, international co-operation, and the actions of the State and civil society, these must be narrowly articulated.

Literacy requires the political will of the various governments, the necessary funding to guarantee quality education, as well as the articulation between State and civil society. Likewise, illiteracy represents a structural, political and social phenomenon, hence, it is not exclusively educational.

Providing access to the written language is largely a state responsibility; however, access to formal education is not enough. It is also necessary to guarantee access to the harmonious interchange with written language and information technology users; likewise, encourage the use of the language in the different contexts. While it is important, the supply of educational services is not quite enough; public policies governing access to the written language will be required, so as to ensure its funding, the provision of adequate spaces, and properly trained teachers.

The training of EDJA teachers and literacy workers has become a central and urgent task, while training efforts are intended to include teachers as well as volunteers.

Public policies are needed that may free literacy from the classroom-school cycle; additionally, literacy efforts should be inserted in cultural policy programmes, production and cultural consumption opportunities should be created, and a press specially conceived for beginning readers should be developed. Each of these measures requires funding, to date an unresolved issue. Literacy, as a concept, needs to settle the contradiction between what is important and what is urgent. Shed the notion that survival comes first, and stress that the momentousness of literacy resides in the fact that it constitutes a strategy for retrieving one’s own culture and participating in it.

Literacy initiatives can be worked in as part of a different type of transversal component of adult education programmes: education and work, local development, citizenship and participation, gender and others. Likewise, literacy can be associated with health and consumer education programmes, and credit and small business promotion programmes.
The creation of action co-ordinating bodies in the area of literacy, has been proposed. These units, much like a National Council for Adult Education, would include State officials and members of civil society.

Follow-up criteria and indicators as well as strategic actions must be established with the participation and commitment of the State and civil society; in this connection, it is important that these indicators make the evaluation of agreement compliance mechanisms possible.

A caveat is in order. Literacy and the development of intelligence should not be made equivalent. The written language is but a support structure underpinning reflection and the expression of thoughts.

Lastly, literacy was a tremendously important task in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Currently, however, it is no longer considered fashionable in the region, not part of development priorities. Nonetheless, the statistics on repetition and dropout rates, the growing number of families and their increasing difficulties in terms of keeping their children in school, compel us to reconsider the importance of literacy as an educational emergency.

Within this framework, it is claimed that the time and the political opportunity have come to once again embrace the literacy mission through the elaboration of integral literacy strategies, articulated with multiple and diverse youth and adult educational projects.

**UNESCO’s education for peace award, 1999**

UNESCO’s Education for Peace Award for the year 1999 was granted to Argentina’s Plaza de Mayo Mothers’ Association. This distinction, established by UNESCO in 1980, seeks to foster outstanding pursuits aimed at mobilising and sensitising public opinion towards the construction of peace.

At the award ceremony, Koichiro Matsuura Director General of UNESCO, expressed his satisfaction at the presence of Ms. Hebe de Bonafini, Chairwoman of Argentina’s Plaza de Mayo Mothers’ Association, who was a distinguished guest of the Organisation at its Headquarters. Ms. Bonafini was awarded a bronze statuette that symbolises peace, along with a check for US$ 25 000.

The Director General recalled the history of this movement in defence of human rights and peace born in 1977 in Buenos Aires, when a group of mothers congregated at the Mayo Square (Buenos Aires) across the presidential palace, to extract from the governing military junta news about their vanished sons. Police orders to disband met with resistance, and the recalcitrant women rather than obey chose to circle the square. This march is re-enacted every Thursday, as it has been for the last twenty - two years.

The Director General characterised the association as a non-violent, ethical action movement for peace; a peace based on respect for life and fundamental rights. Hence, their demands for an autonomous justice system and a fully democratic society. “Their commitment to an education for peace, particularly among the young, grows stronger by the day. Having opened a bookstore, a literary café, and a cultural centre, the Mothers decided to expand their scope of action. They recently founded the Popular University, driven by a desire to teach about the value of life, words, principles and ethics, and provide men and women the intellectual, political, and ethical means with which to construct a more equitable, solidaristic, and self-sufficient society. Through their courage and perseverance these women are advancing the cause of justice and peace in an exemplary fashion. I salute them with profound respect and appreciation.”
LANGUAGE, POWER AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Juan Casassus*

The present article explores educational quality perceived as a socially constructed process. Social construction, as used herein, alludes both to the process and to the substance of the concept. In terms of the process, the leitmotiv is power and change. In terms of its substance, quality is examined from two different perspectives. First, the concept of quality of education is analysed from the perspective of its construction in everyday language. A second view, addresses its scientific formulation.

A brief social history of quality in education

In the formulation of educational policy of a great number of countries, located both in the North and South, the objective of educational quality has become a strategic concept around which the rest of the educational policies have been structured. While this remarkable convergence could be attributed to the globalisation of our world, it is perhaps even more remarkably, the core of this planet wide set of educational policies, niches a socially ambiguous concept. These two aspects, the political - technical convergence of educational quality and the significance of the ambiguity of the concept, are examined below.

What is the origin of the political - technical convergence evoked by the educational quality issue?

The following is a brief narrative about with power in the realm of education, and the ways thinking and acting have changed in recent years. The quality of education became a moot point for the first time in the United States, in the wake of the 1983 report drafted by President Reagan’s National Commission for Educational Excellence, “A Nation at Risk”. The report stated in no uncertain terms, that the state of the country’s education had effectively jeopardised both the competitiveness and integration of American society and that, as a result, there was an urgent need to adopt measures to revert this situation.

A year later, the American authorities –in collaboration with the OECD– sponsored an international meeting of Ministers of Education for the purpose of establishing the high priority the OECD countries should henceforth assign to the quality of basic education. This decision, in turn, triggered a number of international conferences intended to link quality with various other education components such as the curriculum (1985), school management (1986), the teaching profession (1986), and evaluation and supervision (1986), all of which are subsumed in the international report “Schools and the Quality of Teaching” (1990) and in the Ministerial Debate on Quality of Education and Formation for All (1992).

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While this issue had been part of the Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean since 1979, not until the late 80s, was the debate to receive top billing in the agenda of the Conference of Ministers of Education (1989 and 1991), and in UNESCO/ ECLAC publication “Education and knowledge: basic pillars of changing production patterns with social equity” (1992).

During these national and international debates, a consensus of opinion gradually took shape in support of the notion that education represents the most suitable public instrument to solve society’s crucial survival and development problems, such as economic growth and social integration. While the former is inspired in the human capital theory (in its different interpretations), the latter holds that integration is generated through the school system via equity mechanisms and the socialisation of common values and cultural codes.

This newfangled “common sense” applicable to education and development was stated as follows: “the better the education, the better the capacity to resolve the challenges posed by economic growth and social integration”. This socially correct statement, however, is soon found to be operationally wanting, since it does neither provide a mechanism to define the level of education being delivered, the quality, if you will, nor the “appropriate instruments that will allow the determination of such a level”.

Scrubbing the quality of education in this manner was, in the minds of educators, a foreign almost anachronistic undertaking. With the notable exception of Binet’s developmental work on standardised I.Q. tests for students in early 1900 France, and the Stanford-Binet test contributed by his North American followers, there were no instruments capable of determining whether a certain type of education was fair, poor, better or worse than another. The lack of methodologies had to do, among other things, with the fact that education had traditionally valued and because every activity undertaken per se becomes invisible and self-justifying, there was a need to make it visible.

**Why measure quality of education?**

In order to demonstrate the merits of “a better education”, there was the need to have content up such a concept one that would make it visible and, thus, measurable.

By the mid 80s, the prevailing thought was that an individual was better educated than another when he/she had completed more years of schooling. By the same token, a country was said to provide better education when its enrolment, retention and passing rates were higher than those exhibited by a neighbouring country.

Ultimately, quality was given a quantitative dimension, making it tantamount to more years of schooling, prolonged permanence and/or higher number of graduates.

This quantitative view proved inadequate when - at different points in time - the various countries found themselves in a position to offer every one of their school-aged children a place in their educational systems. The rules of the game had suddenly changed for, if in order to rank “quality” one had to resort to the difference in years of schooling, what would happen when everybody acquired the same education and the year differential vanished? If every country attained a similar level of instruction, discriminating among them became impossible, as was attempting to explain - in terms of human capital - the residual element that would account for the differences in competitiveness observed in the various countries. As soon as the world’s countries attained similar levels of schooling, comparing “quality” in quantitative terms no longer made sense.

Consequently, when the massive-scale proportions of education became evident, expansion relinquished its place as the main objective of educational policy, and inquiry turned inwardly to explore the workings of the sys-
tem itself. This was a conceptually significant turn of events, for reflection on the system now shifted from expansion (the answer to demography and democratisation) to its internal operation. As a result, the search for quality took on a qualitative approach.

Hence, the renewed interest in measuring methods. Naturally, the first step that would permit “seeing” education - reifying it from a qualitative standpoint - involved resorting to quality measuring instruments.

A first stage dealt with the elaboration of hypotheses governing the “material” factors that determine achievement. Teacher/student ratios, the number of books in the students’ homes or schools, the amount of lighting used in the classrooms or the number of students accommodated in each, comprised some of the early hard facts. Later on, preoccupation shifted to “immaterial” factors such as the expectations and interactions that normally take place inside the student’s home or school. Finally, however, inquiry settled on its current focus: monitoring and measuring academic achievement.

As a result of this search, and in keeping with the modified policy design, various systems devised to measure variables through which the quality of education could be assessed, were put into place before and during the 90s in North, Central and South America, Europe and in some Asian and South African countries. Additionally, during the 90s several international studies were developed such as IAEP’s (1988 and 1991) International Assessment of Educational Progress, IEA’s (1991) Study on Reading Literacy, IEA’s (1994-1995) Third International Study in Mathematics and Science, TIMSS, OECD’s First International Adult Literacy Study - IALS, UNESCO (1996) SAQMEC and Monitoring Educational Progress (1995 -1997), and UNESCO’s Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Educational Quality (1997), First International Comparative Study on Language and Mathematics.

**Is quality an ambiguous and tautological concept?**

Measuring is an essentially straightforward process: it usually involves elaborating tests that measure expected achievements, which are then administered to the students. Within this context, “quality” takes on a precise operational meaning: quality is a percentage of the educational objectives achieved. Here, the objective itself is not questioned. It is assumed that the objective to be measured and what the student should learn, are one and the same.

However, when talking about quality of education in plain, layman, terms, what comes to mind is not the percentage of educational objectives achieved, but an altogether different concern: the educational objectives themselves. Thus, in everyday language, the term quality has more to do with whether what is learned at school is - or is not - instruction of a sound quality, or whether it meets - or does not - personal and social needs.

When the term “educational quality” is used, the difficulty confronted is that what is being alluded to is not specified. In fact, in everyday conversation it is assumed that the individual does know what educational quality is (a true statement, as we shall see). Thus, when the idea is to recognise quality in education the type of reasoning usually encountered goes something like this: “there is quality in education when one recognises that there is quality in education; and one recognises that there is quality in education when there is quality learning”. This constitutes tautological thinking, and is commonly described as the kind of circular reasoning that leads nowhere which, in this case, also happens to revolve around a central concept of ambiguous nature.

The ambiguity issue may be easily solved by making the quality concept operational, and thus reducing it to a precise definition. This would put an end to both its ambiguous and tautological natures. This is certainly plausible. In fact, it was mentioned earlier as part of the technical view. This observation is not trivial,
for it has launched action initiatives and, specifically, it has contributed to the development of important institutions such as the national assessment systems.

But, is this the most convenient way of solving the problem?

If, indeed, educational quality has become one of the pillars of educational policy, this has little to do with its technical preciseness; but, rather it is linked to the ambiguous nature of the concept. Moreover, it could be said that the thrust behind the concept of quality lies exactly in its ambiguity.

This is so for a number of reasons.

One such reason, stems from the fact that both “education” and “quality” are objects inherent to a particular culture. As a result, a universally accepted definition of quality is not currently available. Edwards (1991), suggests viewing the problem from a theoretical perspective, where the meaning of quality would have to be built and elucidated in each individual case.

A second reason, linked to the emblematic power of the particular cultural object involved, has to do with the fact that in modern historical times quality appears to be associated - in every walk of life - with the underlying philosophy of modernity. Thus, the modernity discourse is rife with concepts such as “progress” and “development”, used practically as synonymous with quality of products, quality of life, and quality of education. The notion of quality used in this context evokes, on the one hand, the utilitarian and pragmatic components of modern rationality, but, on the other, it also alludes to an unspecified “additional something”, which is what qualifies quality.

Within this context, the constant strain between the elements of ambiguity and certainty that characterise the concept of quality, is made fairly evident. User expectations are precisely broad, blurred, complex and ambiguous, and are constantly alluding to “an additional something”. However, it is made operational by an analytical simplification process which is determined largely by how easy or facile it is to measure these expectations, as illustrated by the tendency to circumscribe quality measurements to the areas of Language and Mathematics.

Consequently, educational quality is often visualised as one of those typically significant, mobilising concepts, loaded with emotional strength and brimming with value, so extensively resorted to in our society. Its richness and power reside precisely in its ambiguity, for - like any other culturally constructed object - they reflect that “additional something” that must go into the social construction. This, can either be done through regular or specialised language.

The social construction of quality

Observing the social construction of quality in regular language implies analysing how this process comes about. First, educational quality is socially built through our thoughts which, in turn, find expression in linguistic events.

From the standpoint of practice, educational quality represents passing judgement on the outcome, or on some aspect of the educational process. This judgement has six major characteristics:

- it is a judgement made by an individual;
- it is bounded by criteria and standards;
- it is socially constructed
- it has a historical meaning;
- it has a multiple nature; and
- as part of the public domain, “quality” is intrinsically linked to the equity issue.

These characteristics will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections. For now, suffice it to say that in order to make a judgement, it must be preceded by a question about quality.

The question about quality

The fact that governments and individuals are concerned with the quality of education represents, in itself, an important, interesting and novel event. This being the case, it may be advantageous to elaborate further on the fact
that it is indeed a concept whose content is socially constructed.

How does this happen? When constructing the “quality of education” concept, the first thing to realise is that we are not in the presence of a directly apprehensible object. It is not an entity in itself, nor does it emerge autonomously. Its appearance is predicated on someone asking a question about the quality of education, which is loaded with implicit content. Thus, analysing the question that addresses the quality issue, may prove revealing.

One way of approaching this analysis is thinking of the question and the answer as separate components. Two alternatives are feasible. First, placing the answer before the question. Thus, even before raising the question, the expected quality would be there, just waiting to be discovered. A second option would imply placing the question before the answer, in which case we would have a question without an answer.

However, practice observation reveals that the answer is not independent of the question. While initially it would appear that the question precedes quality, in actual practice the question shapes the answer or, differently put, the question is responsible for shaping the resulting quality. In this context, one could say that the “quality of education” emerges because somebody asks the question. By contrast, had nobody been asked himself about the quality of education, nobody would have raised the issue and it would have remained invisible.

Further practice observation yields another bit of information: behind the question itself there is an individual who is doing the asking. Therefore, identifying such an individual is not a trivial matter, nor is examining the particular relationship between the ability to ask and the capability to come up with an answer. Not that every question will elicit an answer or, for that matter, that this capacity is contingent on the individual asking it. If the person raising the question lacks authority, the question stirs no action, a reply is not generated and the problem remains concealed in darkness.

This would imply that the quality issue surfaces as a public concern only when it is formulated by a rather renowned public figure. Nevertheless, this personage does not have to necessarily be part of the public apparatus, as he may very well belong to an organised segment of civil society, say a syndicated teacher group, a business representative or a parent-teacher association.

Thus, as previously mentioned, in order to stir concern about the quality of education, the person asking the question must be someone in authority. In the brief historical account presented in the opening sections, the person who in the early 80s raised the question about the quality of education in the United States, was the country’s President, an emblematic figure of power.

However, while it is easy to understand how a power-wielding individual can draw out a response by merely asking a question, it would be foolhardy to think that a movement of global scope could be launched by a single person. For a question to lead to real actions and have the desired social impact, its content must be meaningful to other social actors; consequently, beyond the constructive ability of one actor, the implicit existence of a collective construction of social reality, must be assumed. This, independent of the vehicle of expression, whether public actors, be they politicians - to wit, the meeting of Ministers of Education - or other social actors, who are the ones interacting in social consensus’s.

The answer to the question about quality

When the - authorised - question is made “what is the quality of education in …?” the answer is either a well-grounded or an ungrounded judgement. A verdict that may - or may not - be substantiated by evidence. Until recently, most of the opinions so freely were ungrounded. In fact, in practically every country, people tend to express unsubstantiated and, for the most part, negative views in connection with the quality of education.
The advent of measuring systems has changed all of this, for now answers take the guise of numbers which have been traditionally considered solid fundaments of judgement. These figures are the result of testing, and are usually expressed as “47% in mathematics”, for example. However, although the reaction a number evokes also calls for a judgement, the number does not represent a judgement in itself. It does, nonetheless, lose some of its neutrality if its labelled “poor” or “good”. Achieving 47% of an academic objective, may be socially perceived as positive or negative. For example, such an asseveration could take the following form “… given the conditions governing the pedagogical process, 47% is a positive … or a negative … result”. Be that as it may, the mass media will generally favour the expression … “negative”.

So the question lingers: “How can an individual answer appropriately if the meaning of the words “quality of education” and its qualitative and/or quantitative indicators are unclear? As long as there is no clarity with respect to common criteria, the question about quality will remain ambiguous; and, hence, so will the answers. In contrast, as soon as shared or broad-based criteria are established, the question - and the answer - will be clarified.

However, a clearly stated question is just one aspect to consider. In order to elicit a response, the question must not only be clear, but, it must also make sense to those who are responsible for answering it. That is, the question must constitute a motive and a focus of attention to those called upon to contribute to its formulation. For instance, to an educator the ratio 1 teacher to 25 students - a traditional “material” quality indicator - may translate into more discipline in the classroom although, in itself, it has little to do with the quality aspect (a view recently corroborated by international research conducted by IEA and UNESCO1).

For a teacher, educational quality is not linked to indicators; rather, an educator’s opinion is more likely to be linked to those criteria forged by the formative perspective, one of the cornerstones of the teaching profession.

**Six characteristics of the judgement on quality**

If judgement is the instrument chosen to uncover the quality of education, it is important to understand the main characteristics of a judgement and its formulation. Six characteristics of quality judgements were mentioned earlier. These are the following:

*Quality judgements are always made by an individual*

All those who have attended schools are in a good position to judge the quality of the education received. However, different individuals may have different opinions with respect to the “same” education.

If someone asks a group of graduate students about the quality of education imparted by their same school, different opinions are likely to be heard: “my school was fine. I was taught mathematics there, and I was able to go on to study accounting”; someone else might say “my school was fine. It gave me the values I needed to cope with life”; a third person may observe “my school was no good at all, because they never taught me foreign languages”. Who is right? What rating does this school deserve, quality-wise? It is impossible to say: the opinions expressed are different, even oppositional.

Since the answer to the question “how good is the quality of education in …?” can only be given by the individual who makes a judgement, determining who the individual is, is highly important. Different answers are not just a reflection of individual differences, but are also indicative of entirely different interests and points of view. Judgements made by a school principal (the individual who observes

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1 See IEA’s TIMSS (1996) and Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Educational Quality’s First International Comparative Study of Language and Mathematics, UNESCO, OREALC (1999).
it from within, from where the process is unfolding), is different from a parent (the individual who represents an external beneficiary), which is different a journalist (an individual who leans towards external communication), or still from a State official (an individual who is responsible for controlling from within the system, but is an outsider to the school).

This being the case, it is essential to distinguish between two situations: one involves the identification and valuation of the individual called upon to make the quality judgement, that is, the person who is to determine the presence or absence of quality. The other - when there is more than one individual involved - requires determining who is right or, alternatively, deciding which is the strongest opinion. Whoever is in a position to settle this issue, will resort to a criterion to back his decision. In most cases, the criterion used will be political.

In order to make a valid judgement of the educational quality of the aforementioned school - or that of any other school for that matter -, two elements must be taken into consideration: first, the judgement must be well-grounded and, second, it must be made by an individual invested with some authority.

On the other hand, to say that the individual must make an well founded judgement means that the validity of the judgement is being enhanced through this mechanism. This is important, since it is precisely the validity of a judgement what leads to the concretion of actions.

What judgements are made on genuine grounds? or how are these judgements founded? Echeverría (1994) distinguishes five elements in the grounding of judgements:

- they are made “to accomplish something or driven by something”. Judgements are formulations whose purpose is to beget actions. For example: the judgement of a parent could be: “this school is no good, therefore I am removing my little girl”;
- they can be matched against the community’s expectations. Educational quality would be influenced by the extent to which what happens in a particular school corresponds to what the actors (individually or collectively) have determined should happen. For example: “schools should provide shelter to children and teach them how to read and write”;
- they are specific, that is, they are not based on generalities. For example: claiming that “in this school children talk too much; therefore, it must be a bad school” constitutes a sweeping generalisation, since - except where “conversation” has been established as the only criterion - there are other specific elements that make up the quality dimension;
- they must make room for positive statements germane to what is being judged. For example: “that is a good school, since it has a 90% passing rate in spite that there are no automatic promotion mechanisms in effect.”; and,
- there must be soon for a contrary statement: “this is a bad school, since it has a 50% passing rate”, which may be true of a particular year due to special events such as a flood that made it impossible to finish the school year. Were it not for the flooding incident, the situation would not have been expected to deviate from the 10% repetition rate averaged in the last 5 years. In this case, the original judgement is poorly grounded.

On occasions, however, the fact that a judgement is well founded constitutes no guarantee that it will be granted validity or that it will trigger any action. For, its recognition is also associated with the position of authority held by the person making the judgement. In contrast to other endeavours, such as the role played by judges in the legal realm, or referees in the world of sports, in the field of education there are no positions that confer sufficient authority to - by virtue of one’s office - make valid judgements in this matter. Livingstone and Zeiky (1982), observe that in order for judgements to be recognised as valid, the judges involved must meet, as a minimum, the following requirements:
– they must be qualified through knowledge, experience or position, to make judgements in their fields of expertise;
– that the judgements put forward make sense to the persons formulating them, and
– that the judge takes into account the scope and objectives of the judgement, keeping in mind that these do vary.

A judgement on quality on contingent on criteria and standards

When quality is being judged, the judgement is always based on a specific criterion. A criterion serves to define the action domain of a particular judgement. For example, one criterion may say reference to the labour domain, another to the cognitive domain, and a third one to the value domain. In order to make a judgement, however, delimiting its domain is not enough, for a standard is also required.

Standards operate like levels, they are references or conditions of satisfaction established by the users which serve as references in making the judgements. There are a number of ways to establish standards according to their intended use and origin. They may be used to define a level of performance that will be attained by only a few (standards of excellence), or by all (basic standards). They may be based on the state of the art of the disciplines or on the official curriculum; they may be based on empirical distributions (criterion - referenced) or ideal outcomes (norm - referenced).

These distinctions harbour others, such as their relative or absolute; maximum or minimum; and general or specific conditions.

Relative standards are contingent on the comparative analysis of results. “School X’s grades place it among the upper 20%”; compared to the 79% of the rest of the participating schools, its quality can be considered good.

Absolute standards are totally independent of comparisons. Thus, for example, the quality standard of excellence can be set at 90% (out of a possible 100%), and the basic standard at 60%.

Combining these two distinctions may yield situations where a school might be at 80% on the relative standard, but have attained an absolute score of only 50 %. Rated by relative standards, it would be a good school, although by absolute standards this would not be the case.

Standards can also be general and coincide with educational goals, or specific and coincide with curricular objectives. General standards may state, for example, that “education is supposed to produce modern citizens”, “well - meaning individuals, fulfilled, and endowed with an integrated personality”, “competent and competitive individuals”. This is the level of generality that seems to prevail in the social discourse, being at the same time, the hardest to measure.

The determination of standards is also dependent on judgements, and not unlike them, this determination is contingent on the individual formulating it. In this respect - and not unlike what happens when the question about quality is asked - once formulated, and in order to become valid, that is accepted by users as references to make judgements on educational matters, they must be perceived as originating from an authorised source. Only within this context will its application gain validity and, consequently, usefulness.

This represents an important condition. Because, in the final analysis, the entity responsible for validating the standard, is the social group. If, in any given country, the standards - irrespective of how well - formulated these may be - are not perceived as valid by the users, they will never become an acceptable reference. Furthermore, even if it has satisfied every technical specification, a standard will not be valid, unless explicitly accepted. Otherwise it will remain an invalidated standard and, as such, useless. In this respect, a standard will

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2 For a more detailed discussion see Resnick’s National Standards in Education, or Casassus’ Estándares en Educación: Conceptos Fundamentales.
depend not only on the individual formulating it but, also, on the user who is the validating agent, and who endows it with the thrust it needs to function as a reference.

It should be noted that the debate on standards is a recent occurrence, and that at present there is no consensus of opinion relative to what are the distinctive characteristics of educational standards. In actual practice, various interpretations of what people say when making reference to them seem to co-exist, giving rise to manifold views on what national, regional and international standards should be like.

The social group - architects of quality judgement

Parent surveys conducted in Argentina, Chile or Venezuela on the quality of education imparted to their children, have yielded similar responses. The lower the socioeconomic stratum surveyed, the more favourable the opinion recorded. This situation is reversed as the socioeconomic ladder is ascended.

In order to settle this disparity, an analysis of the context-related elements that have a bearing on these judgements is called for. However, an education rated “not as good or poor” is judged to be “good” by the most immediate group of users. Conversely, an education rated “good” from the standpoints of location, infrastructure, salaries or materials, tends to be regarded as “poor” by the parents of a privileged group. One conclusion is possible, however; quality education judgements are in fact socially constructed, and have a tendency to vary according to the culture and social strata.

Quality, a historical concept

“Present day education is not as good as it used to be”, is an often heard complaint. But, in making reference to past criteria one is alluding to a certain type of education and to the fruits it yielded in a different historical period.

For example, in connection with the labour world, to claim that yesterday’s education was better, is tantamount to asserting that those who had acquired it were able to access specific posts and social positions. And, since “yesterday” the educational supply was predominantly elitist and limited, the elites were the only beneficiaries.

Conversely, the claim that today’s education is not as good, means passing judgement on the basis of past criteria and standards, overlooking the goals materialised by education - democratisation and universalisation. Consequently, it represents - in the best of cases - a poorly-grounded judgement. Nowadays, a greater educational supply and a more educated population are raising the educational requirements to access the very same posts of yesteryear. Therefore, when a person states that “today’s quality of education is not what it was” what that person is saying is that an individual with a level of education equivalent to that of the past, will find it harder today to access a “similar” level of employment. In effect, there is a relative depreciation of the diploma-credential used as reference and, consequently, a bettered diploma-credential is currently needed.

Judgements are made with reference to a standard. However, standards have a temporary, historical referent. The historical aspect of quality means, on the one hand, that it is not an abstract, timeless entity and, on the other, that while it may make perfect sense under given circumstances, it may not make any sense at all under a different set of circumstances. Because criteria and standards vary according to the circumstances, to the extent that quality is dependent on them, it may be claimed that quality is not an absolute concept but a relative and dynamic one.

Multiple qualities, multiple points of view

Assuming it would be fair to conclude that quality is not an absolute concept, a valid question would challenge the convenience of imposing a single criterion for quality, instead of
conceiving it as a flexible, relative and dynamic notion, fully adaptable to the users’ needs.

If the latter view is adopted, it may be argued that quality is multidimensional and that multiple qualities exist. There are qualities for every person and every group. Each person has his/her very own concept of quality for, the individual’s criteria, needs, history and perspectives, are all different.

Moreover, a person does not have to deal with different people in order to observe the great diversity of quality judgements. Each individual has a different conception of quality based on the selected realm and the purpose of the judgement in that particular realm.

Some parents may believe that a discipline-oriented school would be better for their older children, but they may also consider that such stern discipline could be negative for a younger sibling.

Additionally, while that particular school may meet the needs of the older student in terms of disciplinary aspects, it could be poorly rated in others such as, for instance, if the youth is interested in computer science and the school does not have PCs available for student use.

**Quality and equity**

Educational quality is also linked to equity. Every person has a right to a quality education. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the distinction between quality of education and equality of opportunity is, actually, difficult to make (OECD, 1991).

Viewed from this perspective, quality is also associated with numbers. Quality should not be connected to tutorial schemes or to the 1 to 1 relationship between a teacher and a student. “Quality” today implies assuming the massive-scale education has attained: in this sense, it is associated with a large number of students.

While quality must be understood as linked to equity, the latter may be thought of as detached from quality. International studies reveal that some countries exhibit low academic achievements (low quality) and a small performance differential between schools (high equity). On the opposite end, there are those countries which show a small performance differential between schools (high equity indicators) as well as high academic achievements (high quality indicators). This is the precisely the stuff a policy objective should be made of.

Universalised education poses diametrically different pedagogically problems. One of them is the quest for quality for all students. Public concern assumes the quality of education issue and turns it into an object of public policy. Moreover, it attempts to deliver equitably distributed educational quality. Because schools tend to make a difference in the life of a child: a good school constitutes an advantage; a deficient school becomes a drawback.

The question “quality for whom?” has its answer: “for everybody”. However, the opportunity to access this quality of education is not the same for everybody. There is a differential access to the quality purveyed by the system; thus, some attend first-tier schools while others have to content themselves with mediocre institutions. This is particularly grave considering that the sectors that do access these schools are typically the underprivileged groups. This state of affairs sets the stage for a “double jeopardy” situation (Willms, 1992).

In a different sense, the ways this quality of education is accessed are not necessarily the same for everyone. Quality for all, within a context of diversity, is like accessing a quality that has been defined for all, but has also been adapted to the individual or collective player that demands it. In a context of diversity, the quality demanded by, say, groups concerned with gender issues implies including gender-related conflicts; or in the case of religious groups, religion must be a major consideration; finally, the gifted, will require a curriculum that encourages their full development.

**How to think about quality in education?**

So far, discussion has centred around the emerging concern with educational quality and how it came about, both from the perspectives
of its recent history and everyday language. The latter perspective places particular emphasis on the judgements made by the users, the galvanising agents of the educational demand. Focus will now turn to the elements of the educational supply and, in particular, its links to existing policy, that is, the elements that are amenable to modification through decision-making by educators. Which domains are susceptible to modification?

The answer to this crucial question demands resorting to analytical subtleties that facilitate addressing the quality construction issue from the perspective of specialised language. Five distinctions associated with educational quality as it relates to its object, have been proposed; its unit of analysis; its indicators; its measurement; its components and, lastly, its dimensions.

What is the object of quality?

Pragmatically, the quality concept does not exist independently from the object of which it is an attribute. This makes it necessary to specify the object to which the quality criterion has been assigned. This being the case, it would be accurate to refer to the quality of education as the quality of every object it encompasses.

In the field of education, however, defining the “object” of the study to which a quality judgement has been assigned is not always easy to do, since we are likely to run across both material and immaterial “objects”.

Some illustrations of the former are: educational buildings and facilities, textbooks, teachers, students, and the statistical interactions generated between them. However, in order to speak factually about the quality of something, certain criteria and standards must be specified.

The quality of educational facilities can be easily appraised since there are regulations governing spaces, cost and construction features. In this connection, and despite the existence of international norms, we are still unable to talk in terms of absolute regulations since they must be adapted to national and even cultural circumstances. A case in point, the regulation that establishes minimum space requirements for primary school classrooms in eight European countries which share similar economic conditions, varies markedly between 2.2 to 7.2 m² per student.

But even in such a highly specific area such as this one (even in the presence of space, cost and construction form) an adequate judgement of whether or not the architectonic design is a good conducive to collective learning, is pending.

The quality of books is harder to determine than the quality of buildings; or, to put it differently, the standards/norms for books versus the standards/norms for buildings. While books do have some norms governing language, illustrations, colours, type and size of lettering according to age, there are still extensive grey areas where criteria are not shared; for example, the type of information contained in books and its relevance to the student.

Judging the quality of teachers and students is even harder, since norms are much more ambiguous in this particular area. As regards teachers, education system management efforts have only recently established performance criteria for teacher evaluation. Until such time that these aspects are institutionalised and socialised from the standpoint of society as a whole, the issues that becloud recognition of the prestige and financial standing owed teachers, are not likely to be dispelled.

Nonetheless, somehow teachers appear to have concocted a common opinion when it comes to rating the quality of their charges and peers. Every year, on the first day of school one can hear teachers commenting “this year I have got a good class” or perhaps “this year I have got a terrible class”. This judgement, has proven one of the most reliable predictors of student achievement, despite being founded on fairly shaky assumptions, both in the case of students and teachers. Therefore, while identifying the material object to which a given qual-
ity has been assigned entails no great difficulty, its characterisation can occasionally be tremendously complex and its outcome not always shared.

On the other hand, immaterial objects are receiving growing recognition. To the extent that the material dimensions are gradually systematised, these are being increasingly perceived as the necessary - but not sufficient - conditions that will make the difference - quality enhancement. This is why modern researchers tend to focus on interactions involving such immaterial objects as the system and its operation, management and organisational climate, relationship systems, learning opportunities, programme structure and organisation, and the expectations and the very concept of education, the elements most likely to make a positive contribution to an improved quality.

The unit of analysis: quality of the educational system? and/or quality of the school?

When studying quality, it is important to make the following distinction: what are we using as the unit of analysis? The entire education system, the school, the classroom or the student?

This is important for the following reasons. First, the macro vision (the national system, international studies) and the micro vision (local facilities, the school, the classroom, the students) are the two major axes along which quality concerns unfold. Complex interrelations between society and the individual are at play here: either the view that advances full social development or the view that promotes personal development.

Second, the unit of analysis is important, since any decision to improve educational quality would have to start by enhancing quality at that level. The reason this can be done is that every unit of analysis has its own concepts, indicators, points of observation, in short, its own action strategies. For, the action strategies implemented at one level are not necessarily consistent with those desirable at a different level as, for instance, it is usually the case with the centralisation and decentralisation processes undergone by the education system. However, the analyses conducted at the various levels of aggregation are not independent from one another, a fact that argues strongly for adopting schemes involving multiple levels (Sammons, Thomas, and Mortimer, 1998).

The indicators

The renewed interest shown both by parents and the Sates before the advent of the communication and information society, is contributing to rekindle preoccupation with the performance exhibited by the education system. How to approach this issue? This can be done through indicators or indicator systems.

In simple terms, indicators represent types of information or sets of measurements which characterise and provide information on the state of an education system. However, they do go beyond characterising. Several authors, Sheldon and Park (1975), Ruby (1989), Darling - Hammond (1991) and Nuttall (1991), observe that indicators, given their capacity to identify that which calls for further action or analysis, facilitate a clearer formulation of problems, and the design of new action lines, while also raising new questions.

The performance of the education system has traditionally been gauged with reference to its efficiency, that is, the pace at which students progress from one grade to the next. For example, after six years of schooling, a student should have completed six grades. If that is the case, the system is considered very efficient. The efficiency of the systems - or more precisely, monitoring their inefficiency (repetition) - leads to accelerating the passage between grades through the adoption of various automatic promotion mechanisms.

In the absence of other indicators, the efficiency of the system is still considered a good quality index. However, this particular index tells us nothing about what and how much students actually learn.
Increased enrolments and expanded coverage are no longer valid parameters of a good quality education system. In a perspective focused on quality, the student’s point of entry into the system will determine when concern with performance considerations should begin, rather than at what point is performance achieved. For this reason, introducing effective learning measurements as performance indicators represents a major breakthrough. In fact, this has contributed importantly to the development of national measurement systems which are, in turn, supported by other indicators; namely, tests.

Any response to the performance issue, requires reflecting upon the objectives of the system. In a subsequent step, indicators should be developed in order to verify how the systems behaves in relation to these objectives.

From the perspective of the State, creator of the education system and its main lender, performance translates into the formation of an educated citizenry. Wise and Darling-Hammond (1984), observe that this attempt implies the implementation of objectives in three different planes: socialising the new generations under a common culture (introducing them to the community codes and meeting common social needs); socialising them in terms of ethical values and preparing them to become active citizens (in order to meet political needs); and lastly, making them ready for an economically productive life (in order to meet economic needs).

Thus, the creation of systems that evaluate school performance from the perspective of the State, may be reasonably expected.

However, if the unit of observation is changed to schools- and, hence, the level at which the analysis is conducted - and then the question of school performance is raised, it will become clear that the objectives pursued by schools are, in fact, different. Some of the most often encountered involve concerns about the child’s emotional, cognitive, and psychological development. Each level has its own areas of interest and, consequently, performance evaluation efforts require the use of indicators for that particular level. Because the State has established the right to an education as well as its compulsoriness, it has tended to adopt indicators that relate to its social, political and economic objectives. Performance indicators in the areas of Language, Mathematics, and Civics, are favoured over information that accounts for individual skills such as love of learning, self-esteem, creative abilities and aesthetic appreciation.

Here again, we encounter dilemmas of a political nature, since specialists are yet to agree on a universal frame of reference based on which indicators could be inferred. Despite the importance an indicator system may have on the performance of a system in relation to its permanent objectives, acknowledging the importance of the links bonding indicators to educational policies, remains a strong undercurrent.

In this regard, Nuttall (1991) in an extensive review of the literature, suggests considering the following principles prior to elaborating a system of indicators:

– consider the policy objectives (evaluation and follow-up of reform initiatives, programmes or specific goals);
– develop indicators that facilitate policy decision-making (that provide timely and global information and are not too numerous);
– work with justifiable indicators (that is, that are supported by research findings, and with variables than may be changed as dictated by the outcome of the action);
– define technically-sound indicators (valid and reliable), and
– design an indicator system with a low cost of implementation.

These principles are applicable at any level of the system: across the board, at the local or at the school levels. Its application may hinge importantly on materialising a dialogue between political needs and their technical feasibility. This way, actions will not be founded on rhetoric but on the analysis of needs and their feasibility.
What to measure?

Should cognitive achievements be measured? Or, should measurements include other transversal dimensions in the affective, aesthetic, ethical and social domains? Debate in this area is not locked between mutually exclusive positions, but has rather become a question of emphasis. While the cognitive domain has been attributed various degrees of importance in the conceptualisation of quality, everybody acknowledges that each of the remaining domains represents essential components of society’s expectations as they relate to education.

Hence, it is not a matter of acknowledging - or negating - the various dimensions of education. Rather, it is a question of determining which domain is more amenable to measuring. The problem lies in the fact that there are no available instruments which are unequivocal in terms of what is being measured, and economic enough for large-scale application. These restrictions concentrate - by default - the attention of specialists and measuring systems on the elaboration of instruments designed to measure cognitive achievements. Be that as it may, focusing on cognitive results unleashes a tremendous energy that can be funneled into educational reforms. The presence of visible results makes possible the systematisation and accumulation of scientific knowledge, and opens a window of opportunity to raise investments in the sector and justify further spending.

Concern with measuring cognitive results, is but a first step. An important step, to be sure, since it examines data and performances, but hardly sufficient. There is nothing wrong with figures, but if they do not beget actions, they become barren. Nevertheless, they must be studied in order to serve as guides in the elaboration of actions intended to enhance the system’s performance.

In this first stage, the curriculum is examined under the limelight. The identification of students’ weaknesses in specific disciplines, prompts the elaboration of assistance mecha-
articulation in the school calendar, the pace of the programme, the use of spaces and resources, and the other variables that enter into the quality-building process.

The quality of results deals with what and how much have the students learned, that is, what percentage of the achievement has been attained. In general, quality measurement activities concern themselves with this type of quality. The quality of the educational programme design is not addressed here.

The academic achievement levels recorded at the beginning of the measuring activities stirred some alarm, however, these appear to have gradually blended into society’s daily perception of the system. Attention has thus been directed at other areas. As in the past, one of these areas includes the curricular aspects; the quality of design of what is expected to happen. Conversely, little attention has been paid to the quality of processes. Only an adequate definition, articulation, and management of these processes, can guarantee that quality will yield positive results (UNESCO, 1994). The message conveyed by Deming, Drucker, Juran, Crosby or Senge is that the design of results does not, per se, generate quality. Results show the level of quality achieved, they register a past event. However, if the event is not auspicious the process can not be reversed.

On the other hand, inputs are important. Adequate inputs contribute to high quality results, while inadequate ones tend to hinder them. However, in themselves, inputs do not generate quality.

A system produces quality through its input - transforming processes. Every event in the field of education constitutes a process. A well-designed, enlightened process, with built-in quality controls, is bound to yield high quality results.

These components can be - and, in fact, have been - considered separately. However, if during the planning of school strategies they are taken collectively, they become a continuous quality improvement cycle.

**Quality dimensions**

Again, discussing this issue from the level of the system as a whole or from the school level, is an open option. In Latin America, for example, Schiefelbein (1990) when considering a set of quality dimensions at the international level, adopted a macro perspective. Others, V. Arancibia (1992), G. Frigerio, M. Poggi and G. Tiramonti (1992), and V. Espínola (1994), opted for the school level.

If one chooses to focus on the school, it is possible to identify a large number of dimensions where quality measurements are possible. Moreover, the number of potential indicators can be fairly extensive. (Coopers and Lybrand (1988) have proposed 50, but the list provided by CIPFA greatly exceeds this figure).

Those concerned with the quality dimension strive to reduce and integrate the various dimensions. To accomplish this task, six strategic areas or dimensions have been selected, where observation, differentiation, the search for information, the location of indicators, the formulation of judgements and the development of quality improvement actions, can be done fairly easily. Some of them apply to processes, others to results.

The first dimension consists of the school’s or the system’s goals and objectives. This is where the “product”, or the type of service the school intends to deliver, is defined. One of the most effective methods to find them is through the study of the educational projects advanced by the schools and other administrative entities making up the system.

A second dimension encompasses planning, management, and evaluation styles, and their relationship to expected results. The strategy used in determining where to go, how to get there and how will progress be monitored, lies in the process area. The way a process is conducted will determine the results. Pyramid-like, hierarchical, traditional and authoritarian structures in the school medium, are not conducive to quality processes. Quite the opposite, a quality culture is based not on imposi-
tion but on the school principal’s ability to lead, on the commitments and incentives derived from participating, and from autonomous actions.

A third dimension involves the elements that facilitate access to learning opportunities. Students learn according to what is made available to them. This dimension harbours a combination of curricular resources, as well as physical space, use of time, and the amount and type of materials.

In the fourth dimension one can find teachers and their activities. This dimension includes, in addition to the salary issue, the labour environment, teachers’ working conditions, their time availability, the training opportunities they can access, their capacity to participate in decision-making initiatives affecting the entire school, their degrees of innovative autonomy and flexibility, and recognition based on performance. All these areas have a marked effect on labour satisfaction. This dimension, although not directly linked to students’ results, constitute a favourable condition that does lead to result-enhancing actions.

A fifth dimension touches on the emotional environment. The school’s very own culture is expressed through behaviour and its system of relations. Lightfoot (1984) and Oakes (1989), highlight the important role played by the school culture in student satisfaction and their academic results. The authors specify that within this culture the key factor that sets apart good schools is the “vital” relationship of students with one or two teachers, thanks to the stimuli it contributes to learning.

Lastly, and perhaps, the most relevant dimension, has to do with the links established with the children’s parents and guardians, for there is an actual sharing of the formative responsibility. Research findings indicate that communication with the parents is one of the factors that weighs more heavily in academic performance.

This set of dimensions establishes itself in the quality observation domains. In each of them there is room for actions designed to improve learning conditions. However, these are not discrete dimensions operating in isolation. Quite the opposite, they interact, helping or hindering the possibilities offered students to attain the expected results.

**Final comments**

This paper has attempted to show how in a large number of countries educational quality has become a strategic topic of educational policy. The history of this process involves not only pedagogy, for power is also present. In the narrative of power, public actors, both individual and collective, have a role to play.

In order to complete the analysis of quality, shown here in a historical perspective, it would be important to comment on its outlook. Thus, the question could be asked: why has the quality of education remained at the core of educational policies? Seemingly, there are two main reasons: social movements and progress in the social sciences.

In connection with social movements, the location and persistence of the quality issue at the centre of educational policies would not be possible were it not attuned to mainstream social movements which shepherd major policies along specific orientations. The search for educational quality would be senseless if its conception was dissociated from the context of a macro-social movements which place education at the centre of developmental policies, and of micro-social movements which place education at the centre of the policies - and within them - which, in turn, transform the actors of the educational community into pillars of the process. The convergence of both planes is one of the factors that grant it the solidness it requires to transcend time.

However, this convergence is not the only element that has reinforced the centrality of the educational issue. This convergence has been accompanied by a scientific, technical and social movement whose evolution reflects the changing perception of educational quality. This movement could be illustrated as five
stages, at the risk of greatly oversimplifying the outcomes of the multiple studies that have been conducted on the subject.

Quality as an educational product, was originally conceived with a low reflection or intellectual value-added component, a weak “causal” link with the outcome or product. Part of the problem was that the product carried such misleading connotations as: enrolment, retention and graduation.

Subsequently, and inspired in the work of Coleman (1966), focus shifted to the observation of the factors that impinged on the product. The reasoning went something like this “if we introduce, it is bound to happen”. Emphasis fell largely on material factors affecting the process such as textbooks, equipment, furnishings, facilities and buildings, and on context - related factors, such as those related to ethnias and socioeconomic levels. Policy formulations would then take the form “if we introduced more books we are bound to get better results”, and so on.

A third stage, induced by the so called “reproductionists”, in particular Berger and Luckman (1967) and Bourdieu (1977), incorporated the social and cultural dimensions to the analysis. Focus now shifted to the family and the children. In this case the formulation tended to concentrate on the child and the family as inputs, so that the formulation now went something like this “in the presence of this culture/family is bound to happen”. By introducing the social variable into quality considerations, this movement helped to diversify the analysis and render it more concrete.

The fourth moment attempted to identify a stronger relationship with the product by focusing observation on academic achievement, with the consequent shift from inputs and processes to outcomes and the measuring of achievements. During this stage, important developments take place in the methodological and statistical fields. However, the focus on academic, utilitarian and instrumental outputs, left to its own devices, is insufficient if the objective is to define what needs to be done in order to bring about the desired change in performance.

The fifth stage incorporates a new perspective. Factors are again taken into consideration; however, this time, along with preserving a strong relationship with outcomes (the product), analysis becomes more sophisticated (hierarchic or multiple level models, non linear models), and attempts to integrate the more subtle factors that provide a better understanding of what underlies performance. Consequently, the search is now focused on such factors as interactions and the ecology of processes.

Having acknowledged the complexity and multidimensional nature of the processes, the scenario stands ready. The task is now reduced to achieving the synergy generated by change through a closer relationship between the outcomes of science; the views, supports and actions of individual and collective public actors, at the macro level; and the needs and skills of individual and collective public actors, at the educational community level.

References


CHALLENGES AND TASKS CONFRONTING CHILEAN EDUCATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Fundación Chile’s Education Programme*

The purpose of this document, prepared by Fundación Chile’s Education Programme in collaboration with its Consultative Committee, is to make a positive contribution to the analysis and discussion of the future of Chilean education. The key message conveyed by this paper is that Chile, upon entering the 21st century, and in order to narrow the knowledge gap that sets it apart from the more progressive countries, eliminate the equity rift that splits its population, and instil its citizenry with the tenets of freedom, accountability and discipline characteristic of a democratic society, must give education top priority in its agenda.

With these objectives in mind, a new policy approach has been proposed along four major axes: reform classroom education placing emphasis on higher academic standards; promote more stringent teacher professionalisation initiatives, enhance school management; and, increase educational spending.

A new context

Chile’s future depends on education, while the challenges that must be assumed are indeed daunting. In fact, the whole world is being transformed by globalisation, a process driven by cutting-edge technology in the fields of information and communications. As a result, in today’s society, practically every productive activity is certain to be knowledge-intensive.

In this regard, a similar challenge confronts all contemporary societies: they must raise their ability to generate, acquire and adapt knowledge; impart it and distribute it to the population as a whole; participate in its evolution; and, disseminate it far and wide. A high-quality, and equitably-distributed education is the key to meeting these challenges.

In the more dynamic countries, education is rapidly changing in order to cope with the demands brought forth by the information society. Four major trends mark the direction taken by these progressive school systems:

- On-going education for all. This approach holds that all persons should have the capability, motivation and encouragement to learn throughout their lives. Here, emphasis lies on the standards of knowledge and skills that must be acquired during the individual’s productive years. Additionally, on-going education must contribute to personal development and the building of democratic values, promote community living, sustain social cohesion, and foster productivity, economic growth and innovation.

- A society built on educational resources and learning networks. Education takes place in the home, both inside and outside schools, through formal and informal modalities, in universities or vocational training centres, at

* Fundación Chile’s Education Programme: Celia Alvariño, José Joaquín Brunner, Joaquín Cordua, René Cortázar, Cristián Cox, Ernesto Ezquerra, Marcela Gajardo, Alfonso Gómez, Rodrigo Jordán, Iván Lavados, Fernando Léniz, Andrés Navarro, Cristián Zegers. This document is also available at Fundación’s Chile website: http://www.fundch.cl/fc/dt/lcindex.htm, or at calvarin@fundch.cl.
different levels, within the working place, in the classroom or at a distance, supported by the media and information technology, home-based or as part of a multinational scheme, and through the use of public and private infrastructure. In this last respect, the issue among OECD countries is not so much whether or not education should be privatised, but how to channel the development of a fast growing educational industry.

- Competency-based education. The quality and relevance of education is defined by its capacity to produce socially-desirable skills. Those of a more generic nature, however, such as creativity, communication abilities, emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, familiarity with state of the art technology, ability to work in teams, personal initiative, and capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, are increasingly being rated alongside specific cognitive skills. So too, is a formation based on a strong foundation built on effort, discipline and responsibility.

- Education based on the creative use of new information and communication technology. For centuries now, the technological requirements placed on schools have been fairly lax. Currently, however, this demand has begun moving along an increasingly interactive technological continuum, progressing from the hands-off analogical media to the highly interactive digital concept.

If Chile is to become part of the information society it, too, must reform its education. For, education should be conceived as a bridge that facilitates access to the global society of information, allows a steady flow of users, and guarantees that their numbers will not fall under the current 20 per cent who have already crossed this threshold.

Chile has made a tremendous effort towards modernising its education system. It would be fair to say that it has already laid down the basis for the tasks the 21st century will demand from us all. In fact, it has updated its curriculum, bringing it up to par with today’s advances in the field of education; it has extended its school shift allowing additional time to be devoted to student formation; it is in the process of linking the country’s schools to the world of information via Internet; and, during the 90s, it duplicated investment -in real terms - in education.

Broadly speaking, public opinion views Chile’s reform in a positive light, as shown by a survey conducted by the Public Study Centre (CEP) in late 1996. In every surveyed area, most parents seem to agree that the quality of education being imparted to their children, particularly in the areas of general culture, quality of instruction, and occupational training, is superior to what they themselves received.

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<td>Professional training</td>
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* Either did not know or did not wish to answer

Progress notwithstanding, when measured against countries which are leading the race to become part of the information society there is still a substantial educational gap. Likewise, in terms of performance, the country’s educational system is light years away from achieving its twofold objectives: equality and social cohesion.

In terms of indicators such as average years of schooling of the adult population, and the developmental level of the basic infrastructure required by the information society Chile, as compared to other countries, rates rather poorly. The countries which took part in this comparative study are newly developed economies of European and Asian-Pacific origin.

As important -if not more so- as the aforementioned gap, is the equity chasm that splits Chilean education along social lines. Here, the main unresolved issue is the close correspondence between the quality of education and the socioeconomic background of the student. In fact, only 4 out of 100 students from the lower quintiles attend schools with perfor-
Challenges and tasks confronting chilean education at the… / Fundación Chile’s

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Source: The Global Competitiveness Report 1997 (columns 1 and 2, for 53 countries) and The 1999 IDC/World Times Information Society Index (columns 3 to 6, for 55 countries).

1: Average school years of the economically active population - place in ranking.
2: Based on the number of per capita PCs; includes imports for the home, government use, commercial purposes, or imported by students and teachers; percentage of PCs used outside the home as part of computer networks, and expenditure on software vs. hardware.
3: Includes television and cable television subscribers, number of per capita cellular phones, radio sets and facsimile machines, cost of telephone calls, home telephone lines, and percentage error by telephone lines.
4: Includes commercial non-agriculture Internet users, home users, use of Internet for didactic purposes, and e-business expenditure by Internet users.
5: Includes civil liberties, freedom of the press, per cent of the population that reads newspapers, schooling rates for secondary and tertiary education.

In order to alleviate and eventually eradicate this double gap - knowledge and equity - within the context of the information society, Chilean education will have to adopt much more stringent quality standards, a decision that may have important operational repercussions in terms of educational policy guidelines, in at least three major developmental areas:

- the organisation of teaching/learning processes;
- the role of teachers;

Proposals

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- the organisation of teaching/learning processes;
- the role of teachers;
– management of individual schools and the educational system.

A set of guidelines designed to address the crucial tasks each of these areas represent, is given below.

**Teaching/learning: quality and equity**

Viewed from the perspective of the information society a good quality education is, first and foremost, one that develops the capacity to “learn how to learn” in terms of internationally accepted standards. Equity, in turn, means not simply guaranteeing universal access, but providing a differential instruction that will allow each and every student to attain said standards. In the coming years, education would do well to focus more directly on the standards, demands and specific characteristics these different groups of students exhibit.

School autonomy must pave the way so that each school may become an efficient learning community. From now on, it will be up to the individual schools - administration, teachers and students - to improve their quality of instruction, and their capacity for experimenting and innovating. This will require a highly motivated teaching staff, strong leadership on the part of school principals, clearly defined objectives for each teaching institution, and plans and programmes designed for or adapted to a particular community, in accordance with nationally established guidelines and consistent with the exigencies of local and international reality. Furthermore, schools must be helped and encouraged to creatively use the additional time made available by the extended shift, towards enriching their programmes and meeting the expected quality standards.

There should be a gradual adoption of qualification standards for the post of principal, which encompass both formal preparation and training, as well as administrative aspects. School principals should undergo a strict selection process pursuant to stringent professionalisation criteria. Additionally, employment could be made contingent on presentation, by each candidate, of an educational project involving the specific school applied for, before an audience consisting of parents, teachers and community representatives. Likewise, it is important to elaborate unequivocal performance guidelines, well-defined terms of office, and a clear-cut appointment policy covering designation to successive tours of duty.

Within the context of lifelong learning, basic education must assume the responsibility of delivering to every school boy and girl sound reading/writing and mathematics skills, and the capability to make use of the available information and communication technology. This, in addition to awakening and developing in the students the desire and motivation to learn on their own, build confidence on the means selected, and keep abreast of new developments. Despite limited funds, some Chilean schools have been successful in this undertaking. There is an urgent need to learn from successful educational experiences, and to adopt those innovations that may make a positive contribution to enhanced classroom instruction.

Today, when universal access to secondary education is practically a reality, support to state-run schools - particularly those catering to underprivileged sectors - becomes indispensable in order to ensure a substantial improvement of their performance. Tomorrow, 12 years of schooling, the time needed to acquire the basic knowledge that will help understand the world and the skills that facilitate lifelong learning and productive endeavours, will be the minimum mandatory requirement for the entire population.

Young men and women, spurred by the hope of finding gainful employment and, from that point, launching their own technical careers, are placing increasing importance on vocational and professional training. The school system cannot afford to let them down, for the country needs their contribution to the production effort and they, in turn, need to be given the opportunity to combine work and study. Thus, the necessity to adopt, starting now, a more systematic view of the interrelations between
the technical training imparted at the secondary school level and that offered by Vocational Training Centres. The importance of shifting the centre of gravity from supply to demand, and of emphasising that educational contents, the equipment being used, and the schools themselves are “on line” with the productive world, is much greater in this sector of the educational system than in any other. Technical-professional formation must be the product of a joint effort - with the necessary distribution of roles and responsibilities - shared equally between schools, the public and the business sectors. Furthermore, it should work closely with organisations whose responsibility it is to define and certify labour skills, and with agencies that follow and inform on the vagaries of the labour market and certify these vocational centres, both at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Within the context of the information society, equity would mean applying to students of different socioeconomic background, and different intelligence levels, the same rigorous learning standards. To this end, the National Foundation for the Eradication of Poverty* has proposed increased subsidies for students from the two lowest income quintiles. Chile can afford to make this effort. In order to achieve equal education for all - and in the process advance social mobility and cohesion - the school system must be able to discriminate among its students, and invest more on those who have less. On the equity issue, this should be one of the first commitments assumed by the new government administration.

At present, in the first income quintile, only one out of four boys and girls between the ages of 2 and 5, attend nursery schools. In the following two quintiles the percentage is slightly higher - less than three out of ten. The number of places needed to accommodate at least half of these children has been estimated at 230 thousand. This being the case, expanding and improving pre-school education becomes an urgent necessity, lest we allow those inequities traceable to the students’ economic background to mark a difference even before entering first grade. In terms of equity, the urgent accommodation of at least 200 thousand new students should become the second most important priority, complementary to increased subsidies for the poorer families.

If the objective is to improve the quality and equity of education and transform it into a bridge that will grant access to the information society, it will be necessary to increase and diversify the educational supply, and simultaneously adopt a variety of instructional media. A broader and more intensive use of information and communication technology will play an important role here, particularly in terms of: increasing access of overage or underprivileged students and reinforcing their instruction; promoting self-controlled learning; easing the burden represented by the teachers’ perfunctory obligations; facilitating team work activities by students; and, promoting distance communication modalities, and the use of pedagogical resources available through Internet and audio-visual media.

A number of conditions are essential to achieve this: a faster development of electronic information infrastructure and audio-visual communications in schools; broadening the efforts made by public and private concerns aimed at linking all schools to the net while providing free access to Internet; reinforcing the Ministry of Education’s “Enlaces” net by expanding its equipment and coverage through the progressive incorporation of rural schools into the information society; and, fostering the production of multimedia contents and the innovative use of the new technologies with a view to improving teaching, learning and school management. The cost of permanent updating services for all these areas, is an item that should be part of every school improvement estimate.

In fact, contemporary society teaches and learns through multiple means and in different

* Fundación Nacional para la Superación de la Pobreza.
contexts. The place a school must occupy, if it is to serve as the foundation stone of a lifelong formation process, is at the hub of a net of educational institutions and resources. To this end, it should become involved with the other network components, be immersed in its local community, and in close contact with families, neighbours, municipality and city. Furthermore, schools should seek whatever support may be obtained from vicinal businesses and universities, non government organisations, specialised innovation agencies and, in general, channel the resources made available by this network towards the advancement of their own formative tasks. Electronic networks could help enormously to materialise these contacts, and at the same time contribute to the opening of schools for the benefit of the community.

Schools should also look into the possibility of putting their spaces and equipment to use as care centres for the community and as stages for cultural events. In some localities this has helped to strengthen the weakening social bond that seems to be a characteristic of contemporary society, and reinforce the three-way interaction between school, family and community. In Chile, this strategy would be particularly helpful in terms of dealing with problems that have greatly affected social cohesion such as juvenile delinquency and drug addiction.

**The teaching profession: key to the future**

Tomorrow’s education will be the direct result of the training being provided to today’s teachers. Despite recent efforts involving 17 pedagogy faculties across the country, this is probably the Achilles’ heel of the reform. In the future, teacher training faculties should be evaluated and accredited according to strict standards - and with the participation of their international brethren. Each faculty should then establish a publicly - or self - financed improvement programme contracted on a performance basis. To this end, it is indispensable that initial teacher training initiatives adopt clear and precise criteria with respect to what is expected - and demanded - from pedagogical studies, and elaborate and explain the standards applicable to each level and discipline. Any new international grants for this sector should take this priority into account.

Today, the teaching profession faces a most urgent need to reinforce the practical skills required to teach reading - writing and mathematics so that - in keeping with the new fundamental objectives and minimum contents of the curriculum - future teachers may master the various disciplines; to train teachers on the use of the new educational technology, and acquaint student teachers with the latest learning assessment methods that should be applied in all schools. The acquisition of essential pedagogical skills should be measured through a nation - wide test administered to senior university students. Additionally, within the framework of effective accreditation procedures, teachers should be subjected to a periodic examination, an initiative that could be made extensive to other professions as well.

Quite possibly, the concept of permanent education will never have greater importance than it does in the teaching profession. The genuine revolution undergone by educational technology and the swift changes in context the information society has imposed on knowledge, demand that teachers continue to participate in the learning process throughout their careers. In this respect, efforts must be made to promote diversity and ensure the high quality of the educational supply. Universities, businesses and public sector agencies, should collaborate in the production of new, teacher-oriented distance education programmes taking advantage of the new alternatives that state of the art technology makes available. The government, along with the financial sector, should urgently elaborate a funding programme that will allow each and every teacher to own a personal computer within a period of five years.

In order to raise and enhance management efficiency across the various levels, and reinforce autonomous school governance and administration, the formation of school and sys-
Challenges and tasks confronting chilean education at the… / Fundación Chile’s

Management at the level of schools and educational system

Perhaps one of the greatest contributions to contemporary educational psychology, is having demonstrated that “any subject matter can be taught to any child at any age in an honest fashion”. School management should be mostly concerned with organising effective learning pursuant to this principle. Its ultimate objective is not the level of efficiency reached by the institution in terms of profitability, but how to organise learning so that the expected standards are met.

With this objective in mind, every school should be in a position to manage its own resources and affairs, adopt self - evaluating mechanisms, and make public disclosure of its achievements. Municipally - run schools must give way to autonomous, self - managed municipal schools. School management regulations, including the teaching profession by - laws, should be adapted to permit the emergence of these learning communities.

Purveyors of education, the Ministry of Education, existing private agencies, and those that may be created for this purpose, must provide technical support and elaborate policies and programmes designed to soften the transition toward self - managed schools. Additionally, they should co - ordinate the efforts made by the individual institutions and lend support to school - inspired initiatives. Public and private purveyors of education should be able to farm - out the administrative services currently being handled by the schools themselves, hire competent agencies to manage these schools, try delegating or sharing management responsibilities - as in the case of the smaller municipalities - or implement innovative combinations thereof.

The net efficiency of schools should be evaluated with respect to the effective contribution each school can make to the education of its students, taking into account the initial accretion of cultural capital acquired in the child’s home. In this connection, the Educa-
tional Quality Measuring System (SIMCE) has been responsible for introducing what is perhaps one of the most important innovations. A second significant step in this direction, is the public disclosure of results, which means that now interested families will be able to make informed decisions as to where to send their school-aged children. Regrettably, this instrument is unable to measure the effectiveness of the individual schools, since the measured performance is contaminated with the students’ socioeconomic variables. This being the case, a further sophistication of the instrument will be required to enable measuring the “value added” each school has contributed to education. This will also stimulate a more intensified and focused use of incentive policies intended to reward the performance of efficient schools. Lastly, the new alternatives opened by communication technology should progressively expand the volume of information being delivered to the community.

Current procedures involving school supervision and inspection, are formal and insufficient and should be overhauled, essentially because they neither cover what goes on inside the classroom, nor evaluate the quality of the processes, nor help promote it. In fact, school accreditation procedures should be implemented as a device for identifying strengths and weaknesses, and thus contribute to making their own permanent improvement possible. Said procedures should take into account the mission assumed by each school, report on the quality of the education being imparted, certify the efficient use of resources and ensure that the school’s climate is consistent with the educational principles underpinning its mission.

An efficient accreditation procedure should be independent, periodic, and double as an instrument designed to evaluate the attainment of quality objectives measured against pre-established standards. The outcome of its task, should take the form of an in-depth report on the progress and limitations exhibited by each institution - later to be used as a quality enhancement tool. In the case of poorly performing schools, this report should be accompanied by a support programme. Consistently non-complying schools, should be closed or transferred to a different purveyor. Nothing can be more detrimental to the equity of the system than a school incapable of measuring up to its formative responsibilities.

If the notion is accepted that society as a whole represents a network where various educational agents - of different natures and institutional levels - co-exist, then the apparent dichotomy between what is private and public, becomes secondary in importance. Rather, the guiding principle should state that such a network guarantees:

– lifelong learning opportunities for all;
– a progressive link between all parts of the network, so that the learning process has a great variety of trajectories to follow; and
– the participation of all players concerned with education, in accordance with the principle of academic freedom as set forth in the Constitution.

Today, a teaching State has come to mean a public authority that gives way to an education-oriented society. For this formula to work, however, the State must be able to rely unconditionally on private actors. They, in turn, must follow sensible guidelines and public regulations that ensure probity, observance of the people’s mandate, and quality of service. The Government, through appropriate laws, economic incentives and the implementation of information and evaluation procedures, should promote the emergence of multiple educational agents. To this end, the current regulatory framework must be modernised and simplified, by expanding the information base available to the users, incorporating the list of accredited schools, and making more room for initiatives proposed by the various social groups.

The Ministry of Education has central functions to discharge. Its major function, on behalf of the public interest, is that of guarantor of the system’s quality and equity; additionally, it is the main organisation accountable
for enforcing compliance with educational standards and, the agency responsible for the strategic orientation of the system. In other words, it represents the entity in charge of: designing and formulating medium-term educational policies; identifying needs and innovating opportunities; stimulating and co-ordinating efforts to promote such innovations; launching and developing - on its own or through third party agreements - key support and technical assistance programmes; using incentives intended to guide the system “at a distance”, that is, without intervening in its daily operation. It is also the agency which harbours the skills, resources and instruments, to effectively raise the equity of the school system. In order to accomplish all of this, the Ministry would be required to strengthen its professional and technical staff; raise its own policy-elaborating capacity and create consensus-building units around these policies - say, a nationally represented consultative body; and, adopt a flexible regime that may allow it to commission services thus taking full advantage of all the institutions, capabilities and resources lying outside the sphere of the State.

Furthermore, it will also be necessary to earmark additional resources in key educational areas in an effort to stimulate research, experimentation and innovation projects. In effect, the gap between direct public spending on education and spending on learning more about this sector, and the impact educational reforms have had on the population, has widened in the last ten years. Attaining the proposed quality and equity objectives presupposes the undertaking of numerous knowledge, experimentation, evaluation and transference-intensive initiatives and, consequently, their design and development must rely on public and private funding.

As the country gradually metamorphoses into the information society, investing on people - particularly on children and youths - will have to increase accordingly. This endeavour should be oriented by three main principles. First, every person - not just the more talented or the richer - has the right to be educated and trained. Second, initial education - basic and middle - must be free, and nobody should be excluded on the basis of economic status. Third, education should be financed preferably by the State, but also by all those capable of contributing to it. In fact, this approach has allowed Chile to attain a high level of educational investment greater than the average of developed countries -, as a ratio of the country’s GDP, along with one of the highest rates of private sector participation.

It is therefore imperative for Chile’s next government administration to confirm the priority given to education, and continue to foster initiatives intended to achieve the ambitious goals embodied in the ideals of quality, equity and advancement of the teaching profession. Likewise, it would be important to preserve the current school subsidy procedure, and perfect it by increasing the amount allocated to the poorer families while adopting measures based on SNED (National Performance Evaluation System for Schools) findings. This would allow interrelating increased subsidies to edu-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public Expenditure on education (in thousands)</th>
<th>Public Expenditure on educational research (in thousands)</th>
<th>Ratio expenditure on educational research/education</th>
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<td>95 530 926</td>
<td>85 168</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>330 424 394</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>445 369 638</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>986 917 574</td>
<td>208 495</td>
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*Source: Figures made available by the Treasury and CONICYT (1998 currency).*
cational outcomes, as well as supplementing the information base used by the students’ families to make their school selection.

Increased subsidies for the poorer students should more clearly reveal the contribution made by blend financing to educational development, thus making it possible to eliminate undesirable side-effects, such as discrimination and economic segmentation, among and within subsidised schools. Rather than penalising those families and municipalities that decide to invest more in education, it is the duty of the State to offset this additional expense by granting subsidies and scholarships to schools, students and municipalities which can not generate or contribute with additional resources.

![Graph: Disposition to Invest More in Children’s Education]

A fairly small sector - albeit fast growing in Chile as well as in the rest of the world - structured and operating as an incipient industry devoted to purvey educational goods and services, is emerging within the countries’ network of educational opportunities and resources. In fact, the new technologies and a soaring demand for permanent education, will greatly facilitate the development of an educational industry in the country, an enterprise that warrants encouragement and support both from the perspectives of its domestic market projections and in terms of global competitiveness.

By way of summary

Chile has made a gargantuan effort towards modernising its education. However, the gap between it and the countries leading the race to become part of the information society, is still substantial. Furthermore, in terms of educational outputs, the system is far from meeting the expected equity objective. As a result, the challenges that lie ahead are truly daunting.

As the country approaches the ideals of the information society, it will become increasingly necessary to invest more in people, particularly in children and youths. Along these lines, the coming government will ineluctably have to reaffirm the priority given to education while society, as a whole, will be compelled to commit itself to a set of actions and objectives and to the necessary investments that will ensure their materialisation.

Proposed measures

- Education must provide the tools that will allow our citizenry to access the information society, and guarantee that their numbers will not fall under the current 20 per cent who have already crossed this threshold.
- It is imperative that the next Government corroborates the high priority placed on education, and continues to promote initiatives leading to the attainment of ever more stringent quality, equity and professional development standards.
- The Government must promote the emergence of multiple educational agents through suitable laws and economic inducements.
- To this end, the current regulatory framework must be modernised and simplified, by expanding the information base available to the users, incorporating the list of accredited schools, and giving more space to initiatives proposed by the various social groups.
- It would be important to preserve the current school subsidy procedure, and perfect it by increasing the amount allocated to the poorer families, and simultaneously interrelating increased subsidies to educational outcomes.
- Rather than penalising those families and municipalities that decide to invest more in
education, it is the duty of the State to offset this additional expense by granting subsidies and scholarships to schools, students and municipalities which can not generate or contribute with additional resources.

– Likewise, it will be necessary to earmark more resources for research, experimentation and innovation in key educational areas.

– In order to effectively attain equal opportunity in education - and thus contribute to social mobility and cohesion - schools must treat their charges differentially, investing more in those who have less. In terms of equity, this should be the first commitment made by the next government.

– Expanding and improving pre-school education has become an urgent necessity, lest we allow those inequities traceable to the students’ economic background to mark a difference even before entering first grade. In terms of equity, the urgent accommodation of at least 200 thousand new students should become the second most important priority, and one that complements increased subsidies for the poorer families.

– In the coming years, education would do well to focus more directly on the standards, demands and specific characteristics these different groups of students exhibit.

– Additionally, schools will require a highly motivated teaching staff, principals with a penchant for leadership, a clearly defined mission for each individual school, and plans and programmes elaborated or adapted by the community itself in accordance with national curricular standards and local and international requisites.

– School principals should be appointed following a rigorous selection process pursuant to stringent professionalisation criteria.

– Tomorrow, 12 years of schooling, the time needed to acquire the basic knowledge that will help to understand the world and the skills that facilitate lifelong learning and promote productive endeavours, will be the minimum requirement for the entire population.

– Technical-professional training must be the product of a joint effort - with the necessary distribution of roles and responsibilities - shared equally between schools, the public and the business sectors. Furthermore, it should be closely linked to organisations whose responsibility it is to define and certify labour skills, and to agencies that follow and inform on the vagaries of the labour market and certify these vocational centres both at the secondary and tertiary levels.

– A broader and more intensive use of information and communication technology will play an important role, particularly in terms of: increasing access of overage or underprivileged students and reinforcing their instruction; promoting self-controlled learning; easing the burden represented by the teachers’ perfunctory obligations; facilitating team work activities by students; and, promoting distance communication modalities, and the use of pedagogical resources currently available through Internet and audio-visual media.

– Furthermore, electronic information infrastructure and audio-visual media in schools must be developed much more rapidly; efforts made by public and private concerns intended to link all schools to the network while providing free access to Internet, should be magnified; the Ministry of Education’s “Enlaces” net must be reinforced while simultaneously fostering the production of multimedia contents and the innovative use of the new technologies with a view to improving teaching, learning and school management.

– The new technologies and an escalating demand for permanent education, will greatly facilitate the development of an educational industry in the country, an enterprise that warrants encouragement and support both from the perspectives of its domestic market projections and in terms of global competitiveness.

– Teacher training faculties across the country should be evaluated and accredited according to strict standards - and with the participation of their international brethren. Each faculty should then establish a publicly - or self -
financed improvement programme contracted on a performance basis.

- In the case of teachers, the acquisition of essential pedagogical skills should be measured through a nation-wide test administered to senior university students. Additionally, within the context of effective accreditation procedures, teachers should be subjected to periodical examinations, an initiative that could be made extensive to other professions as well.

- Universities, businesses and public sector organisations, should collaborate in the production of new, teacher-oriented distance education programmes taking advantage of the new alternatives state of the art technology makes available.

- The government, along with the financial sector, should urgently elaborate a funding programme that will allow each and every teacher to own a personal computer within a period of five years.

- Continued salary improvements will require the promotion of a new policy that guarantees a base wage while allowing for salary increases keyed to performance, level of responsibility, outcomes, the nature of the tasks undertaken, and other factors that may help improve the quality and productivity of the professional practice. This is a major and, as of yet, unresolved challenge on the agenda, while a formula for dealing with this economic issue, with political-trade union overtones, still languishes on the drawing board.

- In any event, application of the teacher performance rating mechanisms as contemplated in the current regulatory framework is sine qua non.

- Likewise, experimental incentive schemes should be actively developed, a strategy already adopted by various private subsidised schools. Municipally-run schools should enjoy the same managerial autonomy to proceed in this direction.

- In order to raise and enhance management efficiency across the various levels, and reinforce autonomous school governance and administration, the formation of school and system managers - principals, administrators, heads of technical - pedagogical units, education and curricular specialists -, acquires a particularly important significance.

- Every school should be in a position to manage its own resources and affairs, adopt self-evaluating mechanisms, and make public disclosure of its achievements.

- Municipally-run schools must give way to autonomous, self-managed municipal schools. School management regulations, including the teaching profession by-laws, should be adapted to permit the emergence of these learning communities.

- Purveyors of education, the Ministry of Education, existing private agencies, and those that may be created for this purpose, must provide technical support and elaborate policies and programmes designed to soften the transition toward self-managed schools. Additionally, they should co-ordinate the efforts made by the individual institutions and lend support to school-inspired initiatives.

- Public and private purveyors of education should be able to farm-out the administrative services currently being handled by the schools themselves, hire competent agencies to manage these schools, try delegating or sharing management responsibilities - as in the case of the smaller municipalities - or implement innovative combinations thereof.

- The net efficiency of schools should be evaluated with respect to the effective contribution each school can make to the education of its students, taking into account the initial accretion of cultural capital acquired in the child’s home.

- Current supervision and inspection procedures are formal and insufficient and should be overhauled.

- In fact, school accreditation procedures should be implemented as a device for identifying strengths and weaknesses and thus contribute to making their own permanent improvement possible.
– An efficient accreditation procedure should be independent, periodic, and double as an instrument designed to evaluate the attainment of quality objectives measured against pre-established standards. In the case of poorly performing schools, this report should be accompanied by a support programme.
– Consistently non-complying schools, should be closed or transferred to a different purveyor. Nothing can be more detrimental to the equity of the system than a school incapable of measuring up to its formative responsibilities.
– The place a school must occupy, if it is to serve as the foundation stone of a lifelong formation process, is at the hub of a net of educational institutions and resources.
– Schools should also look into the possibility of putting their spaces and equipment to use as care centres for the community and as stages for cultural events. In Chile, this strategy would be particularly helpful in terms of dealing with problems that have greatly affected social cohesion such as juvenile delinquency and drug addiction.

**Physical education and sports**

"During my installation address, I stated that UNESCO raised a stimulating paradox and said at that time that 'it can not become a mere club for intellectuals but must serve as an international forum for intellectual exchange. It can not aspire to be a research organisation, yet it must monitor and stimulate its progress. Nor is it an operational entity, however, through international co-operation in the fields of education, science, culture and communications, it must ensure that the principles of world peace, justice and solidarity are morally adopted and physically implemented. Lastly, UNESCO is not a funding agency, while it must provide funds to catalyse new projects which, in turn, will give rise to new requests for funds. This, in order to demonstrate that ideals can only materialise through actions'.

Within this framework UNESCO, contributes to reinforce the activities of all those who endeavour to make sports, true to their values and humanistic mission, an integral part of permanent education, an element of self-realisation and friendship, and an instrument of peace, development, solidarity and international understanding. Indeed, because sports are unaffected by traditional political, social or economic controversies, and develop in the fertile domain of universal human values, they can make an important contribution to international exchange and understanding. The sense sports may make, can only be found if they are oriented at humanism. This is why a radical transformation of attitudes must be encouraged so that women, through increased participation in the various sports activities, may play an assertive role in their decision-making."

KOICHIRO MATSUURA
Director General of UNESCO at the closing ceremony of the third International Conference of Ministers and High Officials In Charge of Physical Education and Sports. Punta del Este, Uruguay, December 3, 1999.
UNESCO AND THE DAWN OF A NEW MILLENNIUM

Koïchiro Matsuura*

It is, beyond all doubt, an immense honour to appear before you today, after so many illustrious predecessors. I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart for having placed your trust and your hopes in me in this way. Over the next six years, I shall try to be as worthy as I can of your confidence, and I make that solemn pledge before this distinguished assembly.

I am conscious, as I stand before you, of the immense responsibility with which you have entrusted me, and of the scale of the collective task that we can accomplish only by working together. For over half a century, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has pursued the goal of mobilizing those who are most willing to help, most generous with their talents and most fertile in imagination - but always on the basis of what is possible, feasible and practicable, in keeping with our resources, our means of action and also our commitment, in the pressing service of the inhabitants of our world. Yes, we must do all that we can - for the world expects no less - to help bring about the self-fulfilment of everyone while showing respect for all. Therein lies the true touchstone of peace, what is known as the “Wisdom of Nations”. This vision - yours and mine - has been that of UNESCO from 1946 to the present.

This is the vision that I have tried to make my own. Allow me, here, to introduce a personal note. For this was the vision of the world which I learnt as a child in Japan, where I witnessed the final years of the conflict, more terrible than all others, which disfigured the middle of the century now coming to an end. I was a little boy in the district of Yamaguchi, two hours by road from Hiroshima, under the incendiary bombs. I saw fear, death and grief raining down. Twice, not far from us, the flash of a nuclear explosion lit up the sky. Luckily for humanity, there has been no repetition of this too bright light up to the end of the century, at least not above the heads of the living.

But can we be so sure that we will never see it again? I still remember my first visit to Tokyo, three years after the end of the war. From the surroundings of the Imperial Palace, still standing intact in the centre of our capital, I could see all the way out to the distant suburbs, for the buildings all around had been reduced to rubble!

In this way, through a lesson in horror which was almost too graphic, I saw the manifest consequences of a long militaristic and misguided policy. And believe me, for those who survived such an ordeal, the words of peace; of the stubborn search for tolerance; of universal disarmament; of the effort to channel the human potential into the service of education, science, communication and culture; such words, I say, can never sound hollow.

For those who grew up in post-war Japan, under the harsh conditions of food shortages and material deprivation which followed so many years under arms, peace came to assume vital importance. Contrite in the face of its share of responsibility for starting the bloody events of the first half of the century, our country forever renounced, in its Constitution, the use of armed force and undertook to work for “peaceful cooperation with all nations”. The founding document of the new Japan recognized that “all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want”, and further asserted forcefully that “laws of political morality are universal”. The United Nations came into being in the very same year in which we turned our backs on war. Our different political thinkers, although belonging to the most diverse currents of opinion, did not fail to note the striking convergence between the articles of our new Constitution and the wording of the Charter of the United Nations. In November 1946, the Constitution of UNESCO proposed “to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

As a young man, I therefore chose my country’s diplomatic service. As I saw it, this was a way of contributing to the cause of peace among all nations. And I see nothing other than a logical, indeed an essential, continuity between my then commitment to peace in a national setting and my new functions today, under international auspices. UNESCO extends, continues, I might even say crowns a career which has been totally devoted to understanding among peoples.

As a student in the United States and subsequently on diplomatic service throughout five continents, I got to know the culture of others, to meet others as friends. This is a deep conviction of mine: getting to know the culture of others, listening to what they have to say, dispels hatred and mistrust, and helps to build peace. It is only through open-mindedness of this kind that we can perceive the true wellsprings of our own civilization, by the clear light of comparison and contact. All living cultures are in motion and influence one another. In the words of an English poet, “No man is an island”.

And here I should like to venture a paradox. Neither is there an island - and certainly not my own - that could henceforth accept mere island status. Nowadays, no island is an island. As Arnold Toynbee pointed out, the history of Great Britain, even at the height of its imperial power, can only be understood in the light of all the cultural influences that it has received. over the centuries, from the neighbouring continent - beginning with the light cast by Greece. that was so powerfully refracted by Rome. Our Japanese islands themselves were nurtured in their own way by contributions from Korea, China, India, even from Iran and far-off Hellenized Asia - and more recently from Europe and the United States. No sooner had contact between our islands and the rest of the world been restored, during the Meiji period, than it was Japan’s turn. in the space of a few years, to exert an immediate and far-reaching influence on Western aesthetics through the works of its great latter-day artists, during the triumphant years of Impressionism and the Ecole de Paris, until it began to play its present-day political, economic, scientific and cultural role in the indivisible and universal concert of nations.

Throughout my diplomatic career I have become daily more convinced of this idea of the incessant mutual enrichment of all human cultures, by their profound spiritual and moral unity. The concept of human solidarity forged by exchange underpins our institution, and in 1968 my illustrious predecessor René Maheu expressed it in words that are still poignant: “to open one’s mind to the universal human dimension is to gain access to all the riches of the world and of history, but it is also to wear oneself out in a constant effort to surpass oneself’.
This unity can even be seen face-to-face, if I may put it like that. One of the most deeply moving encounters of my life took place at the research centre of the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa last March when I saw the bones of our common mother “Lucy”, who lived some three million years ago. Her remains may be those of the oldest known hominid. She belonged to the Australopithecus species. It seems that we are all distant descendants of Lucy. Through her we recognize ourselves as members of a single family. Lucy’s children peopled every continent: from Africa to Europe, and from Asia to the Americas. The heritage of Lucy’s descendants is certainly extremely rich: it is the heritage of our different cultures, and of our so numerous languages too, which UNESCO is responsible for helping to safeguard, in the same way as it safeguards our monuments and works of art, all of them inestimable treasures of the human memory.

More than eight centuries ago the great Muslim poet Sa’dî of Shirâz had already sensed it is true, the indivisible unity of our species in these magnificent lines: “all humans form a single being; he who touches one of its limbs, touches me - and if he wounds it, he wounds me”

For Lucy’s legacy also has a darker side. Could our distant mother ever have imagined so many descendants? On 12 October the population of the world reached six billion individuals spread over some 200 States: and there are still many obvious problems.

Half a century after the founding of UNESCO in the wake of a world war, when the hope prevailed that such slaughter would never be seen again, we cannot fail to see that Lucy’s descendants are still busy fighting each other. Fortunately, the nightmare of the Cold War has passed, but not the nightmare of so many local and civil wars where, as always, intolerance vies with hatred - for territorial, ethnic, even religious reasons - and often with truly terrifying arsenals.

In the sciences, incontestable advances in medical research have nonetheless blurred a great many ethical reference points. Genetic engineering is worrying. By ravaging whole countries like the great plagues of the past, new epidemics such as AIDS are still defying the efforts of our laboratories. These diseases strike the poorest populations hardest because investment in expensive remedies with little market potential is unfortunately still hesitant. And how can one mention the prodigious upheavals in the fields of computing and telecommunications, without at the same time worrying about the widening gap between the new scribes who have mastered these refined tools and the mass of those who have, as it were, now become in this respect the new illiterates?

Madam President,
Mr Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The chasm of poverty has not at all been closed: nor, in today’s globalised economy, is the abyss between the haves and the have-nots merely geographical, a matter of “North” and “South” as so often described. A widening rift between the few rich and the many poor splits numerous societies in the so-called “South”, while the spectre of unemployment has returned to haunt many of the proudest industrialized nations in what is conventionally
labeled, the “North”: undermining the sense of personal dignity of countless workers in the name of economic logic.

But two-thirds of the world’s inhabitants live in the so-called developing countries of the “South”. A third are children aged less than 15, with trends pointing to even higher proportions of youth in the next generation, along with corresponding soaring demands on education. Some of these States, to be sure, are indeed developing, though with glaring social discrepancies. But others seem to be falling by the wayside, pushed farther back into absolute poverty through natural or manmade disaster, and reduced to apparently endless dependence upon international emergency aid - just to survive, not develop.

Yet such wretchedness often seems almost unreal to the other third of the world’s population, as if only a series of virtual images of squalor, periodically flitting across a television screen. To some, the poorer countries only appear as so many opportunities to delocate their industries towards reservoirs of cheaper labour, or as dumping grounds for pollutants henceforth banned at home. But others see these lands as a dark menace, as sources of uncontrolled immigration threatening to confiscate domestic jobs: whence ugly fresh spurts of racism.

Finally, concern over the very future of our crowded planet remains unalleviated. The natural riches we daily deplete may never be replenished again, and the vast bodies of water we soil, while killing off countless varieties of marine life, might never more be cleansed. One of our most pressing tasks is to preserve what is most precious today while addressing the human needs of tomorrow. Sustainable development, meaning the world we must leave to future generations in terms of available and renewable resources, with human potential intact, has become very much the tallest order of the day.

Of course our world picture should not be painted too dark. Since 1946, much headway has been made. The prophetic creators of UNESCO foresaw the foundations of our world body becoming ever more democratic: that is, enshrining “the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect” of all human beings, as stated in the founding document.

Certain standards of human dignity, in the eyes of nearly all human beings, have become almost universal concepts. At least we know that repeated reference to ideals can ultimately dictate and entail some effort to live up to them. Despite local lapses still absolutely to be condemned, the recognition of the true equality of all human beings before the law, regardless of colour, gender, language, or creed, is in general hardly any longer even questioned - at least, in so many words. Member States have multiplied because whole peoples have become independent; and member governments know how much they must pay increasing heed to the governed. By gathering delegates of governments who themselves must give account to their citizens, UNESCO, in turn, becomes ever more accountable to the civil societies of the world at large: that is, to the entire human family. And such is the moral responsibility which UNESCO seeks.

It has become something of a cliche to say that we are now leaving one century, indeed one millennium, in order to enter another, as if a mere change in digits made any real difference to our lives. Still, the mind likes to find its bearings in such conventional time references. It is moreover true that when the twentieth century opened, prevailing human wisdom believed, rather intoxicated with its own success, that the march of scientific and
technical progress would almost automatically lead on to further human happiness and moral enlightenment: while by mid-century, when UNESCO was created, the general view had become far more sober, in grim awareness of all the best, and all the worst, that human beings can do.

The dominant note today, as the twentieth century ends, is one of necessary and vigilant caution. We glimpse how much technology can deliver, but are also now keenly aware of how much our guiding moral sense must remain alert. It is also true that we here at UNESCO, after sighing with relief at the end of the Cold War with its rigidly imposed grid, know that we are experiencing another striking turn in history, curiously parallel to that faced by our founders at the close of the Second World War. For we see international affairs becoming more fluid again, with fresh choices once more open before us - but also uncertainty and risk.

Again, the world in 1946 was far from perfect. It is far from perfect now. But what UNESCO offered then, and still does today, was a factor of hope", in Dr Julian Huxley's words. UNESCO's first Director-General saw in the Organization's creation a "milestone in the unification of the spirit of man.

UNESCO is such a factor of hope, because it is the one international organization which, through all its programmes, respects and defends what is of universal worth and dignity in the material and spiritual heritage of all cultures: and thereby, the absolute dignity of all human beings themselves. Respect for individual dignity is indeed one of UNESCO's key concepts. Globalization has actually been progressing for far more than five centuries now, indeed ever since humanity's increasing mastery in the navigation of all the earth's oceans. But what is happening now is globalization's dramatic acceleration, thereby presenting a global challenge and so demanding a global answer. Yet the response must be made with all due respect for the cultural diversity and identity, for that priceless individual component, that makes up the sheer dignity of our many peoples.

But UNESCO can only go on providing the world with such hope, and such defence, if it proves itself an adequate world instrument. UNESCO is no end in itself. UNESCO is a world service, or, if you like, a tool, at once delicate, highly complex, and precious. Humanity may all the better avail itself of such a tool if all the world's States - and peoples - agree once again to make proper use of it, and so contribute to its efficiency and universality. UNESCO must once more represent the whole world, with no exceptions. I pledge to do my best, in the course of my stewardship, to persuade those who would still stand outside, to return, or newly join.

But criticisms, not all of them unfair, have been leveled against this great instrument: and failings, where verified, must be made good. The purpose of sound management is, again no end in itself, but a duty: to ensure that our institution fully discharge its great task as a true world service, responsible and accountable to the world - and to the world's taxpayers. Our resources are therefore not unlimited, nor should we spread ourselves too thin. I propose that we streamline our activities within the limits of our budgets, and closely focus upon those programmes which are our true mandate - not for the sake of fashionable austerity, but in order to make a real impact where best we may, and where truly we must, provide our needed service: in our ongoing war against poverty, through education and the nurturing of human resources.
Our task is to favour development on behalf of human beings - and certainly not the other way around! I suggest pursuit of our most practically conceived programmes, in cooperation with leading institutions, scientists and scholars around the world, in terms of our four great directives on behalf of education, science, culture, and communication.

UNESCO is a challenging paradox. It cannot lapse into a mere club for intellectuals, but must serve as a forum for international intellectual exchange. It cannot pretend to be a research institution, but must keep abreast of and stimulate research. Nor is it an operational agency, yet it must see that global ethics for peace, justice and solidarity, through international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication, are both morally observed, and tangibly applied. Finally, UNESCO is not a funding agency, although it must provide catalytic funds to generate further funding: in order to demonstrate that ideals only take shape through action.

I shall have occasion to address practical approaches in some detail, regarding management and other related matters, both before the Executive Board and before all the assembled delegates to UNESCO: because all Members of this Organization must be closely involved in dealing with these issues. We need to improve coordination and, indeed, harmonious cooperation between all three of this Organization’s essential components: Secretariat, Executive Board, and General Conference. I might add that one of my concerns will be fully to revitalize the Secretariat, UNESCO’s most precious asset.

Moreover, the kind of participatory governance that UNESCO promotes internationally, it should also apply to itself: by improving its own working environment, the better to tap the wealth of knowledge, experience and enthusiasm that each one of its staff members has to offer.

Beyond governments, UNESCO must also join and maintain dialogue with the representatives of civil society, such as the great NGOs. UNESCO must speed up structural reforms, and heighten the efficiency and transparency of its management, because Member States, and the world’s peoples, can expect no less from this institution: the better to conceive, and to carry out, the bold new programmes which the next century will demand.

Here I can only evoke a few examples.

One of my stewardship’s absolute priorities will be to assist and reinforce Basic Education wherever needed - with due regard for the local culture. Basic education for young children, both boys and girls, is the single key to their future, to any hope for employment, livelihood, and social emancipation. It is also the first and necessary step towards democratizing access to higher education or vocational training. Indeed, basic education is the true driving force for sustainable development in the world. I shall pursue this effort on behalf of basic education in every practical way throughout my term in office. Basic education moreover fosters the initial seeds of mutual understanding, through the twin key concepts of “tolerance” and “learning to live together”, whereby all and each may be enriched in a harvest of many cultures.

Another priority will concern Science, in a global approach examining its links to development and to the fate of humanity as a whole, while assessing the many new ethical challenges it poses - as in the case, say, of the human genome. UNESCO for its part must increasingly concentrate on those scientific programmes where it can play a truly original role, such as those pertaining to ecological issues and to the most rational husbanding of natural resources, and moreover continue to promote international cooperation and ex-
change of theoretical and applied scholarship: here again, especially in view of preserving the environment and of mitigating natural disasters. UNESCO will further seek to strengthen and multiply ties between major centres for research, science and technology.

But Science today also means the social sciences. Rapid world change and manifold transformations in the relations within and between human communities must be assessed and understood in depth - while the need to deliver fair justice to all, in the face of heightening social discrepancies, tensions and conflicts, requires considerable education in human rights and ethics: and this too is a crucial UNESCO task.

We must moreover continue to play a major role in the Cultural field, where UNESCO enjoys great experience. This is to pursue the safeguarding of the World Heritage - both artistic and natural: for it is an essential part of our mandate to promote informed respect for the achievements of the Earth’s many peoples. As I said when serving as Chair for the World Heritage Committee, the monuments inherited from our human past, along with the features of our landscape, are so many material moorings, which we wish to bequeath to the human future. In UNESCO’s view, cultural diversity, but also cultural exchange, are in fact twin and inseparable notions: whereby we may learn from each, and yet may contribute to all. In light of today’s globalization, it is becoming increasingly important for peoples to protect their cultural identity and heritage, including intangible cultural treasures.

Such a heritage to cherish thus not only concerns our material endowment in terms of natural landmarks or buildings from the past - it also addresses the knowledge and meaning these material riches have to impart to our contemporary world, and hence implies involvement in fresh creativity. I intend to enhance UNESCO’s commitment to contemporary cultural expressions, the better for us to understand the major trends in today’s world.

In terms of Communications, still another of our Organization’s chief pillars, UNESCO must continue to champion free expression, and also to defend international diversity in the production and flow of cultural goods - while keenly working to democratise and facilitate access to information and knowledge in all forms. UNESCO thus notably addresses the crucial worldwide challenge raised by today’s emerging information society: along with all the social, cultural and ethical implications of electronic media. UNESCO’s task here includes dealing with the very unequal admittance to sources of information in the world’s various countries.

In every one of these fields, UNESCO will bring all its influence and pressure to bear, in order to enhance the role and increase the participation of women. And our Organization must also pay heightened attention to the hopes of the world’s youth: for the cultural trends and manifold expressions of today’s young should inspire us, if UNESCO wishes to inspire them.

UNESCO must thus remain true to itself, as an abiding and continually vital institution, while yet addressing each day’s new issues, and thus undergoing each age’s necessary challenges. I should like here to refer to the great seventeenth-century Japanese poet, Bashô, who dwelt on such a living contrast between Fueki, the fundamental unchanging permanence of things, and Ryuko, the trends and changes of the era. In other words, things which must change do change; and things which must not change, will not change.

So with UNESCO, whose great task continues.
Madam President, Mr Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Director-General and dear friend, Professor Federico Mayor,

At this moment when I accept the heavy responsibility of succeeding you as Director-General, I should like to express to you, on behalf of us all, our respect and gratitude for the work you have performed during your 12 years of office.

Your latest books, *Un mundo nuevo* and *Los nudos gordianos*, will remain with us as a living source of inspiration, urging us to an ever deeper commitment to the ideals of UNESCO.

Your achievements, Mr Director-General, have already taken their place within a vast endeavour that transcends our personal destinies. And here I should like to quote some lines of a great poet of the twentieth century, Vicente Huidobro, a Chilean of universal scope, who is one of your favourite writers:

The flowers and the grasses fade  
Perfume floats faintly on the air like bells ringing in another province  
Other looks and other voices come  
Other waters flow in the river  
Other leaves appear suddenly in the wood

My heart will overflow the earth  
And the universe will be my heart.

Madam President,  
Mr Chairperson,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Huidobro might almost be Buddhist, and echo Bashô, in thus evoking the necessary everchanging surface pattern of what, in essence, must be changeless.

An ancient tradition, dear to all civilizations, is that there exists a subtle link between the inner harmony of human beings, and the balance of the natural world around us - as if we projected thereon our own inner turmoil, or inner peace. One of the guiding principles of our Japanese ethics is just such harmony, which we call wa, our own pronunciation of the Chinese character hé This strong belief in harmony has endured with us to this day. As Director-General, I should like to impart the spirit of wa. In accordance with wa, tensions should be resolved, not through conflict, but through harmony - and not only amongst one another, but in attunement and sensitivity to the very flow of the natural order around us.

In the whirl of this changing age, let us stand firm and faithful to our enduring purpose:

“building peace in the minds of men.
Articles published in the Bulletin of the Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. 1982-1999 (spanish/english)

Nº 50, December, 1999
Work - oriented education for youths and adults.
*Enrique Pieck*

Literacy: access to the written culture, education and information.
*Judith Kalman*

Language, power and quality of education.
*Juan Casassus*

Challenges and tasks confronting chilean education at the beginning of the 21st century.
*Fundación Chile’s Education Programme*

UNESCO and the dawn of a new millennium.
*Koichiro Matsuura*

Nº 49, August, 1999

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UNESCO and the Culture of Peace. *UNESCO*

Education through communications and culture. *Claudio Avendaño, Pilar Izquierdo*

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*Rosa María Torres*

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*Ernesto Schiefelbein, Laurence Wolff, Paulina Schiefelbein*

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*María Luisa Jáuregui*

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*Pablo Salvat B.*

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Regional Information System. Background and prospects. *SIRI*
Worldwide programs to create systems of education indicators. *SIRI*
Home surveys as information source for the analysis of education and its links to well being and equity. *Arturo León*

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UNESCO and educational development in Latin America and the Caribbean. *UNESCO*
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**Nº 42, April, 1997**

Secondary education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Objectives, expansion, demands, and modalities. *UNESCO-OREALC*

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The teaching profession and educational development in Latin America and the Caribbean. *UNESCO-OREALC*

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The role of teachers in educational reform. *Claudia Harvey*

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Funding secondary education to what end? which areas? who will do the funding? *Ana María Corvalán*

**Nº 40, August, 1996**

Education, Democracy, Peace and Development. *MINEDLAC VII Recommendations*

Education for development and peace: valuing diversity and increasing opportunities for personalized and group learning. *UNESCO, Santiago*

Evaluating student performance. Classroom research: complementary pedagogical action. *Ubiratan D’Ambrosio*

Students really want to learn. *Marilyn Atherley*


**Nº 39, April, 1996**

Secondary education in the Caribbean. *Errol Miller*

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Action for equality, development and peace. UNESCO

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Educational reform in Latin America and the Caribbean: An agenda for action. Ernesto Schiefelbein
Uruguayan high school graduates: Who they are, what did they learn and what do they think. ECLA, Montevideo
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Open and distance learning. UNESCO

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Educational demands prompted by the new styles of management styles. Cecilia Montero
Agreement on common basic contents in Argentina. Cecilia Braslavsky
Class committees in Guyana. Leyland Maison
A quality basic education: the evolution of the teacher’s role. Argar Alexander
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Current trends in educational reform. Juan Carlos Tedesco
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Equal educational opportunities for women: myth and reality. María Luisa Jáuregui
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Characteristics of the teaching profession and the quality of education in Latin America. Ernesto Schiefelbein, Cecilia Braslavsky, Bernardete A. Gatti, Pilar Farrés
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Being a teacher: decision or destiny. Permanence conditions in the teaching profession. Pilar Farrés, Carmen Noriega
Teachers formation and training: Impact on learning in the United States. *Violeta Arancibia*
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Modern management of educational systems. *OREALC*
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Human resources policy for the management of educational systems. *Guíomar Namo de Mello*
Education management at the local level. *Burchell Whiteman*
Educational decentralization in Mexico. *José A. Pescador*
Information needs for decision making in modern management of the ministries of education. *Germán Rama*
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Research on functional illiteracy in adults. *Vanilda Paiva*
Recommendations for improving reading and writing comprehension in children from rural and urban marginal areas. *Josette Jolibert*
The 900 school program. A Chilean experience. *Viviana Galdames*
Reflective thinking and creativity in reading and writing achievements. The PRYCREA Project: a Cuban experience. *América González Valdés*
The children’s literacy in Latin America. *Emilia Ferreiro*
Language policy and literacy learning. *Marie Clay*
Literacy and culture. *Brian V. Street*
Peace education in Grenada. *Leonard L. Greaux*
Jerome Bruner and adult education. *Jorge Jairo Posada*
Functional illiteracy, informed knowledge and mass media. *Germán Mariño*
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Professionalizing education to meet basic learning needs. Addresses and summary of agreements. PROMEDLAC V
Towards a new era in educational development. Main Working Document prepared by UNESCO
Recommendations on the execution of the Major Project in Education of 1993-1996. Intergovernmental Committee for the Major Project of Education
Santiago Declaration. Ministers of Education and Heads of Delegation attending PROMEDLAC V
Teacher’s contribution to educational problems in Latin America and the Caribbean. Magaly González P., Adalaila L. Macías S., Cecilia R. Rizo C.
Learning and teaching science: a relationship to bear in mind. Carlos Palacios, Encarnación Zambrano
Decentralization of education. R.W. McMeekin

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Reading comprehension in children from rural and urban areas. OREALC
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Reflections on improving the quality of education. Juan Bosco Bernal
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Functional illiteracy requirements in youth and adults. Ecuatian and work in a small developing state. Olabisi Kuboni

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The Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean- Progress, limitations, obstacles, and challenges. Working document Recommendation Quito Declaration
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World Conference on Education for All
World Declaration on Education for All
Framework for action to meet basic learning needs
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Literacy, human rights, and democracy. José Rivero H.
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Bilingual education in the autonomous regions of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua: Experiences and prospects. Massimo Amadio

Nº 19, August, 1989
Third Meeting of the Regional Committee of the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. PROMEDLAC III
National adult literacy action in Latin America: A critical review. Rosa María Torres
Educational financing in budgetary austerity period. UNESCO. Division of Educational Policies and Planning
World Conference on Education for All. Accomplishments of the basic learning needs
Patterns in Caribbean science-related cultural beliefs which may affect learning in school science. June George, Joyce Glasgow

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Repetition: the constraint for reaching universal primary education in Latin America. Ernesto Schiefelbein
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Contributions to the construction of a didactic model for new strategies on long distance education. Marta Mena
The rural school in Colombia. Rodrigo Parra Sandoval
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Alternatives to understanding illiteracy in the region. Emilia Ferreiro
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Evaluation of Educational Projects in Latin America. Johanna Philp
Learning problems in children 6-15 years. E.M. Houston

Nº 12, April, 1987
Second Meeting of the Regional Intergovernmental Committee of the Major Project of Education and the Sixth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning of the Member States in Latin America and the Caribbean National Requirements of Educational Planners. Walter Garcia
Audio-Visual Mass Education. J. Manuel Calvelo Rios
Jamaica Nutrition Education Project. Carol Baume

Nº 10-11, December, 1986
Experiences of educational innovations: Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica. Arvelio García
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Adult education in Latin America: requirements and strategies for the training of staff. José Rivero
Alternatives in basic education for adults. Felix Chaparro
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Nº 9, April, 1986

The Major Project in the Field of Education in Central America; advances, limitations and priorities for action in the future.

*UNESCO sub-regional Education Office for Central America and Panama*

System of Statistical Information to support the planning, operation, monitoring and evaluation of Ecuador’s literacy programme.

*Dayssy Vega de Baca*

The creation of alphabets: an interdisciplinary task.

*Anna Lucia D’Emilio*

Nº 8, March, 1986

Strategies for training community educators for initial education programmes not based in school. *Gilberto Calvo*

A framework for drawing up diversified strategies for training multi-purpose educators.

*Rodrigo Vera*

OREALC’s activities to support The Major Project

Nº 7, September, 1985

The Regional Plan of Actions for the Major Project gets under way

The System of Networks of Cooperation for the Major Project in the field of Education

The Regional Information System of the Major Project (SIRI)

Multiple actions carried out by OREALC to support the activities of the Major Project

Documentary support

Activities of the UNDP/UNESCO Project RLA/83/012 “Support for literacy and adult education processes in Central America and Panama (September 1984-July 1985)

VIII Regional Conference of National Commissions for UNESCO in Latin America and the Caribbean

OEI Congress

Nº 6, January, 1985

First Meeting of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for The Major Project

Balance of efforts made with respect to each of the objectives of The Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean region and priorities for future action

Regional Plan of action of The Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

Nº 5, May, 1984

Establishment of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for The Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

Establishment of the support unit for The Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

Some activities carried out in the countries of the region

Project activities at regional and subregional levels

Regional and international co-operation
Nº 4, November, 1983
Some activities relating to the Major Project carried out in individual countries
Ministers agree to support the Major Project
Regional and subregional technical meetings

Nº 3, March, 1983
Communication methods and procedures
Linkage between formal and non-formal education
Role of educational and professional guidance
Promotion of science and technology
Formal education and literacy
Educational development strategies in rural areas
Basic education and in-service training of teachers
Curriculum development at the local level
Reorganization of educational content
Mechanism for subregional integration
OREALC’s Major Project support programme

Nº 2, August, 1982
Outstanding points in the debates of the St. Lucia Meeting
Recommendation of the St. Lucia Meeting
Statutes of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee of the Major Project
Some activities carried out within the framework of the Major Project
Activities foreseen for the immediate future. Regional and sub-regional meeting.

Nº 1, April, 1982
Establishment of an interim intergovernmental Regional Committee for The Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
Establishment of national mechanism of the Major Project
National seminars on the Major Project
The Major Project and the subregional integration mechanism
Regional technical meetings
UNESCO technical co-operation
Studies related to the Major Project.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books Series</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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