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BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Formal education, informal education and continuing education in Europe and Latin America

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Formal education, informal education and continuing education in Europe and Latin America

First of all, we need to define our terms because, as often happens in the social sciences, many expressions do not have a specific, universally accepted definition. The meaning and connotations of words change in the light of many factors such as place and time, the school of thought being used as the basis for a paper, in addition to sociocultural and other variables.

For the purposes of this background document, *education* means the ‘entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of, the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge’.¹

As regards ‘non-formal education’ and ‘informal education’, a distinction is usually drawn between these two expressions. The former is taken to refer to processes which take place within institutions and premises and in contexts which are not educational in character, but which adhere in all aspects to specific objectives and plans. Nor should ‘non-formal education’ be confused with ‘non-institutionalised education’.

As regards ‘informal education’, to which the title of the requested paper refers, it is usual to regard it as those educational processes which do not follow specific plans, which are more spontaneous, which do not necessarily take place within an institutional framework, whether or not educational, which can be obtained through everyday experience and which, as a result, many people associate with the educational role played by the communication media, whether or not the latter intend to impinge on the changes in conduct of the general public.

With regard to continuing or continuous education, a UNESCO document, signed by Dr Carlos Tünnermann Bernheim,² citing Charles Hummel,³ sets out clearly and precisely the distinction between lifelong education, adult education and continuous education in the following terms: ‘However, lifelong education must not be confused with continuous education, as happens fairly frequently, and sometimes, incidentally, in order to monopolise the concept for special purposes. Adult education is only one aspect – although an important one – of a system of lifelong education. As for the idea of continuous training, it is also restrictive in that it relates exclusively to the vocational side of education, whereas, in the concept of lifelong education, the term ‘education’ is understood in its broadest sense.’⁴

For its part, the *Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century*, chaired by Jacques Delors, suggests rethinking and broadening the notion of *continuing education* towards one of *lifelong education*, because not only must it adapt to

¹ Taken from the *Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, approved by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) at its 18th session on 19 November 1974.

² Member of the UNESCO Executive Board, UNESCO Special Adviser for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, member of the Governing Board of the United Nations University (Tokyo) and of the Club of Rome, General Secretary of the Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA) and former Minister for Education of Nicaragua. At:

http://www.daad.de/de/download/alumni/veranstaltungen/03_03_30/Bernheim.pdf

³ Charles Hummel: *Education today for the world of tomorrow*, Voluntad/UNESCO. Bogotá, 1978. p. 37.

⁴ La educación permanente y su impacto en la educación superior. By Carlos Tünnermann Bernheim. At: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001204/120441so.pdf>

changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole human beings – their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act.¹

Having made these clarifications, we can go on to tackle our subject and start by pointing out that, although at an individual level the first priority is certainly to satisfy the basic, primary or vital human requirements (food, health, etc.), from the point of view of society as a whole, equal and of course – as in any sector – non-exclusive priority must be given to education. The reason behind this assertion lies in the fact that hunger, poverty and social injustice, at all levels, do not necessarily stem from factors relating to scarcity of natural resources, inadequate production technologies or excessive population growth, but they also stem, at a more fundamental level, from the general prevalence of a defective system of values, in which many human beings (individuals, groups, classes, and significant sectors of the population of a country or even groups of countries), lacking the principles of solidarity and a broad vision of world development, do not feel worried by, responsible for or part of the wealth-poverty divide or, in general, relate to the situation of injustice which affects the majority of the inhabitants of our planet, surrounded by shameful contradictions.²

Consequently, the concepts of *formal* and *informal education* and *continuous education*, as clarified above, must inevitably serve the common good, that is to say, the attainment of full and sustainable development for mankind as a whole, development which must be measured in terms of genuine social justice and equity; peace and harmony, respect for human rights, nature and cultural differences; general satisfaction of human requirements of all kinds, including quality education for all; and full democracy.

It is vitally important to bear in mind that today's world is marked by the changes which are occurring constantly and at a speed hitherto unknown in the history of mankind. At the present time, according to various specialist calculations, we produce more information every day, in a few hours, than we could produce in 100 years just a decade or two ago.³ Against this background, the concepts of *lifelong education* which, as we saw above, broadens the traditional meanings of continuous and continuing education, and *informal education*, which is ideally suited to contributing to a process of learning throughout life, take on even greater importance because informal education itself is a lifetime process and, in addition to drawing on everyday experiences, its subject-matter contributes to one's own education and to that of others.

We are becoming increasingly and more generally aware that the social communication media constitute a vital and increasingly active component of informal education.⁴ This is why, when

¹UNESCO; **Learning: the Treasure Within**, Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, chaired by Jacques Delors; EDICIONES UNESCO, Correo de la UNESCO; Mexico, D.F., Mexico. 1997. Also, the *Compendium* to that report; UNESCO Publications, Paris, France, 1996.

²Taken from: *Educación: Protagonista del Desarrollo* Revista Visión Internacional, Vol. 79 No 4, 16 to 31 August 1992. Mexico City, Mexico.

³See for example, among other sources: *¿Cuántos datos se crean al día en Internet?* At: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/02/08/navegante/1297179889.html>

⁴The following references may be cited, among many:

– *Fundamentos y retos de educación social-informal desde el análisis crítico de los medios de comunicación*. Primer Congreso Virtual Latinoamericano de Educación a Distancia – LatinEduca 2004. At:

http://www.ateneonline.net/datos/50_03_Lorenzo_Oswaldo.pdf

– *Medios de comunicación de masas, educación informal y aprendizajes sociales* Ángel Liceras Ruiz. University of Granada,

we talk about ‘education’, we have to include the role played by those mass communication media. This is because, although people have traditionally said that the role of those media is to ‘educate, inform and entertain’, the acts of informing and entertaining are also educational activities which have an enormous potential for educating – or diseducating, as the case may be – especially with respect to young children.¹

The communication media therefore bear an enormous responsibility in terms of educational processes and particularly informal processes; adhering fully to the principle of freedom of the press, but at the same time recognising that, on the one hand, such freedom, like all human freedoms, has a limit: the limit imposed by ethics, by the unrestricted subjection to universal ethical values and principles. On the other hand, that freedom must of necessity be directed towards seeking the common good.

In order for education to fulfil its vital and irreplaceable role in terms of satisfying human needs and answering human aspirations, it must mirror the proposals in the above Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century. Among the issues considered by that document, it is interesting to single out, on the one hand, those which relate to the tensions to be overcome through the educational process: the tensions between the global and the local, between tradition and modernity, between long-term and short-term considerations, between the need for competition and the concern for equality of opportunity, between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings’ capacity to assimilate, between the spiritual and the material; to which we might add, as other forms of tension to be overcome, the tension between past and present, between subject and object, between universal principles and values and social theories and, in cultural terms, the tension between the individual and the universal, which incorporates the challenge of maintaining the always precarious balance between the individual experiences of the various social groups and the necessary preservation, through education, of the means of constructive dialogue with the essential elements of the universal culture.² Another interesting point is what the UNESCO Report defines as ‘the four pillars of education’: namely, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together – or learning to live with others – and learning to be.

Another essential concept which should underpin all matters relating to education in all its forms is *disarmament education* whereby the huge sums spent on the production and purchase of weapons and military expenditure in general should be re-directed towards education. In this way, we could gradually start to replace the culture of death and violence, which is constantly being nurtured and expanded, with a culture of life and peace.³

Spain. 2005. At:
<http://www.ub.edu/histodidactica/CCSS/Liceras-medios.pdf>

¹Teaching material for the subject *Development, planning and the project cycle* for the Doctorate of Education, at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the National University of Cuyo (Mendoza, Argentina), a programme developed jointly with: PRIS (Laboratoire de Psychologie des Régulations Individuelles et Sociales), University of Rouen, France; and the Centre de Recherche sur la Formation of CNAM, France. Mendoza, Argentina, 2004.

²The reference to tensions other than those referred to in the Delors Report was taken almost verbatim from: Heller, Agnes, et. al. Zaia Brandão (Org.). *A Crise dos Paradigmas em Ciências Sociais e os Desafios para o Século XXI*. Contraponto Editora Ltda. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 1999.

³Taken from: Escotet, Miguel A.; Alborno, Orlando, et al. **Educación y Desarrollo desde la Perspectiva Sociológica**. Universidad Iberoamericana de Postgrado, Salamanca, SPAIN, 1989. Also from teaching material for the subject *Development, Planning and the Project Cycle*. Doc. cit.

Parliaments and inter-parliamentary organisations have an important and irreplaceable role to play in this vital undertaking. As regards this role, all of us here at EUROLAT know, and the Latin American Parliament has rightly said in several of its institutional documents, that the legislative assemblies have the threefold, fundamental task of legislating on, overseeing and debating the great social problems.

For Parliaments and parliamentary associations at international level – both regional and subregional – the legislative task comprises the following main activities: (a) promoting and supporting the improvement and enhancement of existing legal bodies; (b) encouraging legislative harmonisation and the enactment of laws, decrees and other legal instruments to serve as a framework of reference for the legislative activity of countries, and (c) promoting the adoption, in each national Parliament, of the recommendations and resolutions passed in joint deliberations.

In terms of their oversight activities, national Parliaments and parliamentary associations should create bodies to follow-up and to monitor compliance with the undertakings, recommendations and resolutions adopted.

In addition to the fact that the regional and subregional Parliaments themselves constitute meaningful forums for discussing and examining the main problems which beset society and the corresponding action measures, it is for them to provide the forums for intra- and interregional dialogue, not only with other similar entities but, in general, with all the main actors in the process.¹

PARLATINO has often reiterated the fact that parliamentarians, as the lawful representatives of civil society, cannot stand aside from debating such important issues as education, for example, which has profound implications for all aspects of human life. The legislative function does not just consist of ratification; it is essentially a decision-making and overseeing function, and these activities cannot be applied to a *fait accompli*; they imply close involvement in all the stages of the process and continuous monitoring of that process.

It is, therefore, incumbent on all of us, as parliamentarians of our respective countries, as members of this EUROLAT *Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Human Exchanges, Environment, Education and Culture* and, basically, as the lawful representatives of our electors and their most cherished hopes, constantly to ensure that education fulfils its fundamental and irreplaceable role in the development and integration of our peoples.

To conclude this paper, we should like to refer, among these obligations, to those undertaken by the Latin American legislatures, meeting at the, *Inter-parliamentary Conference on Education*, convened by PARLATINO and UNESCO and held at the then permanent headquarters of the Latin American Parliament in São Paulo, on 5 and 6 November 2002, obligations which are set out in the *São Paulo Declaration*, the Final Act of that Conference.

1. To ensure compliance with the Constitution of each country, in relation to laws on

¹Taken from the presentation of the Latin American Parliament at the *Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Round table session on the Parliamentary Dimension of the WTO*. Geneva, Switzerland, 17-18 February 2003.

statutory education, both in terms of years of attendance, and as regards the ages at which attendance at school is compulsory.

2. To encourage national educational systems to ensure: (a) in terms of coverage, *education for all*, without any discrimination; and (b) in terms of meaning and content, education which incorporates the four pillars referred to in the '*Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century*' (*Delors Report*): *learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together and learning to do*, in addition to *education about values* which perfectly fulfils the fundamental and strategic role of forming whole human beings.
3. To secure investment of no less than 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) with a view to progressively increasing allowances in the medium term, according to the needs of each country, guaranteeing effectiveness and fairness in the allocation of resources.
4. To strengthen the role of the school using the methods best suited to each country and each community, in order to foster genuine autonomy on the part of educational units, greater effectiveness and efficiency of processes and outcomes, and more active participation on the part of all actors.
5. To promote the upward valuation of teachers, by improving their continuing education and training, as well as their working conditions and pay, based on a suitable assessment of their performance, in view of the social importance of this function.
6. To ensure that new technologies are incorporated in educational processes and in system management for improved learning.
7. To make educational systems more flexible so that supply is more varied and tailored to the different needs of pupils and of the teaching community in general in order to guarantee learning throughout life.
8. To encourage continuous assessment of the quality of education and the use and dissemination of its results in order comprehensively to improve the educational systems of each country.
9. To promote a culture of social responsibility through education and through the participation of families, local communities and other social actors and stakeholders.
10. To urge the communication media to assume full responsibility in their role as purveyors of values and to become genuinely involved in the general educational process of each country.
11. To encourage research, thinking and public debate concerning education and educational reform, given that the direction and foundations of and strategies for educational change need to be studied on a continuing basis.
12. To formulate and implement the necessary strategies and measures to ensure implementation of the *Regional Education Project for Latin America* and the *Caribbean 2001-2015* (PRELAC) and the *Plan de Educación para el Desarrollo y la Integración de América Latina*. And

13. To kick-start the process of legislative harmonisation in Latin America and the Caribbean and to boost other strategies for international cooperation in this area and for regional and subregional integration.