

LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE NORTH, BASIC EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH? ♦

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At the juncture of the 20th and the 21st century we may be witnessing a consolidation, rather than a reduction, of the gap between North and South in terms of education and learning. Different and even divergent education and learning paradigms are being proposed for the North and for the South by the international development community.

In the context of globalization and of the emergent "knowledge society", *Lifelong Learning* has been revitalized and is being adopted in the North as a key political, societal and educational organizing principle for the 21st century. At the same time, *basic education* – narrowly understood -- is being applied as the equivalent organizing principle for the South. This responds to the conventional deficit rationality that has accompanied North perceptions, relationships and aid vis a vis "developing countries". Such rationality ignores the heterogeneity of these countries and their contradictory nature, where high illiteracy rates and low school achievement may coexist with complex and quality education and training systems, research and intellectual production, and scientific and technological developments.

The World Conference on Education for All – EFA (Jomtien, March 1990) advocated an "expanded vision" of basic education, understood as the foundation for lifelong learning. Such "expanded vision" comprised children, youth and adults, school and out-of school education, and a broad and dynamic understanding of *basic learning needs* of the population. Jomtien's vision, however, was not translated into practice over the 1990s in aid-assisted countries in the South. Jomtien international partners themselves – UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank - as well as other international agencies did not adopt such broad understanding. Education recommendations and policies for "developing countries" have continued to apply a restricted notion of *basic education* - fundamentally related to children, schooling and even access to primary school - and a restricted notion of *basic learning needs* understood as *minimum learning needs*.

The World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000) acknowledged that EFA goals had not been met and extended the deadline until 2015. Jomtien's goals were essentially ratified but the "expanded vision" of basic education was no longer central to the overall framework. Now, primary education is clearly the ceiling (even worse: four years of schooling, according to the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 by the United Nations system, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation

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and Development - OECD), and the emphasis on children has been further focused as an emphasis on girls. Both Jomtien and Dakar lacked a holistic vision of education and learning, and of the formal school system as such – pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education- in relation to basic education goals and to meeting the basic learning needs of the population. Youth and adult education continue to be viewed as remedial and compensatory, focused on the extremely poor, and very much associated with literacy rather than with adult basic education in a broad sense. Obviously, this is not the appropriate framework for the development of the Lifelong Learning paradigm, both in concept and in practice.

Globalization and Knowledge Society for All means Lifelong Learning for All. The North knows it and acknowledges it for its own nations and citizens. The South must strive for it, fighting against double standards and increased global inequities, hopefully with the collaboration of -- rather than against the will and advice of -- the North and the international development community.

Some of these ideas have been developed in previous publications by the author (see www.fronesis.org):

- *Lifelong Learning: A new momentum and a new opportunity for Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) in the South*. A study commissioned by Sida (Swedish International Development Agency). Stockholm: Sida, 2002.
- "What happened at the World Education Forum?", in: *Adult Education and Development*, Nº 55. Bonn: IIZ-DVV, 2001.
- "Knowledge-based international aid: Do we need it, do we want it?", in: Gmelin, W.; King, K.; McGrath, S. (editors), *Knowledge, Research and International Cooperation*, University of Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies, 2001.
- "Cooperación internacional" en educación en América Latina: ¿parte de la solución o parte del problema?, en: *Cuadernos de Pedagogía*, Nº 308, Barcelona, diciembre 2001. Monográfico sobre "La educación en Latinoamérica".
- "Learning Communities: Re-thinking education from the local level and through learning." Paper presented at the International Symposium on Learning Communities, Barcelona Forum 2004 (Barcelona, 5-6 October 2001).
- *One Decade of "Education for All": The Challenge Ahead*. Buenos Aires: IIEP UNESCO, 2000.
- "Improving the Quality of Basic Education? The Strategies of the World Bank", in: Stromquist, N.; Basile, M. (ed.). 1999. *Politics of Educational Innovations in Developing Countries, An Analysis of Knowledge and Power*.

NewYork-London: Falmer Press, 1999.

- *La educación según el Banco Mundial. Un análisis de sus propuestas y métodos.* Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila / CEM, 1997. (with José Luis Coraggio)