

"WHAT WORKS" SERIES

What Works in Education: Facing the New Century

by Rosa-María Torres
Foreword by Rick Little



International Youth Foundation®



Rosa-María Torres

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International Youth Foundation®

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) was established in 1990 to bring worldwide resources and attention to the many effective local efforts that are transforming young lives across the globe. Currently operating in more than 60 countries, IYF is one of the world's largest public foundations supporting programs that improve the conditions and prospects for young people where they live, learn, work, and play. IYF's "What Works in Youth Development" series examines cutting edge issues in the field and aims to provide practitioners, policymakers, donors, and others supporting youth initiatives with insights into effective practices and innovative approaches impacting young people around the world.

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The International Youth Foundation (IYF) is dedicated to improving the conditions and prospects for children and youth where they live, learn, work, and play. *What Works in Education: Facing the New Century* reflects IYF's deep commitment to addressing the educational needs and resources available to young people during a time of sweeping global change.

While great strides have been made in many parts of the world in ensuring that more young people have access to education, the stark fact remains that an estimated 110 million of the world's children are not in school. For those that do have access to education, we need to ask ourselves, are they learning what they need to know in order to succeed? Is that education relevant to their needs? Are there strategies and approaches that can dramatically improve the quality of learning young people experience, while mobilizing diverse sectors of society in strengthening existing educational resources?

What Works in Education: Facing the New Century presents a careful analysis of current trends in education and learning, highlighting various myths in our approaches to education and positive signs of change as we enter a knowledge-driven era with new educational demands. We are grateful to author Rosa-María Torres for her insights into this complex and far-reaching topic and to the Lucent Technologies Foundation for its financial support. Currently, the Lucent Technologies/IYF Global Fund for Education and Learning is funding innovative programs for young people in 15 countries. Such programs are providing out-of-school and indigenous youth in Australia with access to information technology to enhance learning and education skills; training rural teachers in China in interactive teaching methods; providing alternative education and life skills training to low-income young women in Venezuela; and engaging teachers and students in Japan in efforts to promote volunteerism in schools.

These dynamic programs, and others being spearheaded by IYF's partner organizations in over 40 countries, focus on making education more relevant to the needs of young people in today's society. They target programs within the formal education system, mostly by supporting teacher training and curriculum development. They also support initiatives serving out-of-school young people and those at risk of dropping out of school. Among the results of these efforts have been improved student/teacher relations and academic performance, increased creativity and interest in learning, improved self-esteem, and the ability to work in teams.

Many of these programs—and others around the world—are highlighted in the pages of this report. Building on the vast accumulated knowledge of the past, the report analyzes education and learning trends and takes the best of what we have learned in pointing the way forward. Rosa-María Torres is careful to make the distinction between education and its focus on traditional school-based learning and teaching practices, and learning, which encompasses the lifetime of an individual and his or her ability to develop useful knowledge from a variety of

sources. She asks us to discard outmoded stereotypes of young people as problems to be solved and to beware of the very language we use to describe “disadvantaged” youth, “at risk” youth, and “school dropouts.” The report recognizes young people as able contributors, capable of furthering their own learning, as well as that of their peers.

Emphasis is placed here on the quality of teaching as much as on the content of what is taught; on the importance of engaging family members and the wider community in fully meeting the educational needs of young people; and on equipping youth with the competencies to participate in a knowledge-based, technology-driven economy. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons underscored here is the importance of collaborative efforts between public, private, and civil society actors in meeting the myriad educational challenges we, as a global society, face.

We hope you will find the insights and recommendations put forth in this report useful in your work with and for young people.

Rick Little
President and Founder
International Youth Foundation



This paper explores the basic learning needs of young people, both in the South and in the North, at the turn of the twenty-first century. It acknowledges the usual gap between adult perceptions of young people and how young people in different contexts perceive their own learning needs and desires.

The temptation to generalize and provide recommendations that pretend to be good for all has been avoided. Categories such as “North” and “South,” “developed” and “developing” countries, “youth” and “youth at-risk,” “life skills” or “learning needs,” homogenize highly diverse realities, contexts, cultures, and social groups, and thus diverse learning needs, wants, and conditions. On the contrary, we highlight such heterogeneity and welcome the emerging trends toward diversification and experimentation with new education and learning models. The need to differentiate and re-think education and learning, both within and outside the school system, is gaining increased attention among education researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners. Putting the poor—the majority of the world’s population—at the center of such education renewal and diversification efforts, remains the greatest challenge of this new century.

In order to capture such diversity, both theoretical and practical, I have reviewed relevant literature and over 150 youth education and training programs from around the world representing a range of national and cultural contexts, sources, and languages (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, and German). Assuming that programs are policy-in-action, we have prioritized for such review programs perceived, or that perceive themselves, as successful, innovative, or worth taking into account for some reason. Given the disparity between intention and implementation, I have preferred to refer here, whenever possible, only to programs I am familiar with and/or have actually visited.

My own research and practical experience in the field of basic education and learning reaffirms that, rather than developing something radically new, what is needed is to revitalize and translate into coherent practice some of the key principles, findings, and insights that have accompanied progressive and critical educational thinking and research for many years.

Supplementary tables and program examples are inserted throughout the text. However, this selection represents only a fraction of the innovative experiences being conducted in the field of youth education all over the world.

The need to differentiate and re-think education and learning, both within and outside the school system, is gaining increased attention among education researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners.

Interest in youth and education and learning has been growing worldwide since the late 1980s when national and international events, studies, and commitments proliferated concerning the education of youth in the 21st century.

Since the 1980s, and particularly in the 1990s, youth (and adolescents, in some contexts and for some program areas) emerged as a specific category, differentiated from children and from adults.¹

The field of Adult Education, in several regions and countries, was re-named Youth and Adult Education (YAE). UNICEF, traditionally engaged with children and children's rights, introduced youth, and especially adolescents, as part of its mandate. Through these international agreements, many countries and governments created special institutions and policies for youth.

The 1990s saw a proliferation of research and publications; policies; programs and institutions; mass media coverage; global, regional, and national meetings; and declarations and commitments related to youth. Assessments and evaluations have been carried out on several of these commitments, often leading to renewed energy toward meeting unachieved goals within expanded frameworks and deadlines, usually extended for an additional 5, 10, or 15 more years.²

Youth: From Trouble-maker to Lifelong Learner

Escalating youth needs are the concern of everyone—families, school systems, and societies at large—both in the North and in the South. Youth tend to be viewed as a problem and at the very heart of many of our most pressing social concerns. Drugs, violence, delinquency, and teen pregnancy are problems youth have come to be associated with worldwide. Analyses of the situation of youth almost everywhere point to growing alienation, a lack of a sense of identity and of future, and disconnection from families, school, communities, and the broader society.

Parents from all social backgrounds and cultures echo dissatisfaction with the educational and social support structures available to their children. According to many experts, the generation gap and ensuing conflict are stronger than ever before.

School systems are having a hard time coping with adolescents and youth. Following the strong emphasis given primary education in the South in the 1980s and 1990s, secondary education emerges as the new challenge for many of these countries in the first decade of this century. According to evaluation data, problems

Analyses of the situation of youth almost everywhere point to growing alienation, a lack of a sense of identity and of future, and disconnection from families, school, communities, and the broader society.

¹ There are no consensual understandings and classifications of the terms child, adolescent, youth or adult. The Convention on the Rights of the Child calls "child" someone up to the age of 18. Age categories also vary in different contexts and cultures. In general terms, the period 10-14 is considered adolescence, and youth may extend up to 25 or 30 years of age.

² This was, for example, the case with the "Education for All" global initiative, launched in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, under the auspices of by five international agencies (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank), and ratified in 2000 in the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, with the year 2015 as the new proposed deadline.

Following the strong emphasis given primary education in the South in the 1980s and 1990s, secondary education emerges as the new challenge for many of these countries in the first decade of this century.

of discipline and violence, school dropouts, and low learning achievement characterize secondary education worldwide.

Youth appear at the crossroads of many of the most important societal concerns of our time. Family disintegration, poverty, war, and armed conflicts have resulted in millions of street children and youth, refugees, and lack of proper adult protection and affection for youth in all social classes. Unemployment grows, becomes structural in many societies, and is particularly pronounced among youth. The rapid growth of AIDS has affected adolescent and youth development, impacting the very nature of relations between genders at an early age.

The world many youth live in, and most youth are exposed to through mass media, is a world of injustice, violence, corruption, individualism, materialism, and financial and sexual abuses, where almost anything can be bought and sold. Rising violence and crime are also youth issues. Distrust of politics and political parties, in elections and in overall civic participation, are widespread among youth growing up in different contexts and cultures as revealed by a number of studies and surveys in many parts of the world.

Education, Learning, and Lifelong Learning at the Center of the Knowledge Society

Globalization has come with the requirement and promise of a “knowledge society” and a “knowledge-based economy.” Lifelong learning has emerged as a need for all and an organizing principle of both educational and social systems.

This shift also requires that teaching and learning be viewed as two distinct aspects of education. *Teaching* (pedagogical methodologies, curricula, academic content, the knowledge and information conveyed by the instructor) has received much attention; while *learning* (if and how the student internalizes and processes that information, whether the student can apply it to new situations and generalize



Table 1: Understanding Learning Better

- Learning begins at birth and extends throughout the life of an individual.
- All ages are good to learn—childhood, youth, and adulthood.
- Learning is the key mission of educational and training systems, institutions and agents, and thus the most important area in which to judge the effectiveness of education and training policies, programs, and practices. Unless we can accurately assess what a student has learned (e.g., that he/she can summarize it, interpret it, explain it, apply it, and extrapolate it to new situations) teaching has not been effective.
- But *learning* transcends *education*: not all that is learned is the result of education (e.g., of teaching).
- The school system is not the only educational system, much less the only learning system: learning involves the family, the community, the workplace, peers, mass media, learning by doing and by reflecting on one's actions.
- Learning, in the school environment, goes beyond the classroom, the proposed curriculum, and conventional testing.
- Teaching is not only an adult-child relationship: children and youth also teach and learn from each other, and teach adults.
- There are many ways to learn besides listening and reading.
- Learning needs and wants differ according to different groups and cultures, and change over time.
- Individuals have different learning needs requiring different teaching strategies and styles.
- Not all that needs to be learned can be taught (e.g., can be transferred through an educational activity).
- Learning is a complex process and is not guaranteed by access (e.g., to school, to educational opportunities, to modern information and communication technologies).
- Motivation, effort, and time are critical requirements for learning.
- Learning is essentially about understanding and making sense of what is learned for one's own purposes.

Source: Torres, 1998.

Today's fast-changing economy requires that young people—and adults—commit to becoming life long learners, continually upgrading their skills and knowledge base to adapt to emerging needs.

For many educators, the lifelong learning paradigm confronts the challenge of accepting the school system as one (among other) learning systems, and the need to transform it to cope with its new role.

it, and any changes that take place in the student's world view because of the new knowledge) has received less attention. So the education process is not complete or effective, unless teaching is reflected in actual learning from the student's perspective.

There are various modern interpretations of the concept of lifelong learning. For many educators, the lifelong learning paradigm confronts the challenge of accepting the school system as one (among other) learning systems, and the need to transform it to cope with its new role. For analysts, lifelong learning is strongly associated with dis-



Table 2: Lifelong Learning

While the concept of *lifelong learning* has many different interpretations, some of its core features include:

- A clearer differentiation between *education* and *learning* (and thus between *lifelong education* and *lifelong learning*).
- Emphasis on learning (and the learner) rather than on teaching (and the teacher).
- Expanding access to *learning opportunities*.
- Learning as a process that takes place throughout one's lifespan.
- Diversification of learning settings, strategies, and modes of delivery.
- A renewed emphasis on the process, not only on content and results.
- Importance given to the core issues and content to be learned, not only to methodologies, teaching strategies, and tools for teaching.
- Lifelong learning as a need and a right for *all*.

tance education and modern information and communication technologies (ICTs), not only as a complement but also as a substitute for schooling. In any case, it is commonly accepted that lifelong learning and the requirements of the upcoming knowledge society imply a major shift in the conventional education and learning culture.

Key Points

- Since the late 1980's youth are increasingly at the center of international commitments, policies, and studies, through a renewed worldwide concern with unmet educational goals, but also because of a generalized perception of youth as a problem to be solved.
- Globalization, based on a knowledge economy, requires a shift in societies' organizing principles, especially in the area of education: from a focus on education and teaching, to a focus on learning; from youth as passive recipients of information and services, to youth as critical thinkers and lifelong learners.

...it is commonly accepted that lifelong learning and the requirements of the upcoming knowledge society imply a major shift in the conventional education and learning culture.

A Review of Literature and Experiences Worldwide

Contemporary literature and programs related to youth education point to important similarities across regions, countries, and cultures. Such similarities can be attributed to several factors, among them:

- commonalities of education and learning institutions worldwide;
- common characteristics and realities of this particular generation of youth, as distinct from previous generations of youth (each generation exhibits specific characteristics because each generation lives during a different historical period);
- the role of development agencies particularly in the case of developing and transitional countries; and
- the internationalization of ideas and trends vis á vis education, learning, youth and development, in an increasingly globalized society.

In the framework of such global trends, there are also many regional and national differences. Policies and programs dealing with the education of youth differ between countries in the North and in the South, but also among and within the major geographic regions. While much of the terminology may give the impression of a common language, there remain important cultural, political, and ideological differences in the understanding, emphases, and concrete applications of such concepts. Thus, concern with school achievement and academic competencies has become a worldwide concern, but the terms of such concern differ between North and South, and within each region. For example, programs dealing with drug abuse are much more widespread in the North than in the South. Europe and the United States have somewhat different approaches to what and how youth should be learning in schools. Mathematical skills appear as a main concern in the U.S., while multiculturalism and tolerance are at the center of many youth development programs in transition (ex-communist) countries in Europe. Programs for street children and vocational training for youth are particularly widespread in Latin America, while a focus on girls' education is a major trend in many countries in Africa and Asia. Concepts such as life skills, cultural identity, leadership, self-esteem, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, resilience, citizenship and citizenship building, volunteerism, and many others, have different meanings in different cultures.

Policies and programs dealing with the education of youth differ between countries in the North and in the South, but also among and within the major geographic regions.

Table 3 summarizes some of the common trends in education and learning which transcend cultural and national boundaries. Column A highlights frequent features found in the literature and accounts of programs in this field, while Column B highlights less frequent, but desirable features. Although presented in columns, these trends do not represent dichotomies but rather a continuum, with extreme positions on both ends and many variants and shades in between. The remainder of this text will elaborate on each of the points summarized below.

Table 3: Global Trends in Youth Education and Learning Programs

A Traditional	B Desired
Participants	
Programs <i>for</i> youth	Programs <i>with</i> youth
Addressed to specific groups (e.g., at risk, disadvantaged)	Focused on specific groups but within an inclusive framework that avoids stigmatization and further isolation
Dealing with <i>youth</i> only	Dealing with <i>youth</i> , their <i>families</i> and/or <i>communities</i>
Youth as <i>beneficiaries</i>	Youth as <i>social and change agents</i>
Education agents	
<i>Adults</i> as teachers and mentors (inter-generational learning)	Also youth learning from youth (e.g., intra-generational learning, peer tutoring)
Mission	
Adapt/integrate youth into society	Also develop critical awareness and understanding of their realities so that they play an active role in transforming them
Focus/approach	
Focus on <i>education</i> or <i>training</i>	Focus on <i>learning</i>
Concern with the <i>what</i> (content) of education	Also concern with the <i>hows</i> (methods, approaches, strategies) of education
Primary focus on preventing or correcting negative conducts	Primary focus on identifying and stimulating positive behavior, talents, and assets
Concern with <i>employability</i>	Concern with <i>sustainable livelihoods</i> —not limited to employability.
Learning about immediate, local realities	Also learning about national and global realities
<i>Sectoral</i> approaches and interventions	More holistic and cross-sectoral approaches and interventions
Relationship with the school system	
Concern with enabling and convincing youth to go back to school	Also concern with changing the school system and culture to make it more youth- and learner-friendly
Dealing with either formal or non-formal education	Complementing formal and non-formal education
Project design and implementation	
Projects implemented	Projects also documented and evaluated

Based on a review of literature and experiences throughout the world.

From Programs for Youth to Programs with Youth

Traditionally, the education of children and youth has involved an adult-centered approach. Educational provision has been centered on adult perceptions of young people's needs, which have then been translated into curriculum, teaching strategies, and spatial and time arrangements. Typically, children and youth learning needs are defined based on demands posed by the family, the community, and the larger society. Most of these demands focus on helping the child or young person to succeed through various life transitions—to adulthood, to building a family, to work. Little attention has been given to what youth themselves have to say. Even when consultation is involved, young people's opinions are usually framed within the logic of needs rather than of wants.

The weaknesses of this adult-centered and authoritarian approach have become increasingly apparent. As the case below shows, young people are demanding to have a voice and to participate. Past failures speak to the need to involve youth—not only for the sake of their valuable contributions and participation in society—but because their knowledge and perceptions are critical for successful policy and program design and implementation.

Typically, children and youth learning needs are defined based on demands posed by the family, the community, and the larger society.

Listening to Youth When it Comes to Meeting Their Needs

“El Encuentro” (The Encounter) is a network of community-based child and youth education centers located in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Extreme poverty keeps many local families from leaving their neighborhoods, since they have no money for transportation or even to look for a job. In the absence of recreational opportunities, El Encuentro developed a program to meet young people's needs for sports and other outdoor activities. After a while, however, several participants came one day to talk to program staff: “We are all the time doing something physical,” said one. “You think entertainment is good for us because it will distract us from our problems. But we do not want to forget about our problems or pretend they do not exist. We want to talk about them. We would prefer to come here and talk with you.” Following their input, the project was converted into an indoor program, balls were replaced by chairs, and conversation became the central activity for reaching local youth.

Source: Conversation with coordinator of “El Encuentro,” José C. Paz, Argentina.

Authoritarianism is no longer the prevailing trend in both the family and school system. More democratic relationships are emerging at home and in the school system.

Important changes are taking place in this regard. Authoritarianism is no longer the prevailing trend in both the family and school system. More democratic relationships are emerging at home and in the school system. There are more and more examples of youth participating in school governing boards, actively defining, together with school authorities, the codes and regulations of the school.



Many youth and educational reform efforts are now working to enable and enhance dialogue between students and teachers, between children and parents, and/or between students, teachers, and parents. The notion of young people as protagonists with valid voices and valuable contributions is increasingly being integrated into programs around the world, governmental and non-governmental.

New tensions and contradictions also are emerging as a result of these trends. Roles and issues of authority, discipline, autonomy, and liberty are being redefined. The tension between learning needs (as perceived by adults and by youth themselves) and learning wants, or between learning for the present and learning for the future, is being addressed in curriculum and pedagogical design. Experimentation is being advised before “going to scale.” It has become increasingly clear that the only way to address such tensions, and to define and promote the best possible educational approaches, will be by engaging youth in the process. Many of the programs highlighted in the following pages make this participatory approach a key ingredient of their philosophy and success.

Taking Steps to Avoid Reverse Discrimination

Increased poverty and social exclusion are some of the downsides of the market economy and of globalization. Half of the world's population is currently categorized as poor or surviving below the poverty line, on less than two dollars a day. To address these harsh realities, "poverty alleviation" and "compensatory" social policies focused on "disadvantaged" groups (also termed "marginalized," "at risk," "vulnerable," or "in especially difficult circumstances") have been emphasized over the past few years. Diverse groupings and conditions are included under this category, including working children, street children, low academic achievers, dropouts and out-of-school youth, pregnant adolescents and youth, drug abusers, refugees, and ethnic minorities. Poverty is the organizing category that underlies and furthers many of these conditions.

The focus on "poor/disadvantaged/at risk groups" responds to a social inclusion approach aimed at ensuring social equity and is thus valuable. However, a closer look at many such inclusion policies and programs reveals negative underlying assumptions and repercussions.

On one hand, such focus has contributed to identifying youth with disadvantaged youth and disadvantaged youth with "problem" youth. All these associations and generalizations have added to the negative image of youth in general, and of disadvantaged youth in particular.

The very term "disadvantaged" may not be the most appropriate. Is disadvantaged a term that should be applied to people—whether referring to children, youth or adults—or rather to their conditions? Do "the disadvantaged" see and call themselves such? How are such individuals disadvantaged—in what ways, with respect to whom, and to what?

Calling attention to the problems of youth who live on the margins of society has increased the public's negative perception of them.

Likewise, calling youth themselves "disadvantaged," rather than their

Calling attention to the problems of youth who live on the margins of society has increased the public's negative perception of them.



BRAZIL: Projeto Axé, Salvador-Bahía

Projeto Axé, initiated in 1990, seeks to enable vulnerable children and youth to build their own personal and social projects. Axé works with street children and youth, ages 6 to 24, in Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia, Northeast Brazil. By 1999, 7,700 children and youth had been served by the project, 30 percent of them girls. (An initial survey conducted by Axé revealed the existence of 12,000 street boys and girls in the streets of Salvador).

- Axé works with both governmental and non-governmental organizations. It does not pretend to be a solution but to mediate in search of solutions. Axé aspires to empower citizens to transform their own realities, on both a personal and social level. The project believes that citizenship building is done better on a daily basis and through daily routines.
- The project is based on a “Pedagogy of Desire.” Youth pursue their own interests and desires, selecting from 17 activities, including education, health and recreation, arts and culture, professional training, and assistance with school. Emphasis is placed on arts and culture. Axé believes that street children have the right to leisure and beauty and that arts and culture are not only instruments of education but are educative in themselves. The project offers music and fashion workshops and engages youth in three Afro-Brazilian music bands. It also provides modern and classic dancing instruction, music workshops, and art classes in which participants learn serigraphy and how to make recycled paper. Learners spend eight hours a day at the project.
- All youth entering Axé must commit to staying or going back to school. Aware that many children and youth came from failed school experiences, Axé organized its own school, *Ilê Ori* School. But it did not want to organize a “school for the disadvantaged,” so it convinced municipal education authorities to organize a public school integrating 50 percent Axé students with 50 percent adolescents and youth living in the area. Axé staff made sure all learners went back and stayed in school, assisted them with studying and learning, met with families, and monitored school activities among all learners—not just Axé participants.
- Axé decided to overcome the usual dichotomy between being a social project and an income-generating project, and to demonstrate that it is possible to combine social needs and entrepreneurial management. In 1997, it initiated a development program that has allowed it to generate its own income and become sustainable. The production park is modern and well equipped. Three educational enterprises are in operation: clothing design, fashion, and recycled art paper and interior decoration. Axé students are trained in these professional skills, learn to view work not only as a means of production but also as a means of citizenship building, and learning about work organization and rights. Axé is proud to say that consumers prefer Axé products, not because they are produced by poor youth trying to become social entrepreneurs, but because the products are of excellent quality.

Source: Projeto Axé: <http://www.s3editora.com.br/projetoaxe/textos/idiomas/ingles.htm>



Children and youth of all social strata are exposed to a globalized culture of individualism, materialism, violence, family disintegration, uncertainty, and loss of fundamental values.

situation, may have enhanced the negative image that society holds of them. Such a focus obscures the needs and wants of youth as a generation, regardless of their family income, social status, or personal condition. In fact, as highlighted in abundant literature today, a crisis of identity, lack of sense of future, alienation, violent behaviors, use of drugs, and difficulties securing satisfying jobs, affect both rich and poor all over the planet. Children and youth of all social strata are exposed to a globalized culture of individualism, materialism, violence, family disintegration, uncertainty, and loss of fundamental values.

Effective policies and programs should avoid reverse discrimination. Rather than isolating specific youth groups in institutions and programs addressed to them only, such policies adopt area-based, community-based, and whole-school approaches in order to promote interaction with other groups—indigenous children interacting with non-indigenous children, girls interacting with boys, the poor with the non-poor. Proyecto Axé (see page 18), which works with street children, is a good example of this. Striving for maximum quality, and to combine formal and non-formal education, it decided to create a special school that is special not because it is “a school for street children” but a quality school that integrates all children from the neighborhood.

Key Points

- More democratic relationships in school, family, and other settings are emerging that incorporate a more participatory role for youth.
- Effective programs are moving away from practices that perceive youth as “disadvantaged or vulnerable,” towards models of social inclusion in which *all* youth are recognized as active agents in overcoming a marginalized situation.

Dealing with Youth, Their Families, and Communities

Traditionally the linkages between school and community, and even between school and parents, have been weak and remain a key challenge to educational reform throughout the world. Emphasis has tended to be, and remains, on internal dynamics within schools and not on external forces in a young person's life.

Research and experience have shown the impossibility of educational reform, and even of sustainable educational innovation, by focusing exclusively on just internal (that occurring within the school) or external (that occurring in relation to family or community life) factors in education. In particular, recent research has underscored the importance of the family—and of mothers, in particular—in school enrollment, retention, satisfaction, and effective learning. Educated parents, engaged themselves in learning and with high expectations of their children, make a critical difference in their children's motivation and achievement vis á vis learning.

More and more programs—like those in Poland, Australia, and Colombia highlighted on pages 21-23—have started to acknowledge these facts, and to give special importance to parental and community participation, beyond the conventional “participatory” roles—attending meetings, assisting with homework, or providing financial support. In some cases, parents' learning needs are addressed, sometimes together with those of their children. In others, parents and community members actively participate in management bodies, and in teaching/mentoring roles. Literacy and reading activities have provided a fertile ground for many such activities. Involving parents and communities is increasingly acknowledged as a competence that needs to be learned and thus incorporated into the professional training of teachers and of education managers. More and more programs are seeing their mission, not only in terms of educating youth, but in actively engaging and enhancing learning among families and communities.

Involving parents and communities is increasingly acknowledged as a competence that needs to be learned and thus incorporated into the professional training of teachers and of education managers.

POLAND: Supporting Teacher Training

The Polish Children and Youth Foundation (PCYF) supports innovative solutions for improving the quality of education, especially in rural school districts and for students with learning challenges. PCYF understands that such improvements can only result from a holistic view that embraces teachers, students, and parents, with each playing active and complementary roles.

PCYF has focused much attention on training teachers in today's Poland to encourage the active participation of students in the learning process. Traditionally, the Polish educational system was focused on rote learning in a hierarchical environment, a system that resulted in widespread passivity among students. By encouraging greater student participation, PCYF was able to pursue a larger goal of promoting the country's democratization. Its training programs enable teachers to: refine their style and methods, develop strategies for coping with stress or aggression, work effectively with learning disabled children, and actively engage parents and community members in school or after-school activities. Course curricula focus on class integration and conflict resolution, while encouraging creativity through classes in drama, origami, and ecological issues.

Two programs that have benefitted from support are "Developing Children's Creativity" and "Look at it in a Different Way." Both encourage creativity among young people, while nurturing their self-esteem, teamwork, and self-expression skills. Adults attend workshops in alternative methods of working with youth, negotiation skills, stress management, and coping with "burn out."

Source: International Youth Foundation





AUSTRALIA: Youth Outreach Programme

The Youth Outreach Programme (YOP) embraces a holistic approach. Together with youth, their families, and local communities, it provides young people with links, opportunities, and supports in education, employment, and training, while addressing personal needs such as housing, financial security, family mediation, and counseling. YOP recruits and trains local mentors to work intensively on a one-to-one basis with young people to help them identify their unique gifts, build personal and career goals, and develop links to support services. Young people learn job search skills, find employment and training opportunities, and gain work experience, benefiting from the mentor's knowledge, resources, and community connections. Special consultants work with young people on individual problems when needed, providing drug and alcohol counseling, for example. The program also serves as an advocate for young people in the community and as an agent for community change, using community development activities to promote models of effective service delivery in rural communities.

YOP approaches young people in a flexible, non-controlling, and non-threatening way. YOP also adopts a holistic approach to partnership, bringing together government, the civic sector, and businesses, to respond to young people's needs in a more coordinated and sustainable manner. Supported by the Foundation for Young Australians, as well as the Western Australia Family and Children's Services department, YOP has benefited more than 525 young people since its founding in 1992, improving their confidence and motivation, securing jobs, participating in further education and training, or getting involved in community work.

Source: International Youth Foundation

COLOMBIA: Ratón de Biblioteca (The Library Mouse)

Medellín is a Colombian city whose name has been associated with one of the nation's most prominent drug cartels. To prevent youth from getting engaged in a pervasive drug culture, provide them with productive activities, and stimulate educational growth, Fundación Ratón de Biblioteca (Library Mouse Foundation) was launched in 1981. The program strengthens bonds between young people, ages 6 to 18, their families, and their communities through a shared interest in reading. Communities apply to the foundation and, after an analysis of their needs, they receive printed and audiovisual materials, books, and learning games. Youth participation is stimulated through group reading, music, dance, games, and the production of plays. Teachers and parents are engaged in workshops and meetings focused on their roles as educators. In 2000, the program served 24,000 young people. Evidence indicates that young people involved in the program have improved their academic achievement, teachers have improved teaching methods in the classroom, and reading has become a daily practice in many homes.

Source: International Youth Foundation

Key Point:

- Effective programs increasingly address the educational needs not only of youth, but also actively engage and enhance the learning of families and communities.

From Youth as Beneficiaries to Youth as Social and Change Agents

As is well known by those who believe in the educative and healing power of volunteer and community service, young people who are given the opportunity to engage in the solution of real social problems, begin to engage in the solution to their own problems.

Youth are important agents of change in all societies, even if their contributions remain hidden from public awareness. Millions of youth worldwide study and work hard, take care of their siblings, assist those who know or have less, give up personal comfort to comfort others, and are actively engaged in cultural, social, and political action in their communities and countries.

Adult literacy programs worldwide, particularly in the South, have relied on youth as an important—and often as the main—teaching force. All over the world, one finds adolescents and youth as teacher aids and assistants in the classroom or in the school, in community libraries, health and community centers. Today, youth are playing a critical role in helping children and adults, including their own parents and teachers, become familiar with modern information and communication technologies.

Studies show that youth are enriched and gratified through work in service to their communities. Thus, it may be wise not only to invest in education programs addressed to empower and enhance the self-esteem of youth, but to involve youth in activities in which they feel socially useful, dignified in their role, gratified by others' acceptance, and proud of themselves. As is well known by those who believe in the educative and healing power of volunteer and community service, young people who are given the opportunity to engage in the solution of real social problems, begin to engage in the solution to their own problems.

The three programs highlighted on pages 25–26 are a small sample of the varied menu of experiences that demonstrate young people's potential as effective education agents—educating and learning about others, while at the same time learning about themselves.



Youth Can Do it: Three Governmental Programs in Latin America

MEXICO:

Founded in 1973, *Cursos Comunitarios* (Community Courses, or CC) is a national, governmental program offering primary education to small, isolated rural communities with between 300 and 500 inhabitants. The program was initiated on an experimental basis with 300 young people in two states of the country. After three decades, CC constituted a subsystem within the Public Education Ministry—operating in 44,778 rural communities and serving nearly 250,000 pre-school and school children. A post-primary education program is currently being developed.

CC schools offer the national curriculum and an official certification upon completion of primary education. Young boys and girls, ages 14 to 24, assume the teaching role that makes this program possible. These *Instructores Comunitarios* (Community Instructors) must have completed at least the lower secondary level, and receive special training prior to and during the two years they stay and teach within the community. In exchange for their social service, they receive a small monthly subsidy and a five-year study scholarship with which they can complete their secondary studies or pursue a university degree.

Cursos Comunitarios can thus be seen as a program that has promoted the right of education for both children and youth, who have served as both learners and teachers, in some of the poorest and most isolated communities in rural Mexico.

Source: Torres & Tenti, 2000.

CHILE:

The Programa de las 900 Escuelas, conducted by the Ministry of Education, assists public schools located in very poor areas and reflecting low achievement results according to the national evaluation system (SIMCE). In its efforts to improve teaching and learning in reading, writing, and arithmetic, the program focuses on the first four grades of primary school. It integrates several components: improving infrastructure and equipment, teacher training, support for teachers and administrators, Learning Workshops for children (Talleres de Aprendizaje –TA), provision of textbooks, classroom libraries and educational materials, and support processes (communication and evaluation).

The Learning Workshops are one of the most innovative elements of P-900. They are addressed to children who are lagging behind for some reason, and aim not so much at reinforcing what is learned in school but at enhancing the children's creativity and self-esteem. The workshops operate with small groups (between 15

and 20 children), before or after regular class hours, twice a week. They are the responsibility of young people from the community—called *Monitores*—who are chosen by the school principal and teachers, are provided with special educational materials, undergo a carefully designed training program, and are supported by supervisors from the Ministry of Education. They work in teams of two, and receive the equivalent of US \$50 per month over the six-month period they work (20 hours a week, 8 hours dedicated to work with the children and the rest with the supervisors, classroom teachers, and the children's parents).

Since 1990, nearly 3,000 schools have been serviced by P-900 and many of them have improved their academic achievement, thus reducing the gap between these and other schools in the country. Once schools show steady improvement, they leave P-900 and are substituted by new schools also in need of special support.

Source: García-Huidobro, 1999.

ECUADOR: National Literacy Campaign “Monsignor Leonidas Proaño”

Ecuador's national literacy campaign, launched by the government in 1988, engaged secondary school students, ages 16 to 18, as literacy teachers. Participating in the campaign was a requisite for graduation. The announcement brought widespread skepticism and resistance from various sectors of society, particularly among the urban middle and upper classes. Critics argued that high school students were functionally illiterate, irresponsible, and unprepared for the task. However, the plan proceeded and built upon students' capacities to learn and to contribute. Nearly 70,000 high school students (58% girls and 42% boys) participated in the campaign, which began with an 8-month training program. Nearly 300,000 literacy learners enrolled in the 4-month campaign, with nearly 200,000 completing the process. (The 30% dropout rate is comparatively low at the international level for this type of campaign.) Eighty-five percent of participants reached a satisfactory level of literacy. Also, impact evaluation indicated a positive impact on learners' self-esteem, as well as that of their families and communities. Ninety percent of youth involved said the experience helped them learn about their own capacities; 66.1% learned about other youth's capacities; 85% about their country and national reality, 85% about education; and 81% said they would teach again if another literacy program were launched.

The campaign culminated with a National Literacy Congress attended by 1,000 youth literacy instructors. At the Congress, youth were asked to reflect on their experiences as students and teachers, to critically analyze the Ecuadorian school system, and to provide the President and Ministry of Education authorities with concrete proposals for change.

Source: Ecuador, 1990; Torres, 1990.



Key Point:

- Effective programs incorporate youth as teachers, peer-tutors, caregivers and service providers, recognizing their role as active contributors to their communities.

Learning from Adults, but also from Peers

Both parents and teachers have found it difficult to accept that they learn from their children and students, and that children and youth know and possess valid knowledge.

Teaching has traditionally been associated with adults and learning with children and youth. The traditional education relationship—at home and in all educational institutions—has been hierarchical and age-dominated. School systems were designed and have operated until recently with the assumption that what is learned in school is essentially prescribed in the curriculum and taught by teachers and textbooks. Peer interaction, both within and outside the home and the classroom, has largely been ignored as a critical source of learning for children and youth. Moreover, school culture has discouraged and even punished peer interaction, viewing it as disruptive, rather than as facilitating communication and promoting teamwork and collaborative learning.

Both parents and teachers have found it difficult to accept that they learn from their children and students, and that children and youth know and possess valid knowledge. School and social systems have been resistant to acknowledge the reciprocity between teaching and learning, and the inter-changeability of these roles across generations.

This scenario has begun to change over the past few years as a result of economic, social, cultural, and technological changes, but also as a direct result of renewed understandings and practices in the education field. It is increasingly accepted that lifelong learning applies to all and that all ages are good to learn, that learning does not start with the first day of school, that children and youth must be heard and respected, and that they have much to teach and share with their peers, families, and communities.

The two programs on page 29 illustrate two dimensions of the positive communication and education role young people can play—and are playing. One program is based on the simple assumption that nobody can communicate better with a young person than another young person, especially if complicated issues and personal experiences are at stake. The other program highlights young people's comparative advantages in the realm of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs). Adult society is acknowledging that youth possess knowledge and know how that is socially valued and needed.



Youth Helping Youth

BOTSWANA: Educational Center for Adolescent Women and Peer Counseling by Teens

In Botswana, high pregnancy rates among adolescents are of increasing concern. In response, the YWCA launched two inter-related programs. The Educational Center for Adolescent Women (ECAW) provides pregnant women and new mothers with continuing education and parenting advice. Such help is crucial since most pregnant teens are forced to leave school and face obstacles in returning. ECAW courses include academic subjects, as well as family and sexuality education, baby care, and counseling. In 1990, a craft component was introduced to teach teen mothers trades such as sewing and dressmaking. A related program, Peer Counseling by Teens (PACT), aims to assist boys and girls in building their self-esteem, setting goals and making decisions, as well as to counsel classmates on sexuality and related topic such as HIV/AIDS. Each year 1,000 youth, ages 12 to 19, attend the program. Together, ECAW and PACT are battling teen pregnancy and other youth problems such as alcohol and drug abuse.

Source: International Youth Foundation

CANADA: Canada's Connectedness Strategy

In 1994, the Canadian Government decided to implement a Canadian Strategy for an Information Highway. The Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) recommended expanding the use of the Internet for service delivery to all Canadians, with heavy emphasis on lifelong learning. That was the basis for Canada's Connectedness Strategy and its People Centered Approach: involving communities, fostering ownership in process, and stimulating local capacity. Goals established for 2001 were to have all Canadians connected by March 2001, to establish up to 10,000 public access sites and sustain such sites for universal access (Community Access Program), and to create 20,000 on-line projects involving 5 million students (Grassroots Initiative).

Youth were placed at the center of the initiative, both as a target population and as implementing agents. Through the Community Access Program, youth provide training, technical support, outreach, and awareness raising in the communities they serve; post content on the web; refurbish computers; and work as teacher mentors in the schools.

Source: Johnston, 2000.

Key Point:

- Effective programs incorporate the notion that adults also can learn from young people, incorporating lifelong learning as a necessity for every age.

From a Focus on Education to a Focus on Learning

Education has traditionally focused on teaching as opposed to learning. By contrast, “learner-centered approaches” place the learner at the center of education efforts with their learning becoming the most important indicator of effectiveness and success.

For too long, learning was associated with rote learning. Retrieving and repeating information was confused with understanding and with knowing. Non-learning has traditionally been attributed to students, their families, and social conditions, and hastily explained as “learning problems,” with little attention to teaching and system problems.

A focus on learning places the learners—their specific needs and wants, contexts and conditions—at the center of all efforts and decisions. Not only the curriculum and the pedagogy, but all aspects of educational delivery—teacher training, calendar and schedules, spatial arrangements, administration, evaluation criteria and procedures—must respond to learners’ and learning needs, rather than to those of administrative and teaching staff. It means ensuring meaningful and effective learning, and enhancing—rather than inhibiting—the desire to learn and to continue learning. It means accepting the inseparability between quantity and quality, content and method, process and results, teacher learning and student learning. It means believing in the learners’ potential to learn and to succeed, and thus accepting non-learning as an indication of the need to modify the system and the teaching strategies rather than as an indication of learning and learner disabilities.

Educational institutions are much more common than learning institutions. Not surprisingly, radical innovations often flourish in the most difficult conditions, where the inappropriateness of conventional education and teaching models become most apparent. This is the case of the program on page 31 and of several others highlighted in this publication.

A focus on learning places the learners—their specific needs and wants, contexts and conditions—at the center of all efforts and decisions.

Making Sure Access to Education Means Access to Learning

JAPAN: Tokyo Shure

Tokyo Shure is a full-day alternative school in Tokyo that serves children, ages 6 to 19, who are enrolled in formal schools but refuse to go to school. *Futoko* children—as they are called—are considered dysfunctional, lazy, and even psychologically disturbed. However, the problem lies often in the schools rather than in the children. *Futoko* children are frequently the victims of a school environment where they feel pressured and mistreated, by both teachers and peers, in the context of a national school culture that is well-known for its formality, rigidity, and emphasis on academic achievement.

In 1984, concerned parents of *Futoko* children started a study group to share their concerns and seek solutions. Rather than forcing their children to go back to formal schools, they decided to start an education center of their own where children could regain their self-confidence, learn and grow at their own pace and according to their needs. Tokyo Shure offers them a curriculum comparable to that in formal schools, but also offers them a wide variety of activities including field trips, dance, arts activities, sports, camps, and special events such as nationwide meetings of other *futoko* children. Both elementary and secondary school students reserve one afternoon per week for a general meeting. Classes are taught by in-house staff and outside lecturers. All activities other than regular classes are proposed, planned, organized, and executed by the children themselves.

The experience has had wide repercussions in Japan. The initial eight-person parents' group in 1984 has now grown into a nationwide movement with 1,000 members. Tokyo Shure has influenced policy and public attitude regarding *futoko* children. Also, the Tokyo Shure model has inspired many other alternative schools throughout Japan and has drawn attention to the inadequacies of the formal school model, not only for *Futoko* children, but for children in general. A major challenge of the program remains, however, carrying out an independent evaluation, and being officially approved by the Ministry of Education so as to be able to issue a diploma for completing elementary or lower secondary school education.

Source: International Youth Foundation

Key Point:

- Effective programs place the learner's potential at the center of the educational process, viewing non-learning as a problem in the educational system, rather than in the student.

Beyond the What of Education to the Hows of Education

Increased attention to learners and learning has meant greater attention to the *hows* of education—that is, to the selection and combination of strategies, methods, and means.

Education has focused on content, that is, on *what* learners must learn. Effective learners, educational institutions, and programs have traditionally been measured in terms of the amount of data and information learners can store and retrieve. Educators are provided with desired learner profiles and outcomes, lists of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to be achieved—such as critical thinking, creativity, self-confidence, problem-solving, conflict resolution, tolerance, leadership, entrepreneurship, environmental awareness, teamwork, and other positive qualities. However, much less attention has been placed on how such competencies and values are attained, *if* they are teachable, and, if so, under what conditions and with what strategies.

Increased attention to learners and learning has meant greater attention to the *hows* of education—that is, to the selection and combination of strategies, methods, and means. It has also resulted in the increasing realization that *how* something is taught and learned is a critical dimension of the learning experience. Creativity, flexibility, and diversification of strategies and methodologies characterize most youth education and training programs. Two elements are particularly prevalent: (a) the revival of arts in all its forms (e.g., music, dance, crafts, painting, theatre, acting, film,



video); and (b) the incorporation of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs), as both means and content for youth learning and development.

The incorporation of arts and of modern technologies into the educational arena form part of a broader trend toward recognizing that culture, joy, and creativity are integral components of education and learning. Both the arts and ICTs have come to be perceived as motors for creativity and imagination, and as tools for strengthening identity, self-expression, and communication, particularly among youth. Merging education and culture, science and sports, and traditional and modern technologies is a challenge that more and more educational institutions and programs are willing to assume, experimenting and learning along the way.

Arts and Technology as Allies for Learning

CHINA: China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF)

CYDF is committed to experimenting with and making use of all available means to enhance creativity and autonomous learning among children and youth. Poetry and the Internet are two such means.

- **Experiments with the Internet and Multi-Media System.** This program introduces computers in schools and trains both teachers and students to use computers as tools for independent learning. Teachers receive training in MS Office and MS FrontPage software, and students received training in web browsers, email, and web design software.
- **“City and Country, Hand to Hand” Classics Recitation Campaign.** This program introduces expressive poetry into schools as an extra-curricular activity, together with drawings, writing, acting, and student-led exercises. It is believed that poetry and related creative activities reinforce student self-expression and contribute to improving the relationship between teachers and students. The program started in 2000 in 110 schools reaching approximately 40,000 students in the Beijing, Chicheng, and Mengzhou Provinces.

Source: International Youth Foundation

The incorporation of arts and of modern technologies into the educational arena form part of a broader trend toward recognizing that culture, joy, and creativity are integral components of education and learning.

Key Point:

- Traditionally, educators must teach students a set of competencies. However, there is a growing awareness that *how* content is taught is as critical to learning as the content itself.

Critical Learning and Learning for Transformation

Today's global trends demand that young people be engaged learners and critical thinkers. In the face of rapid changes, young people need to learn skills related to flexibility, teamwork, entrepreneurship, autonomy, creativity, and problem solving.

Critical and autonomous thinking are more vital than ever for personal and social development. Access to information and modern technologies is not enough. Learning to identify, discriminate, and critically analyze information has become a key basic learning need in itself. Social and economic realities are deteriorating for the majority of the population, and environmental degradation has become a serious threat to the future of mankind. Under these circumstances, active and responsible citizenship implies not only "adapting" to change, but also anticipating change, participating, controlling, and re-directing it through transformative social action.

But "educating future citizens" also adopts different meanings in youth education programs worldwide, the main difference lying in the understanding of what it is to be a citizen and how youth are expected to play such a role. For some, citizenship and citizenship building mean learning about rules and obligations, democracy and participation; for others, it means engaging youth in voluntary or community activities; for others, it means developing critical and reflective abilities and capacities for self-determination and autonomy.

Leading education institutions and programs worldwide are engaged in this transformative understanding of education and learning. The experience on page 35 illustrates what many others are striving for.

Key Point:

- Today's global trends demand that youth become critical, autonomous thinkers. This requires a profound transformation of education models.



...active and responsible citizenship implies not only "adapting" to change, but also anticipating change, participating, controlling, and re-directing it through transformative social action.

Learning for Local Development and Social Transformation

INDIA: Barefoot College

Tilonia is a city in Rajasthan, one of India's poorest states. Today, Tilonia with around 2,000 inhabitants is well known for its Barefoot College, an initiative that aims to demonstrate the power of rural people's inventiveness, learning capacities, and competencies to identify and solve their own problems.

Most Tilonians survive on subsistence farming or manual labor. Over 45% of men and 80% of women are illiterate, and more than half of the children do not attend school. However, informal learning processes have been in place and strengthened over the years. A voluntary agency, called the Social Work and Research Center (SWRC), working here since 1972, has helped villagers help themselves along this process.

All College activities operate with solar energy: the residences, the water testing laboratory, the library, the offices, and the pumping and water distribution systems. Youth who have not gone beyond primary school are in charge of the installation, fabrication, and maintenance of the system. Solar energy also made possible having access to computers and e-mail. The first 20 computers were installed between 1990-1995, and more than 30 women were trained to use them so that they could catalogue the library books and color slides.

A villager who is illiterate designed the campus of the college. He also planned the piped drinking water supply that now operates in six villages, which was built together with the people in all those villages.

Formal and non-formal education is also given priority: there are 40 day-care centers and 4 day-primary schools, which are also used as adult education centers. Also, 150 night schools were opened for children who must help their parents during the day. More than 3,000 children are enrolled in such night schools, served by local teachers trained at the College. The Government of India picked up the idea of night schools, and similar schools have been created in eight Indian states.

Source: UNESCO, Programme for the Education of Children in Difficult Circumstances, Examples of Projects: http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/street_child/english/index.html

From Preventing Negative Behavior to Promoting Positive Behavior

Youth have traditionally been viewed as a problem by the adult society. Adults often think of youth as selfish, alienated, and prone to antisocial and negative behaviors. The school system and mass media have become two major propagators of such negative perceptions of youth. The school contributes strongly with the image of failure: millions of children and youth enter the system as students and become slow learners, repeaters and dropouts. Some are given a second chance, with remedial and compensatory measures. The mass media, while paying increased attention to youth and to youth issues, insist on stereotyping youth as frivolous and in highlighting youth delinquency much more than youth contributions to society.

Studies in many parts of the world have shown the positive relationship between the high expectations of the parent and of the teacher, and young learners' self-esteem, performance, and achievement.

How are youth depicted in the media?

"The youth of today is definitely poorly depicted by today's media. I watch many news programs that depict today's youth as quite possibly the most violent generation to date. In the past two years, I have only seen one news program that praised teenagers (surprisingly, the whole hour was devoted to the subject!). Media has improved its image of teenagers since then, but much of the good things teens do are being ignored. In my opinion, our generation is going to make the greatest changes for the good of the world. I have met many people with amazing ideas and philosophies that will just astound anyone willing to listen. If there is anything I would like the UN to know, it is that our generation is willing to help in any way possible to improve the condition of the world and create peace. All you need to do is ask."

Source: Dusty Wilson (17), United States of America, 2001-01-28. UNICEF, Voices of the Youth.

Studies in many parts of the world have shown the positive relationship between the high expectations of the parent and of the teacher, and young learners' self-esteem, performance, and achievement. Some studies conclude that high teacher expectations can have a more decisive impact on student learning and success than professional qualifications and experience. Other studies show that successful students coming from poor economic, social, and cultural environments have strong and determined mothers who believe in them and in their capacities, and who do not necessarily have a strong education background or even school experience (CEPAL, 1991). Thus, for



both teachers and parents, it seems to be the attitude, rather than the diploma per se, what makes the difference.

Deficit approaches to learners lead to policies and programs concerned with *re-educating* them rather than with *educating* them. More effort appears to be devoted to controlling or redirecting youth behavior, than in

strengthening and developing good behaviors, assets, and talents. As much as deficit theories and assumptions have been criticized and rejected in the education field, they remain alive, are visible in both rhetoric and practice, and continue to defeat the best intentions, particularly when dealing with the “disadvantaged”—those in developing countries, the poor, girls and women, and children and youth in difficult circumstances.

There’s a big difference between “preventing school failure” and “ensuring school success.” The first assumes failure as an outcome that can be avoided, while the latter assumes success as a possibility that can be reached. The first will strive for school retention and completion as indicators of success; the latter will strive for excellence. The first tells children, youth, and their families that they are prone to fail; the latter reminds them that they are meant to succeed. Working toward success implies different mindsets and efforts from all involved.

Fortunately, more and more programs—and many of those portrayed here—adopt the “ensuring success” perspective. Translating this vision into coherent practice requires structural changes and a holistic strategy, and thus sustained efforts over time.

Key Point:

- Effective programs promote “youth as assets” models, in which all stakeholders—youth, parents, teachers, the community at large—focus on students’ potential for success rather than for failure.

As much as deficit theories and assumptions have been criticized and rejected in the education field, they remain alive, are visible in both rhetoric and practice, and continue to defeat the best intentions, particularly when dealing with the “disadvantaged.”

From Focusing on Employability to Focusing on Sustainable Livelihoods

“Education for work” has traditionally meant “education to get a job” in exchange for some monetary income. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) have been based on the concept of employment. However, the situation and prospects of work have changed considerably.

The future world of work will be increasingly knowledge-based and technology-driven. Technology is replacing labor, and thus it is expected that more individuals will shift to self-employment and to entrepreneurial activities. The employability of high school and even higher education graduates is no longer a given. Unemployment rates have increased and continue to increase in most countries in the world, and a growing number of people cannot satisfy their basic needs through formal sector income alone.

Unemployment rates have increased and continue to increase in most countries in the world, and a growing number of people cannot satisfy their basic needs through formal sector income alone.

A New Vision of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for the 21st Century

The Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Seoul, Korea, April 1999) produced a *New Vision of TVET for the Twenty-first Century* which includes:

- Preparing and developing the individual for work and self-fulfillment must be given centrality in education and training systems, and be considered an integral component of lifelong learning.
- Education and training must go together, providing the required combination of personal abilities, technical knowledge, generic and technical skills, values, and attitudes required for work.
- TVET aims to help youth and adults take advantage of the skills they already have and to develop others through the acquisition of key competencies during general education.
- TVET content must be introduced in the school curriculum, incorporated with training in the workplace, and be available for self-development.
- A sound TVET system is an indispensable component of national development.

Source: UNESCO, 1999; Parsuramen, 2000

This opens critical challenges to school and training systems, and demands a radical re-thinking of TVET. The priority will be to ensure that children and youth

develop competencies for sustainable livelihoods aimed at solving basic needs (e.g., living conditions, health promotion, personal services and care, social interaction, and entertainment) (Coraggio, 1999). The experience developed by Enda Tiers Monde, a large international NGO based in Senegal, is highly inspiring in this regard.

SENEGAL: Enda Tiers Monde

“The popular [informal] economy is a rational response to scarcity: it employs all the human and material resources available with enormous inventiveness. One cannot dismiss it as being merely a survival-economy allowing people to “just scrape by.” It increasingly makes up for the shortcomings of the state, or its absences in all areas from schooling for the young, improving sanitation and waste collection, etc. It has moved beyond the basic family unit to create extended networks. Far from being simply a grouping of economic activities, the popular economy has reinvented a certain social structure, where those excluded from the modern system (the unemployed, the handicapped, the elderly, the young), can find their place.”

Founded in 1972 and headquartered in Dakar, Enda’s work extends to nearly 15 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Its mission is “to find ways of ensuring that our immediate struggle to combat poverty, social degeneration, and environmental degradation are conceived as part of a process to push for socio-economic and political change.”

Since the 1980s Enda opted to concentrate its activities in urban areas, aware of the rapid urbanization process of many countries in the South and the many problems associated with such expansion. It also opted to concentrate its work on youth as critical agents for urban development and transformation. A third dimension of its work became fighting for the recognition of the “popular urban economy,” rejecting the term “informal economy” and the pejorative conception associated with it. Encouraging the economic activity of young people and enhancing their talents and abilities for work, are at the core of Enda’s work.

West-Africa Ecopole, a community resource center dedicated to the popular economy, was built in 1995 in a slum area of Dakar, in an abandoned factory, which was transformed and renovated with the help of the European Union. Ecopole has various functions: serving as an exhibition space for popular arts and crafts; a training center where craftsmen train children in the use of recycled materials; and a place to disseminate technological innovations and stimulate debate on issues around the popular economy.

Source: De Ravignan, 1998; Enda, 1999



Key Point:

- Effective programs aim to ensure that youth develop competencies to become sustainable in a knowledge-based and technology-driven economy.

Beyond the Immediate and the Local, to the National and the Global

Relevance has been at the center of educational debate both in the field of formal and non-formal education. What should children, young people, and adults learn? How and with what criteria should teaching and learning content be selected, when there is so much to be taught and to be learned? These questions are particularly critical when it comes to basic education, and to the education of the poor.

Many place value on learning about oneself and one's immediate reality, and gaining knowledge and skills that have concrete and practical applications. They doubt the relevance of literature and poetry, and even of history and world geography, for



children and youth struggling for survival and confined in marginal neighborhoods or isolated rural areas. In fact, such minimalist approaches have commonly shaped education policies and programs targeting the poor and other discriminated social groups. Emphasis has been placed instead on providing basic literacy and numeracy skills for all, domestic-related content (teaching girls how to sew), and farm-related skills for those living in rural areas.

Narrow approaches to basic education and to “basic learning needs” are under question today. More and more, equity has been placed at the center of educational debates and understood as making sure everyone gets similar learning opportunities, despite starting from tremendous disparities. Globalization and modern technologies have broadened the world for all, not just for a minority. Lifelong learning is a need for all, and not just for a few. The present generation of children and youth, no matter who they are, where they live and what their future prospects may be, are already global citizens.

The concepts of *relevance* and of *basic learning needs* have been drastically redefined over the past few years. Policies and programs that are leading the way have understood

More and more, equity has been placed at the center of educational debates and understood as making sure everyone gets similar learning opportunities, despite starting from tremendous disparities.

Children, youth, parents, teachers, and entire communities have been involved in experimentation with ICTs, distance education, and e-learning.

this, and have consequently expanded their horizons together with the expansion of information, communication, and learning opportunities. Study tours, visits, and internships (in the same country or in other countries), have been incorporated as regular components of student and teacher education and training programs in many countries. Children, youth, parents, teachers, and entire communities have been involved in experimentation with ICTs, distance education, and e-learning. Networking, on-line and face-to-face, has become a regular communication and learning tool for

Broadening Horizons

EUROPE: European Youth Parliament

The opening up of borders between European Community (EC) members has brought with it new challenges for European citizens, and for children and youth education and learning systems in particular. The European Youth Parliament (EYP), created in 1987, is an attempt to engage youth in understanding and building a new multicultural European reality. Every year, two student teams are selected from each member EC country to participate in nine days of parliamentary sessions, which include policy discussions, debates on resolutions, and cultural events. EYP resolutions are delivered directly to the EC parliament. Since EYP's founding, 14,000 students, ages 16 to 18, and 700 teachers from 27 countries have participated. At a time when ethnic and nationalistic feelings are on the rise throughout Europe, the European Youth Parliament has advanced greater social awareness and cultural tolerance among youth.

Source: <http://www.eyp.org/>

CHINA: China Youth Development Foundation

The China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) supports education programs that introduce pedagogical and curriculum innovations into schools, with particular emphasis on promoting life skills, creativity, and critical thinking in young people. By providing practical examples of such innovations it is expected to have an influence on government policies.

Through CYDF's *Happy Star River Program*, children growing up in Beijing are given an opportunity to stay for up to seven days on a farm, participate in chores, and learn about rural life. Through exposure to a new environment, urban children gain increased understanding and respect for rural living, and a wider understanding of life in general. At the same time, the experience teaches teamwork and responsibility to children who often come from one-child families. The program began in July 2000 with 120 urban children.

Source: International Youth Foundation

the education community, including children and youth, parents, teachers, schools, universities, NGOs, and local communities.

Although very different in nature and in scope, the programs described on page 42 respond to the same ideal of expanding learners' horizons and making sure they experience diversity, so that they understand it better and learn to respect it.

Key Point:

- Effective programs adopt broad approaches to basic education, not limiting their students' access to knowledge related to their specific and local circumstances, but exposing youth to global issues and contexts.

Holistic Approaches and Cross-sectoral Interventions

While attempting to address specific segments or groups of the population, institutions and agents involved with the education and training of youth became increasingly specialized. One may categorize them by types of institutions (school, out-of-school), ages (adolescents, youth, specific age groups, etc), gender (boys, girls), specific groups (e.g., street children, abused children, disabled, pregnant teens, out-of-school youth, drug abusers, prostitutes), topics and emphases (e.g., personal development, work skills, reproductive health, the environment). In general terms, four major goal areas can be identified in current programs addressed to youth: (a) personal development, (b) social development, (c) school/academic achievement, and (d) the world of work. Most programs focus on one or two of these dimensions. However, holistic and comprehensive approaches to youth development are gaining ground.

Fragmentation and specialization have been counterbalanced with new groupings and alliances. A new term and a new professional category—Social Educators—emerged in recent years in an attempt to merge a wide range of educators dealing with specific groups and coming from three main areas: adult education, cultural promotion, and specialized education.

New organizational arrangements have resulted from the emergence of new groups and issues, and the softening of traditional boundaries between disciplines. The conventional classification of education into *formal* (that provided by the school system,



Toward a Pedagogy of Holiness

The Salesian (or Lasallian) Preventive Education System

The "Preventive System" was created by St. Don Bosco, who founded the Salesian Society in 1864. Today, Salesians are working in 103 countries throughout the world and are dedicated to the continuation of Salesian love and work for young people. They profess to be "signs and bearers of God's love to the young." Salesian pedagogy is based on reason, religion, and loving kindness. It aspires to create a generation of young men and women steeped, not only in a sound knowledge-based education, but also in a strong value-based education for life. Intrinsic elements of the Salesian education model are:

- The *preventive* message supports the conviction that in every young person, no matter what their condition, there are hidden sources of good which, if properly stimulated, can lead to a path of faith and honesty.
- A *pedagogy of holiness*, at the center of which is the young person, seen always in the totality of his/her dimensions (body, mind, feelings, and will), of his/her relationships (with himself/herself, with others, with the world, and with God), in the perspective of the person and environment (collective advancement, commitment for the transformation of society).
- The educational significance attributed to the *family, school, work, and various youth associations and groups*. The school, in addition to fostering the cultural, social, and professional dimensions of the young, has to provide them with an efficacious structure of moral values and principles.
- A preferential interest in the *world of work*, for which young people have to be carefully prepared. Salesians are well known for their schools and arts and crafts workshops.
- A concern for fostering a sense of *social responsibility*. Education must stress the students' understanding of their role as good Christians and citizens, fulfilling their duties and contributing to mankind at large.
- The importance given to *youth groups and associations* to develop youthful dynamism and initiative.
- By offering a variety of activities, Salesians aim to create *living and learning environments* ("youth centers") where youth can love, be loved, pray, engage in joyful occupations, and learn to live and work.
- The *educator as a friend and benefactor of the students*, who advises them, wishes to make them good, to save them from trouble, from punishments, and from dishonor. By implanting a 'family spirit' in the school, and adopting the principles of reason, kindness, and religion, educators help students to develop their potential, and assist them in preventing wrong-doings.
- A school that is *open to the community*.

Source: The Preventive System <http://www.shcpt.edu/about6.html>

organized in a given sequence, and with official recognition), *non-formal* (education activities organized out of the school system) and *informal* (casual or intentional, everyday learning that takes place without the mediation of education) has lost ground and is under question. Cross-sectoral interventions have become more common, especially those linking education with health, work, environmental, and gender issues. More common are collaborative efforts between governmental and non-governmental institutions, the public and private sectors, as well as between various governmental units and between international development agencies.

Many of the programs featured in this publication illustrate such trends toward more holistic frameworks and more collaborative arrangements. Salesian Pedagogy, included on page 45, has been in place for over a century, advocating and trying to translate into practice the Salesian vision of a “Pedagogy of Holiness.”

Key Point:

- Effective programs work through models that address learners as whole persons, integrate different disciplines, and promote collaborative efforts among private, public, and non-governmental institutions.

Going Back to School, but to a Different School

Many programs today are addressing the growing problem of school dropouts. Retention rates in secondary schools are low and an issue of increasing concern. Poverty and other related factors—unemployment, family disintegration, child labor, or teen pregnancy—explain only part of this phenomenon. The other part is explained by the many problems school systems experience in attracting and retaining youth. As many have argued, the very term dropout may not be the most appropriate, given that often what is at stake is not so much an individual decision to leave but an institutional pressure that forces out. (UNESCO/EFA Forum, 1998)

Dissatisfaction, boredom, and lack of interest in what is taught and learned, are expressed by youth in relation to the school system all over the world. While this is true for young people in general, it is accentuated for students who do not respond to the standard student profile prefigured by school systems. Children and youth who have a home and a family and/or who do not have to work or take care of their siblings can dedicate special time to study and to play. Children who have educated parents, fathers who earn a regular income, and mothers who stay at home and assist with school work, also have a great advantage.

Many institutions and programs dealing with out-of-school youth set “going back to school” as a key goal. However, going back to the same school will not necessarily ensure that things will go better this time, and youth know it. Grade repetition does not ensure learning and is, together with poverty, the most important predictor of school dropout. The experience of failure, and of self-inflicted guilt for such failure, sets the stage for repeated failure, especially if the host institution remains unquestioned and unchanged. (IBE-UNESCO/UNICEF, 1996).

The “go back to school” appeal often responds to the common assumption that school failure is in reality, unilaterally, student failure. In cases where the school is found to bear some responsibility, there is a preference to not engage in what many see as an impossible battle: reforming the school. Many, however, are ready to take up the challenge and work simultaneously on both fronts: with youth and with schools, with parents and teachers, helping build bridges and dialogue between them. Such are the stories told on pages 48-49.

...the very term dropout may not be the most appropriate, given that often what is at stake is not so much an individual decision to leave but an institutional pressure that forces out.

Striving to Transform the Formal School System

RUSSIA: The New Perspectives Foundation

Fostering awareness among teachers, school administrators, and educational policymakers about the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child was viewed as a means to change attitudes and behaviors inside and outside the classroom regarding teacher-student interaction. For this purpose, the New Perspectives Foundation (NPF) launched a competitive grants and technical assistance program in 2000 in five regions of Russia. Grants were made to organizations that introduce innovative methods of teaching children's rights in schools. Support was directed at training courses for teachers and to organizations offering joint trainings for teachers and parents on the rights of the child. NPF also conducted a public relations campaign, in cooperation with a major periodical, for teachers to further communicate the importance of children's rights. Strong partnerships were established with the Ministry of Education, the Academy for the Improvement of Qualification and Retraining of Pedagogues, and representatives of advocacy organizations, all of them members of an Expert Council responsible for program selection and monitoring. The program will extend to at least 15 regions in the country in the coming years.

Source: International Youth Foundation

BRAZIL: Youth Cultures, Teachers, and Schools Project (São Paulo)

This was a two-year project, initiated in 1999 by a local NGO with extensive experience in working on youth and education issues. The project, carried out in a marginal area of Brazil's largest city, started by acknowledging the need to change the school system in order to make it more receptive to youth. To begin with, a bimonthly dialogue was established between secondary school students and their teachers. Support was provided to help youth understand the value of education, and help teachers understand better young people's motivations and cultures.

Organized dialogue between students and teachers went on for several months. A parallel process was started in each participating school. Extended groups consisting of students, local youth, teachers, school administrators, parents, and community members agreed on five key issues to be addressed: information, education, expression, participation, and living together. However, when steps were implemented, 8 out of 12 participating teachers were removed and placed in others schools. In Brazil, as in many other countries in the South, there is a growing "flexible employment" policy: many teachers are hired on a temporary basis, are paid lower salaries, and are moved to different locations as needed. In the end, three schools prepared their school projects, one was not interested, and the rest were left out because of the removal of the participating teachers.

The project was a learning experience for all (including the organizing NGO), in that better understanding of school culture is essential to any attempt to try and transform it. The process led to the creation of a new music group, the Grupo Educação Ritmo Rua, with the overall aim of continuing the fight for a school sensitive to youth cultures and needs.

Source: Ação Educativa, Project *Culturas Juvenis, Educadores e Escola*, Ação Educativa, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Key Point:

- Effective programs recognize that educational failure does not lie solely with the student, and address changes with the collaboration of youth, parents, teachers, and administrators.

Complementing Formal and Non-formal Education

...the distinction between *formal* and *non-formal* education has become unclear, and to a certain extent, irrelevant.

The concept of non-formal education (NFE) was born out of insufficiencies within and criticism of the formal educational system. The term non-formal education became associated with out-of-school education and was applied to a particular approach to education characterized by greater adaptation to the needs and circumstances of learners, creative use of educational resources, community participation, decentralized and more flexible organization and management, and less authoritarian management and teaching styles. Over time, formal and non-formal education, often opposed rather than complemented each other. Many saw out-of-school education as the natural place for innovation and for diversification of education and learning strategies, and in-school education as inherently rigid, homogenous, static, and resistant to change.

This situation, however, does not hold anymore. School systems have been experiencing innovation and important changes over the past few years. In many countries—particularly in Asia and Africa—the term *non-formal* is also used today to refer to schools and school education policies and programs that feature



some of the characteristics once attributed to NFE and out-of-school education. NFE practice has also shown it is very difficult to transform conventional educational thinking and practice even outside school doors. Building bridges between NFE and FE, rather than developing them as separate systems, has been and continues to be an important goal in many parts of the world (UNICEF, 1993; ADEA Working Group on Non-Formal Education, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, the distinction between *formal* and *non-formal* education has become unclear, and to a certain extent, irrelevant. In fact, formal (school education), non-formal (out-of-school education), and informal (“learning from life”) learning converge in the lives of people. It is to be expected that in the next few years, and within the lifelong learning paradigm, conventional classifications will regroup around new categories. Education and training will be inseparable, knowledge and skills will

Challenging Conventional Boundaries Between Formal, Non-formal, and Informal Learning

BANGLADESH: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

Bangladesh is one of the poorest and most populous countries in the world. Illiteracy rates among the adult and young population are high, particularly in rural areas and for young women (about 85%). In 1985, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the largest NGO in Bangladesh and in South Asia, initiated its Non-Formal Primary Education Program (NFPE). BRAC primary schools, located in rural areas, offer a four year education program for children, ages eight to ten, and a three year education program for adolescents, ages 11 to 14. Girls comprise 66% of the program participants and are a main target of both programs. BRAC schools are built close to the home of the children, operate two to three hours a day, and consider seasonal changes in work, in order to facilitate children—and particularly girls’—enrollment, retention, and completion. In addition to reading, writing, and numeracy, children and youth learn farming techniques, health, and nutrition, and interpersonal skills. Teachers are chosen from among the literate people in the village. Most of them are high school graduates and women. The same teacher teaches the full cycle.

BRAC non-formal schools have become a model and an inspiration for many Asian and African countries. From 22 schools initially, BRAC now boasts over 34,000 schools which are reaching over one million students. Dropout rates are low, about 7% (35% in formal schools). Recent developments include the development of Pre-Primary, Urban and Adolescent education programs. Over 400 libraries and 6,100 community Reading Centers have been opened to ensure that BRAC students, as well as their families and communities, continue to read after they finish school.

Source: International Youth Foundation.

GERMANY: School Clubs Berlin

A network of School Clubs were launched by the German Children and Youth Foundation in 1994 to provide young people with formative after-school activities within public school buildings. About 4,000 school-age children participate annually in self-directed activities such as running coffee shops, libraries, theater groups, and social service groups. These activities are designed and implemented by volunteer students. The school clubs are coordinated with local NGOs. Cooperation and information sharing between schools and community-based organizations are stimulated so as to ensure better services and support for youth. The School Clubs Program has been replicated in 281 sites in Germany.

Source: International Youth Foundation

fuse, and the “education” needs and opportunities will stretch along one’s entire life. Content will evolve constantly and so will the education and training demands of people. (Delors, 1996; Commission of the European Communities, 2000).

All over the world, education programs exist that resist traditional classifications. They are challenging the formal/non-formal, school/out-of-school barriers, building bridges and creating hybrids in the effort to utilize all the opportunities and resources available to reach children and youth and make lifelong learning a reality for all.

Key Point:

- Effective programs around the world are showing evidence of the necessary and renewed linkages between formal and non-formal education. The new paradigm of lifelong learning reinforces this fusion even more.

The Importance of Documenting and Evaluating

Lack of documentation and lack of evaluation have been chronic deficits in the education field, and specifically in the field of educational innovation. Many good and even extraordinary experiences remain hidden, untold, and unanalyzed, even for and by the people participating in them. The Action-Reflection-Action methodology needs to be a built in component of everyday work; yet this remains a challenge for educational innovators.



Documenting allows others to know and learn about the program, but above all it allows program participants to learn from it. Documenting is important for posterity, but it is essential for the present and for ongoing critical reflection on action. Evaluation is essential to knowing whether a given action is effective or not, to introduce improvements, and to build internal and external credibility.

This same study has brought to the surface the weaknesses of documentation and evaluation efforts of youth education programs. Very few of the over 150 programs consulted have been thoroughly documented and evaluated. Many more are documented than evaluated. And of those documented, very few go beyond the descriptive level and present a full account of the experience, sources of inspiration, its history and development, its achievements and obstacles, its assets and dilemmas, its results, and its ongoing and future challenges. Often, accounts are linear and anecdotal, and miss the most relevant or innovative aspects of the program. Also, most stories are told in writing, many of them have no pictures or visual resources, few have videos, and very few have a full combination of media, including books and other publications, videos, web pages, or CD Roms.

Not all is related to financial resources. Even “wealthy” programs have poor documentation and evaluation results. At the same time, there are poor and under-financed programs with very thoughtful and comprehensive accounts of what they did and do. Evidently, those who see the value of documenting and evaluating, devote time, effort, and resources to it.

Evaluation is essential to knowing whether a given action is effective or not, to introduce improvements, and to build internal and external credibility.

Documenting for Worldwide Dissemination: Two UNESCO Projects

UNESCO-UNICEF: “Education for All: Making it Work” Innovations Project

The World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) recognized that a policy of “more of the same” would not achieve education for all. Following the conference, UNESCO and UNICEF launched the global project “Education For All: Making it Work,” aimed at identifying, documenting, and widely disseminating examples of educational change. Special attention was given to programs focused on learning acquisition, on providing a solid foundation for lifelong learning, on adapting to socio-cultural environments, and on building partnerships with local communities and parents.

Various tools were used for this purpose: a series of booklets and a related series of videos; a database on innovative projects around the world; thematic portfolios describing current thinking and experience on specific challenges facing education; and workshops that brought together decision-makers, field personnel, and local innovators. The project provided advice on how to promote and contribute to educational innovation. It alerted planners and education decision-makers to the benefits to be drawn from change, increased the cooperation between actors in the field, and showed that the key for change lies in the hands of those who are making education possible despite the problems and obstacles.

UNESCO: Youth Project “Education to Fight Exclusion”

The project identifies, promotes, and connects innovative projects from throughout the world that deal with education as a means to combat youth marginalization. The project works at two levels: (a) it supports a selection of projects in over 30 countries, most of which correspond to non-formal education; and (b) it documents several of these projects and disseminates them through a series of booklets that capture essential elements of these projects: background and history, context and process, advances and obstacles, results and challenges. Different perceptions and opinions of the various actors involved are displayed. Programs are portrayed not only through their achievements and results, but also through the real problems and dilemmas faced along the way, thus avoiding linear accounts of “success stories” and providing the readers with meaningful accounts they can relate to and learn from.

Source: UNESCO, Program for the Education of Children in Difficult Circumstances
<http://www.unesco.org/educatio>



Key Points:

- Effective programs document their actions to facilitate critical reflection on those actions and to allow program participants to learn from them.
- Effective programs evaluate their actions to know if indeed they are being effective and to build internal and external credibility.

Strictly speaking, there is no such a thing as the “learning needs and wants of youth in the 21st century.” We stand at the beginning of a new century and nobody can anticipate today what it will be like. In fact, in the field of education, current prospects and plans for the future do not go beyond 2010 or 2015. Thus, identifying such needs as they evolve, for specific groups, contexts, and circumstances, becomes a must for any educational effort that aspires to be relevant and effective.

Self-esteem and self-confidence, critical thinking and understanding, solid expression and communication skills, both orally and through reading and writing, continue to be essential foundations for lifelong learning and for citizenship building among children and youth.

Rather than something radically new, education and learning in the 21st century appear as the unfinished business of 20th century, as the revival of some basic premises and aspirations that have accompanied education theories, research, and reform plans for many years. Self-esteem and self-confidence, critical thinking and understanding, solid expression and communication skills, both orally and through reading and writing, continue to be essential foundations for lifelong learning and for citizenship building among children and youth. Access to computers and the Internet does not ensure those basic learning needs per se, although they may be powerful allies if properly introduced.

Innovations and exemplary practices are essential, but the proliferation of small, local innovations does not lead to educational transformation. For wider educational and social impact it is essential to go beyond the program and the micro level, seeking to articulate with and impact on other educational institutions and interventions, both the innovative and the less innovative. The challenge of any innovation is to move from being perceived as an alternative (to the dominant conventional education pattern) to becoming truly transformative. Going to scale and serving as an inspiring model for the formal school system implies strong, consolidated experiences, readiness to share lessons learned, and accept the necessary adaptations and ownership required by those that see in them viable routes.

Education and learning are critical for personal and social development, but are no panacea to the world’s social and economic problems and to the ones facing youth in particular. Increased poverty and unequal income distribution throughout the world have become major constraints to access and improvement of education and learning. Thus there is an urgent need for specific policies and measures to deal with the structural factors that produce poverty, social exclusion, and social injustice; for more holistic understandings of education and of educational policies and programs; and for reinforcing the critical dimension of education and learning, preparing children and youth for proactive, transformative action. Because “the future” is not a given but a social construction, and children and youth are key agents in such construction.

This document is aimed primarily at people working on the ground and involved in action, but it aspires to reach also those engaged with policy-making and research.

The separation of, and the need for synergy between, these three dimensions—policy, action, and research—and of the actors involved in them, emerges as a critical conclusion and recommendation of this study. The three are essential and complementary for strategic thinking and for effective action. In today’s globalized world, economic development with social equity and cultural diversity has become more complex to achieve than ever. In this context, without macro awareness and without policy dialogue aimed at influencing major decisions and trends, micro interventions will find it more difficult to transcend bandaid approaches, make an impact, and become sustainable. On the other hand, top-down policy-making that is distant from real people and from the efforts implied in translating ideas into practice, is usually fruitless. The “think globally, act locally” motto is misleading and must be challenged. Thinking and acting are intertwined and are required at every level, from the local to the global.

Some fundamental challenges towards these “desired trends” have been displayed here through the experience and voices of those who are already striving to make their way within different contexts and circumstances. They are widening scopes, paying attention to context and culture, accepting diversity, making sure participation is a conviction rather than a concession, building bridges and alliances, linking formal, non-formal and informal learning, encouraging innovation and experimentation, and fundamentally relying on and investing in human capacities and in youth in particular.

This may be just one more “to do” list of those that have become familiar to educators worldwide. But it can have real meaning if it triggers a serious, context-framed reflection on current practice and thinking. Because doing differently implies knowing, understanding, and thinking differently. And, while education and training are important ingredients of any cultural and institutional change strategy, there is nothing like learning by doing, by observing, by listening to others, and by systematically and critically reflecting on one’s own practice.

While education and training are important ingredients of any cultural and institutional change strategy, there is nothing like learning by doing, by observing, by listening to others, and by systematically and critically reflecting on one’s own practice.

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