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# Skills and Competencies

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# AED – Adult Education and Development Editorial

## Mint tea in the garden



Johanni Larjanko  
Editor-in-Chief

Outside the cool meeting room there is a whooshing sound as a man showers bushes, flowers and grass with water from a garden hose. Everything glistens in the sun. We are sitting at the Faculté des sciences de l'éducation in Rabat, Morocco. Cats are prowling the area. Birds are chirping, but otherwise the campus is quite peaceful. I am sipping some wonderful Moroccan mint tea with heaps of sugar spooned in for good measure.

Earlier in the day thousands of teacher students have marched through the city towards the Ministry of Education, demanding their rights. I was reminded about the challenge of writing editorials for a global journal, always running the risk of limiting my perspective to what I know, to how the world looks according to me.

To be a world citizen takes some very specific skills.

It is afternoon. We have just finished a very long and intense discussion in the AED editorial board. It's about our upcoming topic. In the middle of our discussion two words emerge. Skills and competencies.

It's a funny thing with skills. When you have one, you take it for granted. Like walking. Talking. Riding a bike. Reading. It is hard for me to imagine not knowing how to do these things. They are so much a part of who I am, that I find it challenging to make a distinction between my skills and me.

On an intellectual level I understand there are millions of people who cannot swim, read, write, or ride a bike. But on an emotional and personal level I cannot grasp it. Perhaps it is because for example reading or writing is an acquire-and-forget skill. Something you learn once, use all the time, but cannot readily unlearn.

To grasp the reality of someone lacking basic skills is tough. Yet this is a common challenge for adult educators. I cannot presume to know how you feel, what you know, or what you need. But I must try. And so must you.

This is how I see it. A skill might be an integral part of who you are, but it does not define your worth. I am not better than anyone else, regardless of our respective skill levels. Life is not a competition. My skills only make sense when they are used to help you, and vice versa. As living creatures on this planet, we are all connected. What that means in practice, and how it affects adult education, is what we explore in this issue.

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# Word of mouth

No filters. No alterations. Just word for word, this is what our interviewees had to say.

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From Gaza  
with love



# Section 1

## *Agenda setting*

The heavy hitters in the world of adult education include UNESCO, OECD, the World Bank and the European Union. In this section they all get a chance to set the agenda for our issue. What, according to them, are the burning issues in the world of skills and competencies? How should we understand these things?



# *Michael Trucano*

## “Distributing digital dividends”

*Interview*

**Interview** by Johanni Larjanko  
**Photos** by World Bank





*Michael Trucano is Senior Education and Technology Specialist and Global Lead for Innovation in Education at the World Bank. He blogs at <http://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/>*

It's the middle of summer. I have travelled to a remote island in the Vaasa archipelago, in Finland. Basically I am in the middle of nowhere. I have an appointment. Michael Trucano of the World Bank has agreed to talk to me on future skills. I set up my computer and open Skype. In another part of the world, Mike answers from his office in Washington, D.C., where it is early morning. As the afternoon sun is shining on me and the waves are lapping at my feet, I conduct an interview with a man deeply engaged in digital equity.

#### **What skills do you think we will need in the future?**

Hmm, well, certainly we will need a bunch of them. It depends on who we are, where we are, what we need and what we want. Some of the skills that we've had in the past that have helped us not only navigate life, but which have helped us to find and keep employment, are certainly changing. A lot of routine work is going to be much less valued. In its place, I think skills such as critical thinking, communication and the ability to get on with, manage and work with all kinds of people are the sorts of non-cognitive skills and competencies that will be increasingly important. I wouldn't call them 'new' skills, exactly. There is a lot of worry about automation these days, and that the robots are coming or the algorithms are coming. These are the types of skills and competencies that don't lend themselves to being automated because they are fundamentally human, fundamental to who we are as people.

#### **So the driving forces here are globalisation, technical developments and the sensation that the very nature of work and the type of work that is being done manually is shifting towards computer-assisted or technology assisted to an increasingly higher degree?**

Yes, that is an assumption I would share. Technology is driving so much of our lives right now, whether we like it or not. It's

been like that for centuries, but the speed and the pace of change now is, I think, especially disorienting for many people. It's unsettling.

#### **Some consider digital a tool, a way of accomplishing something. Others would say that digital is a topic and a skill in itself. Something to understand, with deep and fundamental implications for society, and the planet.**

I stand right in the middle of that line. I think it is both. That's one of the challenges about so much of this. At the recent Volkshochschultag in Berlin, the question of digital equity was raised. We discussed whether digitalisation improves equal access to education, promotes 'educational justice', or if it increases the unequal access to education even more. In that case as well, my answer is 'yes' to both sides. It's a complex world we live in, and the answers aren't simple.

More and more people realise that it is certainly possible to leapfrog in the wrong direction as well, and also that certain groups may jump ahead much further than others.

#### **There used to be a lot of talk about the leverage effect the Internet could bring to developing countries. What happened with that discussion?**

I think it's a discussion that is still going on in some places. The metaphor of 'leapfrogging' is still heard, related to the use of new technologies. Usually it is about using information and communication technologies (ICT) in education to skip some steps in development. I think more and more people realise that it is certainly possible to leapfrog in the wrong di-

rection as well, and also that certain groups may jump ahead much further than others. There is very little, or at least too little, debate in the world today around the resulting inequalities. But these are things that can change quickly, and it is perhaps worth noting that the winners, the big winners, can also fall from their perch as well.

This is something that I think should colour our discussion on equity, and I mean equity front and centre. In the education sector, 'equity' is really the big issue, together with the need to imbue students, citizens and the workers of tomorrow with sets of new skills. What I mean is: We need to use ICT in a way that at the very minimum offers equal opportunities. If we think about this, about inequality, from the start, I think it can help direct us in more useful ways in how we think about technology use in education. If we do not think about these things, we will have some real problems.

Looking back, I do think many good things have happened over the years as a result of technology use in education, but we are definitely not there yet.

**I have a feeling ICT has been a promise for a long time now. Something that will level the playingfield, improve our lives, democratise learning, etc., etc. But when will it ever fulfil these promises?**

It's true. The 'revolution' has been long promised, the revolution that technology can bring about in education. Back in the 1920s, Thomas Edison talked about the potentially revolutionary value of the motion picture, and what that was going to do to transform education. His very words have since been repeated with some regularity and increasing frequency about the potential revolutionary value of television, radio, and computers; now it's about tablets. Looking back, I do think many good things have happened over the years as a result of technology use in education, but we are definitely not there yet.

**Can you explain digital dividends to me?**

Every year the World Bank puts out what we call our flagship analytical publication, the "World Development Report". This year it looked at the impact, and also in many cases the non-impact, that technology has had on communities and societies around the world. Basically it says that the dividends that are to be accrued from the use of technology are being unequally distributed in profound ways. The report states that we have a choice. As policymakers, educators, citizens or parents, we can decide how we want to answer that challenge. If we decide not to answer that, this is also a choice. In the literacy community, they started talking almost three decades ago about a 'Matthew Effect' related to reading, the idea that the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. We are seeing this in technology as well. Advantages accrue to those who are already advantaged. 'Digital Dividends' documents this, in the typical World Bank way. There are lots and lots of data,

and graphs, and charts. The report may seem a bit heavy at times, but there is an advantage to having this amount of data behind the analysis. It is very thorough, and so makes a clear statement: We need to deal with this.

**So we have a choice. We can despair, or we can act.**

Yes. I don't want to deny that feeling of despair that some people have, but if we do not have a choice, who does? Technology is created by people, and there is a tremendous amount of exciting things happening, creating new opportunities. We can change the way education is offered, as well as other public services. More and more of these tools are also freely available, thanks to open source software and various social movements. These are opportunities, they will not change things by themselves.

**At the same time the concept of what is knowledge, and what do you need to learn is being discussed. I would say that to manage well in the future you need to learn more about social skills, learning-to-learn, curiosity and self-reliance. Do you agree?**

You know: I think I do! The facts today are only one Google search away. Many such things are routine, and thus lend themselves to automation, or outsourcing. In the past 40 years, education has done a decent job of teaching in this facts-based way, at least in the global North and West. They have helped people to become, and remain, middle class. Now it is different. In addition to teaching certain basic facts, and how to place these facts in their proper context, we need to teach non-cognitive skills, communication skills, skills dealing with empathy, critical thinking and analytical skills. These will influence and shape society, and should be part of the curriculum.

**So, the million-dollar question is, how can we teach these skills?**

There is a lot of rhetoric today in some quarters about technology replacing teachers. Some say the access to information will somehow magically lead to a better informed and enlightened student population. A fundamental belief here at the World Bank is that investment in teachers, and in support for teachers, will yield the best results. We are talking about all kinds of teachers, in classrooms and outside. The student or the learner is at the centre, and the teacher is right there beside her.



"We need to teach non-cognitive skills, communication skills, skills dealing with empathy, critical thinking and analytical skills", says Michael Trucano.

# Better skills, better jobs, better lives



Andreas Schleicher  
OECD Paris  
France

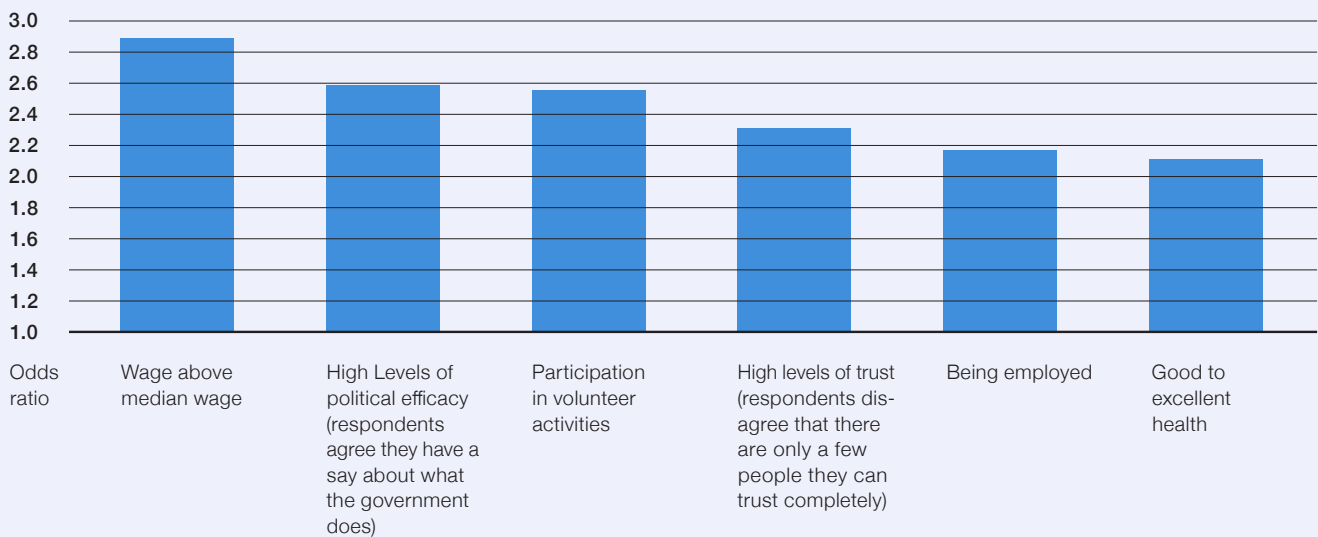
**Abstract** – *Everywhere, skills transform lives, generate prosperity and promote social inclusion. And if there is one lesson the global financial crisis has taught us, then it is that we cannot simply bail ourselves out of an economic crisis, we cannot solely stimulate ourselves out of a crisis and we cannot just “print money” our way out of a crisis. A much stronger bet for countries to grow and develop in the long run is to equip more people with better skills to collaborate, compete and connect in ways that drive their lives and their societies.*

The OECD’s Survey of Adult Skills shows that what people know and what they do with what they know has a major impact on their life chances (see Figure 1). For example, on average, across countries, the median hourly wage of workers scoring at Level 4 or 5 in literacy – who can make complex inferences and evaluate subtle truth claims or arguments in written texts – is more than 60% higher than for workers scoring at Level 1 or below – who can, at best, read relatively short texts to locate a single piece of information that is identical to the information given in the question or directive, or understand basic vocabulary. Those with low literacy skills are also more than twice as likely to be unemployed. The survey further shows that this impact goes far beyond earnings and employment. In the countries surveyed, individuals with poorer foundation skills are far more likely than those with advanced literacy skills to report poor health, to believe that they have little impact on political processes, and not to participate in associative or volunteer activities.

So in one way, skills have become the global currency of 21<sup>st</sup>-century economies. But this “currency” can depreciate as the requirements of labour markets evolve and individuals lose the skills they do not use. For skills to retain their value, they must be continuously developed throughout life.

Furthermore, the toxic coexistence of unemployed graduates and employers who say that they cannot find the people with the skills they need underlines that more education does not automatically translate into better economic and social outcomes. To succeed with converting education into

Figure 1 – International average



Increased likelihood (odds ratio) of adult scoring at Level 4/5 in literacy on the OECD Survey of Adult Skills reporting high earnings, high levels of trust and political efficacy, good health, participating in volunteer activities and being employed, compared with adults scoring at or below Level 1 in literacy (adjusted)

Notes: Odds ratios are adjusted for age, gender, educational attainment and immigrant language background. High wages are defined as workers' hourly earnings that are above the country's median.

Source: Based on data from the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012

better jobs and lives, we need to better understand what those skills are that drive outcomes, ensure that the right skill mix is being learned over the lifecycle, and help economies to make good use of those skills.

### The evolution of skills

The essential starting point for that is to better anticipate and respond to the evolution of skill demand. Government and business need to work together to gather evidence about skill demand, present and future, which can then be used to develop up-to-date instructional systems and to inform education and training systems. During the past few decades there have been major shifts in the economic underpinnings of industrialised countries and, more recently, of many emerging and developing countries, too. As Levy and Murnane<sup>1</sup> have shown, the steepest decline in skill demand is no longer in the area of manual skills but in routine cognitive skills. When we can access the world's knowledge on the Internet, when routine skills are being digitised or outsourced, and when jobs are changing rapidly, accumulating knowledge matters less, and success becomes increasingly about ways of thinking – creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and judgment – about ways of working – collaboration and teamwork – and about the sociocultural tools that enable us to interact with the world.

One thing many nations could learn from countries like Denmark, Germany, Norway or Switzerland is to shift more

of the premium in education from qualifications-focused education upfront to skills-oriented learning throughout life. OECD's Learning for Jobs analysis shows that skill development is far more effective if the world of learning and the world of work are linked. Compared to purely government-designed curricula taught exclusively in schools, learning in the workplace allows people to develop "hard" skills on modern equipment, and "soft" skills such as teamwork, communication, and negotiation through real-world experience. The experience of these countries also suggests that hands-on workplace training is an effective way to motivate disengaged youth to re-engage with education and smoothen the transition to work. They succeed with preventing school dropout by offering more relevant education and second-chance opportunities, and by offering work experience to young people before they leave education. Employers have an important role in training their own staff, even if some, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, get public assistance to provide such training. Trade unions in these countries also help to shape education and training, protect the interests of existing workers, ensure that those in work use their skills adequately, and see that investments in training are reflected in better-quality jobs and higher salaries.

### Four actions to increase participation

Preparing young people for their entry into the labour market with upfront education and training is only one facet of skills



development; working-age adults also need to develop their skills so that they can progress in their careers, meet the changing demands of the labour market, and don't lose the skills they have already acquired. A wide spectrum of full- or part-time adult-learning activities needs to be available: from work-related employee training, formal education for adults, second-chance courses to obtain a minimum qualification or basic literacy and numeracy skills, language training for immigrants, and labour-market training programmes for job-seekers, to learning activities for self-improvement or leisure. There is much that can be done to dismantle barriers to participation in continued education and training:

*First:* Making the returns on adult education and training more transparent can help to increase the motivation of users to invest in adult education and training. Governments can provide better information about the economic benefits (including wages net of taxes, employment and productivity) and non-economic benefits (including self-esteem and increased social interaction) of adult learning.

*Second:* Less-educated individuals tend to be less aware of education and training opportunities or may find the available information confusing. A combination of easily searchable, up-to-date online information and personal guidance and counselling services to help individuals define their own training needs and identify the appropriate programmes is needed, as is information about possible funding sources.

*Third:* Clear certification of learning outcomes and recognition of non-formal learning are also incentives for training. Trans-

parent standards, embedded in a framework of national qualifications, should be developed alongside reliable assessment procedures. Recognition of prior learning can also reduce the time needed to obtain a certain qualification and thus the cost of foregone earnings.

*Fourth:* it is important to ensure that programmes are relevant to users and are flexible enough, both in content and in how they are delivered to adapt to adults' needs. A number of countries have recently introduced one-stop shopping arrangements, with different services offered in the same institution. This approach is particularly cost effective as it consolidates infrastructure and teaching personnel and makes continuing education and training more convenient. Distance learning and the open educational resources approach have significantly improved users' ability to adapt their learning to their lives.

Cross-border skills policies are important, too. Countries may not have an adequate supply of skills because they have booming emerging sectors and not enough people trained in those fields, because their societies are ageing and there are too few young people to replace retiring workers, or because they want to move major parts of the economy to higher value-added production, which requires a well-trained workforce. Similarly, while skills policies are typically designed nationally, an increasing number of employers operate internationally.

### Going beyond the borders

Also, while skills policies are typically designed nationally, an increasing number of employers operate internationally and must derive their skills from both local sources and the global talent pool. Some countries have therefore started to consider skills policies beyond their national borders and have begun to invest in the skills of people in other countries. This has the double advantage of providing well-trained workers to branches of firms located abroad and reducing the incentives to emigrate, especially among highly skilled individuals. Another way to encourage skills development globally is to design policies that encourage cross-border tertiary education. This can help a country to expand its stock of skills more rapidly than if it had to rely on domestic resources alone.

And yet, building skills is still the easier part; far tougher is providing opportunities for young people to use their skills. Employers may need to offer greater flexibility in the workplace. Labour unions may need to reconsider their stance on rebalancing employment protection for permanent and temporary workers. Enterprises need reasonably long trial periods to enable employers giving those youth who lack work experience a chance to prove themselves and facilitate a transition to regular employment. The bottom line is that unused human capital represents a waste of skills and of initial investment in those skills. As the demand for skills changes, unused skills can become obsolete, and skills that are unused during inactivity are bound to atrophy over time. Conversely, the more individuals use their skills and engage in complex and

demanding tasks, both at work and elsewhere, the more likely it is that skills-decline due to ageing can be prevented.

### Facing the skills mismatch

But even developing skills and making them available to the labour market will not have the desired impact on the economy and society if those skills are not used effectively. The OECD Skills Survey shows that, in some countries, skills mismatch is a serious challenge that is mirrored in people's earnings prospects and in their productivity. Knowing which skills are needed in the labour market and which educational pathways will get young people to where they want to be is essential. Skills mismatch on the job can be a temporary phenomenon: sometimes, for example, the demand for skills takes time to adjust to the fact that there is a larger pool of highly skilled workers available. Thus, not all types of skills mismatch are bad for the economy. Skills surpluses, which can result from an underuse of skills in specific occupations, can serve as a skills reserve that may be used in other, more advanced jobs and for building knowledge economies over the long term. However, the mismatch between workers' skills and their tasks at work can adversely affect economic and social outcomes. The underutilisation of skills, in specific jobs in the short to medium term, can be a problem because it may lead to skills loss. Workers whose skills are underused in their current jobs earn less than workers who are well-matched to their jobs and tend to be less satisfied at work. This situation tends to generate more employee turnover, which is likely to affect a firm's productivity. Under-skilling is also likely to affect productivity and, as with skills shortages, slow the rate at which more efficient technologies and approaches to work are adopted.

Successful entry into the labour market at the beginning of a professional career has a profound influence on later working life. The "scarring effects" of a poor start can make it difficult to catch up later. Strong basic education, in conjunction with vocational education and training programmes that are relevant to the needs of the labour market, tend to smooth the transition from school to work, as do hiring and firing rules that do not penalise young people compared with other groups, and financial incentives that make it viable for employers to hire young people who require on-the-job training. Such policies can help to prevent skills mismatch and unemployment later on.

### The key success factor

High-quality career guidance services, complemented with up-to-date information about labour-market prospects, can help young people make sound career choices. Some countries also have effective active labour-market measures, such as counselling, job-search assistance and temporary hiring subsidies for low-skilled youth; and they link income support for young people to their active search for work and their engagement in measures to improve their employability.

None of this will work unless skills become everyone's business: governments, which can design financial incentives and favourable tax policies; education systems, which can foster entrepreneurship as well as offer vocational training; employers, who can invest in learning; labour unions, which help to ensure that investments in training are reflected in better-quality jobs and higher salaries; and individuals, who can take better advantage of learning opportunities. Countries also need to take a hard look at who should pay for what, when and how. Governments need to design financial incentives and tax policies that encourage individuals and employers to invest in post-compulsory education and training. Some individuals can shoulder more of the financial burden for tertiary education, and funding can be linked more closely to graduation rates, provided individuals have access to income-contingent loans and means-tested grants.

Many countries still have a recession to fight, but the cost of low skills is high, and the equivalent of a permanent economic recession.

### Note

1 / Authors: Levy, F. and Murnane, R. (2013): Economy-Wide Changes in Job Task Content 1960–2010, Presentation given at the 2013 CCR Conference in February 2013.



### About the author

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# Shaping the literacy agenda from a lifelong learning perspective



Ulrike Hanemann  
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**Abstract** – *Within a lifelong learning framework, literacy and numeracy are viewed as part of a set of basic skills which are indispensable for full participation in society and form the core of basic education. However, this view also involves major challenges in developing a common understanding of how to approach literacy (and numeracy) as a continuum, as a lifelong and life-wide learning process, and as a task that will cut across all of the education targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 as well as the other 16 SDGs over the next 15 years. The vision of “lifelong literacy” supports integrated and holistic approaches.*

While a vibrant debate can be observed on the “right mix” and proficiency levels, there is a broad consensus that literacy and numeracy are crucial components of a set of essential, foundational or general skills and competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These are essential for performing daily tasks, leading healthy lives, finding work, engaging in social and political activities, and independent learning. Strong literacy skills are associated with a range of valuable and desirable development outcomes including access to decent work (see St. Clair 2010; UNESCO 2016; UIL 2016). They have the potential to enhance people’s ability to interpret and transform their realities in the pursuit of their goals. Moreover, they provide a basis for many other learning and training opportunities.

Although the notion of literacy has evolved over the past decade towards a more nuanced concept of literacy as a learning continuum comprising different proficiency levels, arriving at a global consensus on the definition is still a challenge. The emphasis on the need to contextualise literacy and frame it as a social practice – what is required to be “literate” can differ depending on the context and what an individual aspires to do with his or her reading and writing skills – has led to a certain degree of relativity of the literacy concept. In addition, a broader understanding of literacy and numeracy as part of a set of basic skills has also opened the door to a proliferation of new combinations of the term literacy, adding knowledge areas such as digital literacy (or literacies), ICT literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, envi-



ronmental literacy, financial literacy, critical literacy, health literacy and legal literacy, among many others. While a number of these areas are closely interrelated with the ability to read, write, compute and communicate, and others are adding important components by doing justice to new technological developments, some creations of terminology are in fact contributing to watering down the essence of the term “literacy”. This conceptual confusion complicates the tasks of formulating clear policy goals and assessing and monitoring literacy outcomes and progress.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recently adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN 2015), and in particular SDG 4 – the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) “Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all” (WEF 2015) – frame this debate in a new perspective. Education 2030 emphasises a holistic and lifelong learning approach. Addressing literacy within a truly lifelong learning vision requires a deeper understanding of “literacy” and “basic skills” in theory, policy and practice. This endeavour involves tackling a number of challenges, including the creation of a consensus on what we mean by “literacy” and “basic skills” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need to broaden the vision vis-à-vis rapid changes in an increasingly complex world, and operationalise literacy and basic skills from a lifelong learning perspective as agreed upon at the global level.

## Addressing literacy within a truly lifelong learning vision requires a deeper understanding of “literacy” and “basic skills” in theory, policy and practice.

### Seeking conceptual clarity

The term “literacy” usually refers to the ability to deal with written text. Numeracy, as mediated by written material, is often added as a complement (or even perceived as a component) of literacy. Yet, SDG Target 4.6 – “By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy” – explicitly refers to numeracy as a “key skill”. Increasingly there is also mention of language skills, in recognition of the fact that most people live in linguistically diverse contexts and need to communicate – orally and in writing – in different languages and scripts. In addition, major cross-country surveys of adult skills (i.e. the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies [PIAAC]; OECD 2013) have started to include “problem solving in technology-rich environments” in their assessment frameworks. This recognises the fact that the ability to use digital technology, communication tools and networks through information and communication technologies (ICTs) is indispensable in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw clear lines to define the scope of literacy. This is mainly due

to three reasons: (1) the diversity of possible practical uses of literacy enabling individuals and collectives to pursue their goals; (2) literacy being associated with varying contexts which evolve and change over time; and (3) literacy being closely intertwined with language, culture, communication, knowledge production, critical thinking, opinions, ideas, problem solving and independent learning, just to mention a few dimensions determining the complexity of literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Becoming literate does not only involve knowledge (e.g. of the alphabet, script and language) and skills (e.g. reading fluency and comprehension), but also touches on attitudes, dispositions and motivation (e.g. confident and self-sufficient learners are more likely to use their literacy skills broadly) as well as on values (e.g. being able to critically assess the purpose of a message or to responsibly use social media to interact with different audiences). In short, literacy refers to the (cap)ability of putting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values into action effectively when dealing with (handwritten, printed or digital) text in the context of ever-changing demands. Therefore, it is more precise to denote literacy as a competency or even a set of competencies instead of simply a skill. While in many countries (and languages) there is no clear distinction between “skills” and “competencies” (e.g. Francophone countries), and consequently both terms are often used interchangeably, a number of countries have started to refer to literacy as an “essential skill” (e.g. Canada), a “basic skill” (e.g. UK), a “key competence” (e.g. OECD in PIAAC), or even “literacy capability” (e.g. Australia).

There is a tension between the increasing complexity of literacy and the need to use a terminology which is clear and intelligible to everybody. While acknowledging the “plurality” of literacy (UNESCO 2004) and literacy practices, its multidimensionality and dynamics as a social practice, and its increasing complexity in a fast-changing and highly inequitable world, there is a risk of contributing to confusion and dilution of the core meaning when using the term “literacy” metaphorically to designate basic competencies or skills in senses other than those directly concerned with written text (Lind 2008). Therefore, it is advisable to limit the use of the term to those practices which are related to written language (script, print, or digital) as a means of communication.

### Expanding the vision

The acceptance of the notion of literacy as a learning continuum comprising different proficiency levels has been one of the most significant developments in the conceptualisation of literacy over the past decade. This understanding of literacy rejects the simple dichotomy of “literate” versus “illiterate” which is still used in statistical reports on “literacy rates” or “illiteracy rates” which are often based on estimates instead of being measured through direct testing. Instead, this understanding perceives literacy as a continuum of proficiency levels spanning a range of different uses. While the required proficiency levels and how people apply reading and writing skills depend on specific contexts, the minimum literacy

threshold to be reached by all citizens of a country needs to be established at the policy level, and it must evolve over time.

## The acceptance of the notion of literacy as a learning continuum comprising different proficiency levels has been one of the most significant developments in the conceptualisation of literacy over the past decade.

At the global level, the explanatory text for SDG Target 4.6 establishes “proficiency levels of functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at successful completion of basic education” (WEF 2015: 15). This corresponds to the level envisaged in Education for All (EFA) Goal 4 (“improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 [...] and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”; WEF 2000: 16). While the adjective “functional” does not really contribute to conceptual precision and is a somewhat unnecessary qualifier (literacy is always “functional” since it equips people with skills/competencies which allow them to “function”), the statement on the required competency level – basic education – has major implications: it establishes some kind of minimum literacy and numeracy threshold to be achieved by all.

This ambitious goal involves expanding the vision of literacy. It requires continuity of learning processes beyond literacy at the elementary level. Literacy and numeracy, alongside with other basic skills, are situated at the heart of basic education. They are developed in a progression of competency levels which range from reading with understanding a simple sentence to performing higher-order tasks around complex text and all kind of graphic representations. Instead of short literacy courses, it is necessary to offer comprehensive youth and adult basic education and training programmes which respond to (changing) social and economic development needs and contexts.

According to an operational definition offered by UNESCO, basic education covers notions such as fundamental, elementary and primary/secondary education; comprises at least nine years and progressively extends to twelve years (in formal education); prepares the learner for further education, for an active life and citizenship; meets basic learning needs including learning to learn, the acquisition of numeracy, literacy and scientific and technological knowledge as applied to daily life; is directed to the full development of the human personality; develops the capability for comprehension and critical thinking; and it inculcates the respect for human rights and values, notably human dignity, solidarity, tolerance, democratic citizenship and a sense of justice and equity. In addition, equivalent basic education needs to be offered for youth and adults who did not have the opportunity or possibility to receive and complete basic education at the appropriate age (UNESCO 2007).

The understanding of literacy reflected in SDG Target 4.6 is guided by this broad vision of basic education, which includes basic skills, and is at the same time supported by the lifelong learning vision.

### Advancing literacy from a lifelong learning perspective

Lifelong learning is becoming increasingly important as a key organising principle for all forms of education and learning in a rapidly changing world. While learning is an absolute necessity for everyone, it is particularly important for disadvantaged individuals and groups who have been excluded from, or failed to acquire basic competencies through, formal schooling.

The vision of lifelong learning has evolved over the past few decades to become a constant feature in 21<sup>st</sup>-century policy discourse. Based on emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values, the concept of lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages, in all life contexts (e.g. at home, at school, in the community and in the workplace) and through formal, non-formal and informal modalities which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands (UNESCO 2014: 2). Furthermore, the vision of lifelong learning supports the idea of building bridges between different components, actors, institutions, processes, life spheres and life phases to develop holistically designed learning systems.

The recognition that learning never stops over a person's lifetime also applies to literacy learning: the acquisition and development of literacy takes place before, during and after primary school. The same is true for life-wide learning taking place at home, at work, at school and in other spaces in the community. In other words, the development of reading and writing skills should be closely associated with activities which are relevant – or even essential – for human development. Instead of aiming for the “eradication of illiteracy”, ensuring the achievement of literacy and numeracy for all entails the development of “literate families”, “literate communities” and “literate societies”.

## Instead of aiming for the “eradication of illiteracy”, ensuring the achievement of literacy and numeracy for all entails the development of “literate families”, “literate communities” and “literate societies”.

The vision of “lifelong literacy” supports integrated approaches to teaching and learning literacy and numeracy, such as family literacy, intergenerational learning, and literacy embedded in practical skills training and income-generating activities. Such approaches bring literacy closer to people's lives and the different purposes for which they need or want to read, write, calculate and communicate.

The declared intention of SDG Target 4.6 emphasises the necessity to provide literacy programmes which are respon-

sive to the needs and contexts of learners “within the framework of lifelong learning” (WEF 2015: 15). This implies that learning and using literacy and numeracy skills has to be perceived and dealt with as a continuous and context-bound process which takes place within and outside of educational settings across all ages and generations (throughout life). As a life-wide learning process, literacy needs to be addressed in combination with the development of other skills and competencies. Linking literacy with development issues within an inter-sectorial approach seems to be the most promising way to contribute to the achievement of most of the SDGs.

Indeed, literacy can only unfold its full potential to “transform our world” if it is conceptualised and operationalised from a lifelong learning perspective. This involves: (1) understanding literacy as a continuous learning process which takes place across all ages and generations; (2) ensuring that literacy and numeracy are achieved at proficiency levels that are equivalent to those achieved at successful completion of basic education; (3) embedding literacy in or combining it with the development of other skills and integrating it into other development activities; (4) integrating literacy in sector-wide reforms towards lifelong learning systems; and (5) ensuring that literacy is part of national or sub-national development strategies (Hanemann 2015).

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# The new Skills Agenda for Europe



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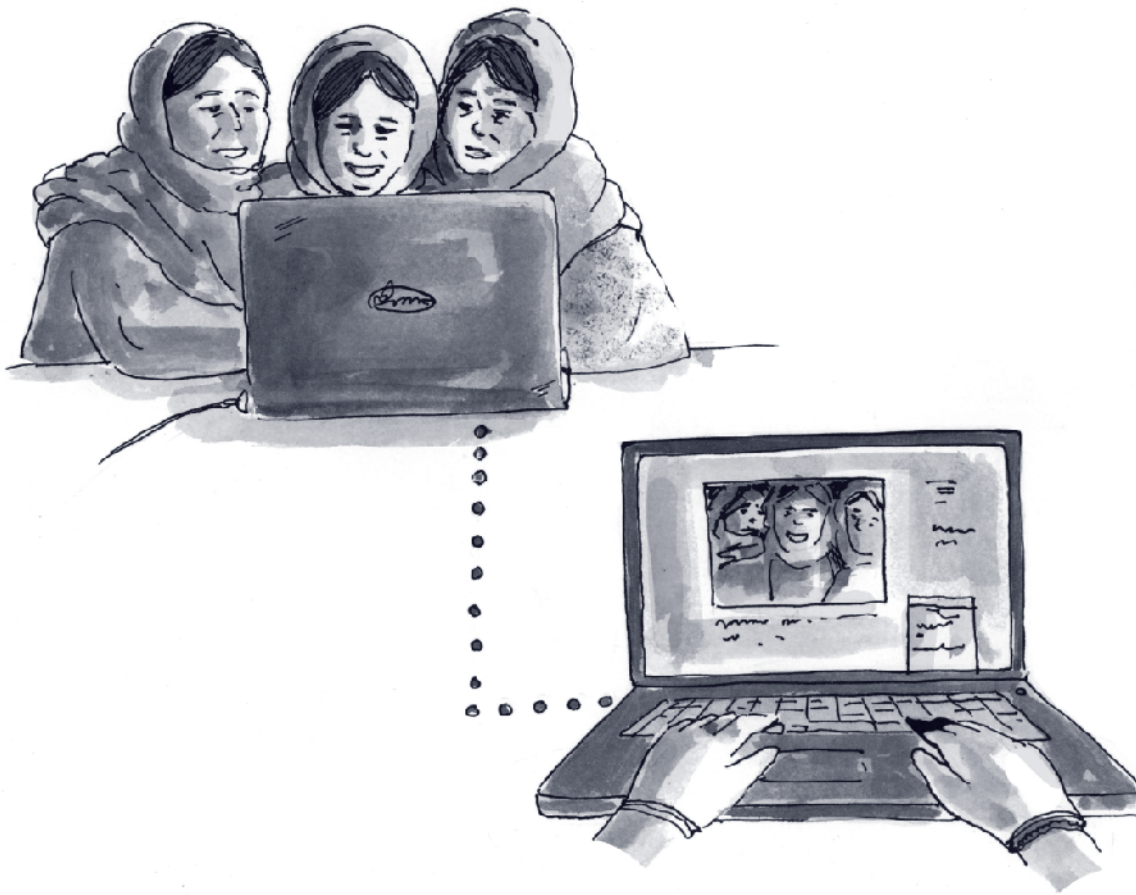
**Abstract** – *The European Commission has published major proposals to tackle a number of challenges faced by the EU in the field of skills and human capital. These aim to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation, make skills and qualifications more visible and comparable, and improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices.*

The European Commission, in June 2016, published a major package of proposals aiming to encourage the 28 Member States of the European Union (EU) and a wide range of stakeholders to work together to increase their efforts to “strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness”: the new Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>1</sup>.

This new Skills Agenda for Europe sets out to address a number of important challenges and opportunities:

- The digital transformation of the economy is re-shaping the way people work and do business; digital skills are needed for all jobs, from the simplest to the most complex. They are also needed for everyday life, and a lack of digital skills may lead to social exclusion
- The EU workforce is ageing and shrinking, leading in some cases to skills shortages; yet labour markets do not draw on the skills and talents of all; for example, women’s rate of employment remains below that of men.
- The quality and relevance of the education and training available in Member States vary widely, which contributes to increasing disparities in countries’ economic and social performance.
- The skills that people acquire outside formal education – online, at work, through professional courses, social activities or volunteering can often go unrecognised.

Furthermore, there are significant skills gaps and skills mismatches: many people work in jobs that do not match their



talents, although many employers say they have difficulty finding people with the skills they need to grow and innovate. These skills mismatches hinder productivity and growth.

Most importantly, the Commission also draws attention to the high proportion of European adults who lack adequate reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills, putting them at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Around 70 million adults – a quarter of the adult population – are affected.

The new Skills Agenda highlights the role of skills as a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth. They are key to social cohesion. For all these reasons, the Commission believes that more needs to be done to encourage people to acquire and develop skills throughout their lives. This will require significant changes to policy, reforms of education and training systems and smart investments in human capital.

The new Skills Agenda for Europe is structured around three priority areas, which are quite self-explanatory. We need more and better skills (“Improve the quality and relevance of skills formation”). We need to put the skills we develop to good use (“Make skills more visible and comparable”). We need to better understand what skills will be demanded to

help people choose what skills to develop (“Improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices”).

The following sections outline the main challenges identified by the Commission, and its proposals for tackling them.

### Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation

Acquiring skills is a lifelong process, and starts when people are very young. More and more, evidence shows that policies to increase attainment alone are not sufficient: the quality and the relevance of what people learn are now centre-stage. Many young people leave education and training without being sufficiently prepared to enter the labour market, to start their own business or cope with dynamic changes in society and economy.

The Commission is proposing a set of actions to improve skills formation across all life stages, with actions ranging from strengthening basic skills for adults to mainstreaming digital skills and making VET a first choice.

### Strengthening the foundation: basic skills

To support more and better skills, the first step is an appropriate level of basic skills – literacy, numeracy, digital skills – for everybody. It is therefore not surprising that one of the actions proposed by the Commission focuses on this: the proposal for a Skills Guarantee aims to provide low qualified adults access to flexible tailored upskilling pathways to im-



Commissioner Marianne Thyssen (far left and picture on next page) is responsible for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility in the European Union.

prove these skills or progress towards an upper secondary qualification.

Europe faces a basic skills challenge. More than 65 million people in the EU have not achieved a qualification corresponding to upper secondary level. This rate varies significantly across EU countries, reaching 50% or more in some. Around a quarter of the European adult population struggles with reading and writing, and has poor numeracy and digital skills. Numeracy, literacy and basic digital skills are essential to access good jobs and participate fully in society. These are also the building blocks for further learning and career development. This was recently brought home to Commissioner Marianne Thyssen (who is responsible, amongst other things, for skills) when she and Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands met with Sam Riley [photo], a man who has been able to turn his life around because he received support with his literacy skills. The Commissioner keeps his handwritten letter in her office as a reminder of the importance of helping people to improve their basic skills [photo].

Yet, across the EU, the adults mostly in need of engaging in learning participate very little in lifelong learning. On average, only 10.7% of adult Europeans participated in any education and training in 2014, again with significant variation between countries and against an EU target of 15% set to be reached by 2020. But an analysis of the participation of low-qualified adults in education and training shows even lower participation rates, varying from below 1% in some countries to over 20% in others. On average in the EU only 4.3% of low-quali-

fied adults – that is, the group most in need of learning – participate in education and training.

Europe faces a basic skills challenge. More than 65 million people in the EU have not achieved a qualification corresponding to upper secondary level.

To improve the employment opportunities and overall life chances of low-skilled adults in Europe, the Commission has made a proposal to help low-skilled adults – both in-work and out of work – to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills and, where possible, to develop a wider set of skills leading to an upper secondary education qualification or equivalent. The proposal is that Member States should introduce a Skills Guarantee, which would involve offering to low-qualified adults: (a) a skills assessment, enabling them to identify their existing skills and their upskilling needs; (b) a package of education or training tailored to the specific learning needs of each individual, and (c) opportunities to have their skills validated and recognised. The proposal was developed based on existing good practices, in EU Member States and beyond, and calls for establishing strong coordination and cooperation mechanisms to make the Skills Guarantee a reality.

These new upskilling pathways would take into account the different skills levels and training needs within the very



wide group of low-qualified individuals. They would lead to training in literacy, numeracy or digital skills for those who need them. For those who are ready to engage in further learning, the pathways could lead further: to a qualification at EQF level 4 or equivalent certifying the acquisition of a broader set of key competences. The overall aim of the Guarantee is to help people with the weakest skills and educational background to develop the skills they need to access and progress in quality work and actively take part in society, as well as to boost employability, competitiveness and support fair and balanced growth, reaping the full potential of digital and technological advancements. By addressing the needs of this wide target group, the proposed Skills Guarantee would support policies aimed at overcoming social inequalities faced by people with low skills and give them a fair chance to improve their lives and avoid poverty and social exclusion.

### **Making vocational education and training (VET) a first choice**

Forecasts in several Member States indicate that there will be a shortage of people with vocational qualifications in the future. VET is valued for fostering job-specific and transversal skills, facilitating the transition into employment and maintaining and updating the skills of the workforce according to sectoral, regional and local needs. However, for many young people and their parents initial VET remains a second choice. VET needs to increase its attractiveness, for example through

quality provision and flexible organisation, allowing progression to higher vocational or academic learning, and closer links with the world of work. Business and social partners should be involved in designing and delivering VET, which should include a strong work-based dimension, whenever possible coupled with an international experience. The Commission will promote opportunities for learners to undertake a work-based learning experience as part of their studies, support partnerships between learning providers, research and business to foster joint work on higher vocational programmes, and launch a first European Vocational Skills Week in 2016 to showcase excellence in VET.

### **Building resilience: key competences and higher, more complex skills**

Formal education and training should equip everyone with a broad range of skills which opens doors to personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. These include literacy, numeracy, science and foreign languages, as well as transversal skills and key competences such as digital competences, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, problem solving or learning to learn, and financial literacy. Early acquisition of these skills is the foundation for the development of higher, more complex skills which are needed to drive creativity and innovation. These skills need to be strengthened throughout life, and allow people to thrive in fast-evolving workplaces and society, and to cope with complexity and uncertainty. While some of these competences already have an established place in educational systems, this is not typically the case for key competences such as entrepreneurship and citizenship, or transversal skills. Where some Member States have taken steps to incorporate them in curricula, this has not always been done consistently. To promote a shared understanding of two of these competences, the Commission has developed reference frameworks for digital competences (now taken up in 13 Member States) and entrepreneurship.

Under the new Skills Agenda, to help more people acquire a core set of skills, the Commission intends to launch a revision of the European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning<sup>2</sup>. The goal is to develop a shared understanding of key competences and to further foster their introduction in education and training curricula. The revision will also provide support for better developing and assessing these skills. Special attention will be paid to promoting entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets, including by encouraging practical entrepreneurial experiences.

### **Getting connected: focus on digital skills**

The rapid digital transformation of the economy means that almost all jobs now require some level of digital skills, as does participation in society at large. The collaborative economy is changing business models, opening up opportunities and new routes into work, demanding different skill sets, and bringing challenges such as accessing upskilling oppor-

tunities. Robotisation and artificial intelligence are replacing routine jobs, not only on the factory floor, but in the office. Access to services, including e-services, is changing and requires that users, providers and public administrations have sufficient digital skills. E-health, for instance, is transforming the way people access and receive healthcare. The demand for digital technology professionals has grown by 4% annually in the last ten years. Yet the number of unfilled vacancies for ICT professionals is expected to reach 756,000 by 2020. Furthermore, almost half the EU population lacks basic digital skills; with around 20% of people having none at all. Member States, business and individuals need to rise to the challenge and invest more in digital skills formation (including coding/computer science) across the whole spectrum of education and training.

The Commission is launching the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition to develop a large digital talent pool and ensure that individuals and the labour force in Europe are equipped with adequate digital skills.

### **Making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable**

Qualifications signal to employers what people know and are able to do but rarely capture skills acquired outside formal learning institutions, which therefore risk being undervalued. Identifying and validating these skills is particularly important for people with lower qualifications, the unemployed or those at risk of unemployment, for people who need to change career path and for migrants. It helps people better showcase and use their experience and talent, identify further training needs and take up opportunities for re-qualification. Differences between education and training systems, however, make it difficult for employers to assess the knowledge and skills of people with a qualification from another country than their own.

Under the new Skills Agenda for Europe, the Commission proposes actions to improve the transparency and comparability of qualifications and to support the early profiling of migrants' skills and qualifications.

### **Improving transparency and comparability of qualifications**

The European Qualifications Framework<sup>3</sup> for lifelong learning (EQF) was established to make it easier to understand and compare what people have actually learned (learning outcomes) while gaining their qualification. It has encouraged actors from different national educational sectors to work together to design coherent national qualification frameworks based on learning outcomes. The Commission has put forward a proposal for revising the EQF in order to make it more effective in helping employers, workers and learners to understand national, international and third-country qualifications. The initiative should thus contribute to a better use of available skills and qualifications for the benefit of individuals, the labour market and the economy.

### **Early profiling of migrants' skills and qualifications**

Understanding the skills, qualifications and professional experiences of newly arrived migrants is a challenge for many countries. Identifying migrants' skills early on can help determine the first steps needed to integrate them into their host society and the labour market. This may involve referring them to appropriate training (including language training, business training or apprenticeships available through the European Alliance for Apprenticeships), or to employment services. The Commission proposes a number of measures to more rapidly integrate third country nationals, including a tool to assist receiving countries to identify and document the skills, qualifications and experience of newly-arrived Third Country Nationals and to support the training of staff in reception facilities as well as making available online language learning for newly arrived migrants.

## **Understanding the skills, qualifications and professional experiences of newly arrived migrants is a challenge for many countries.**

### **Improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices**

The third priority area focuses on the skills data availability and its usage by policy makers, education and training providers, learners and employers.

### **Better information for better choices**

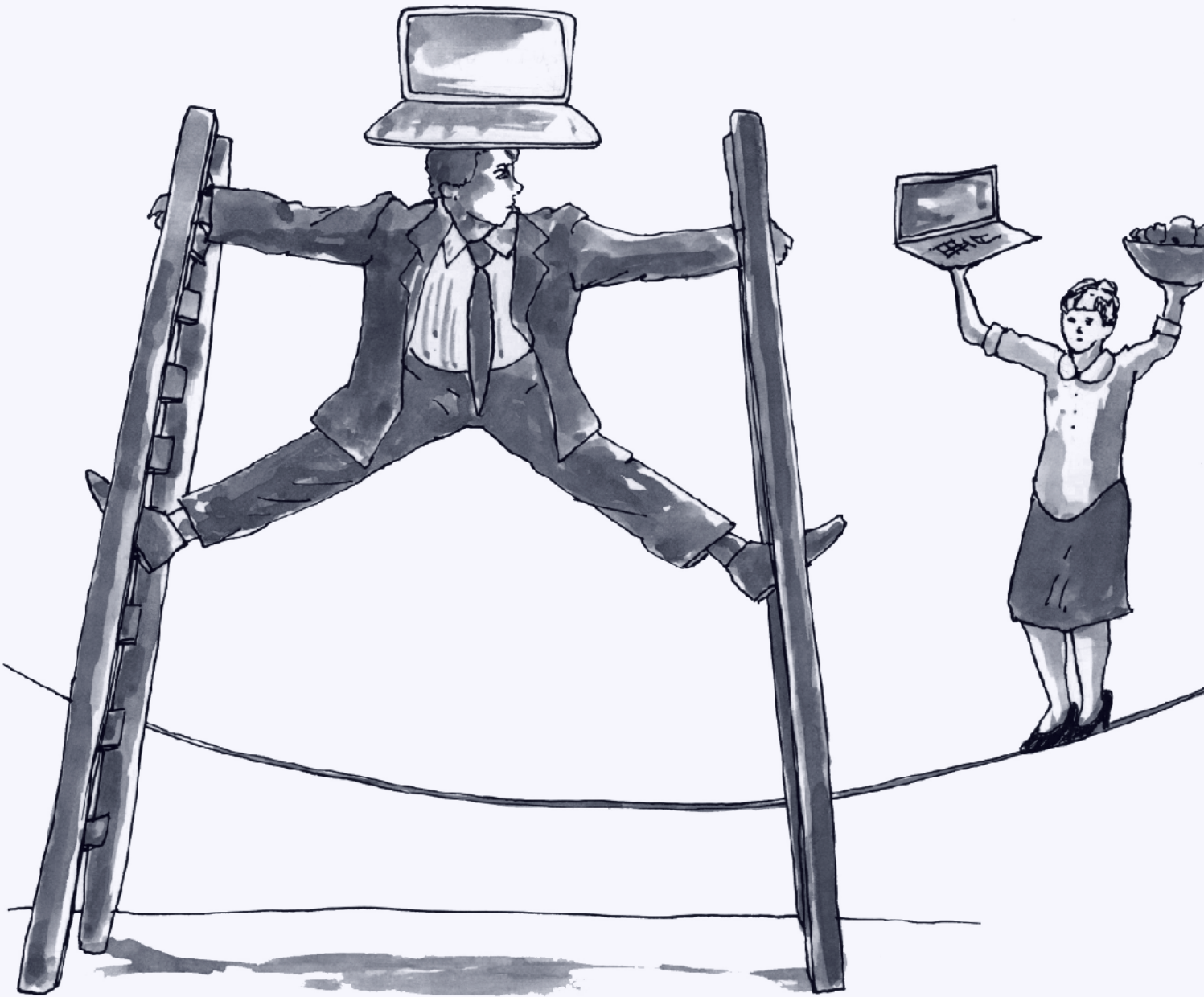
Whether seeking jobs or deciding what and where to learn, people need to be able to access and make sense of available skills intelligence. People also need to (self-)assess their skills and present their qualifications effectively; and employers need more efficient and effective ways of identifying and recruiting people with the right skills.

The Commission will submit proposals to set up an intuitive and seamless online service platform providing web-based tools for documenting and sharing information on skills and qualifications and free self-assessment tools by building on the good results of the Europass<sup>4</sup> Framework. It will also further improve data on skills needs and trends by web crawling and big data analysis for offering accurate and real-time information on skills for the use of individuals, employers and policy makers.

### **Boosting skills intelligence and cooperation in economic sectors**

Current and future skills needs vary across different sectors of the economy. New sectors emerge or change radically. The supply of the right skills at the right time is important for competitiveness and innovation. A major challenge for in-





dustry is to better anticipate and manage these changes. To improve skills intelligence and tackle skills shortages in specific economic sectors, the Commission is launching a Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills. It will help mobilise and coordinate key players, encourage private investment and promote more strategic use of relevant EU and national funding programmes. Sectoral skills partnerships, in industry and services, will be set up to identify skills needs and develop concrete solutions, such as joint development of higher VET opportunities and business-education-research partnerships and to promote the recognition of sectoral qualifications and certifications. Sectors targeted in a first stage include automotive, maritime technology, space, defence, textile and tourism.

### Better understanding the performance of graduates

Universities and VET providers prepare young people for working life, so they need to understand labour market trends, know how easily their alumni find jobs, and adapt their programmes accordingly. Students need this information to make informed choices on what and where to study. Better information on the labour market outcomes for graduates is needed. Mechanisms for tracking tertiary graduates have been developed in a number of Member States and the Commission plans to support Member States in improving information on how graduates progress on the labour market.

### Conclusion

The new Skills Agenda sets out a joint agenda for the EU, Member States and stakeholders. The goal is to reach a shared vision and commitment to work together on improving the quality and relevance of skills formation in order to keep step with the rapidly changing skills requirements of the labour market, equip everyone with a minimum set of basic skills and make qualifications easier to understand, helping workers and learners to move around more easily within the EU.

The European Commission has invited the European Parliament and the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions to endorse the Agenda and to support its implementation, in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

### Notes

- 1 / <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>
- 2 / <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:c11090>
- 3 / [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f\[0\]=im\\_field\\_entity\\_type%3A97#](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#)
- 4 / <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

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# Skills and competencies for life and work – magic recipe?

We have seen this for a long time. The gap between general education and vocational education and training. It has persisted in the science, research and policy of education as two different paradigms, two separate pathways leading to completely different goals. This artificial split only ever functioned in the educational practices of formal education (and from the formal point of view) or at the extreme poles of the educational reality continuum. It is a split that has been harmful for both paradigms and has hindered faster development of educational ideas and more innovative practices.

As such, this had to end.

The growing problems on both sides – growing unemployment, fast changing industry, new types of economies, technological development, as well as a growing uncertainty, an increased number of conflicts, lack of tolerance, climate change and environmental problems has forced us to finally pay more attention to both education for the world of work and education for a changing life. Limited resources emphasise the necessity of finding new ways to approach education, to be efficient and locate synergies, and last but not least, for the logic of the holistic reality of the person who learns.

A concept of skills for work was supposed to cover TVET and everything around the world of work. Skills for life got the task to prepare people for everything else – literacy and numeracy, basic education, ICT, environmental awareness, peace and interculturalism, science, communication and human relationships ... and a lot of other things. This combination of skills for life and skills for work became very popular, and the main global policy makers adopted it, even those who were earlier pleading for completely different paradigms (such as UNESCO and OECD; the European Commission took the lead in the uncritical use and application of the concept). The promising unity of various skills soon became a kind of recipe for all fields of education. All sorts of vocational skills, even very practical ones, for a concrete purpose and single use, were put in the basket together with abstract cognitive skills, metacognition and critical thinking, with personal traits and human relationships!

In some cases the term skills was replaced with the term competencies, which is a bit broader and less reductive, but skills for life and work, as a set, resisted this change. Even the difficulties in categorising skills in this dichotomous way did not lead to further questioning of the dominating paradigm nor any development of the next steps.

Of course, the problem of such an uncritical, not clearly articulated combination lies not in their separation, but in the

only sphere where it works already (and worked even before, unnoticed by policy makers and theoreticians), in educational practice. Many initiatives, projects and programmes already did show that only a holistic, integrated approach can work for education. But they have yet to reach the creators of the policy concept and influence the rethinking of the current trend in combining skills. It's not about percentage of skills for work and percentage of skills for life in the curricula, it's not about simultaneous or consecutive provision of them, it's not about identifying and adding more and more skills, or about making priorities among them.

Further development should focus on finding various innovative ways of combining skills (including competencies and knowledge), on functioning models that work for the person/learner and for industry/economy (not forgetting society!), on identifying the elements of successful programmes in an existing provision (good practice examples), and above all, on a broader, contextual, integrated approach in/to education. Special attention and support should be given to the initial and further education of teachers and trainers, since they have the crucial role. A deeper research and new understanding of the phenomena of learning itself might also contribute to the new ways of building bridges between different areas of human life. Including work.



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# Stephen Evans

Short  
Interview

## **Adult Education and Development: Which skills and competencies do we need to survive in the future?**

*Stephen Evans:* Learning and skills are central to a fair, inclusive and prosperous society. They help people to play an active role in their community and society, support their children in their education and development, and are increasingly vital to employment and career opportunities.

Yet today too many in the UK find themselves locked out of opportunity and without the learning and skills they need.

**Essential skills:** The 2011 Skills for Life Survey found that one in four adults have low numeracy skills and one in six have low literacy skills. The 2011 Census showed that 850,000 adults were 'non-proficient' in the English language. Worryingly, the UK is in the bottom four countries for literacy and numeracy skills among 16–24 year olds in the 2013 OECD Adult Skills Survey. Almost one in four adults lacks basic digital skills. All of this is linked to shortfalls in financial capability, active citizenship and health capability.

The importance of these essentials is only going to grow. Our economy and society are changing. The advance of technology makes digital skills ever more important to access public service, open up new ways of learning, and finding work. More and more jobs require basic levels of literacy and numeracy: today, only one in two people with no qualifications are in work.

**Professional and technical skills:** Beyond this basic core of skills, a range of technical and professional skills is vital for the growth industries of the future, such as technology, engineering and science. Here the UK performs relatively well in terms of higher level skills and has some of the best universities in the world. But our intermediate skills base is less strong. Despite some great provision and world-leading industries, the UK has a relatively low proportion of people qualified to intermediate level. This can make it challenging for people to progress from low pay if they lack the skills to gain a higher salary, and for employers to compete in the global economy.

**Adaptability and flexibility:** The main thing we know about the future is that it cannot be predicted accurately. Many of the jobs of the future have not been invented yet. And new ways of connecting people and engaging them will be created too. At the same time, the UK's population is ageing and working lives lengthening: today's school-leavers are likely to have 50-year careers. So ensuring people are equipped

to adapt and respond to change and uncertainty is essential. This also means updating skills as technology moves on, and changing jobs and careers multiple times. Learning and flexibility are the best way to help people adapt to change and make the most of it.

## **How can we learn them?**

Flexibility and adaptability are just as vital to our learning and skills system as they are to our society and economy. People learn in a variety of ways: from friends, family and colleagues, in the workplace, at home or in the community, online, and in the classroom. All of this learning, whether it is formal and leads to a qualification or informal and focused on a specific question, is valuable.

**Essential skills:** Those of you familiar with the Learning Through Life inquiry into the future for lifelong learning will know that it recommended a set of capabilities all citizens should have for the 21st century. The Learning and Work Institute have taken this forward by arguing that the UK should double its investment in basic skills so that all adults get the chance to build their literacy, numeracy, digital, health, financial and citizenship skills by 2030. And we've developed the Citizens' Curriculum as a new way to do this: locally-led, developed with the active participation of learners, and inter-linking the life skills of language, literacy and numeracy, with health, financial, digital and civic capabilities. The results of our pilots are positive: practitioners and learners have both told us of the benefits, and we have shown clear savings to other public services because people are more engaged: one local council saved €4.35 for every €1 spent.

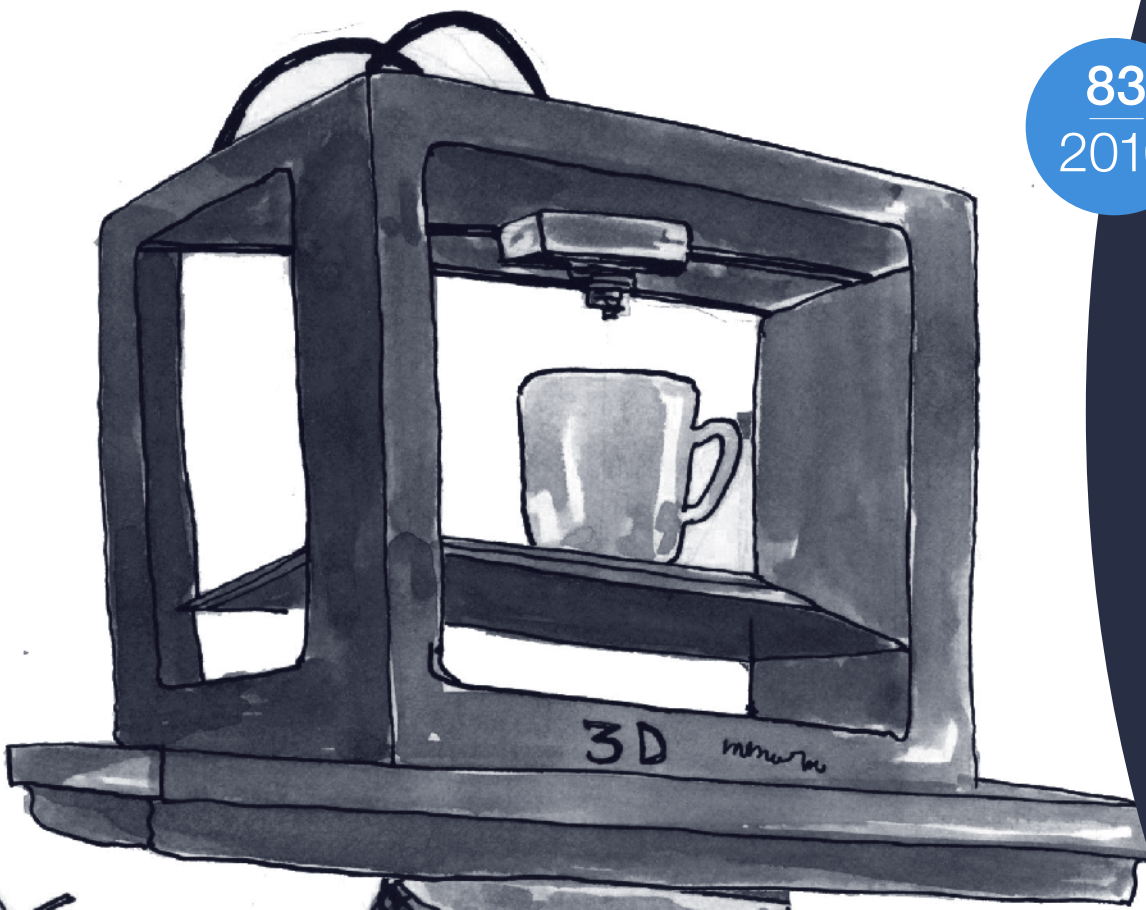
**Professional and technical skills:** The UK Government has published a Skills Plan based on the findings of the Independent Panel on Technical Education led by Lord Sainsbury. This aims to establish clearer pathways for technical education. The Learning and Work Institute welcome the principles and aims of these changes: the test for their success will come in the details of their implementation and how they work for adults as well as 16-19 year olds. Apprenticeships are the other key Government policy in this area: combining work with training in professional and technical skills. They have targeted 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020, with the content of learning led by employers. The Institute has welcomed the drive to expand apprenticeships, but we have called for a greater focus on access to apprenticeships (so

that everyone who can benefit can access one) and quality (so that apprenticeships have real benefits for employers and individuals). Both the Skills Plan and expansion of apprenticeships apply to England only: the Scottish and Welsh Governments have separate approaches.

**Adaptability and flexibility:** Lastly, it is clear that the ways in which we learn have changed, are changing and will change. For example, there is a big growth in use of digital and online methods of learning. At the Institute, we are proud to be pioneering this: from developing new ways of digital learning in prisons, to supporting Further Education colleges to develop new online ways of learning, to incorporating technology into family learning and using Apps. It also means a greater focus on bite-size learning and learning in informal ways, as well as traditional longer qualifications. This all brings such exciting opportunities: we are only at the beginning of this journey.



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## Section 2

# *Conceptual diversity*

A global journal like AED tries to cover themes that are universal, but just because we are using the same words around the globe does not mean we conceive of the world in the same way. Our conceptual diversity offers a different perspective and some different points of view.

# Knowledge, competencies and skills for life and work



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**Abstract** – *Skills for life and work is regarded holistically here. It is life in its totality – as youth, adults and the elderly, all genders and generations, lifelong, life-wide, and life-deep. And when we look at work, then we mean all kinds of jobs, but we hope for decent work. Thus it is our attempt to grasp a deeper understanding of knowledge, competencies and skills for citizenship, the broader context of the Education 2030 Agenda.*

**What are the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills? What are the skills for the future? Can we even generate skills through education and learning to anticipate the future?**

By skills we mean knowledge, competencies, capacities, qualifications as well as attitudes and values. When we talk about skills we talk about all these aspects. The field is complex. Additionally, there is the problem of translation. Even in the three languages in which we publish Adult Education and Development, the way we understand knowledge, competencies, capacities, skills, attitudes, values is quite diverse. It doesn't end with that. There are many more options for misunderstandings if you look at the literature or in dictionaries. If you are brave enough to search for "skills" in Google, you get more than a billion related entries. Do a Google search on "competencies" or "knowledge" and you also get more entries than you can look at. The definition and comprehension varies according to the diversity of context and by whom the words are used. To put this issue of AED into context, we will now try to paint a picture of this very complex field.

## Words and definitions

Given the multitude of ways in which to understand and define these words, we will not try to go into details of definitions, discuss similarities, commonalities and differences between these words, or the day-to-day use of the words associated with skills. Nevertheless it is inspiring to look at a list of





a few words which are frequently mentioned when we talk of basic, personal, social, transversal, soft, transferable, life, livelihood, literacy, manual, vocational and entrepreneurial skills. These are often combined with arguments that the skills gap needs to lead to a skills offensive which will reduce the skills shortages that hinder the development of individuals and of society.

This rich diversity became clear to us during two meetings of the editorial board of this journal. Board members from Latin America came with a strong notion on popular education, those from the Nordic countries in Europe brought to the table a tradition of relating adult education more to enlightenment and citizenship. Colleagues who are closer to employability and decent work underlined the importance of the huge variety of technical and vocational skills – they all brought their arguments and made their points of what this issue should include in order to fully cover the many dimensions of skills and competencies.

Since we want to provide ideas and experiences on how to put education, learning and training into practice for the development of competencies and skills for life and work, we have to ask: What does it really mean for rural and for urban areas, for villages and cities, in the different countries and continents? At the same time we want to learn from innovative examples in the teaching of youth and adults, through popular education or study circles, in community learning centres or in universities, from the diversity of providing new skills and competencies for migrants or refugees, from dis-

aster-struck communities, or the necessary skills to deal with crisis and conflict. And we wonder whether we all understand in the same manner, because this goes well beyond common practices and the clarity of definitions which have been in use for generations.

Learning environments, teaching and learning in institutions and social settings are still highly relevant for learning and education.

#### Adult education and lifelong learning

There seem to be some important notions and strengths of knowledge, skills and competencies in respect to lifelong learning and adult education that are essential to mention: We have evidence that, the higher the level of general knowledge of a person and of groups, the easier it is for them to acquire skills and competencies which are needed to cope with the challenging changes in societies and the globalised world. Learning environments, teaching and learning in institutions and social settings still have a significant relevance for learning and education (Baethge/Baethge-Kinsky 2004). Learning competencies – which combine the abilities to decide when it is necessary to learn something new, how to learn

and where to participate in learning and education processes – are high when individuals have had positive non-formal learning experiences in different institutions and institutionalised learning contexts. These findings highlight the relevance of formal and non-formal learning opportunities, which are so diverse on different continents, in different countries and communities. It shows that competencies can be addressed in different ways: knowing how to know, participating in life and work.

## It is still not possible for the individual to achieve this process of building up her or his competencies all by herself or himself.

During the past decade, competencies have had specific meanings regarding employment and work. Especially for employment, the opinions about definitions and the structure of competencies are very diverse. From a vocational perspective, people are skilled when they acquire certain competencies which are linked to employment, profession, positions and tasks. Furthermore, it has become very popular to evaluate competencies. These competencies follow former ideas of qualification but focus on the individual (Arnold 2011), not questioning how these competencies are learned by the individual. This is a pity, since it is important to understand how competencies are being generated on the basis of knowledge, by practicing, by reflecting experiences, by (self) evaluation and through dialogue. More importantly, it is still not possible for the individual to achieve this process of building up her or his competencies all by herself or himself. Institutionalised and sophisticated learning environments are needed. In addition there is a great interest in generic competencies which enable people to transfer knowledge and skills into other contexts and working tasks. Today we have to rethink necessary generic competencies that enable individuals to handle globalisation effects and digitalisation 4.0 with regard to access to work and employment. Work is an important part of life, and facing mobilisation and migration we have to question how relevant life skills change continuously.

## Today we have to rethink necessary generic competencies that enable individuals to handle globalisation effects and digitalisation 4.0 with regard to access to work and employment.

Apart from the big economic, social and cultural differences still existing in countries and regions, new societal processes of transnationalisation occur, in the sense of a growth of mutual relations and reciprocal effects through policies, mi-

gration and economic globalisation processes (Pries 2008). From a cultural perspective, transnationalisation requires awareness of the existence of transcultural effects. This means that cultures no longer should be conceived of as single and complete entities with different identities, but as linked and interrelated cultures which are exposed to strong cultural dynamics and have strong effects on each other. Living in such connected cultures requires a transcultural perspective on how skills are achieved which help one understand and reflect cultural differences and, in addition, to be able to think about possibilities of how to shape transcultural forms by including different cultural perspectives and interpretation systems. This transcultural skill consists of a cognitive and an emotional part, because knowledge is linked to emotions; and patterns of emotions are an initial part of learning and educational activities and practices (Damasio 2004; Gieseke 2007).

### Studies – CiLL, PIAAC, PISA, AES, BeLL

A very specific set of skills have increasingly been mentioned as crucial. We talk, of course, about computer skills. It seems they are almost a prerequisite for life and work for the younger generation today, and are often not less important for those who have to update their skills to achieve the needed “Competencies in Later Life” (CiLL).

CiLL focuses on the 66 to 80 year old population and opens up and deepens a debate which we have on the one hand with what we learn and teach within U3A, the universities of the third age (the silver generation), in the light of the increasing studies and statements on current and future demographic trends. On the other hand we can look at CiLL as in line with and complementing the PIAAC (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) research of skills sets for the 16 to 64 years cohort. Finally there is also PISA (Program for International Students Assessment) which in the meantime has had several rounds to measure literacy, mathematics and scientific competencies of those at school aged 15.

In as much as we see the need for recognition, validation, and accreditation of learning outcomes, we would like to shed light on what all the new qualification frameworks mean for non-formal or informal learning. “Recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) refers to the establishment of arrangements to make visible and value all learning outcomes (including knowledge, skills and competences) against clearly defined and quality-assured standards. RVA covers the whole process, including identification, documentation, assessment and accreditation of learning outcomes from different settings.” (Yang 2015: 10)

These studies focus on the individual achieving her or his competencies. The studies take interest in showing competence levels and measure individually gained competencies. There are more studies showing that adult education, enterprises and other institutions, but also informal learning forms, are important for skills (AES – Adult Education Survey). Participation behaviour varies in all different countries and is influenced by many aspects and societal and institu-

tional circumstances. The BeLL study shows the wider benefits of general education and shows how skills, learning and participation in a broader sense are linked to each other and how important it is to look at life in all its dimensions. Personal life and work should always be in a balance.

### Focus on life and work

When we mention life, then we have a very holistic view. It is life in its totality – youth, adults and the elderly, all genders and generations, lifelong, life-wide, and life-deep, being healthy and happy, or not, performing in functions and roles which we like, or would like to change. And when we look at work, we mean all kinds of jobs, but we hope for decent work. Thus it is our attempt to grasp a deeper understanding of knowledge, competencies and skills for citizenship and employability.

We learn as we live, and this learning can be associated with all kinds of formal education on different levels, or schooling, colleges or universities, or non-formal education in community learning centres, vocational or professional training institutes, or through the growing options via informal arrangements using media and information technologies, often combined with face-to-face arrangements.

However, more and more, even with the improvements of better technical and vocational training we realise that especially literacy and other basic skills, transferable or transversal skills are needed to comply with the needs of the individual in the community or society at large and to accord with employability-related competencies and skills.

Recent research and policy development tell us also that knowledge, competencies and skills in the narrow sense are not enough. We need, maybe more importantly, to also look at values and attitudes, especially when we want to contribute to sustainable development. “It is most critically about making sure that individuals acquire a solid foundation of knowledge in key disciplines, that they develop creative, critical thinking and collaborative skills, and that they build character attributes, such as mindfulness, curiosity, courage and resilience.” (Schleicher & Tang 2015: 9)

### Agenda 2030

With this issue we will try again to provide follow-up on an earlier edition of Adult Education and Development where we looked at the Post 2015 process towards implementation of Education for All (EFA) as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which were both declared to run for 15 years in the year 2000. The World Education Forum in 2015 came up with an Education Agenda 2030 Framework for Action. The Incheon Declaration was included as Goal 4 into the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

This overarching goal is to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. It is followed by specific targets that are related to early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling, universities, technical and vocational training,

youth and adult literacy – all in a dimension of gender parity and equal access for people in vulnerable situations. In describing these targets there is a very interesting note in the context of our discussion: “A narrow focus on work-specific skills reduces graduates’ abilities to adapt to the fast-changing demands of the labour market. Therefore, beyond mastering work-specific skills, emphasis must be placed on developing high-level cognitive and non-cognitive transferable skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication skills and conflict resolution, which can be used across a range of occupational fields. Moreover, learners should be provided with opportunities to update their skills continuously through lifelong learning.” (UNESCO Education 2015: 15)

Finally, there is “Goal 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” (UNESCO Education 2015: 18) Reading this, it becomes quite clear that engaging in human rights or peace, and leading a sustainable lifestyle requires more on top of knowledge, competencies and skills. We need to look at attitudes and values in all educational processes of lifelong learning.

### Rethinking and re-skilling

UNESCO, as the UN organisation for educational, social and cultural issues, has kept its role as a think tank, engaging in generating ideas, orientation and reflection, and also providing opportunities to participate in debates, meetings, and studies. Landmark publications carry titles like *The World Educational Crisis* by Philipp Coombs in 1968, *Learning to Be* in 1972 by Edgar Faure, or the Delors Report *Learning the treasure within* in 1995. *Rethinking Education. Towards a global common good?* is the most recent in this series, and carries a very interesting note for us:

“Knowledge can be understood broadly as encompassing information, understanding, skills, values and attitudes. Competencies refer to the ability to use such knowledge in given situations. Discussions about education (or learning) are habitually concerned with the intentional process of acquiring knowledge and developing the ability (competencies) to use them. Educational efforts are also increasingly concerned with the validation of knowledge acquired. However, discussions about education and learning in today’s changing world need to go beyond the process of acquiring, validating and using knowledge: They must also address the creation and control of knowledge.” (UNESCO, Rethinking 2015: 79).

We thus have come very close to what the British philosopher Francis Bacon wrote in 1597, claiming that “knowledge itself is power”. This, together with the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire and his “no education is neutral” argument, shows us it is important to continue examining critically the

words and meanings that are behind theoretical concepts, political statements, empirical research, or practices and activities which are being advertised and propagated in the context of competencies and skills. Thus our engagement in adult education and lifelong learning becomes more than acquiring knowledge as a sort of information accumulation, and we are no longer re-skilling according to what may be needed to merely function in society, but joining in creating a sustainable world for all.

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# Omar Hamza

Short  
Interview

## **Adult Education and Development: Which skills and competencies do we need to survive in the future?**

*Omar Hamza:* I think the most important skill that is needed now in Egypt is effective dialogue. I believe that the revolution influenced negatively our openness to different views. Although revolutions in general provide the ground for dialogue and acceptance, in the Egyptian case people became linear in their views and only ticked to what they think is right. I am totally convinced that enhancing the critical dialogue will lead to sustainability in our lives because when you have the ability to be engaged in critical dialogue, then you will be able to understand how others think and act.

Thus you will communicate better with them. In my work with literacy teachers, I pay attention that they should be trained on how to enhance their critical dialogue capacities as they will reach better results with learners, who will feel confident to share their views and learn through dialogue.

Research skills are also crucial to our future as Arabs and Egyptians. We became addicted to products and technology without thinking carefully about their content and use. When people lack research skills, then they will approach technology as a resource for knowledge without thinking of the content. So we become receivers of knowledge produced by others. This will influence our future where we will not play an active role in the generation of new knowledge. Research skills help us think carefully and collect evidence on what is good and what has to be changed.

Of course these skills are based on another important competency: 'critical thinking'. Critical thinking increases awareness and accordingly people act for justice and sustainability. Many people in the Arab world show misunderstandings of religious faiths and values and act upon these misconceptions. This is because people have limited opportunities to experience how to think about their faiths and how these values are implemented in a society that has new challenges and needs. Critical thinking helps people to understand and reflect on their values and 'read between the lines'. This allows them to learn about the hidden values of religion and not approach it from an artificial view. This will increase the distance between people and immerse them in issues that also increases their distance from the world around them.

## **How can we learn them?**

I believe that it is difficult because in order to know how to achieve these competences we need to have them and find our models and methods to apply in our context. I think we need to develop our sense of shared responsibility where all stakeholders, NGOs, local authorities and individuals decide and think together what are the best tools that lead to the enhancement of these competences.

But we should keep in mind that to achieve it we need to be aware that democracy is the means for providing the space where these competences are practiced.

## **Who should teach them?**

Everyone, but this requires that people rethink their roles. We still have different expectations from parents, teachers, decision-makers, NGOs in terms of their responsibility toward development. As a result their efforts are divided and not built on each other. I think all institutions (governmental, religious and civil society) are responsible to work in harmony to achieve progress.

The international community is also responsible to support the Arab region to enhance these skills because the lack of development of our region and others will impact the level of sustainability, peace and development that we all wish for our globe.



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# Enhancing competencies in the Arab world: issues to be considered



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**Abstract** – *It is impossible to develop and foster a global set of skills and competencies for life and work if we do not at the same time look at the contexts in which such a culture should be implemented. While we share many traits and aspirations globally and as individuals, we are also locked into our respective systems. To accomplish change we must understand the realities of the people we want to inspire and help. This article describes some of the history, context and challenges in the Arab region.*

My modest experience in the field of adult education has taught me a lot about the process of developing training programmes for adult educators, especially when they are implemented in such different contexts as the very varied Arab world. I admit that at the beginning of my engagement in the field, I was naïve enough to assume that enhancing learners' skills and competences was an easy task, especially when these terms are central to the field and thus appear in every report and debate related to adult education. However, during the period in which my colleagues and I conducted a number of initiatives – mostly unsuccessful – we learned a lot more about the field. In the process we began to better understand the meanings these terms take in practice in new contexts, that in turn reflect a wider picture of adult education in the Arab setting.

Let us now look at the main challenges and concerns that we have encountered during the process of contextualising progressive approaches to adult education in the Arab region. The process sheds light on issues that I believe are crucial when conducting adult education programmes. One of these concerns the gap between theory and practice. This is related to how competences are presented in the international context and how they are applied in local settings. This gap, I argue, is a result of social-historical and political factors that create diversity in practices and understandings of adult education that in turn lead to different approaches to training adults and determine how competences are presented and assessed.



### The purpose of adult education

In the last decade, several countries in the Arab world have witnessed dramatic political changes influencing the quality of services provided to citizens, especially in the field of adult education. International and local reports have highlighted serious problems that the Arab world is currently experiencing, such as an increase in the rate of illiteracy (which had reached around 60 million, of which two-thirds are women), lack of employment opportunities among graduates and youth (which reached more than 60% in some countries), and political instability that limits the opportunities to live in situations where human rights and citizenship values are practiced, protected and appreciated.

This has led a number of organisations to initiate intervention plans to help governments and civil society to overcome these difficulties. Most of these efforts focus on literacy programmes, based on the thought that by enhancing literacy skills, adult learners become more engaged within their societies and play an active role in the process of development and sustainability. I strongly support this progressive view of the purpose of literacy programmes. It is a view that goes beyond enhancing basic reading and writing skills, so as to include opportunities in which adult learners enhance life competences that improve their self-image as individuals who play an active role in the process of developing their communities. This view echoes the general purpose of adult education, where intervention plans aim to enhance

competencies, supporting self-fulfilment, agency, and community engagement. This aim endorses the emphasis made in many reports on the integration of high-level skills, such as critical thinking, reflection, community awareness, and communication in adult education programmes to the extent that these skills become the “terminology” that describes the work of adult educators. However, and based on my work in the field with different organisations in Palestine and the Arab world, I have seen that there are crucial, interrelated challenges standing in the way of the achievement of this objective in practice. Let us have a closer look at three of them.

### International versus local terminologies

One of the challenges that adult education activists face in the Arab region is the absence of pedagogical debate about the field as it appears in the international discourse and how it is implemented in the local setting. Let me give an example. For instance, what is called “adult education” in the international discourse, mainly in the Western world, is still translated in Arabic as “literacy programmes”. This does not mean that the region lacks investment in other life and professional skills, it is simply that they do not fall under the category of adult education and are mostly offered by NGOs and civil society organisations. Furthermore, the term “education” in Arabic is linked to “raising children and teaching them to behave and act well.” As a result this literal translation of “adult education” into Arabic gives a negative impression

about the type of intervention that adults will receive. Consequently the term “teaching adults” (literal translation) is the common term used in Arabic to refer to “adult education” (which means literacy programmes). Similar differences are noticeable in other concepts such as “learning” (as somehow equivalent to teaching), “adult educator” (as similar to school teacher), and “critical thinking” (as limited to articulating what is wrong with something).

## “Adult education” in the international discourse, mainly in the Western world, is still translated in Arabic as “literacy programmes”.

This challenge highlights two issues that cannot be ignored. The first one is related to the influence of different understandings of these terms on practice. I argue that if adult education is limited to “literacy”, then national strategies will pay less attention to other aspects of adult education. If this is the case, what is achieved in terms of the “literacy” rate would be perceived as a successful indicator for improvement in “adult education” and moves towards “sustainability”. As a result, the official investment in other competencies will remain a minor issue left to civil society organisations.

The use of “teaching adults” as a concept is problematic because it reflects the traditional approach to adult education where the focus is on transferring knowledge from experienced “educators” to passive “learners”. This might explain why there is no official institution in the Arab world accredited to qualify literacy teachers in the field, assuming that a person who can read and write (and has basic teaching skills) is qualified to act in this role. As a result, learning is likely to be similar to school teaching without paying attention to the importance of enhancing critical dialogue, active communication and reflection. This challenge leads to different approaches to adult education.

### Progressive methods versus traditional approaches

Arab society is characterised as traditional and conservative, a place where cultural values emanate from religious faith and tribal norms and where individuals are expected, as a result, to follow the majority views and to inherit “common” practices and norms. Furthermore, the influence of Islamic faith creates a situation where religious sayings and texts are constantly referred to in daily life. Thinking beyond (or about) these texts is a taboo, if not a sin. These factors cannot be ignored when presenting progressive methodologies to adult education, as they have a lot to say about a) the educator’s role (as telling learners what is in the text), b) societal expectations of “learning” (as keeping norms and practices as they are), and 3) the status of “knowledge” (as static and not dynamic). Training programmes that challenge these issues will not be easily accepted or implemented, and may be rejected outright as “imported” rather than emanating from the Arab

context. In other words, the integration of critical thinking skills in learning settings, for instance, seems far from the “accepted” traditions.

## In other words, the integration of critical thinking skills in learning settings, for instance, seems far from the “accepted” traditions.

The hesitation, or even the suspicion of “external” ideas has increased in the last two decades where Arab nations have witnessed different forms of relationships (superior, oppressive and hierarchical), with the international community, mainly the US and the West. Contradictory messages from international society about corruption, violence and violation of human rights in the Arab world (where support has never really led to equity and democracy), has increased resistance to the values that the international community has produced. This has created dilemmas between how to react to external intervention (especially when there is no trust in local regimes) and how to reach progress and development. Several Arab activists describe it as the fear of *ghazo’ thakafi* (or cultural invasion) rather than openness to *tabadol thakafi* (cultural exchange). This is because the historical experience of colonialism and political oppression led people either to reject or to follow the set practices introduced by such powers. During our work in the field we tried to join the voices that call for the integration of new ideas while critically examining them and not necessarily accepting everything.

## Several Arab activists describe it as the fear of *ghazo’ thakafi* (or cultural invasion) rather than openness to *tabadol thakafi* (cultural exchange).

### Competences for empowerment versus artificial reform

We cannot ignore the fact that Arab regimes have seldom been characterised as democratic and thus most of the programmes that aim at enhancing competences for empowerment will not be easily “blessed” by the regimes, because their authority may be perceived to be threatened. As a result these regimes limit their support to progressive programmes and cooperate with organisations that “fit” their expectations. Furthermore, since funding is mostly external, it is invested in institutions that work in cooperation with governmental bodies and usually based on the assumption that it will improve the achievement of desired outcomes within a specific period of time. In these cases efforts will focus on meeting the donor’s and regime’s expectations, which in turn will result in investment in basic skills (because they are easily measured).



Thus investment in advanced competencies is unlikely to be achieved due to the factors cited above but also because learners cannot master them without applying them in new and real life settings. This is something the courses do not provide. That is a pity, because what will be produced in the structured learning “rooms” without connecting to real life settings will result in poor impact. This is a challenge when democracy is not an integral part of the social life of Arabs in different countries. Some people might argue that learners will be able to challenge this gap and act for the development of democratic values within their societies. In theory this may be correct but in practice it is more complicated, because undemocratic regimes in conservative communities have only conditional support from the international community and as a result the possibility of meaningful change becomes limited.

### What is needed?

There is no blueprint to overcome the difficulties that have been described above. But there have been some initiatives that have somehow proved successful, conducted by different progressive leaders in the region. One of them is the Ecumenical Popular Education Program (EPEP) that started in Lebanon in 1968 and which currently works with more than 8 Arab countries. The EPEP’s main contribution has been on contextualising the work of Paulo Freire in literacy programmes. The EPEP’s work with other networks in the Arab region has focused on developing a forum for Arab educators to share ideas and to learn from different practices, as well as to contribute to the current discourse about the field. Similar initiatives have been conducted by DVV International by creating an academy for adult education in the Arab world. Here educators from the region share experiences and contextualise new approaches to adult education that consider the challenges mentioned above. I believe that providing a space for discussion and sharing practices about such approaches and dilemmas could lead to the creation of a community of practice where progressive leaders will be able to influence the wider community.

My voice is an echo of UNESCO’s call for networking between government and civil society institutions so both take responsibility for the development process. Of course this requires a clear idea about what should be done and what should not, as well as the approaches that will best result in change.

Breaking the image of educators as “knowledge deliverers” requires training to help them challenge this image of themselves and turn towards facilitating learning rather than transferring knowledge. As long as adult educators do not internalise new images of their work and methods, they will continue acting in the ways they experienced from their teachers as young or adult learners. This requires a different approach to training adult educators. Since there is no institute in the Arab world that issues an official certificate in the field, it is a time to introduce a new “image” of the adult educator with progressive approaches. However, training pro-

grammes should take into consideration the historical context so educators can learn how to criticise and discuss texts and to go beyond them and develop their abilities to plan for their learning. By doing so, there is a possibility for them to play that role with adult learners.

Finally, I believe that the international and local discourses should be enriched. We need to develop more opportunities for engaging educators and strategic leaders in our globe to share experiences and challenges on issues that have not been clarified, such as how to assess different “levels” of competences. I think that the journal *Adult Education and Development* is one of the successful initiatives providing opportunities for educators and activists in the field to share their views, concerns, models and practices.



#### About the author

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(see page 115)

# Approaches to adult education in Latin America: towards a new generation of definitions and policies



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**Abstract** – *In this article the background of the pedagogical and political meaning that adult education has had in Latin America is presented, with a discussion of the problematical contents of the educational policies that have been predominant since the last century and the proposition of some challenges considered key to the development of a new generation of definitions and alternatives.*

## Retrieving history to build an adult education for a new generation

Since the 80s of the last century adult education (AE) in Latin America has experienced a historical deficit and a significant lag in relation to other educational policies.

The “historic” AE model, developed since the 1960s, was based on the policies of integration, economic modernisation and social mobilisation, promoting itself as a key dimension of community and political participation of the epoch. Under various forms, literacy, adult basic education and training programmes for work were synchronised with participatory educational approaches and criticism of school systems. A certain and relevant vision of the deschooling<sup>1</sup> of AE was nurtured by the thoughts of intellectuals like Ivan Illich<sup>2</sup> and Paulo Freire<sup>3</sup>. Freire’s influence manifested itself, also, in the development of a movement of community education with an important political dimension, both in the rural and urban areas. In Freire’s approach, AE was not only a compensatory or remedial education but a “new way to educate the oppressed in order to build a just society.” This same principle led to the popular education movement that developed a major shift – across the continent – in the way we understand AE, associating it with political awareness and coordinating it with social and liberation movements.

The transition of AE from the 1980s to the 90s was difficult and had negative consequences. The so-called consensus of Jomtien<sup>4</sup> (1990), which was politically and rhetorically signi-



ficant, had its interpretation simplified for the implementation of local education policy: a slogan for an education that would meet the basic learning needs of the population was reduced to the development of basic education for children, losing the sense of the Jomtien approach.

The priority in basic education, in the expansion of the coverage of school systems, in improving infrastructure and the use of new educational materials occupied the central position in the political will of governments. AE was shifted to a second level. There was a weakening of the institutional, financial and political economics of AE.

This was expressed in the reduction of national budgets to AE, the lack of leadership from the ministries to promote new projects, the disappearance of specialised divisions in governments and in the migration of technical staff. AE was reduced to compensatory programmes, remedial education and basic literacy.

Economic processes and the implementation of free-market-driven modernisation policies in the region since the 1990s generated a new cycle of AE oriented on training and on instruction for work. However, this cycle has also had serious structural problems in not adjusting AE to the improvement of technical education, not synchronising AE with the demands of local and regional economies in a diversified way, but especially by privatising the training system, which left AE oriented toward training for work, as a prisoner of the narrow and instrumental offers demanded by companies. The lack of incentives, subsidies and recognition of the needs of

the population disregarded all the capacity for development and autonomy of the people who potentially wanted to be trained according to their own decisions and learning expectations. Not even the trade union movement was able to create alternatives.

Another serious issue was the growing pressure of youth on AE education systems. The young school drop-outs saw AE as a way to complete their studies. For them, AE begins to open itself to the name: education for youth and adults; however there is political and institutional confusion about this. There is neither infrastructure nor teachers, nor methodologies to meet this new fact. And we are still waiting to see “case studies” on how some have begun to respond to social and educational challenges of this new reality of an “AE in which youth are the majority”.

A proposition at the preparatory meetings for CONFINTEA 1997 (Hamburg) initiated a process of critique (still in force) of the situation of AE and its mismatch with social, cultural and the demands of the citizenry. This process, led by UNESCO, CREFAL and CEAAL put an emphasis on what the basis should be for a new generation of AE policy. CONFINTEA in Belém (2009) showed how little progress had been made in this regard, despite the strategic recognition of AE as a path to the democratisation of education in the so-called knowledge society.

Without a doubt, between 1997 and 2000 (with strong support from OREALC-UNESCO and CEAAL) a body of approaches was developed to remove AE from its cage and

connect it with the educational reforms that had been developing on the continent. In 2000 as well, the first national evaluations were already available – and from international agencies themselves – in relation to the deficits of educational policies; assessments promoted by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank began to consider the issue of quality of learning as the core, as well as the reform of secondary education, working conditions of teachers, the new curriculums and the necessary link of the school system with families and the development of their cultural capital.

### The tasks we set ourselves in 2000 were:

- Empower AE through educational reforms, improving ministerial endowments, its capacity to influence the design of policies and the expansion of public spending for AE.
- Redefining the meaning of literacy and basic adult education in consideration of the increasing participation of youth, recognising their cultures and different ways of learning.
- Establish policies for the development of research and systematisation of projects, processes and results of these policies.
- Jointly strengthen, through agreements and cooperation, the action of AE state services with the Popular Education organisations. Open AE and its projects to the reality of the new rurality and the incorporation of cultural and linguistic characteristics of indigenous communities in the countries.
- Associate AE with social and cultural policies, establishing new physical and cultural spaces and areas for their development, in convergence with the work of social educators and Popular Education instructors.
- Adopt a territorial approach for AE, giving more autonomy to local governments to establish their compensatory programmes in coordination with the projections and needs of the regional productive clusters.
- Define AE as an investment in social and civic capital: associating AE with institutional processes of civic and environmental education, together with non-governmental institutions and universities.
- No longer define AE from a surplus or merely compensatory perspective but as an education for autonomy, creativity, collective actions and the expressions of people in all fields of culture and human development.
- Generate training programmes for teachers of adults from a perspective of “social pedagogy” and the facilitation of processes of participation for adults in the public sphere and in those spheres which are created through social networks and new communication technologies.

### Definitions of adult education for the new generation

Since 2000, our view has been that these tasks must be undertaken from an AE approach that recognises the human right to education throughout life, and that the strategy

should be focused on the development of skills needed so people and their communities achieve their full human development. Certainly, all within a framework, still ambiguous, about the role and ways of organising AE school systems and the search for an “institutionalisation” of AE which responds to the new challenges which have been described.

This is not the moment to develop – in this article – the fundamentals of the approach to capabilities in AE, it is enough to point out the conceptual, pedagogical, curricular, technical and the concept of the relationship between education and the “world of life” as well as the “world of the citizenry” that would be imprinted in AE if we propound it; a “critical pedagogy of life” oriented toward issues such as: development in the subjects of their ability to self-manage and recognise their civic power; the ability to create, share and manage “common goods” (natural resources, biodiversity, cultural heritage). In summary, an education oriented to extend the exercise of rights for the citizenry and to ensure access, for the individual and for the community, to the common cultural goods which are generated by science and technology.

Currently there are several definitions circulating that are affecting the development of an AE for the citizenry:

- From the perspective of “public educational services”, AE is considered as a “benefit”, which places it as a remedial social policy and an action associated with “residual” actors. These actors are considered “targets” and are subject to a rigid and standardised system of education. What defines participants is their overall condition of “laggards”, without considering their diverse social and cultural conditions, or their age.
- A second definition of AE, according to an identification of their “targets”, is to consider it as education for the unemployed or retired people who need to improve their education either because of their need to go into in the labour market, or, in the case of retirees, for the symbolic value of having completed their basic or secondary education.
- A third definition is AE as training or capacity building for a job, which puts AE, with greater or lesser relevance and institutionalisation, depending on the country, in the field of systems for qualifications and skills certification according to the criteria of companies.
- A fourth definition is to consider AE as a conventional and also a social and community process of lifelong education. It understands AE as a response to the human right of learning throughout life and in all areas of knowledge.

We think the latter approach allows us to conceptualise, in a promising way, an AE focused on the learning needs of individuals, to rethink the dynamics of social demand for AE and design new institutional forms for a public policy of AE. In the same way, this approach is an appropriate backdrop to study what AE means as a complex cultural phenomenon that involves various actors, their cultures, their languages,

their gender, their age, their territories, their knowledge, their organisations and their “sensibilities” or life projects.

If the central focus of AE is the learning of the subjects, we can equally raise issues like the demand for the development of AE in the places where participants live and work, the re-notation of reading and writing in a society, be it a network or a digital space, the redefinition of curriculum according to the territories and participating populations (indigenous people, migrants and displaced persons, people with special needs), among other things which are no less important.

However, adoption of this approach brings with it critical consideration of the relationship of AE with the approach of “training needs” and of “human capital” on the part of “modernising” neoliberal policies of job training and “entrepreneurship” and the elucidation of the capacity of the current economic model to satisfy an educated population through decent jobs. At the same time, it is necessary to design an alternative to the vision of AE as merely for “labour” or a “profession”, giving it new significance as education for human development, where the skills and capabilities of individuals are not only formed to meet the requirements of the economy but mainly to the requirements of *buen vivir* (the good life), to the participation of the citizenry and the empowerment of the human capacity to act, think, imagine and communicate in today’s society, which demands reflectiveness and the “communalisation” of knowledge as a condition for the development of just societies: an “AE of the community”.

#### Notes

- 1 / [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deschooling\\_Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deschooling_Society)
- 2 / [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan\\_Illich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Illich)
- 3 / [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo\\_Freire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo_Freire)
- 4 / <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/the-efa-movement/jomtien-1990/>

#### Further reading

**Picon, Cesar (2016):** Hacia centros educacionales renovados de educación de personas jóvenes y adultas en América Latina y el Caribe: ensayo crítico, Revista Educación de Adultos y Procesos Formativos, UPLA. (Towards renewed educational centres for the education of youth and adults in Latin America and the Caribbean: a critical essay). Available at: <http://educaciondeadultosprocesosformativos.cl/index.php/revistas/revista-n-2/20-hacia-centros-educacionales-renovados-de-educacion-de-personas-jovenes-y-adultas-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe-ensayo-critico>

**CREFAL (2013):** Hacia una Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos Transformadora en América Latina, Pátzcuaro, CREFAL (Towards a transformational youth and adult education in Latin America). Available at: [http://www.crefal.edu.mx/crefal25/images/publicaciones/libros/EPJA\\_transformador.pdf](http://www.crefal.edu.mx/crefal25/images/publicaciones/libros/EPJA_transformador.pdf)

#### About the author

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# Monitoring competencies and skills for life and work



From left to right:

Aaron Benavot, Director  
Global Education Monitoring Report  
UNESCO

Alasdair McWilliam  
Global Education Monitoring Report  
UNESCO

**Abstract** – *In September 2015, the UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and with it SDG 4, the succeeding global education agenda to Education for All (EFA). Coverage of adult education and training, including skills development, under three of the ten SDG 4 indicators is welcome. However, as this article discusses, each of these targets presents particular conceptual and measurement challenges. While important steps have been taken since the adoption of the SDGs, many practical challenges to collect comparable data across countries have yet to be tackled.*

In September 2015, the UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 goals and 169 specific targets, which address a broad set of economic, social and environmental challenges. The new universal agenda includes a standalone goal on quality education and lifelong learning (SDG 4), with 10 targets, which effectively succeeds and, in many ways, expands on the unfinished Education for All (EFA) and MDG agendas. In November 2015 more than 100 ministers of education adopted the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which reflects the ambition and principles of SDG 4, as well as the issues related to its implementation. SDG 4-Education 2030 specifically commits countries to one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education, universal primary and secondary education, equal opportunity to post-basic education, attention to equity, as well as inclusive, effective and relevant learning outcomes.

SDG 4 includes several targets to increase the skills and competencies of the adult population, with direct measures of skills an explicit part of the monitoring framework. However, much work remains to ensure that the necessary data is made available within a reasonable timeframe (say, 5–7 years).

## More ambition, wider scope, and skills added

In the EFA agenda, education was viewed as a fundamental human right. Likewise, the SDG agenda, including the fourth global goal on education, is rooted in a rights-based approach that ensures universal access to basic education



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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within a lifelong learning perspective. While the two global education agendas are similar in spirit, SDG 4 is considerably more comprehensive and ambitious: both in terms of the scope of the education targets and the extent to which progress towards them will be explicitly informed by data. Notable differences include targets beyond basic education (e.g., upper secondary education, higher education, TVET, skills for employment), a greater emphasis on disaggregated data for monitoring targets, and an orientation to reporting on learning outcomes and skills in addition to measures of access and completion<sup>1</sup>.

## Under the new agenda the shift towards quantitatively monitoring outcomes is clear, especially in relation to children, youth and adults.

The new education agenda also differs somewhat with EFA in how skills and competencies are addressed. Under EFA, objectives to improve adult skills were included under goal 3 (Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults) and goal 4 (Increase adult literacy by 50 percent). In contrast, adult skills are included in three of the SDG targets. Under SDG 4, adult skills are primarily covered under target 4.4 to provide “relevant” skills for decent work and employment (removing reference to life skills) and target 4.6 to achieve lit-

eracy and numeracy among a substantial proportion of adults. Target 4.7, to promote knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, in theory covers a range of outcomes related to “life skills”, although many of these should more accurately be described as attitudes and beliefs rather than skills and competencies.

Under the new agenda the shift towards quantitatively monitoring outcomes is clear, especially in relation to children, youth and adults. The EFA goal on skills had little explicit basis for measurement. In practice, the monitoring of adult skills largely took place under EFA goal 4 on adult literacy, drawing on literacy data from national censuses and select household surveys. In comparison, creating country agreement on global and thematic indicators has been a central part of the SDG process and implementation framework, with indicators being established for each of the SDG targets. However, the actual monitoring of the SDGs presents significant challenges in generating new data, which can accurately capture the target objectives.

### Three main levels proposed

Monitoring of the 169 SDG targets is to take place on three main levels, each associated with a distinct set of indicators:

- Global: a limited set of globally comparable indicators formulated by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal (IAEG-SDGs) to monitor

the 169 targets (with at least one indicator per target). Countries will be obliged to report on these indicators and the results reported in an annual progress report.

- Thematic: A wider set of globally comparable indicators that better reflect the specific objectives of each target. Here the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), coordinated by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, proposed a broad set of 43 indicators as part of the Education 2030 Framework for Action.
- National and regional: Under the SDG agenda, national governments and regional entities are expected to:
  - a) selectively draw on the proposed TAG indicators and
  - b) consider developing other indicators, more closely aligned with local contexts and regional priorities.

In regard to adult education and skills under SDG 4, Table 1 lists the global and thematic indicators for the three relevant targets. These indicators have yet to be officially adopted, and are expected to be improved and refined over time. Regardless of the final indicator framework, however, priority will be given to nationally representative data that is comparable and standardised. Given the fact that most countries do not currently collect data for many indicators, efforts will be made to strengthen national statistical capacities and define common international statistical standards and tools. These challenges are compounded by the need for data disaggregated by gender, wealth, location and for other relevant social groups, as specified by target 4.5 and the UNSG Synthesis Report<sup>2</sup> (Table 1).

Each of the listed targets presents particular conceptualisation and measurement challenges. The efforts made to establish a concise and measurable set of indicators at the global and thematic level are ambitious. However, the practical challenges of comprehensively collecting data across countries have yet to be tackled. Questions also remain over what benchmarks are appropriate across countries, and if the proposed indicators are adequately aligned with the objectives of the targets (and if not, what indicators at the regional/national level might be more appropriate). Let us have a closer look at these concerns.

#### Target 4.4: Skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

Both the global and thematic levels propose measures of ICT skills/digital literacy as an indicator of whether adults and youth have relevant skills for decent work. The current proposal for the global indicator are a set of nine self-assessed questions relating to an array of technology-related tasks (e.g. whether the respondent has recently copied or moved a file; used basic arithmetic formulae in a spreadsheet; wrote a computer programme using a specialised programming language). The advantage of such an approach is that data can be relatively easily captured by national statistical agencies through existing traditional household surveys. On the downside, the indicator does not determine whether activities

were undertaken effectively. Since the reference period for the activities are the previous three months, it can also be argued that the indicator better captures that the respondent is employed in a white-collar occupation (where use of ICT technology is part of the job description), rather than an indication the respondent has the skills to access “decent work” more broadly.

A more detailed direct measurement of ICT skills at the thematic, national or regional levels may therefore prove valuable. Existing cross-country examples of such measurements include the Assessment and Teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and the IEA International Computer and Literacy Study covering students and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which measures problem-solving skills among adults in OECD countries. These assessments share common outcomes with the measurement for global monitoring, but are assessed on a scale, demand higher level cognitive abilities and follow a sequence of increasing complexity<sup>4</sup>.

However, given uncertainty over exactly what ICT skills are most relevant for employment outcomes, at the country level, governments may wish to draw upon broader measures of cognitive skills which are proven to affect a range of employment outcomes. In this respect, adult skills surveys such as PIAAC and the World Bank’s Skills Toward Employment and Productivity survey (STEP) provide examples for measuring literacy and numeracy which can be comparably applied across countries<sup>5</sup>. Aside from capturing a broader range of cognitive abilities necessary for decent and productive employment, assessments of literacy and numeracy may also be more relevant to the labour markets of lower income economies.

Ultimately, however, what is considered decent work, as well as the attributes required to access this work will vary by country and over time.

Ultimately, however, what is considered decent work, as well as the attributes required to access this work will vary by country and over time. Formulating a precise benchmark of relevant skills for decent employment, which is strongly predictive across countries for the next 15 years, is therefore an extremely difficult task. In addition to reporting on global and thematic indicators for target 4.4, governments need to establish national benchmarks across the skill measures deemed most relevant to their economic contexts.

Governments should also seek to continue and expand collection of more traditional survey measures of educational attainment, as specified in the proposed thematic indicators. The range of occupations which meet standards of decent work are wide and varied, as does the skills and knowledge required to perform in such employment. Broad measures of skill, whether literacy, numeracy or ICT can only capture a portion of the “relevant” worker attributes.



**Table 1 – Proposed global and thematic indicators for adult education targets**

SDG Target	Global indicator	Additional Thematic indicators <sup>3</sup>
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.	Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill.	Percentage of youth/adults who have achieved at least a minimum level of proficiency in digital literacy skills.  Youth/adult educational attainment rates by age group, economic activity status, levels of education and programme orientation.
4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.	Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by gender.	Youth/adult literacy rate.  Participation rate of youth/adults in literacy programmes.
4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.	Extent to which (I) global citizenship education and (II) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment.	Percentage of students by age group (or education level) showing adequate understanding of issues relating to global citizenship and sustainability.  Percentage of 15-year-old students showing proficiency in knowledge of environmental science and geoscience.  Percentage of schools that provide life skills-based HIV and sexuality education.  Extent to which the framework on the World Programme on Human Rights Education is implemented nationally (as per UNGA Resolution 59/113).

Source: (UNESCO 2015; IAEG-SDG 2016)

### Target 4.6: Literacy and numeracy

As within the EFA goals, adult literacy retains a separate target under SDG 4. Yet monitoring of adult literacy under the new agenda entails notable developments. The first is an explicit targeting of numeracy, which was not formally monitored under EFA. The second is a tacit shift towards assessment of skill proficiency on a scale, moving away from binary measurements of literacy employed as part of the EFA agenda<sup>6</sup>, and allowing a more accurate and nuanced understanding of adult capabilities. Ensuring that such data becomes widely available in the coming years requires that operational definitions of literacy and numeracy are agreed, developed into a scale valid across languages and cultures, and applied cost-effectively within surveys.

Among high-income countries, the most comprehensive source for adult literacy and numeracy proficiency is the PIAAC assessment and its predecessors, IALS and ALL. Within low and middle-income countries, prominent surveys are the UIS

Literacy Assessment Monitoring Programme (LAMP) survey, and STEP. The latter uses a comparable methodology to PIAAC in estimating literacy. On the whole however, few countries have participated in such surveys outside the OECD.

Recently, OECD, UIL and UIS have proposed developing a short standardised literacy assessment drawing on PIAAC items, which could be implemented across a wider range of countries. This would assess respondents along a scale, divided into six proficiency levels. For example, individuals at level 2 literacy “can integrate two or more pieces of information based on criteria, compare and contrast or reason about information and make low-level inferences”.

Implementing such an assessment across countries presents several practical and technical challenges. A primary concern is agreeing on a common measurement of literacy/numeracy and ensuring that the assessment is comparable across language groups. This applies not only across countries, but also within ethnically diverse states where many may not speak the official language.



An additional related challenge is designing a survey which national statistical agencies – often understaffed and underfunded – are able to conduct affordably. The complex sample and psychometric design of the PIAAC assessment, together with its duration (on average 50 minutes for the cognitive assessment<sup>7</sup>) make it technically difficult and costly to implement. An alternative is assessment based on a shorter and simpler module based on a common pool of limited items. This would have the advantage of simplicity and reduced costs, but would compromise the depth and validity of the assessment.

#### Target 4.7: knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and global citizenship

Incorporating key objectives of sustainable development, target 4.7 can be considered a bold, and arguably necessary, endeavour to align global education with the post-2015 sustainability agenda. Yet monitoring the target presents significant challenges. None of the proposed global or thematic indicators explicitly addresses adult skills and competencies. This sub-section therefore focusses on possible measures of adult skills at the national or regional level.

Indicators related to global citizenship and equality that are meaningful across a large spectrum of socio-economic

conditions, political systems, and religious beliefs present significant challenges. One good example is the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study assessment, conducted among eighth grade students. The assessment, based on a 79 item test administered across 38 countries from Europe, Asia and Latin America measures conceptual knowledge and understanding and attitudes related to citizenship. The survey includes globally relevant items on attitudes, but also includes regional modules to capture issues more pertinent to local contexts<sup>8</sup>.

In 2018, participating PISA countries are developing an assessment of “global competences”. Global competence is defined as “the capability and disposition to act and interact appropriately and effectively, both individually and collaboratively, when participating in an interconnected, interdependent and diverse world”. Key dimensions of the assessment include communication and behaviour to interact appropriately and effectively with others holding diverse perspectives, and knowledge and interest in global developments, challenges and trends.

Considering their greater influence on political outcomes and more solidified views, comprehensively measuring knowledge and attitudes among adults is highly relevant to the SDG agenda. However, the funding and organisation necessary to implement detailed surveys is likely to be less forthcoming. With this in mind, opinion polls could provide a useful measure of relevant attitudes to sustainable development issues. For example, international opinion surveys, such as the regional barometer surveys and the World Values Surveys, include some questions on attitudes, values, and behaviour patterns such as tolerance and equal opportunity, social and interpersonal trust, identity, and the environment and global warming. While the data gained from such surveys is less detailed, including a limited set of items into an existing instrument can prove both informative and cost effective.

#### Notes

1 / While EFA goal 6 specified that literacy, numeracy and life skills should be improved through formal education, this largely did not result in the generation of comparable data on learning outcomes across countries, particularly beyond secondary school.

2 / The UN Secretary General’s Synthesis Report specifies that targets can only be considered achieved if they have been met for all relevant income and social groups, requiring clear levels of disaggregation for SDG indicators. In regard to SDG 4, UIS/UNICEF/World Bank and OECD launched on April 5th 2015 an Inter-agency group on disaggregated indicators in education to ensure harmonisation of standards and methodologies for equity.

3 / Each of the global indicators are included in the thematic monitoring framework.

4 / For example, in the problem-solving component of the PIAAC survey, one question asks respondents to access and evaluate information in the context of a simulated job search, finding one or more sites that do not require users to register or pay a fee.

5 / STEP does not assess numeracy.

6 / During the EFA agenda, assessment of literacy was commonly based on whether respondents in Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) were able to read a simple sentence aloud.

7 / Covering literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology rich environments.

8 / The 2016 ICCS assessment will incorporate more items relevant to sustainable development. Students will be asked to rate the seriousness of a broad range of threats such as the extent of poverty, living standards, human dignity, economic well-being, and environmental health (Schulz et al., 2016).

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# Life skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – do we have what it takes?

Years ago I attended a training on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and for the first time had a clear conceptual understanding of the relationship and interdependence between capabilities (competencies, skills, knowledge), access to resources, and how using the combination of these (capabilities and resources) to carry out different forms of livelihood activities can lead to a sustainable livelihood – or not... I also learned about the political/institutional, social, economic and physical environment and their influences at different levels (from local to national) on a person's ability to conduct livelihood activities and withstand shocks and stresses. Of course the training gave me the capacity to conduct sustainable livelihoods assessments, advocate to influence policies, train others; but its actual benefit went far beyond my career and assisted me to look at my own life, my own capabilities, access to resources and the environment I live in. It made me aware that I should have my own livelihood strategy with contingency plans, the ability to anticipate the future, read the signs of my environment and build my own capacities to ensure I have a sustainable livelihood – far beyond just having a salary, but also living a healthy and fulfilling life.

This still holds true today and I believe will also in the future. It seems most of us are quite good at acquiring the competencies and skills we require in the workplace. We plan for, pay for and attend different forms of education and training, but we seldom consider the social, individual and reflective skills that are also needed to manage our day to day lives, so-called life skills. For most of my generation, it seems life skills have been acquired and developed in a very informal manner – somehow on the way. Nowadays, it forms part of many school and adult learning curricula and children, youth and adults can attend different forms of training to develop life skills such as communication, negotiation, critical thinking, problem solving, etc.

There are so many definitions of life skills, but I quite like the simple statement that “Life Skills refer to the skills you need to make the most out of your life.” Madhu Singh (UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg) stated that, more than the definition, it is important to ask how life skills exist in diverse life situations and how they affect the empowerment of people. Thinking about the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems the only thing we can be sure of is the dynamic shifts in our societies and the fact that pressing and difficult situations demand that we mobilise skills, abilities and the creative problem solving potential in all of us.

Tracing the timeline of my own life skill development, I realise that indeed the contextual factor is true and that I developed and used different life skills at different times depending on what my environment demanded from me. Every year when I visit my home country I am faced with technological changes (new parking meters, strange machines to buy movie tickets from, etc.) that baffle me, but I pride myself in the fact that I can manoeuvre my way through Addis Ababa traffic, I can find a plumber or electrician in Ethiopia without the use of the yellow pages or an online directory and I can buy my weekly vegetables using Amharic (local language).

I pondered further and realised that beyond the contextual factor, it is important to ask whether my acquired life skills actually empowered me and enabled me to improve and make the most of my life. Did the fact that I am a woman have an influence in the kind of life skills I needed and acquired or does one size fit all?

Research has shown that life skills are developed as a result of constructive processing of information, impressions, encounters and experiences, both individual and social that is a part of one's daily life and work. The social dimensions are particularly important because they condition life itself. The political, institutional, economic, gender and other domains have a further influence on the kind of life skills needed.

Reading through recent research on skills for women in leadership positions, I could not believe that we are still faced with so many stereotypes. Apparently women in leadership positions should take personal responsibility to reach their goals by investing in themselves in the following areas (amongst others):

- Acquire skills to become more confident and assertive;
- Become aware of communication rituals;
- Learn negotiation techniques;
- Invest in technical competence, cultural and emotional intelligence, etc.

My initial reaction was that this reads a bit like the advice from women's magazines from 1960/70 that recommended wives treat their husbands in certain ways, e.g. when they come home from work, wait for them at the door, have a warm meal prepared, etc. Then I remembered two key issues:

- A sustainable livelihood is not only about my capabilities and access to resources, but also about the environment I live and operate in and how I can read, influence and manage that environment.

- Life skills are contextual and you need to develop what is necessary for a specific time and context.

So, yes, maybe women do a few things differently (communicate differently, negotiate differently) and maybe for some time we have to develop additional life skills to access opportunities in an environment that is not as equal as we would like it to be. At the same time, we may have some competencies and life skills that can actually contribute to the current shifts and dynamics we are experiencing.

My “Note to Self” was, finally:

- Out of the so-called 10 skills for the future workforce, it seems I have relevant competence in most of them (yes, I can make sense of things; I think I have novel and adaptive thinking, cross-cultural competence, etc.). I also have gaps in new media literacy (I refuse to open a Facebook account).
- As a woman I may operate in the same and/or different ways than my male counterparts, but using the life skills I already have, I can negotiate more space for myself and other women (in the workplace and society).
- Perhaps the most important life skill is the ability and willingness to learn!



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Photography  
by Mohammed Baba

# From Gaza with love

Photo reportage

Anwar is 35 years old. She lives in the Gaza strip and she's deaf – a combination of circumstances that could make life extremely difficult.



Photo reportage

# From Gaza with love

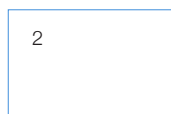
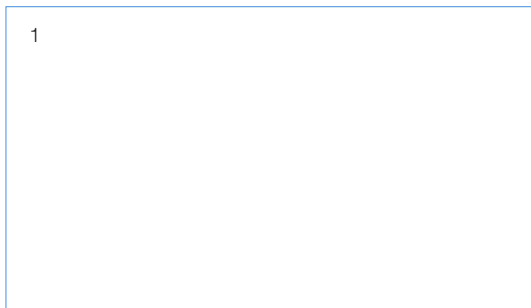
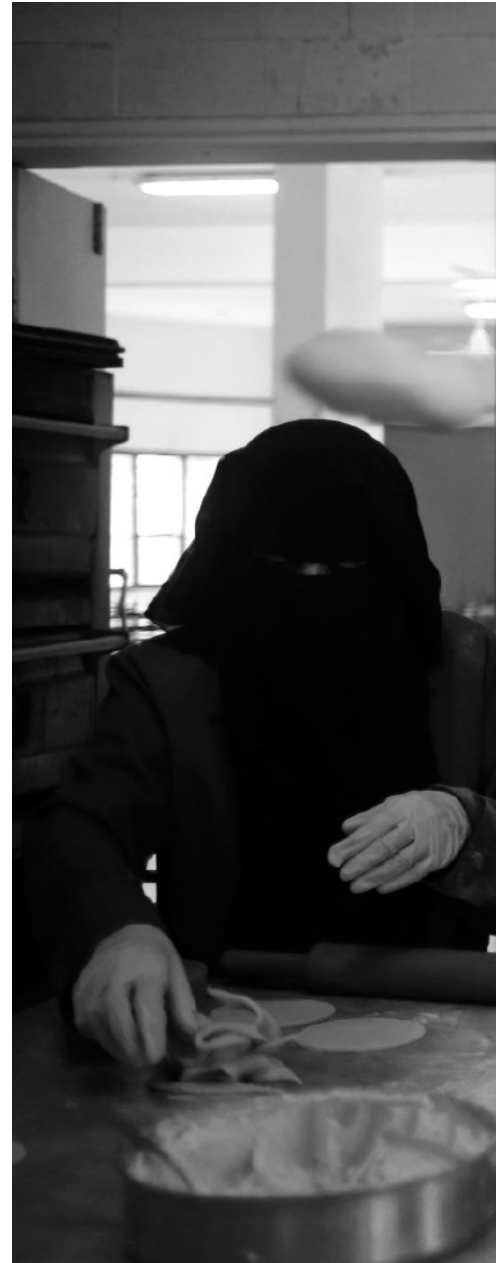
**Photography**

by Mohammed Baba

The El Amal Society was established in 1993 as an initiative of the local community members who detected the needs of people with disabilities. El Amal, then, over its lifetime accumulated business practices, technical experience, and maintained the genuine passion and belief in its role in the community. The society grew from just its founders to a membership with a general assembly of around 100 interested individuals who volunteered to serve the common objectives. Since it was established, the general assembly affirmed democratic practices through regular elections of the executive board. The El Amal organisation, besides being a leading organisation in Rafah and one of the first CSOs to care about the issue of disabilities, learns the best of its wisdom from people who have disabilities. They form the generations of power and energy which keep the organisation growing, not only with the vertical expansion of programmes but also in depth, to consider programme quality and results-driven programming. Since its establishment, El Amal has seen 16 generations of school children graduate through its Special Education Programme and has provided preventive and rehabilitative services to more than 9000 children and deaf adults annually.

The El Amal Society has been able to provide vocational training to people with disabilities for many years and dozens of persons have been qualified in manual crafts. Additionally, El Amal has a permanent workshop where manual crafts, embroideries and textile products are produced.

The El Amal Society, with the cooperation of DVV International, has been working on developing an adult learning programme since 2012 to offer training services that would satisfy the needs of the local job market and to encourage founding small projects and initiatives to help reduce poverty and unemployment despite the political and economic situation in the Gaza Strip.



1 / The day we visit, the atmosphere is relaxed. Here everyone is friendly. While cooking, they chat and observe us.

2 / There is a lot of attention paid to make the pastries just right. It is also a question of pride.







3

4

5



3 / The snacks Anwar and her colleagues are producing are for sale. Customers include kindergartens in the Gaza Strip.

4 / It isn't all about work. The kitchen also offers a safe place to meet, something Rafah does not otherwise usually have to offer.

5 / Anwar and her colleagues are making Ôpastriesó (pizza with spinach and cheese) a snack to be served to guests at the end of the celebration at the El Amal Rehabilitation Society in Rafah/Gaza.





6 / Anwar produces meals at home for her own private project, selling food to the surrounding stores and her neighbours.

7 / A short break while practicing sewing and embroidery at the El Amal Rehabilitation Society.

8 / Anwar shops for some ingredients.





6

7

8



9 / Selling her food Anwar has succeeded in creating a business, and selling her products, no small feat in Gaza.

9

10 / Anwar is baking at home.

10



# Artists in this issue

## Mohammed Baba

Photographer



### **Adult Education and Development: Which skills and competencies did you need to do the illustrations/photos for AED 83?**

*Mohammed Baba:* In order to capture the photo reportage for a specific issue you need to have the right equipment, knowledge of the right angles, an experience with taking pictures in different locations and the full understanding of the story because you will reflect it by your pictures. The most important skill is the sensation of what you are doing.

### **How did you obtain those skills and competencies?**

Working for Agence France Press (AFP) for 25 years has taught me how to reflect on photo stories in the right way.

### **Contact**

Follow me on Facebook: Mohammed Baba

### **Some works**

[https://www.facebook.com/Baba10/media\\_set?set=a.439505646221.237779.521161221&type=3](https://www.facebook.com/Baba10/media_set?set=a.439505646221.237779.521161221&type=3)

[https://www.facebook.com/Baba10/media\\_set?set=a.10150993866191222.413939.521161221&type=3](https://www.facebook.com/Baba10/media_set?set=a.10150993866191222.413939.521161221&type=3)





# Section 3

## *Utopia*

Sometimes the discussion becomes too focused on the problems and shortcomings. Yes, we need to recognise and discuss what does not work. But we also need to raise our eyes from the ground and look forward. Our Utopia section offers another world.

# Technologies and education: is another digital world possible?



Camilla Croso  
Global Campaign for Education  
Brazil

**Abstract** – *As the world, and education, becomes digitalised we need to ask: Who runs the show? This article describes some of the risks and possibilities behind the increasing use of technologies. As such, the use of digital tools provides an opportunity for educational justice but can also deepen the unequal access to education and create social gaps. Some key aspects are presented, such as the importance of the political and pedagogical framework in which new technologies and digital culture are inscribed; the intentionality; asymmetric capacity of use; the human rights perspective and the digital world as an opportunity for resistance, mobilisation and citizenship.*

Nothing is neutral. So the question of whether digitalisation provides an opportunity for educational justice or further broadens social divides will depend, in the end, on the political intentionality behind its use. That intention guides the accompanying policy framework and set of principles which inform the latter. As adult educators, we need to be aware of the political intentionality behind the use of technologies, considering this intentionality as the key factor to provide an opportunity for educational justice or to deepen the unequal access to education and the increasing social gaps.

First of all we must understand that the political and pedagogical framework in which digitalisation is inscribed determines the use of the technologies, and their consequent impact, and not the other way around (Tedesco, 2016). Technologies must be at the service of political and pedagogical frameworks and not determine them. They are a means, not an end in themselves, and certainly not the only means, but one among a menu of means which educators and learners can draw upon.

This means that educational policies should not focus on the beneficial training in the use of technologies and of technological apparatuses, but in forming educators and learners in certain political and pedagogical frameworks towards which technologies will contribute (Tedesco, 2016). The key is the intentionality of such frameworks – intention is what is at stake and must be questioned: increased educational justice will require frameworks which empower people to be active protagonists of their learning experiences. The



aim should be to promote increased dialogue, participation and connectivity with diversity. The intention must be to address concrete educational issues – such as the democratisation of knowledge, improved learning, the promotion of critical thinking and of solidarity, and not surrender to technological fetishes.

In their analyses of digital cultures, some authors have expressed interesting considerations. Milad Doueihi, for example, professor of Digital Humanities at Paris Sorbonne University, noted that the digital culture brings new possibilities, but also unpredictable and sometimes disturbing or even dangerous side effects. He has highlighted the need for an “informed user”, able to question and modify the “prefab digital environment” which is offered. He points out that inequalities and gaps are caused not only by asymmetric access to technologies, but also and especially to asymmetric capacity of use of the different technologies. On the one hand, technologies could be promoting passive consumers that are not questioning or problematising digitalisation, while on the other, technologies could be promoting debate, critical thinking, fostering people to take on an active role in technological development itself as well as in social mobilisation, political action and citizenship.

### ICT and human rights

If Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policies are put forward from a human rights perspective, with the

intention to promote educational justice, it is crucial to consider the public/private relationship. This brings us back to the political intentionality that drives technology and digitalisation. For educational justice to be promoted, it is paramount that the state can ensure free connectivity access and consumption as well as public debates on the technological instruments themselves, their packaging and their content. It is important to underline that these aspects cannot obey a profit-making motif, which would risk actually broadening divides and moulding counterproductive patterns and ways of thinking. If these policies and specific pedagogical contents are not kept in the public domain, the market will occupy this space and take on this role, obeying its own private interests (Lugo, 2015). It is crucial that ICTs and the digital world be open to public debate and policies so that these are in fact at the service of the public good.

The shift to digital attracts a lot of attention. There are clear and significant private interests who want to make a profit through digitalisation as well as other educational processes. ICTs and digital cultures should not view people exclusively as consumers of such technologies (moulded and determined by the market), but also and especially as producers of technologies. The obsolescence of technologies is often run by a pro-profit intentionality, and it is important that there are state and public mechanisms to develop innovation and technological advancements, independent from the market.

Addressing the issues and challenges to the right to education in the digital age, the Special Rapporteur on the



right to education, Kishore Singh (2016), considers how the norms and principles that underlie the right to education should be upheld while embracing digital technologies. He says the technology provides significant benefits to the educational process, but may also undermine the realisation of this right. The guiding principle must be the adoption of an all-inclusive approach. He claims that special attention must be paid to issues of access and skills for the most marginalised groups and that the provision of education through digital technology may actually also contribute to gender disparities. Likewise, the autonomy of teachers to teach as they deem best can be hampered by technology-based education models, reiterating that “Academic freedom includes the right to teach without any interference, including the right to choose the content and methods of teaching and the freedom to use or not to use any specific technique or technology”. In addition, he highlights that while digital technologies necessarily involve the participation of the private sector, we must caution

against the risks of privatisation in education and the commercial interests of private providers.

Similarly, it is crucial to highlight the importance of open educational resources, considering teaching, learning and research materials that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open educational resources, including the choice towards open source software, also imply an ethical commitment to democratic and inclusive approaches, ensuring that people of different gender, nationality, race, location, religion, or physical ability can use, relate and adapt or change them.

#### **The lack of computer dynamics**

In this article I have tried to explore some critical points that need to be taken into account regarding technologies and

education, particularly the political intentionality behind the use of technologies. Technologies are a means, not an end in themselves. They are certainly not the only means, but one among a menu of means, from which educators and learners can draw. New technologies and digital cultures should never be seen as a replacement of teachers, human interaction, or of face-to-face teaching and learning. There is widespread consensus that autonomous, creative, empowered and valued teachers are at the heart of quality education for all. For as great as they can be, technologies cannot replace the dynamics of dialogue, debate, confrontation of ideas and opinions, and overall active collective learning that has a huge degree of spontaneity, thought-in-process and human emotion. Precisely in relation to a rights-based approach to digital technologies, Kishore Singh emphasises that the “public authorities should ensure that the use of digital technologies is considered as a means of education, not as substitute for face-to-face education. They should recognise that human contact in education is essential to the teaching and learning process”.

## New technologies and digital cultures should never be seen as a replacement of teachers, human interaction, or of face-to-face teaching and learning.

Finally, we must bear in mind that the boundaries between the “virtual” and “real” are permeable, and we actually transit between them. This permeability in fact turns out to be a quality which opens the door for pedagogical resources. As citizens, living in a changing world that continually challenges us to think more deeply about our commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, the possibilities offered by the digital world as a crucial space for critical voices and key promoter of resistance, mobilisation and citizenship are undeniable.

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# Lifelong learning as a path to happiness?



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**Abstract** – *This study shows the relationship between lifelong learning and the happiness of lifelong learning programme participants using the HILL (Happiness index of lifelong learning) developed in S. Korea in 2014. The result shows that people with more experience in lifelong learning showed a higher HILL score than those with less experience. We can also see that people who have participated in a lifelong learning programme for a long time scored higher on the HILL than those with a short participation period. This implies lifelong learning can influence happiness.*

Can lifelong learning make you happy? If you think the answer is yes, how could you prove it? If you take a look at most business training programmes you will notice that they usually focus on enhancing competencies aimed at achieving an increased performance of the company. On the other hand, the objectives of lifelong learning focus on enhancing individual empowerment, social inclusion, economic and cultural prosperity. UNESCO's four purposes of lifelong learning – learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together – are the basis of these lifelong learning objectives. Thus, even though experts and practitioners try to prove the effects of lifelong learning programmes, it is not easy to get concrete figures compared to an enterprise.

The majority of the lifelong learning practitioners in Korea use the reaction of learners and their plans to take action as a measurement for a learning programme outcome. However, it is not enough to persuade stakeholders to enthusiastically get involved in lifelong learning efforts. The stakeholders may also have interests in seeing the actual changes made by the learning programme effects.

The purposes of learning programmes of enterprises and lifelong learning fields are apparently different from the beginning. Therefore, the methods used to measure the results of lifelong learning programmes should be something different from those of enterprises. There are two reasons for this. To measure the monetary value of the lifelong learning programme results is impossible. Even more important is to understand that the purposes of learning programmes are

originally focused on generating something which is subjectively valuable.

As a result, we have to find alternative approaches to measure the outcomes, based on the purposes and the objectives of lifelong learning programmes. Vaillant's study (2003) gives us a clue, in which he reported that lifelong learning is one of the seven conditions of happiness. This study was conducted for 72 years with 268 individuals. The result provides a kind of foundation to develop the lifelong learning happiness index. In this article, I would like to share the experience of applying the happiness index of lifelong learning (HILL) as an alternative approach to measure the effects of lifelong learning programmes.

### Relationship between subjective happiness in life and lifelong learning experiences

According to Wikipedia, happiness is defined as "a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy". Happy mental states may also reflect judgements by a person about their overall well-being. Seligman (2004) asserts that happiness is not solely derived from external, momentary pleasure. He emphasises that humans seem happiest when they have

- Pleasure (tasty food, warm baths, etc.),
- Engagement (or flow, the absorption of an enjoyed yet challenging activity),
- Relationships (social ties have turned out to be extremely reliable indicator of happiness),
- Meaning (a perceived quest or belonging to something bigger), and
- Accomplishments (having realised tangible goals).

Seligman's assertion about happiness is related to the purposes of lifelong learning defined by UNESCO. Learning to be is similar to pleasure, learning to know is close to meaning, learning to do comparable to accomplishments and learning to live together matches with relationships and engagement. Compared this way it is fair to state that the purposes of lifelong learning are somehow related to happiness.

### Happiness as capital?

But wait, there is more. Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brasset-Grundy, & Bynner (2004) utilised the concept "capital" to explain the results of lifelong learning. The first capital is human capital which is based on know-how and qualifications that enable an individual to participate in the economy and in society. The second capital is social capital formed by networks in which people actively participate, so that when they face a challenge they can fall back upon their social relations. The third is identity capital which comprises individual features such as self-confidence and internal control to support personal development (Schuller et al., 2004).

Learning can strengthen the development of key skills, abilities and personal resources as well as reinforcing belief

in the individual's ability to deal with disadvantageous situations. Education also helps individuals make well-reflected decisions on behaviours related to their health and happiness. Education enables access to individuals and groups with a similar and heterogeneous socio-economic background, encourages social cohesion and provides the possibility of social involvement (Kil, Motschilnig, & Thöne-Geyer, 2013). Some researchers also reported that the results of lifelong learning are satisfaction with life, active participation in society, social support and promotion of health (Field, 2009; Sabates & Hammond, 2008). Research in Canada reported that the longer participation in lifelong learning, the happier the elderly people are. They also revealed that the elderly learners with longer participation in lifelong learning have positive psychological satisfaction and a physically and socially healthy life. This study further implies that the results of lifelong learning are somehow related to the happiness of learners rather than to economic purposes (cited from Ko and Lee, 2014).

### Learning can strengthen the development of key skills, abilities and personal resources as well as reinforcing belief in the individual's ability to deal with disadvantageous situations.

Michalos (2008) clarifies the argument of the relationship between lifelong learning and happiness. Given these more robust definitions of "education", "influences" and "happiness", education has enormous influence on happiness (Michalos, 2008). Michalos asserted that formal education has no influence on happiness, however, when the concept of non-formal, and informal education is considered, education influences happiness.

### Functional happiness

"Walking into the light"<sup>1</sup> (2010) introduced the concept of "functional happiness" which is a state of well-being that exists, flourishes and is fostered in daily life. The model of functional happiness produced a functional happiness equation:

**Self-generated inspiration + Decreased suffering = Increased happiness**

Inspiration is a positive feeling of joy or elation. Self-generated inspiration quite literally means inspiration that we generate ourselves. There are three areas of focus within self-generated inspiration:

1. development of self,
2. life passions and
3. dream goals.





Suffering is a pain or distress that acts as a strong inhibitor to our happiness. The reduction of suffering focuses on perceptive awareness, acceptance of truths and elimination of roadblocks. The equation states that happiness is directly proportionate to the level of inspiration and suffering in our lives. If we increase our inspiration, which assists in fostering happiness, and decrease our suffering, which impedes happiness, we will inevitably be happier. According to them, people can enhance self-generated inspiration by improving physical fitness, career-oriented pursuits, acquiring a new skill, creating a work of art, increasing knowledge of a subject matter, experiencing new cultures, helping others, competing in the Olympics, starting a business and living an inspired life. On the other hand, people can decrease the suffering by recognising the existence of stress, being grateful for your health, accepting responsibility for the consequences of your actions, coming to terms with the death of a loved one, conquering a fear and finding a new method for completing a previously impossible task (Walking into the light , 2010).

Through this equation we are able to enhance the happiness of people if we have lifelong learning programmes with learning objectives to increase inspiration and decrease suffering. Michalos' study (1991) supports the positive relationship between lifelong learning and happiness. According to the study, a happy person is likely to have low levels of fear, hostility, tension, anxiety, guilt and anger; high degrees of

energy, vitality and activity; a high level of self-esteem and an emotionally stable personality; a strong social orientation; healthy, satisfying, warm love and social relationships; an active lifestyle with meaningful work; and to be relatively optimistic, worry-free, present-oriented and well-directed. Fortunately, most of the lifelong learning programmes are focused on enhancing inspiration and decreasing suffering, which may imply that lifelong learning can enhance people's happiness.

### The components of the lifelong learning happiness index

The HILL was developed by Ko & Eun (2014) and then modified by Lee & Lee (2014) with 6,698 respondents. The happiness index of lifelong learning consists of 20 items including increasing self-esteem (7 items), satisfaction with personal development (5 items), reduction of negative emotions (4 items) and pursuing a meaningful and better life (4 items) as shown in Table 1.

The happiness index was utilised for the analysis, which was developed from a previous study conducted by Ko & Eun (2014) and modified by Lee & Lee. The equation for the index is as follow:

$$\text{HILL} = 2.6 \text{ X Increasing self-esteem} + 2.5 \text{ X Satisfaction with personal development} + 2.5 \text{ X Reduction of amount}$$

**Table 1 – The components of the lifelong learning happiness index**

<b>Increasing self-esteem</b> (7 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning helped me raise the initiative of my life.</li> <li>• Changes occurred in my life by solving problems in a different way of thinking and using new skills.</li> <li>• I can look at myself objectively.</li> <li>• I have the ability to do tasks positively.</li> <li>• I became aware of other people's positions and ideas.</li> <li>• Learning helped me implement my work better.</li> <li>• I began to feel that I am a person in need of neighbours and society.</li> </ul>
<b>Satisfaction with personal development</b> (5 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel good seeing myself growing with learning.</li> <li>• My own self-confidence has increased.</li> <li>• I am happy to learn new things.</li> <li>• I am satisfied because I could learn what I wanted to learn.</li> <li>• Learning could make up for my shortcomings.</li> </ul>
<b>Reduction of negative emotions</b> (4 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily life stress has decreased.</li> <li>• I have felt less boredom.</li> <li>• The fear of accepting new or strange facts has been decreased.</li> <li>• I have experienced less embarrassment due to the results of learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Pursuing a meaningful and better life</b> (4 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The possibilities to participate in social activities such as voluntary work, employment, change, transition and starting a business have increased.</li> <li>• Solidarity with the people working with me for common goals has increased.</li> <li>• I became more concerned about a meaningful life for me and my neighbours.</li> <li>• I could further contribute to create a better society to live together in.</li> </ul>

**of negative emotions + 2.4 X Pursuing a meaningful and better life**

**Application of the happiness index of lifelong learning (HILL)**

The data were collected from 7,725 responses in 27 cities and counties in Gyeong Gi Do province in 2015. ANOVA<sup>2</sup> was utilised for the analysis of the data.

Table 2 shows the analysis results HILL scores by the lifelong learning experiences of the participants. There were statistically significant differences (F=20.631\*\*\*) among the groups by the respondents' participation experiences in lifelong learning programmes. The group with less than 1 year of participation experience in lifelong learning showed the lowest HILL score and it was statistically different from the other groups. The group with more than 5 years of participation experience showed a statistically higher score than the group of 1~2 years.

This implies, statistically, that people with more years of experience in lifelong learning programmes are happier than people with shorter experiences.

**Happiness in the end?**

I believe that education has colossal influence on happiness (Michalos, 2008). Increasing happiness for people is not simple or easy. One of the most important responsibilities of mayors, governors, and authorities is to enhance the happiness of their people. To this end they use various policies and resources. Unfortunately, authorities are more accustomed to paving roads, providing more public transportation, and so on. These efforts may enhance the convenience of city life but may not increase happiness.

If we compare the budgets for economic policies and lifelong learning programmes in one city, it is clear most of

If we were to spend the same amount of money for economic development and for a lifelong learning programme, I can clearly say that lifelong learning will tremendously increase the happiness of people.

the money is allocated to economic policies. If we were to spend the same amount of money for economic development and for a lifelong learning programme, I can clearly say that lifelong learning will tremendously increase the happiness of people. However, policy-makers usually invest huge amounts of money for economic development assuming that the efforts will make people happy. This is why we need a kind of measurement that can prove the value of learning in a way that policy-makers prefer to accept. I think the happiness index is a very strong form. If it helps prove us right, there will be huge support from stakeholders. HILL can also be utilised to identify effective lifelong learning programmes, those which contribute more to enhancing the happiness of participants. In the end the practitioners will also be able to modify their lifelong learning programmes to raise the happiness level of the participants.

**Table 2 – HILL scores by lifelong learning experience**

Experience in lifelong learning	N	Happiness Index scores	Standard deviation	F
1/ less than 1 year	2,462	75.32	12.136	20.631*** 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 > 2*** 6 > 2**
2/ 1–2 years	1,488	77.13	12.739	
3/ 2–3 years	1,052	78.16	13.114	
4/ 3–4 years	776	77.99	12.657	
5/ 4–5 years	451	78.55	13.897	
6/ more than 5 years	999	79.60	13.333	

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

## Notes

1 / <http://www.walkingtothelight.com>

2 / ANOVA is an abbreviation of Analysis of Variance. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a collection of statistical models used to analyse the differences among group means and their associated procedures.

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**Sung Lee** was the president of GILL (Gyeong Gi Do Institute for Lifelong Learning) in South Korea from 2012 to 2015. He received his Masters in Rural Adult Education from Seoul National University and his Ph. D. in Education from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He was the Chair of the Association of Provincial Lifelong Learning Institute and Korea Action Learning Association.

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# *Shirley Walters*

## “The skills you need to change a country (and the world)”

*Interview*

**Interview** by Johanni Larjanko  
**Photos** by UIL



Shirley Walters at a conference in Hamburg.

*Shirley Walters is the founding director of the Division for Lifelong Learning at the University of Western Cape in South Africa. A Professor of Adult and Continuing Education since 1986, She has published widely on issues relating*

*to gender, popular education, community education, lifelong learning in higher education, learning regions and education for democracy. She sits on the Board of ICAE (The International Council of Adult Education)*

**Back in the 70s and 80s, how did you prepare for a time after apartheid? What kind of skills and competencies did you think would be necessary?**

There were a number of different ways in which it was being understood. There were many of us involved in civil society organisations and in university-based adult education departments very involved in the anti-apartheid movement. We were supporting local communities as they were struggling for their rights. We did that in various ways. I have been involved in the University of Western Cape for 30 years. UWC was known as the “struggle university”. A lot of our Adult Education programmes and processes were very embedded within the social movements. I remember a conference we held in 1989. Now, we had no idea, as we do now about all the things that were happening behind the scenes. You know, where the government had been beginning to have discussions with Mandela and others, people both inside and outside the country. We had no idea just how soon it was going to come. So at the conference we were beginning to think of the future. People dared to ask what we were going to do once we got into power. What were we to do about HIV/Aids. This was just a moment in time where I and my colleagues recognised the shift in assumption. We weren't necessarily always going to be in opposition. Now people dared to imagine that something else might happen. At the same time there were increasing numbers of think tanks from the late 80s to the early 90s. They were largely driven by the ANC in exile and looked at the kind of policies that would be appropriate. There was a lot of investment by activists and scholars in trying to imagine what a new policy framework would look like. This involved the Congress of South African trade unions, various social movements, people in universities.

There was a shift in the early 90s to a feeling of “Ok, so what might we want?” There was a lot around adult basic education. We recognised that adult education in general had

been seriously neglected. There was a hope that literacy and adult basic education would begin to be recognised as an important part of the reconstruction of South Africa. A lot of energy was put in by various people to these discussions and debates. There was also a lot of lobbying, and attempts to clarify what we thought, interchange with international colleagues about what we should be looking for the future.

**There was a hope that literacy and adult basic education would begin to be recognised as an important part of the reconstruction of South Africa.**

### **Building Utopia**

**In those discussions about the role and place of adult education, skills and competencies, how much was it about making sure the country could function in a more equal way, and how much was it about the possibility to build something completely new, a new society, another world?**

We were a number of people with quite an utopian thinking. There was a certain degree in which people said we need to do away with what we know, and build something new. There was a lot of discussion and debate around how you would get the private sector and government to pay for work-related training. We were trying to find ways to get more money into the system. This is when the skills fund was started, the taxing of workplaces and so on. In retrospect, I can see that we were connecting for example with the whole debate on a national qualifications framework in countries like Sweden, Germany, New Zealand or Australia. Those were all new ideas to us, although they resonated with what people



Her passion and commitment has touched the lives of many people and helped create more understanding and awareness of lifelong learning world wide.

were trying to accomplish in different parts of the world. A lot of energy went into trying to imagine what the implications of some of those ideas might be.

Until we had the debate on a National Qualifications Framework, nobody had really consciously discussed what a qualification is and who gets to decide that. In these debates people began to see that qualifications are socially constructed. Up until then they had just arrived, from Pretoria. It was like a black box of qualifications. The move to make the process much more transparent and to co-construct qualifications was a really important shift towards a much broader understanding of the politics of knowledge. At the time we weren't fully aware of what we were involved in, but we knew we wanted to move away from the previous, completely authoritarian method.

### When things go wrong

We ended up developing what many considered an incredibly complex and bureaucratic system. We set up various communities of practice. If you argued there should be a certificate on gender-based violence, a group would be set up under the South African Qualifications Authority. The group would co-create a certificate on how to counter gender-based violence. This led to a proliferation of qualifications. I think this was the pendulum that swung. We ended up swinging almost too far. We had hundreds and hundreds of qualifications that had all been developed very democratically. Then we started looking at the take-up of these qualifications. The institutional capacity to actually present these qualifications, and so on. There was not the same amount of energy put into building institutions which could actually take up the qualifications. So we got a heavy system that most people found very confusing. There has been a simplification process going for the last 12 years to make the system functional. Initially there was a

huge pull that could have changed how we understand qualifications and supported all kinds of participation, but it didn't. The institutional base wasn't there.

We ended up developing what many considered an incredibly complex and bureaucratic system.

A lot of people got involved in trying to understand what on earth this transition from opposition to power meant, how new policy could be made, what skills leadership required. All of that takes a long time. We were very skilled at being in opposition, but not necessarily very skilled at being in power. So we had to learn. The shift came at a price. A lot of civil society organisations lost their momentum, and the membership base was lost in the transition. There was no more money to support them. Once we had the new government, many of our former comrades resisted support for civil society. There was an understanding that the government should provide. There were competing notions of what the state was, and what it should do. We lost a lot of our interesting and progressive ways to deal with society, for example regarding literacy. It is only in the last 5-10 years that people have started to reassert some of those understandings. We see that the government is not providing. So we need to find different ways of recapturing our old ideas. People in South Africa are increasingly saying that we can't rely on the government alone.

People in South Africa are increasingly saying that we can't rely on the government alone.



Shirley Walters is awarded a 2016 Honorary Fellow at UIL in Hamburg.

## Literacy, reading and writing

**Then there is also our understanding of what we should do. The debate on literacy is often simplistic, and measured as literate vs. illiterate. In reality that issue is much more complex.**

Oh yes. Because I have been a gender and feminist activist for a long time, I consider literacy to be contextual. Learning doesn't happen in a vacuum. Literacy gives women the opportunity to get out of their houses, and be with other women. This social context gives them confidence and so on. Reading and writing is but one part of it. When we formalise this into a system of adult basic education with qualifications we notice that the uptake is very limited. Our second chance system does not reach the poorest of the poor or the people with the least education. In my opinion we haven't made progress as a society, in our understanding of literacy. It is still quite basic.

**Our planet is heating up. Social, economic and gender inequality and injustice still prevails. What do we, as a species, have to do to make another world possible?**

We need systems change, not climate change. If we take the example of climate change it is usually addressed in a narrow and technical manner. There is a heavy emphasis on technology, and not on people. We have to intervene quite assertively and rethink quite radically some of the dominant paradigms. Take a look at the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). One of them mentions the aim to reach a financial growth of 7% as a notion of what kind of world we need. If we don't start rethinking that as a cornerstone of our discussion, I think we are in deep trouble. What does a sustainable growth paradigm look like? Is it measured by GDP? Is it measured by the Happiness Index, or something else? This is what we need to discuss. We need a radical rethinking of the world we are living in if we want it to be here for generations to come.

# The five skills it takes to build another possible world – learning from and for the World Social Forum



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**Abstract** – Over 35,000 participants from 125 countries took part in the 12th edition of the World Social Forum in Montreal on August 9–14 2016. Activities were clustered around 13 “axes”. The article focuses on the learning and organisational dimension of activism towards another possible world.

## A social movements forum towards another possible world

Three features marked the worldwide impact (Hammond 2007) of the first World Social Forum in January 2001: it took place at the same time as the World Economic Forum, establishing the opportunity to convey a “social” vs. an “economic” message; it took place in Porto Alegre (Brazil), providing the “social” message with a “South” vs “North” dimension; it was run by a network of social movements and organisations, trying to emphasise the “grassroots” vs. the institutional (i.e. territorial authorities, parties) initiative.

Only the third feature – the grassroots vs. the institutional – was still present in the World Social Forum that took place in Montreal (Quebec) between August 9 and 14, 2016. The WSF acknowledged Montreal as indigenous territory of the Mohawk people. This acknowledgement made visible the colonisation of these territories and encouraged participants to take collective responsibility of the challenges faced today by indigenous peoples, including the Energy East pipeline project that would be instrumental to a rapid expansion of the oil sands complex and would further strengthen the grip of the extraction industries on western Canada. Enhancing the socio-cultural and environmental challenges raised by the indigenous peoples and focusing on issues of patriarchy and colonialism, linked the 2016 WSF to the 2009 WSF held in Belém (Amazonas, Brazil).

Over 35,000 participants from 125 countries took part in this 12th World Social Forum. About 15,000 people partici-





World Social Forum 2016.

participated in the opening march on August 4. The forum was made possible by the work of around 1,000 volunteers.

26 self-managed committees contributed to give shape to the WSF programme: for example, the Democracy Committee, the Committee on Social Protection and Human Rights, and the Committee on Education. Activities were clustered around 13 “axes”:

1. Economic, social and solidarity alternatives facing the capitalist crisis
2. Democratisation of knowledge and right to communication
3. Culture of peace and the struggle for justice and demilitarisation
4. Decolonisation and self-determination of peoples
5. Rights of nature and environmental justice
6. Global struggles and international solidarity
7. Human and social rights, dignity and the fight against inequalities
8. Struggles against racism, xenophobia, patriarchy and fundamentalism
9. Fight against the dictatorship of finance and for resource distribution
10. Migration, refugees and citizenship without borders
11. Democracy, social and citizen movements
12. Workers against neoliberalism
13. Cultural, artistic and philosophical expressions for another possible world

On August 14, the forum organised an Agora of Initiatives that included 26 convergence assemblies, sharing more than a hundred initiatives promoting basic rights such as education as well as the defence and promotion of public services. All of the initiatives are collected online at <https://fsm2016.org/en/> in a calendar where the different actions of social change that were put forward are presented. This can be used as a guide for citizens worldwide by providing a concrete basis for ideas and events for change, beginning with the World March of Women 10th International Meeting in October in Maputo, Mozambique. One fear concerning the organisation of the WSF in a “northern” country concerned potential visa issues. In fact, according to the organisers, of about 2,000 potential participants who received official invitation letters to attend the Montreal WSF, around 70% had their applications for temporary visas to come to Canada denied.

The WSF Collective declared its commitment to portray all those who were refused to show the government and civil society, what these participants could have brought to the WSF. “We also want to use the case of Montreal in order to question the accessibility of countries of the North”, explained Raphaël Canet from the WSF organising committee.

In spite of these denied visas, most well-established social movement networks such as Via Campesina and the World March of Women were able to participate and to discuss and highlight the role played by social movements, the struggles for socio-economic, environmental and political change in different regions of the world.

The WSF was also an opportunity to bring human rights (Frezzo, 2009) to media attention, as well as the murder and disappearance of many activists. Take for example Berta Cáceres, indigenous feminist who in her country, Honduras, struggled against the construction of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam in Rio Blanco. She was well aware of the dangers involved in her struggle, with threats coming from private security guards working for the company building the dam, as well as the police and army protecting the project: "The army has an assassination list of 18 wanted human rights fighters with my name at the top. I want to live, there are many things I still want to do in this world but I have never once considered giving-up fighting for our territory, for a life with dignity, because our fight is legitimate. I take lots of care but in the end, in this country where there is total impunity I am vulnerable... when they want to kill me, they will do it," she stated to international press already in 2013. In March this year she was murdered. Two of her daughters, Bertita and Laura participated in numerous WSF activities and made their mother's voice heard: "Berta did not die, she multiplied! Berta lives, the struggles continues!"

The Brazilian delegation denounced the coup d'état in Brazil and the sexist, racist, authoritarian features of the new government that has the support of mainstream media who refuse to call it a coup while attempting to criminalise social movements. The diversity of actors represented in the WSF International Council became very evident as the Council failed to reach consensus about condemning the coup.

### The educational dimension

In the same way, the final convergence assemblies often encountered challenges in the sharing of common languages and agendas, especially when more "institutional" actors such as labour unions took the lead – focusing on labour issues – in reporting the results of the self-organised activities and workshops.

The educational issues in relation to social movements' agendas were clustered, in the convergence assembly, around three main themes: access to free and equitable education; activism and diversity; co-ordination and exchanges among educational social actors.

The World Education Forum (active within and alongside the WSF since 2001, see Surian 2013) addressed issues such as the right to education and popular education. Another issue was the linking to and involvement of local and international actors such as AELIÉS, the Latin American Council of Adult Education (CEAAL), the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), the educational radio network ALER, the Sao Paulo based Instituto Paulo Freire.

WEF activities provided an opportunity to discuss issues of popular education in adult education and offered insights into inspiring local practices such as the Indigenous Requirement at the University of Winnipeg. Kevin Settee, President of the University of Winnipeg Students' Association introduced participants to the Mandatory Indigenous Course Requirements (ICR) at the University of Winnipeg. The proposal was

developed in consultation with Indigenous elders, staff, faculty and students. The proposal was then passed "in principal" by the Senate in April 2015, introducing the mandatory requirement for all undergraduate students to participate in some form of Indigenous learning prior to their graduation. The course will be implemented for the first time in the 2016 fall term.

According to Kevin Settee, the University of Winnipeg Students' Association has been a driving force in indigenising the university, advocating for popular education and the importance of learning about indigenous culture within the indigenous environment.

### Relational and meaning-making skills towards another possible world

The experience at the University of Winnipeg helped to clarify an understanding of all knowledge as "positional" and to take into consideration the capacity of individuals and groups to trigger awareness about their own position and the type of abilities that require further development in the quest for creating sustainable conditions for another possible world. An explicit metaphor comes from the Canadian Leap Manifesto:

"We could live in a country powered entirely by renewable energy, woven together by accessible public transit, in which the jobs and opportunities of this transition are designed to systematically eliminate racial and gender inequality. Caring for one another and caring for the planet could be the economy's fastest growing sectors. Many more people could have higher wage jobs with fewer work hours, leaving us ample time to enjoy our loved ones and flourish in our communities. We know that the time for this great transition is short".

What are the skills that would be instrumental to support such a leap forward? Among the many examples of workshop and campaign materials provided by educational movements it is worth mentioning and quoting five skills clusters suggested by the Global Campaign for Education (2015) at the workshop held in Johannesburg, South Africa, April 2015:

- sharing narratives
- sharing relational commitment
- sharing structure
- sharing strategies
- sharing actions.

We could live in a country powered entirely by renewable energy, woven together by accessible public transit, in which the jobs and opportunities of this transition are designed to systematically eliminate racial and gender inequality.



Over 35,000 participants from 125 countries came to Montreal this year.

### Creating a Shared Story

GCE states that: “Stories draw on our emotions and show our values in action, helping us feel what matters, rather than just thinking about or telling others what matters. Because stories allow us to express our values not as abstract principles, but as lived experience – they have the power to move others”.

Therefore the basis for organising can be found in shared values expressed as public narratives, ways to bring alive the motivation that constitutes the necessary pre-condition to act for change. GCE distinguishes three story dimensions:

- the “story of self”, i.e. the values of the community within which we are embedded
- the “story of us” or what calls us to promote collective leadership, and the
- “story of now”, addressing the challenges to those values that demand present action.

As GCE put it: “By learning how to tell a public narrative that bridges the self, us, and now, organisers enhance their own efficacy and create trust and solidarity within their campaign, equipping them to engage others far more effectively”.

### Creating Shared Relational Commitment

A second area of skills concerns the ability to acknowledge that organising for social change is based on relationships and creating mutual commitments to work together. This perspective prioritises collaboration and learning how to recast our individual interests as common interests. It is also a mat-

ter of acknowledging the role of one-on-one meetings and small group meetings to create relationships based on trust, to lay the foundation of local campaign committed teams, enhancing commitments people make to each other, not simply to an idea or a task.

By learning how to tell a public narrative that bridges the self, us, and now, organisers enhance their own efficacy and create trust and solidarity within their campaign, equipping them to engage others far more effectively.

### Creating Shared Structure

Effective team building creates the conditions for a third area of skills in relation to shared leadership, focusing on a shared structure instrumental to effective local organising, taking into account the integration of the local action with state-wide, nation-wide and even global purpose. Shared leadership and structure create the conditions that energise activists in tackling challenging work. Key team challenges are concerned with how to strive to meet the standards of those served by the team, learning how to be more effective at meeting outcomes over time, and enhancing the learning and growth of individuals within the team.

According to GCE, team members work to put in place five conditions that lead to effectiveness – real team (bounded,

stable and interdependent), engaging direction (clear, consequential and challenging), enabling structure (work that is interdependent), clear group norms, and a diverse team with the skills and talents needed to do the work.

### Creating Shared Strategy

While based on broad values, effective activism also means learning how to focus on a clear strategic objective, i.e. how to turn values into action and creative deliberation. The WSF suggested a 4-step process including:

- Announce your initiative: A wide range of actions is needed to change the world (awareness, education, legislation, protests, claims, awareness...). An initiative is a collective action that contributes to social change.
- Join an Assembly of Convergence for Action: 26 convergence assemblies on diverse themes are carried out by organisations participating at the WSF. By participating in these spaces, you will consolidate and share your ideas with groups working on similar themes to yours.
- Participate in the Agora of Initiatives for Another World to share your initiatives, stimulate citizen commitment and contribute to the construction of the calendar of shared action plans. The WSF Agora will build synergies between the organisations and participants to work together for a better world.
- Contribute to the collective memory of the World Social Forum 2016 and document your activities on the ContActiva platform: <http://wsf-contactiva.esy.es/>.

### Creating Shared Measurable Action

A final suggestion by GCE is to produce an understanding of activism outcomes that is clear, measurable, and specific in order for progress to be transparent and to be evaluated, accountability practised, and strategy adapted based on experience. Examples of such measures include volunteers recruited, money raised, people at a meeting, voters contacted, pledge cards signed, laws passed, etc. Two key process features are (a) regular reporting of progress to goal in order to create opportunity for feedback, learning, and adaptation; (b) training to be provided for all skills to carry out the programme.

The Indigenous Peoples participation at the 2016 WSF helped to question a purely quantitative approach to the last assessment dimension and helped to highlight the importance of a perspective acknowledging commons and circular relations.

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- Further reading**  
A small selection of tips for further reading and useful online-links:
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Discuss this article in our virtual seminar  
(see page 115)

Get Involved!  
ICAE  
Virtual Seminar  
2017

# GCE, the virtual seminar and the Olympic Games

You may well be asking yourself what Global Citizenship Education, the ICAE virtual seminar and the Olympic Games have to do with each other. Writing in Brazil at this time, August 2016, is almost impossible without some allusion to the Olympic Games, presently taking place in Rio de Janeiro. The Olympic spirit should have much in common with the notion of Global Citizenship. The majority of top athletes are nowadays world citizens, as the sports arenas become ever more global. Sadly, the Olympic Games increasingly have more to do with competitive globalisation than they have with co-operative globalisation, although there have been some heart-warming examples of the latter: the North American and New Zealand athletes who collided and fell together during one of the heats of the women's 5,000 meters and then helped each other to the final tape. Other examples, however, of spectator partisanship reveal how far we are from achieving a culture of cooperative globalisation. The treatment dispensed to the French pole-vault champion Renaud Lavillenie by the largely Brazilian public during the final round and the medal awarding ceremony was totally devoid of sporting spirit. This type of reaction suggests that the sporting spirit is not a spontaneous response but one that has to be learnt in schools and other learning spaces. Much has been written about the need for a country or city to prepare to receive the Olympic Games. Generally, emphasis is given to communication, infrastructure, transport, safety and security – but much less to the need to invest in an education which generates cooperative and collaborative attitudes not just to receive a truly global tournament but also, and more importantly, as a preparation for life in general. In many countries this spirit of cooperation and collaboration is largely absent from the formal system of education which thrives on competition, evaluation and rivalry between students and schools. Evidence suggests that these other values are more typical of processes inspired by the spirit of popular education and learnt by engagement in social movements which place social justice, gender equality, solidarity and sustainable development at the top of its agenda. It is this spirit of collaborative participatory community learning which provides the basis for committed global citizenship and cultural understanding. The original inspiration of the Olympic Games also requires this kind of global understanding and goodwill from athletes and public alike. The education we need for the world we want will require new models of fair markets and sustainable development if it is to prepare truly global citizens.



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# Atinyo Matthew

Short  
Interview

## **Adult Education and Development: Which skills and competencies do we need to survive in the future?**

*Atinyo Matthew:* Currently, there is a growing realisation that formal educational systems alone cannot respond to the demands of modern society. Non-formal educational practices are consequently being increasingly employed to reinforce them. The goal is to reduce to barest minimum the levels of poverty, hunger, disease, marginalisation and exclusion prevailing in society. The provision of effective and relevant literacy and life-skills programmes are the principal channels for the attainment of this goal.

In view of the constantly changing nature of the environment in which non-formal education programmes are undertaken these days, we need a greater vision, dedication, flexibility, tenacity of purpose, and skills to design innovative programmes to enhance lifelong learning.

Consequently, key skills and competencies required to survive in the future include:

- **Ability to read, write and compute**  
The normal channel for the acquisition of these competencies is the formal educational system. Non-formal education must not only fill gaps that are left from the formal system of acquiring literacy skills. It must also address education and training needs of society in a very holistic manner.
- **ICT skills**  
To be able to survive in the future, we must learn to manage the challenges posed by the constantly changing world of ICT. In order to meet these demands, a wide diversity of education programmes and modalities of provision are required. Hence, individuals and communities must pursue their learning needs through alternative forms of provision under the broad rubric of non-formal education.
- **Ability to adapt rapidly to forces in the environment**  
Globalisation and climate change are issues assuming greater concern especially to those of us in developing countries. Skills of adaptation and competence in mitigating their effects on society will be critical for our survival in future. NFE programmes could be an effective means of meeting these needs.

The constant changes in the environment demand that the scope of non-formal education will have to change in tandem. Activities of non-formal education system must provide avenues through which people can obtain experience. These activities must build competencies in democratic decision making and negotiating, participation, and personal development. Society must be helped to obtain such qualities as commitment, involvement, responsibility, solidarity, democratic awareness, motivation, initiative, emancipation and empowerment, creativity, respect, tolerance, intercultural awareness, criticism, intellectual independence and self-confidence.

## **How can we learn them?**

In the constantly changing and ever shrinking global village that we find ourselves in, learning must become the main preoccupation of each and everyone. The rate of social change is so great that skills acquired become obsolete almost as soon as they are mastered. All the learning theories must be evoked: experiential, social cognitive and all the other theories of learning need to be employed. Additionally, all available methodologies; lectures, workshops, symposia, demonstrations, simulation, etc. need to be used. Preparation of learning materials needs to become a new field of study; an art and a science that must be taught and mastered by all NFE professionals.

## **Who should teach them?**

The setting in which non-formal education is undertaken is a critical determinant of the type and methodology which is most effective. Best practices in one context may not be exactly replicated in a different setting. Consequently, trainers of non-formal educators need to come from various backgrounds. A classic example of this is the means through which illiterates acquired the skills of using mobile phones. It is a wonder to observe the dexterity with which individuals that cannot read or write undertake complex operations on their mobile phones. Another example is to observe persons that have never had any formal education work complicated arithmetic patterns in order to stake their National Lotto. The above illustrate how, in the future, non-formal education training will follow the pattern of the traditional African education system in which learners receive training by observing performance of knowledgeable peers.

- **Professional trainers**

In addition there will be a greater need for the training and retraining of trainers in the non-formal sector. Non-formal education is an integral part of a lifelong learning concept that ensures that young people and adults acquire and maintain the skills, abilities and dispositions needed to adapt to a continuously changing environment. They can be acquired on the personal initiative of each individual through different learning activities taking place outside the formal educational system. An important part of non-formal education is carried out by non-governmental organisations involved in community and youth work. This is where professional NFE educators play a critical role. Academia will also be involved in research to add new knowledge to the body of information available to society.

- **Standardisation**

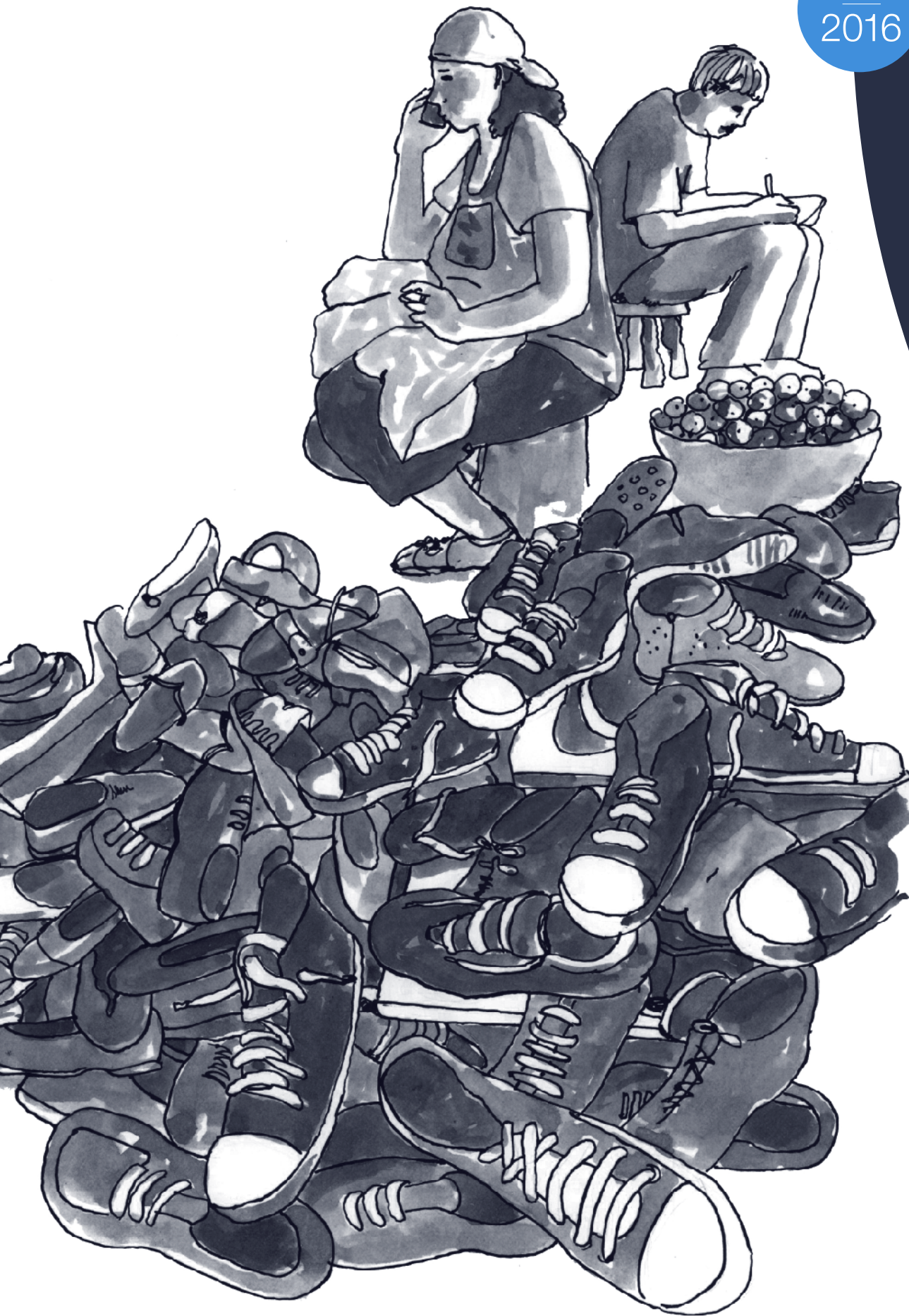
There is a growing recognition of the need to harmonise the skills and competencies acquired from the formal educational system to those acquired from the non-formal system. This can be achieved by standardising the processes and outcomes from both systems. The result will be a seamless merger of formal and non-formal education.

- **Mentoring by Expert Practitioners in the field of non-formal education**

In the process of sharing or popularising the new technologies mentoring can be an effective medium for knowledge transfer and communication. Mentoring may also be used in such activities as advice and consultation, animation, policy determination and planning, promoting expertise, information services, international relations, research, training courses, and teaching materials development.



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## Section 4

# *This is what you need*

Making ourselves future-proof is not just an intellectual endeavor. We need nuts and bolts to build the future. Thus our final section in the journal provides perspectives on what you need to get to where you will want to be.

# Teaching 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and how to assess them



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**Abstract** – *Given the rapid technological advancements, accelerated globalisation and socio-economic changes, many curricula worldwide tend to prioritise and overemphasise the teaching of the skills and competences that are deemed critical to success in today's world. This paper provides a brief account of the so-called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and reflects on the changes in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment, which have been introduced to set a ground for the integration of such skills into the Moroccan EFL classroom, and discusses the ways in which the aforementioned skills are taught and assessed.*

## Introduction

Preparing today's learners for the future simply means helping them to acquire the necessary skills and competencies that will enable them to get a job, to cope with different situations, to solve problems, as well as to interact with different people from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds. An educational system that takes into account the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century students should help them become productive and efficient users of technology, critical thinkers, independent, autonomous and lifelong learners. This replaces the traditional forms of learning that value memorisation and mastery of content knowledge over student-designed demonstrations of skills, along curricula that are still information-based. In addition, the simple transmission and accumulation of knowledge in schools does not provide opportunities for practically applying knowledge to new contexts. Hence, teaching and enhancing these skills requires robust instructional models that foster a culture of quality. This also implies a need to reconsider the tools we use to teach our students, the type of education we give them, and the areas and skills we often tend to emphasise.



Learners at the Adult Education Centre in Casablanca.

### On Defining 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

The term “21<sup>st</sup> century skills” is often used interchangeably with a number of other related terms such as “applied skills”, “cross-curricular skills”, “interdisciplinary skills”, “soft skills”, “life skills”, “inter-personal skills”, “workforce skills”, and “non-cognitive skills” (Silva, E. 2008). Though these may have different meanings in different contexts, they contain almost the same set of competencies. The Educational Testing Service (2007), for instance, defines 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as “the ability to collect and retrieve information, organise and manage information, evaluate the quality, relevance and usefulness of information and finally generate accurate information through the use of existing resources”.

Emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century content-areas include – but are not limited to – global awareness, environmental literacy, health literacy, visual literacy, information literacy, financial literacy, civic literacy, and entrepreneurship literacy. These areas in turn address a set of learning skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, digital and media literacy, creativity, collaboration and leadership. Other life and career skills proposed by the P21 (2011) and the Pacific Policy Research Center, (2010) include social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, initiative and self-direction. The list is long, and could make for several articles. We will focus on the first set of skills, since they may constitute the basic expertise students need to acquire in order to function effectively in today’s world. Let us have a closer look at some of them.

### Critical thinking and problem solving (CTPS)

The term “critical thinking” is often associated with so-called problem solving skills. Yet, a classical definition by John Dewey (1909) states that critical thinking is an active, consistent and careful consideration of a belief or a form of knowledge in the light of the further conclusions to which it tends. Inspired by Dewey’s account of critical thinking, the British Council (2015) defines critical thinking and problem solving skills as the ability of individuals to reason effectively, ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better understanding of issues. The P21 initiative on the other hand defines CTPS as the ability of learners to use systems thinking, make judgments and decisions, and solve problems. This requires critical reflection on various decisions and processes (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010; P21, 2011). Through critical thinking, students are able to frame, analyse, and synthesise information as well as negotiate and discuss various viewpoints to explore different perspectives on issues and problems.

**Critical thinking is an active, consistent and careful consideration of a belief or a form of knowledge in the light of the further conclusions to which it tends.**

It is easy to smile when you know the language.



### Digital Literacy

The whole world is shaped and reproduced by and through technology, and the classrooms are no exceptions. Technology offers the potential to develop students' 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills by providing them with new ways to develop their problem solving, critical thinking, and communication skills. Using technology as a tool to reinforce, extend and deepen learning enables students to discover, master, and communicate knowledge and information, allowing some room for learner-autonomy and responsibility (The British Council, 2011). Technology can help students practice transferring these skills to different contexts, reflect on their thinking and that of their peers, practice addressing their misunderstandings, and collaborate with peers (P21). The use of ICT in our classrooms enhances motivation and active engagement, and allows learners to move from the stage of knowledge accumulation and application, to knowledge creation.

### Media literacy

It is not sufficient to teach our learners how to use various types of gadgets, or how to locate and share information on different sites. One of the critical skills for today's world is media literacy. Students use different types of media and this requires critical awareness of how these media work, how the information is created and for what purposes. It is essential for individuals to be able to access, understand, and analyse media messages (The Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). This skill set includes the ability to understand media bias and the influences they might have on beliefs and behaviours. You are media literate when you can understand ethical issues surrounding the production and the use of various media forms.

### Communication

With the great emphasis on communication today, it has become essential to stress communicative activities in the classroom (Ouboumerrad, 2012). The adoption of communicative approaches has put communication and interaction at the centre of teaching and learning; the main goal of teaching today is to develop students' communicative competence (Richards, 1980, Hymes 1975; Widdowson, 1978; Canale 1980, 1985; and Swain, 1980). Students should be able to communicate clearly, using oral, written, and non-verbal forms in different contexts for a variety of purposes.

Traditionally, education has focused on the fundamentals of good communication – speech, writing, listening, and reading – the demands of social relations and global economy call for a much more diverse set of communication skills. Trilling and Fadel (2009) argue that today's student should be able to communicate and articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively using verbal and/or nonverbal communicative skills in a variety of forms and contexts.

### Collaboration

Collaboration, from a pedagogical stance, can be synonymous with teamwork, cooperation and partnership. Learners are required to be flexible and helpful in working with their peers towards achieving a common objective, and show willingness to make necessary compromises (The Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). Collaboration can also mean assuming responsibility for collaborative work, and valuing individual contributions made by members of the team (Trilling and Fadel, 2009).



"This is about our lives, our futures. We want to have a say in it!". Open discussion at the Adult Education Centre in Casablanca.

## Social and cross-cultural skills

Learning cannot be isolated from the social and cultural context in which it takes place, nor from other cultural contexts that it targets. Part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills is the learning of appropriate social behaviour. Social and cross-cultural skills refer to the learners' ability to function within a group – be it their community or a different culture. This involves showing tolerance and respect for others, besides embracing social and cultural differences while preserving one's own. Moreover, using different perspectives to find solutions to problems is increasingly important in social spheres as well as in the workplace. Partnership students should be able to interact effectively with others and conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner, work effectively in diverse teams, and respond open-mindedly to different ideas and values.

### Promoting 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills: The Case of the Moroccan EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Curriculum

We have looked at some of the core skills needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now let us have a look at how they can be taught. The possibilities are almost endless. We can emphasise 21<sup>st</sup> century subjects, use 21<sup>st</sup> century tools like ICT to develop these learning skills, we can teach and learn in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context and we can use 21<sup>st</sup> century assessment measures (P 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011:5). Collaboration, problem solving and communication can be learned through a variety of methods. Examples include project-based learning, problem-based learning, and design-based learning.

In the Moroccan EFL context, the objectives of ELT go hand in hand with the new conception of communicative competence. Students should learn and be able to use the language to communicate in real contexts for a variety of purposes (The Official Guidelines for TEFL, 2007). Together with the major aim of developing students' communicative competence, there is a place for the integration of the other 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The official guidelines identified the key skills and competences that students need to develop:

- The ability to think through critical, creative, and analytical thinking, systems thinking<sup>1</sup> and problem-solving ;
- The ability to make informed decisions;
- Transferring the English language learning to other learning contexts and situations;
- Developing communication skills;
- Working effectively in groups;
- Make connections with the community;
- Being aware of their responsibilities and rights as citizens and acting accordingly;
- Contributing to the aesthetic and cultural life of their community in any way they can.
- (The Official Guidelines for TEFL in Morocco, 2007:6–7)

## Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning, or project-work is an essential part of the Moroccan EFL textbooks. It is integrated from beginner to advanced levels, with themes and topics that suit students' proficiency and mastery of the language. A project is any activity in which learners as individuals or groups gather and process data from a variety of sources in order to achieve a pre-stated objective and finally present it to the whole class (The Official Guidelines, 2007). Most projects have an end-product – i.e. an oral or written report, a poster, a file, a handbook, an audio or a video cassette or any other presentation format. Project-based learning has a lot of benefits for students who prefer working collaboratively on learning activities. Research has shown that students who have difficulties with traditional classroom, textbook, and lecture learning benefit a lot from a project-based learning experience, which more closely aligns with their learning style and preference (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2008). It is important that such projects are based on authentic, real-world problems and questions that students care about.

Measuring skills like collaboration, teamwork, or critical thinking for instance cannot be achieved through multiple choice or gap filling tasks.

### Learner training

A common feature of Moroccan EFL textbooks is the incorporation of learner training sections in different units of the textbooks. Learning how to learn, or learner training, refers to “teachers' intervention to help learners make regular use of various language learning strategies in order to learn effectively, operate competently in real-life situations, and solve real-life tasks” (The Official Guidelines, 2007). Downes (2005) and Anderson (2007) claim that learner training involves self-instructional processes and strategies which can be used in autonomous learning or in conventional training on “how to learn.” Such training enhances learners' awareness of the language and the process of language learning. It is also aimed at involving learners in the planning of their own learning via supplying them with strategies of time management, organisation and self-assessment. This type of training is one way of providing learners with necessary learning tools that would help them continue learning on their own outside of school.

### Assessment and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills may be more difficult to assess than factual knowledge. Measuring skills like collaboration, teamwork, or critical thinking, for instance, cannot be achieved through multiple choice or gap-filling tasks. Newer tests with

new standards designed to assess critical thinking or problem-solving are needed in order to measure such skills. While performance assessments can always be an alternative to high-stakes tests, it is considered a subjective and time-consuming option.

In the Moroccan EFL context, for instance, performance-based assessment is often used to assess the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). This kind of assessment can easily measure learners' use of structures, appropriate vocabulary items and functions in a performance task. However, although it can provide information on what learners know and what they are able to do with that knowledge, it is still not clear if this type of assessment is enough to measure things like their critical thinking and problem solving skills. Fortunately there are alternative forms of assessment available, such as journal, portfolio, projects, self-assessment, and peer-assessment. Teachers can use four alternative assessment forms for this:

1. **Journal Assessment:** This is a learner's own ongoing record of expressions, experiences and reflections on a given topic.
2. **Portfolio Assessment:** This is a "purposeful" collection of work that helps to define the learner's efforts and achievements in a specified area throughout the course.
3. **Project Assessment:** This assessment measures the learner's ability in "real life" tasks and situations.
4. **Self-Assessment:** A fundamental component of autonomous learning is the ability to assess one's own progress and areas that need improvement. Learner self-assessment ought to be incorporated into every evaluation process. Learners would be allowed to examine and evaluate their own English language learning. (The Official Guidelines, 2007: 74).

Generally speaking, the skills that have been reviewed in this article are widely regarded as a prerequisite for schools and teachers of today. Thus, there is a need to promote such skills in our educational system in order to adapt education to the present and prepare our students for the future, and hopefully meet workplace demands and technological advancements at the same time.

#### Note

1 / Systems thinking is a way of understanding reality that emphasises the relationships among the system's parts, rather than the parts themselves.

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# Critical thinking as a core competence for the future



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**Abstract** – *The idea of learning as a transfer of knowledge pure and simple has been increasingly challenged. A complex future requires tools and abilities enabling us to respond effectively without needing to rely on others. This article explores the role of creativity, critical and independent thinking as well as core skills and competences that are useful for a self-reliant individual. Educators need to interact with learners in ways that raise their consciousness to question assumptions about established routines and systems and motivate learners towards critical thinking in life and in learning.*

We live in an era of change. Technology and globalisation are two strong driving forces, changing the way we interact, learn and work. Advances in technology mean that competences such as communication include new and more complex skill sets compared to only a few years ago. We are increasingly attending virtual meetings, and learning activities are often conducted online. More and more services, such as filling in your tax return, applying for a job and so on, are done online. Snail mail is now almost obsolete. Trends and progress in technology have made information readily available, and it comes from many sources. This means that there is a need to be selective in the way we consume information. We also need to apply critical thinking when it comes to processing it. New realities and ways of life to which we are exposed create different and complex interactions that require skills in order to act quickly, independently and thoughtfully as well as to think critically in order to question and analyse information and to make effective decisions.

## The need for critical thinking

A fast-paced world requires skills and competences that can keep up with the rapid changes and enable us to adapt to society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life. Surviving in the future therefore has to include skills and competences that aim to promote the ability to think in a critical way through life experiences from a personal, civic, social and even an economic perspective. Borrowing from





Community learners in Kenya applying critical thinking.

Dewey and Piaget, Kolb (1984) developed ways of enhancing critical thinking through the model of experiential learning based on

- experience,
- reflection on experience,
- forming abstract concepts arising from that reflection, and finally
- testing the concepts.

Such reflective practices can promote autonomous learning, and aim to develop understanding and critical thinking skills. In this article, I will consider competences by first looking at capabilities and focusing on the role of self-reliance as a component of critical thinking, after which I will review the role of a critical being and finally look at how critical thinking is a practical competence for the future.

Surviving in the future therefore has to include skills and competences that aim to promote the ability to think in a critical way through life experiences from a personal, civic, social and even an economic perspective.

### Developing practical capabilities

Human beings progress in life through interaction with their environment, family, home, community and society at large. As we plan our progress and development, we create situations that shape and optimise our practical capabilities to manage our environments. This requires flexible and practical capabilities to shape the physical, social, technological and cultural ways that will nurture positive progress. Those abilities involve empowerment and self-reliance, to be creative in life choices that will shape that future in the way that we envision. Supporting the development of such capabilities should involve empowering individuals and communities to be able to “do” and to “be”. According to Nussbaum (2011), this capability to do and to be is about the availability of genuine opportunities where questions such as “what are people able to do” are considered, shifting the emphasis onto skills that create opportunity. This approach looks at abilities to evolve and to use knowledge effectively in order to strengthen skills and competences for life and work through critical thinking. We knew this in the past, but we have lost it. Capabilities to operate and act in this way have been eroded over time, mostly during the period of colonisation, where capabilities and confidence to act independently were suppressed, particularly in Africa.



## The effects of colonialism on self-reliance

Colonisation in Africa was built on perceived ideas of the levels of the human race and the place of the African people who, it was felt, needed to be modernised. Political, health, education and cultural systems were set up based on the colonisers' culture, and indigenous systems were disregarded as inadequate or non-existent. These systems created a limited sense of who the communities were, leading to experiences of self-hate, low self-esteem and lack of respect for one's own culture and the start of an experience of a peculiar type of psychological dependency on others (Woolman, 2001). When most African countries gained independence in the 1960s, ideologies such as materialism and consumerism were embraced by indigenous peoples, and colonial-style leadership continued, embracing repressive and undemocratic systems and structures which the new leaders had observed and learnt. The citizens considered themselves free and independent, but they were still mentally colonised, still dependent on the former coloniser to provide guidance (Mungazi, 1996). Colonisation, due to its oppressive ways, had rendered the indigenous people incapable of practicing creativity, and had left them without the ability to mould their own lives.

## The role of critical thinking in self-reliance

Progress and staying competitive in a complex future is an elaborate process of making choices and freedom to make those choices. This requires education and learning that look beyond creating skills for livelihood and income generation which are narrow in the way they focus on a set of skills for particular tasks. The perceived potential for skills which generate short-term profits will take individuals only so far. Dilemmas and challenges that arise from a complex environment would need skills that enable one to examine and reflect on issues and grasp current events in the world in a way that can support practical decision-making. Critical thinking is a skill that enables one to "self-evolve" through reflection, evaluation and decision-making. This may lead to improved self-esteem and self-confidence. In adult learning situations, this becomes essential when it comes to enabling learners to identify obstacles that prevent them from reaching their goals. Critical thinking enables them to operate in a self-reliant and efficient way in a potentially complex future, and to become capable and critical beings.

## The critical being

Reflecting and acting in a critical way is more than a set of skills, it is an approach to life centred on the concept of a "critical being". This concept embraces critical reflection, critical self-evaluation and critical action where a critical person becomes more than a critical thinker. He/she is able to critically engage with the world through self-critique and challenging that which appears to be self-evident. Barnett (1997) suggested a way of looking at being critical in levels made

up of critical reason (knowledge), critical reflection (the self) and critical action (the world), where he emphasised the need to contest and challenge issues in order to be free of beliefs and knowledge systems that limit potential.

Some learning processes often focus on outcomes that have defined and pre-determined competences, which may limit critical thought due to the defined outcome. If learning encourages open conversation, where the outcome is open to a learner's circumstances based on the issues that they are addressing, critical thinking and open-ended reflections on concepts take place. This way individuals can look beyond dependence on a defined way of thinking or working, and become self-reliant by developing a flexible set of skills that fit into a rapidly-moving world that is continually reshaping itself.

## Perception of the critical being in the future

Educators and leaders have an obligation to support adult learners in overcoming the effects of domination that eroded self-efficacy and gave way to a mind-set of inadequacy. Community development initiatives, for example, continually rely on aid and on the support of government and international agencies to solve local problems. This lack of belief in individual and community ability is perpetuated by an education system that does not expose learners to creative and critical perspectives and exposes citizens to a future of dependence. If competences do not include critical thinking, then when a crisis situation arises, the reflective process that can enable one to address the situation is ineffective.

In critical thinking, the learner actively constructs new ideas or concepts and supports a learner's efforts towards becoming aware of their surroundings beyond their immediate contacts. (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). They become aware that any opportunity can be a learning opportunity, and that it does not have to be in a certain setting for it to qualify as a learning process. This awareness of opportunities for learning can enhance experiences and offer an opportunity to reflect and to identify useful ways to navigate through the myriad of issues, both current ones and those which are to be faced in the future. Exercising thinking in a critical manner as a way of life has the potential to translate into a transformation of learners' outlook on life in general.

## Critical thinking in community learning – a Kenyan example

Approaches to community learning should include a process that explores skills and competences for self-reliance through critical thinking as a way to survive now and in the future. Community and adult educators should think creatively, and also support learners in thinking and acting creatively and critically in their approach to life. This can begin with the way in which educators interact with the learners in order to explore and expose that potential using creative methods that encourage opportunities for thought, discussion and personal expression.

In my research study with Kenyan communities, evidence showed that participants had not been exposed to learning and working in ways that enabled them to reflect and think critically and to engage with issues. When presented with opportunities to work in this way, the groups demonstrated innate capabilities to reflect and evaluate situations and showed a desire to develop skills that could be useful for their decision-making process. In this research process, the participants were engaged in a way that required them to reflect on, evaluate and respond to questions presented to them, and then to discuss their ideas emerging from that thinking process. By working with community participants in this way, we demonstrated faith in the participants' abilities to apply themselves. By respecting the ideas that emerged, learners were able to recognise their capabilities to think and act independently, and to begin to work towards building confidence and self-belief.

### Critical thinking as a future competence

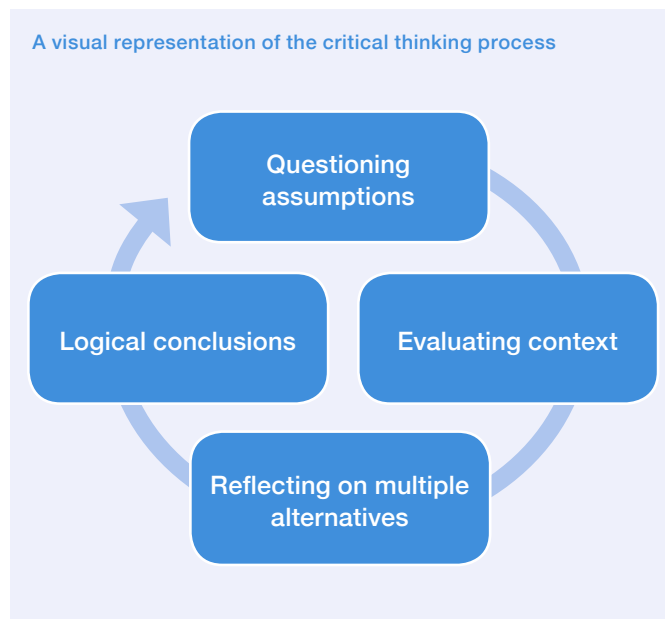
If critical thinking helps us make better informed decisions, then we are able to avoid certain mistakes that would have occurred unnecessarily. There is no specific guarantee that critical thinking will provide success and happiness, but it is useful when it comes to avoiding dependence on others and choices that may lead to unnecessary difficulties. In the words of earlier thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, critical thinking liberates us, guides us through the journey of finding meaning for ourselves, and helps us understand why we believe what we believe. As critical thinkers or critical beings, we do not naively accept knowledge or situations, but we re-think our circumstances based on the evidence that we gather, in order to improve our situations. Critical thinking is not being suggested here as the perfect route to freeing man from what Kant (1784) referred to as "immaturity", but it can act as a starting point for assessing what one needs.

When critical thinking is used constructively with the purpose of attempting to understand our knowledge and to reason things out, then we are able to put issues into perspective, and this can be a positive process. Critical thinking allows us to question things, and this in turn enables us to construct new ideas from knowledge that we have and to build on that knowledge rather than depending on other people to "help" or "advise" us without applying ourselves first. Actively constructing new ideas and concepts requires internalising knowledge and building the learning based on the information learnt. This means that learning becomes an individual's active process to discover principles, ideas and facts. Critical thinking enables people to go through this process, to focus on their development and to review their motivation, self-efficacy and even attitudes towards the learning process.

This shifts the focus on to competences for decision-making based on critical reflective practice that enhances continuous learning and meaningful improvement as well as progress. This means for the future that practical skills and

competences will need to focus on creative and critical thinking that leads to self-reliance centred on:

- An ability to question assumptions and being able to separate fact from opinions. Questioning the way we think and act in order to unveil gaps and non-logic to uncover what is beneath.
- Recognising what is in the context by evaluating the arguments through an objective analysis of examining the quality of any supporting evidence. Then exploring what the wider issues in the subject or context are likely to be and being aware of possible future trends.
- Reflecting on multiple alternatives and establishing the usefulness of the information influencing today and affecting the future.
- Knowing how to bring the process to an end through logical conclusions and being sufficiently flexible to change position in the light of new evidence.



By acquiring and updating practical critical thinking as a central part of skills and competences, people can adapt to society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, thus taking more control of their future. This process encourages continuous learning and emphasises knowing, doing and being. It advances levels of knowledge in a way that reminds us that learning represents a way of life that can be affected by the way in which we choose to respond to what life presents to us. Our outlook, self-beliefs and habits of the mind provide an open-minded attitude that enables learning to take place in a way which builds effective skills and competences that are useful for a fast-paced world.

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# Pesticides, batteries and dead cows: environmental education in Bolivia



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*July, 2016, Achacachi, Bolivia. The environmental educator Edwin Alvarado Terrazas is on the eastern shore of Lake Titicaca, 96 km from La Paz and at an altitude of 3854m. He is teaching a class at the Avichaca Centre for Alternative Education.*

*Edwin and the villagers have gathered in a courtyard. The environmental educator just filled water into a glass and a bucket. While pointing at the bucket he says: "This part is salt water. It is in the seas and oceans. If we were to drink salt water every day, we would do damage to our kidneys." Then he lifts up the glass, with an amount of water many times smaller than that found in the bucket, and warns: "From this fresh water, only one small part is available to us."*

*To demonstrate the value of the fresh water available, he fills a syringe with less than a millilitre and approaches the participants: "This is the water we humans know about. All the groundwater we know about is here!" Edwin has just shared the most important information and has also caught the attention of the people. Now he can continue, explaining what can happen if the body of a cow or a used battery comes into contact with the water all human life depends on.*

When one asks Edwin Alvarado Terrazas about the environmental situation in Bolivia, he leaves one with no doubt as to the problems his country is facing. According to Edwin, it is due in large part to the massive use of industrial products by a society that still has neither adequate infrastructure nor the environmental education necessary to handle these products safely. He is especially critical of the fact that they are sold to citizens without them being aware of the environmental implications of their purchase: "The 'modern world' seeks them out in order to accommodate products and services, but not to indicate the risk of, for example, the inadequate final disposal of the batteries of cell phones."

There are three main issues that are troubling Edwin: toxic waste, agrochemicals and plastic waste. Over recent years, a veritable flood of electrical appliances, mobile phones and other electronic products have arrived in the homes of Bolivians – all these products contain toxic substances, but there is almost no infrastructure for their secure storage or their safe recycling: "We don't have a planned, structured, technological way to deal with these wastes. It is obvious to me that there is an initial failure regarding the subject Environmental Responsibility of Enterprises and in some cases of the state. For example, a very important phone company in Bolivia reports that it signed an agreement with a recycling company to remove used cell batteries. I followed this for two years and the company never left Spain to come to our country. With measures like this you can't take the first step to success."



Courtesy of ARD Alpha/Bayerischer Rundfunk

In agriculture, pesticides and other potentially harmful substances are used even though many farmers and workers are not qualified to handle these products safely: “The street vendors sell them to poor people who have no training and don’t get information.” Edwin warns that these sellers tend to take advantage of the ignorance of their customers: ‘It’s the best!’ ‘It’s stronger; it’s better!’ ‘More, more, you really have to put it on!’ That is what is heard in the streets.”

Finally, Edwin affirms that, with the arrival of a lifestyle oriented toward rapid consumption, the use of plastic packaging in the everyday life of Bolivians has increased exponentially: “The ‘fast life’ makes us big consumers of packaging, bags, and it’s all plastic! Packed lunch for a family of five persons: 5 plastic bags for soup, five bags for the main dish, the salad aside, another bag, peppers and other meat, another bag, spicy llajua [sauce based on tomato and red peppers], another bag, the refreshments, another bag ... and multiply that. It’s frightening.”

## Each one of them have cell phones much more modern than mine.

There is no lack of work for an environmental educator in Bolivia – but where to start? Edwin’s approach is pragmatic and realistic, trying to concentrate on the possible: He can’t exert much pressure on businesses nor accelerate political or congressional action. But he can tell people about their

dependence on nature through a short demonstration with a bucket, a glass and a syringe. It can help the Andean people to rediscover their traditional respect for Pacha Mama – Mother Earth – and the realisation that the damage done to it also hurts the community. It is useful to revive the close relationship between man and earth: For a farmer, to take the corpse of a cow away from a sewer so as not to contaminate water is just merely an extra duty after a long day – the protection of Pacha Mama is a matter of honour and pride.

However, it is essential to connect this notion of pride with practical instruction, says Edwin: “In the end, each one of them have cell phones much more modern than mine.” Consequently, what really counts is knowing how to act once the cell phone no longer works. Many people are willing to do their part, but don’t know how. They lack the most basic information about the negative effects appliances, agrochemicals or plastic products may have if they come in contact with available fresh water reserves. According to Edwin, the task of environmental educators is to disseminate practical knowledge like this: “Through the medium of education, we inform them about the risks involved in buying these products on the street, the categories of risk for the products – which now have colour classifications according to their degree of toxicity – of the risks to health, the economy and production (agri-pastoral) and of the possibility of combating pests and to fertilise soil with natural recipes.”

Edwin tries to transmit to his students all the knowledge necessary for them to protect Pacha Mama on their own,



Environmental educator Edwin Alvarado Terrazas demonstrates how scarce drinking water is (Courtesy of ARD Alpha/Bayerischer Rundfunk).

without any outside support. He emphasises that this is necessary because there is still a lack of infrastructure to treat toxic waste and plastic adequately: “From nine major cities and 339 municipalities, only three have suitable facilities for the treatment of special waste. One city – just recently – began collecting electronic waste. All of them have copy-cat campaigns to ‘collect’ this waste, but the result is a hoax. An NGO announced one of these campaigns to collect batteries – inappropriately calling it recycling – in the town of Copacabana, nearby the magnificent Titicaca. All the students participated, with support from the mayor, and once all the mountains of batteries were collected, they buried them near the lake! It’s a time bomb.” He confirms that there is only “one municipality that, in the scope of its powers, tries to regulate these issues and create infrastructure and systems for the recovery of hazardous waste through campaigns.”

### “Uka jach’a uru jutaskiw!” say the Aymara: “That great day is coming!”

Where there is no official and definitive solution, a temporary solution must be found on the private level. Edwin believes that it is best not to mobilise or gather too much waste in order to avoid problems and massive risks: “In 336 municipalities it’s only possible to teach, for example, transitional home confinement of polluting waste, with rudimentary domestic methods: Place your batteries in properly covered PET con-



Courtesy of ARD Alpha/Bayerischer Rundfunk.

tainers, keep them out of reach of children. And when the container is full, store it in some home-made concrete structure.”

Despite all his criticism, Edwin does not have a completely pessimistic view of the environmental situation in Bolivia. He sees tangible progress on plastic waste: “The changes in Bolivia have been important in the last 15 years. Previously no one even imagined the possibility of separating waste at its source, because the companies contracted by the municipality for collection and treatment mixed all waste together. The day will come when municipal contracts contemplate differentiated collection and utilisation of waste.





Villagers learn to understand the fundamental connection between their own behaviour and the ecological situation in their area (Courtesy of ARD Alpha/Bayerischer Rundfunk).

‘Uka jach’a uru jutaskiw!’ say the Aymara: ‘That great day is coming!’

Our capital, La Paz, just approved its first contract for solid waste management with a company that must collect waste differentially and deliver it to a processing plant composting organic waste – which is already operating on a small scale – and a plastics reprocessing factory (recycled plastic material used for example to make fences, floors and car bodies) which is also in early-stage operation.”

In addition to progress on a practical level, Edwin sees important advances in the field of environmental education: “There are strong entities working to enhance and restore cultural values.” Edwin highlights three broadcasters committed to the welfare of the indigenous and peasant population: Radio San Gabriel, that calls itself “the voice of the Aymara people”; ACLO, the Jesuit radio network, which claims on its website that “through our advocacy of social, economic and productive development, educative communication – in harmony with the environment – we seek to achieve a good life.”

Finally, Edwin mentions the radio channel of the Jaihuayco Centre for Continuing Education (CEPJA), which has programmes in the Quechua language. “In these cultural areas there is an understanding, for example, that water is the blood of Mother Earth. In this sense, I think it will be possible – in a short time, in the medium term – to connect with contemporary issues, because it is about saving the life of Mother Earth.”

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# If you cannot read, forget about the other skills



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**Abstract** – *There must be a starting point when we talk about skills and competencies for life and work. It is all very well to list all sorts of cognitive skills we will need in the future. If we cannot even read, those lists are moot. This article looks at the reasons some boys from low-income families do not attend school in certain parts of Zambia, and what can be done about it. The authors draw on their experience as lecturers in adult literacy and research.*

Zambia faces many challenges educationally. Not all children of school age are enrolled to learn at the primary education level. Some of these children include boys who are not engaged in any learning activities. Lack of adequate school opportunities and shelter (home environment) are some of the main reasons that are given for not learning. In rural areas, some communities do not have primary schools nearby and children have to walk long distances every day. For some, this becomes an obstacle to learning. In most urban areas, schools are often available nearby. Urban areas have public and private schools that cater for the majority of children. There are government and stakeholders' community schools that serve children in need, such as orphaned, vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Nongovernmental organisations that offer education to such children include Development Aid from People to People (DAPP) and Family Legacy. In spite of this provision, not all the children enrol and learn in these schools. Among the affected children are some boys who have various reasons for not engaging in learning activities.

Very often it is a question of money. These boys must earn to stay alive. As a result they miss a chance to learn in their childhood and end up as illiterate adults. The missed early childhood education is the crucial stage in human development.



### The tragedy of the individual, and the tragedy of society

An illiterate population is not only a question of individual misfortunes. Shaw and McKay (1942) contend that, aside from the lack of behavioural regulation, socially disorganised neighbourhoods tend to produce “criminal traditions” that could be passed to successive generations of youths. This system of pro-delinquency attitudes is a clear and present danger for the community. That is exactly why we are so interested in this topic.

Research has been conducted to test for the “reciprocal effects” of social disorganisation (Bursik, 1986) and to test for the potential impact that levels of social disorganisation of given communities may have on neighbouring communities (Heitgerd and Bursik, 1987).

Social organisation and disorganisation influence youth behaviour in many ways. On one hand, the boys of today will hand down behavioural traits they exhibit to future generations; and on the other, they will hand down problems emanating from unity or disunity of family organisations and their (in)stability.

### Why are they not learning?

Homelessness is one of the major deterrents that restricts boys’ attainment of primary education. A growing number of boys in the urban areas of Lusaka, the capital and largest city of Zambia, are homeless. They are aged between six and

fourteen. The majority are usually found at City Market, Soweto Market, Town Centre Trading area, Kamwala Shopping Centre, Major roads within Lusaka and other trading places in the city. It is common to see boys loitering in the streets and begging for essential commodities from people who pass by. Some of them end up stealing. Without a home to go to, such boys have to find means of fending for themselves. Apparently, the population of these boys keeps on increasing because there are some mothers who are also always on the same streets. These boys end up making such places their home. Since the mothers always take their children with them to the market to go and beg from other people, they are rarely at home. Many of the boys do not attend school because they are always on the streets, trading areas and market places looking for food and other things.

### Money first, learning later

Some of the boys in the rural areas of Katete engage in economic activities to prepare for their future. They do this at the expense of attending school. As early as at the age of six, some start herding cattle. They enter into contracts to work for a period of either three or four years during which they cannot get away to go and attend primary school. They work to earn a herd of cattle at the end of the contract. Some of the boys leave their homes to go and stay with the owners of the cattle while others remain with their parents or guardians while they work. Some of the boys decide to stop herding cattle after finishing the first contract while others choose to

go into another one so that they can accumulate two cows. Those that go to herd cattle for one contract have more chances of starting school early at the age of nine or ten than those who go for two contracts. By the time they are through with the second contract, such boys are eleven or twelve years old and have become too old to enrol in grade one. Some of the boys grow up illiterate because of the loss of time in their early childhood, which deterred them from attaining primary education.

### Illiteracy among the “boys”

Illiteracy handicaps, incapacitates and deprives an individual of the ability to meaningfully integrate into academic and cooperate society. Excluded people do not benefit from education provision. The boys in rural and urban areas have different reputations. While the boys in rural areas work to prepare for their future, those in urban areas live on hand-outs and stealing from other people for immediate consumption. Urban boys do not have a definite future, unlike the ones in rural areas who have homes to go back to after they finish working.

The boys in rural areas prepare for their life early and have stable homes. Parents play an important role in ensuring that they help boys transition into adulthood. For instance, in rural areas parents encourage boys to secure farming portions (farming land). Once a boy comes of age, he is given some farmland to build his household. They work so that they too can build homes for their future families. Coupled with this is the inculcation of traditional knowledge in the boys. Parents teach the boys the “rites of passage”, imparting the necessary traditional knowledge to enable them to function in society. Without doubt, such boys have a chance of learning basic and functional literacy skills in their adulthood.

In contrast, some boys in urban areas come from a background where their homes are non-existent. To a great extent, broken extended family systems have contributed to the boys’ predicament. Research (UNICEF, 1997; Shorter and Onyancha, 1999; Liyungu, 2005) indicates that boys in urban areas desert homes to beg for money on the streets to buy what they want; boys have rebellious attitudes towards parents and guardians. They are concerned with surviving their immediate situation and take things as they come. This makes them unstable and explains their unpredictable behaviour. As a means for survival, they often get involved in immoral activities. They grow up bereft of basic resources for making their own homes let alone the much-needed knowledge and skills for work and practice.

### Causes of adult illiteracy

When children fail to attain primary education, they grow up as illiterates. Boys lacking the basic needs for survival cannot prioritise literacy skills. When they live in places which are not stable and unsuitable for creating homes, they end up not being spotted as people in need of certain facilities such

as early childhood and primary education. Without homes or work places, it becomes difficult for education providers to plan for learning programmes to help them. It also becomes hard to reach them with resources meant to alleviate their deplorable situation. Thus, it becomes a double crippling situation. On one hand, when it becomes difficult to identify potential illiterate adults, the likelihood of them growing up without literacy skills is very high. On the other hand, when root causes of illiteracy are not addressed, illiteracy continues to prevail.

When the boys take up roles of herding cattle at the expense of attending early childhood and primary school, they lose out on attaining literacy and skills required in adulthood. If children are allowed to grow up without attending primary school, they end up becoming illiterates. The minute no special programmes for imparting literacy, numeracy and vocational skills are provided to such boys, they remain functionally illiterate.

Once they become adults, they take up roles that have extra demands on them, such as fending for their new families. This is a kind of situation that causes some of these young adults to continue living with their illiteracy. This is a typical situation in which many boys from rural and urban communities find themselves in today in Zambia.

### Developing skills and competencies for different occupations

The “working and street boys” require support so that they can develop skills for use in life and occupations they are interested in. They also need literacy, numeracy and occupational skills to develop their cognitive abilities, applicable in enhancing their livelihoods. Literacy and numeracy skills form a basis which can help develop confidence and competence in productive activities they engage in. The skills in this case refer to learned behaviours that draw on a person’s proficiency and capacity to perform certain tasks dictated by the environment one is in. These skills only become viable when they are competently applied in one’s life. Competency therefore denotes “a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully” (Washington State Human Resource, n.d.).

The boys need context-specific skills that are responsive to their needs. They need literacy and vocational skills to enable them to improve their livelihoods. Olouch (2005) indicates the need to provide occupation-oriented skills necessary for increased economic activity. We are hopeful that this is one way in which those boys who have to spend their childhood herding cattle can be accorded an opportunity to attain literacy and numeracy as well as vocational skills related to economic activities they engage in. This is because literacy correlates with social skills “which brings long-term benefits and has a positive impact on peoples’ personal, family and social lives. It can increase a person’s well-being and self-confidence and combat feelings of social isolation or exclusion” (NALA, 2010:3). World Health Organisation

(WHO, 1999) defines life skills as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. The skills that enable people to develop competencies for taking up actions for initiating positive change in their lives. Such are the skills required for survival, capacity development and quality of life.

## Literacy and numeracy skills form a basis which can help develop confidence and competence in productive activities.

Learning also has to be taken to where the boys are found and allow them to relate it to their daily activities. Doing so will pave the way for experiential learning which offers practical experience conducted in a supportive environment (WHO, 1999). Moreover, we propose that the boys should be provided with their own learning experiences which suit their needs. This can be a way of providing relevant education to the “working and street boys”. This approach corroborates with what WHO (1999) further suggests, that the learning experiences offered should emanate from activities the boys are interested in. For example, the boys in rural areas who engage in herding cattle should be offered related skills in farming. There is also a need to identify what the street boys in urban areas who engage in immoral activities can do to change their lives for the better.

Care must be taken to allow the working and street boys to learn basic skills required for accelerating learning in their areas of interest. This should be done on an understanding of enabling them to construct knowledge and perceive what they want to become in life. The boys should be made to understand and perceive such skill acquisition as a way of transforming their lives and attain an all-encompassing future.

We cannot wait and watch while boys are living without literacy and other skills crucial for their own development. For this reason, there is need to intervene in their lives so these people can adopt lifestyles and patterns of production that will enable them to survive socially and economically. The boys in the rural communities do not participate in education because it does not seem to promise the expected livelihoods. Rogers (2003) agrees that to realise certain benefits, literacy should be contextualised. The type of activities people engage in should give them confidence of sustainability in the future. People need to participate in education activities that encourage them to become involved and committed in creating a society that brings a sustainable future.

There should be an exception for those in urban areas whose livelihood is not stable and clear. They need special measures. The need to impart literacy skills in boys cannot be underestimated. To succeed, a supportive environment is required in which they, too, can acquire skills required for shaping their livelihoods. The aim is to enable the boys to make informed decisions about livelihoods that can sustain

them. Though there are concerted efforts being made by both government and other stakeholders (individuals, NGOs, co-operating partners), there is a need to invest more resources. This should be done so that the boys can stop wasting their lives on things which hardly yield tangible fruits.

We cannot afford to continue turning a blind eye to the predicament of these boys, because doing so is detrimental to sustainable development. These same boys are likely to contribute to the cycle of illiteracy and poverty if the situation is not checked and reversed. The vicious cycle of underdevelopment needs to be cut and attention be paid on positive aspects grounded in the inclusion of the boys in basic skills programmes specific to rural and urban settings.

## People’s mode of producing wealth must be the starting point for initiating skills programmes tailored to development of their livelihoods.

### Lessons learned

All education activities must begin from the interest and circumstances of the learners. Development-oriented learning should be built on and entrenched in cultural practices of the people to allow for sustainable education to prevail. Learning must be based on the cultural specificity of people’s world view. People’s range of contributions to the development process must be the centre of attention. People’s mode of producing wealth must be the starting point for initiating skills programmes tailored to development of their livelihoods.

There is a need to foster cooperation between skills provision and production activities. The central issue in credibility of skills provided is the appreciation of people’s traditions and lifestyles which serve as the starting point for any learning. The education providers must be fully cognisant of cultural aspects of the people and make them become partners in learning and not mere recipients.

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# Maria Margarida Machado

Short  
Interview

## **Adult Education and Development: Which skills and competencies do we need to survive in the future?**

*Maria Margarida Machado:* When dealing with a future perspective, which considers humanity as protagonist of its own history, collectively constructing a better world, I believe that to think of survival demands from each one of us the skill and competence to perceive him or herself, firstly, as an active subject in this process. In order for this to happen it is necessary to know the reality of which we are a part and to understand the transforming role which each individual and the collectivity exercises in those moments of permanence and rupture which change history. In order to know that reality we need, amongst other necessities, to analyse what we did in the past and what we are doing in the present with our lives, as spaces of sociability and nature. In addition to self-criticism, attitude, initiative and determination are fundamental in order to seek the changes necessary to confront the challenges which are posed based on that analysis. To identify the successes produced and the problems caused by the way in which we live, live together and take possession of the natural resources, is the intrinsic condition for survival in the future, as it was in different human experiences which preceded us.

## **How can we learn them?**

I believe that learning takes place when there is access to knowledge and attitude. It takes place as individual or collective learning and in our relation with nature. It is obvious that learning is the result of individual effort, as without individual effort it will not be produced. However, it is not possible to reduce it to isolated initiatives and attitudes, since in dealing with living and survival, the collective element is fundamental in order to consolidate access to knowledge already produced and for the production of new knowledge. The same can be said in relation to attitudes, since in a society in which the posture of individuals is the construction of its reality, this will not happen in an individualised way because the changes which history produces require collective actions. Unfortunately, humanity has not always put into practice the ability to know and the competence to act coherently, given that frequently we perceive amongst us less subjects and more objects of history, given the total absence of the necessary knowledge to act in another way, or even, given the process of accommodation when faced with the challenges which learning raises.

## **Who should teach them?**

The spaces in which learning takes place are multiple. Starting with the family unit with all its diverse configurations today, with regard to the basic necessities for survival and living of individuals from when they are born to when they die. Passing through the different groups which exercise, throughout our lives, a fundamental role in helping to access and produce knowledge, and likewise in our attitudes. Of these we can highlight the formal institutions of teaching which ought to be at the disposal of all subjects, from infancy and throughout adult life, since they retain a legacy of knowledge and of processes of learning required for the production of material and immaterial existence: cultural and religious institutions which deal with that learning for beyond the immediate, challenging us to learn with imagination and sensibility; social organisations of class, trade unions, diverse associations and movements, in which knowledge and action, based on a defined agenda, contribute to the consolidation of historical subjects.



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# Soft skills in non-formal education: building capacities of the youth



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**Abstract** – *This article describes the importance of soft skills with special focus on the youth and the non-formal education system. It takes readers through some of the efforts made by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) in bridging the gaps that exist today with regard to soft skills. Taking a clue from Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the broader discourse at global level, it tries to explain the scope and usefulness of soft skills.*

In recent years, emphasis on the importance of soft skills has grown all over the world. It is no longer enough to know the technical aspects of a job, but how this knowledge will transform into output. Our behaviour, attitude, communication skills, etc., play an important role in the work place, and when looking for a job.

These have often been called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, or soft skills. We are talking about knowledge which includes a broad set of skills, work habits and character traits that are believed – by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others – to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in contemporary careers and workplaces.

Today, no one works in isolation. We are all connected to each other in a given job scenario. Multidisciplinary teams are needed to complete complex problems. To even address these complex problems or challenges we need soft skills. In this context, excellent knowledge of a subject without a good relationship with the team and no skills in team leadership will end badly, and everyone will be unhappy.

Soft skills include work ethics, attitude, communication skills, emotional intelligence and a whole host of other personal attributes. Sooner or later the discussion on soft skills usually turns to the other variety. Hard skills refer to trade skills and subject matter expertise, e.g. accounting, typing, operating machinery, etc. They are quantifiable and their application is universal. Hard skills are specific teachable abilities that are needed to perform a job.





### Why emphasis on the soft skills

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012 of UNESCO suggests putting education to work while talking about the youth and skills. Three skills that everyone needs to learn are presented. They are:

1. foundational skills that include literacy and numeracy and are a prerequisite for further education;
2. technical skills that are needed to do a job, e.g. operating a machine or accounting; and lastly
3. transferable skills that include things like creativity and communication.

Many authors/trainers of soft skills speak about the 4Cs of learning. They are: communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.

Start with yourself. Look around you. The heterogeneity of groups working together has increased over the years. People, especially the youth, have been moving to other continents in search of better work opportunities. At workplaces, teams with diverse backgrounds work with newer communities and groups. These heterogeneous groups need the technical know-how to do a job as well as be sensitive and empathetic to the teams and groups that they work with.

### Focus on the youth

Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education talks about increasing the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. In many places, governments have also been promoting the use of skills through various programmes and policies.

The role of the youth in society has been evolving. Four roles stand out:

1. Civil Role – expectations about the ability to understand and influence civic decision making;
2. Environmental Role – understanding and being sensitive to one's own environmental issues;
3. Economic Role – the youth have to earn their livelihood in today's competitive scenario; and lastly
4. Social Role – understanding and appreciating the social differences of different communities.

Let's take India as an example. A recent economic survey concluded that by 2020, India's population would have an average age of 29. This makes it the only country with a surplus of young people in its population. These young people need to be suitably educated and appropriately skilled so they can participate in society and contribute to economic activities. Existing education systems may, at best, teach

technical know-how, but not the soft skills that they still need to learn.

### **PRIA experience of working with the youth**

PRIA has been acting as a facilitator through many of its programmes. These programmes focus on learning for the youth, with their purpose being to make these young people become agents for change. PRIA also helps build up the capacities of the youth so they can take up various issues for their own communities. Recently, PRIA has focused on two broad thematic areas: first, working with the youth on the issue of prevention of violence against women and girls; second, focusing on a combination of skills for work and life by building capacities to use technology to map their own settlements for basic services such as drinking water, sanitation and electricity, etc. The capacity building approaches include interventions aimed at bringing about attitudinal and personal changes. These programmes have been based on principles of participatory action research to change the mind sets of the communities and challenge stereotypes. The interventions focus on combining skills for work and life.

The work on violence against women and girls has helped build the capacities of the youth to speak about the issue with their families, community, elected representatives and other stakeholders such as the police and health sector personnel. These youth, both men and women, belong to conservative and orthodox societal systems. To bring them together in teams working for common goals requires a lot of effort. The capacity building incorporates a holistic approach to help them face similar challenges on their own later in life. The programme on mapping the service delivery of basic services also uses a similar approach to engage with the youth to build capacities. Building capacities on communication, the importance of working in teams, collaboration and leadership, etc., also plays an important part.

### **Soft skills in non-formal education**

Let's take a look at the importance of soft skills in non-formal education. We are talking about "an organised educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives".<sup>1</sup>

Non-formal education addresses the gaps in employability skills in numerous ways. Because soft skills are seen as increasingly important, employers also tend to assess these skills through various tests.

Unfortunately the current formal education system doesn't support the learning of soft skills. Formal education systems usually focus on foundational skills like reading, writing and technical skills. That leaves a wide gap. Non-formal education is well placed and prepared to react. This will ultimately facilitate better working environments, and lead to improved productivity.

### **Building for the region**

PRIA and the DVV South and South East Asia regional office recently organised a workshop on promoting skills for the youth. The deliberations focused on things like: What kind of skills are to be emphasised in this region when it comes to working with the youth? Many countries participating in the workshop talked about building soft skills.

In the end, it was decided to work towards developing soft skills, especially for those working in the non-formal education sector. There are expectations that non-formal education could address the gaps in relation to soft skills. To develop this one step further, PRIA facilitated a training programme for the partners of DVV working in the non-formal education sector in Lao PDR. To mainstream the topic better, a manual was developed focusing on enhancing the understanding of practitioners in non-formal education on soft skills. The manual includes steps and activities for facilitating training on soft skills, and can be used as reference material to facilitate trainings on building understanding on soft skills. To reach a wider audience, PRIA and the DVV South and South East Asia regional office also conducted a training of trainers (ToT) in Cambodia which also included participants from Vietnam and Lao PDR. Some of these participants were from the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO). This training of trainers was facilitated with an understanding to build on the issue of soft skills for those working in the non-formal education system and thus prepare trainers who would take this issue forward and reach to a larger group of persons.

### **Conclusion**

Looking at the broader picture, the importance and awareness on the issue of soft skills have grown. The increase in mentions and focus on such skills in various reports and scholarly articles only confirms this fact. Looking at Asia, the emphasis on such skills has gained momentum. At the First Regional Central Asian Adult Education Forum Key Skills for Youth in 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>2</sup>, organised by the DVV Central Asia Regional Office, participants emphasised the need to work on the issue of soft skills. Education systems should be in a position to prepare adults, especially youth, to deal with complex problems/challenges. Here the role of the state and other stakeholders is very important in engaging with the youth. It is imperative that the apathy of the youth towards various systems is addressed on appropriate platforms. It is also important to support youth leadership in defining systems. Young people need to be involved in the decision making. This can be done by addressing the existing gaps and building capacities wherever needed, soft skills being one of the most important.

Given this scenario, it is important to understand the existing mechanisms and work with them to promote building capacities on the issue of soft skills. This is especially true for the non-formal education sector due to its flexibility in promoting lifelong learning.

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### About the author

**Priti Sharma** has over 19 years of work experience in the development sector and has worked on issues related to local governance, civil society engagement, sexual harassment at the workplace and human resource management. She has worked as a researcher, trainer and coordinator. Currently, she is involved with PRIA International Academy (PIA) as Sr. Programme Manager.

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**“Global Citizenship Education”**

Adult Education and Development 82 dealt with the international debate on global citizenship education and invited authors from different regions, backgrounds and disciplines to share their thoughts and experiences on the topic and related questions such as identity, migration, peace, the meaning of citizenship, globalisation and sustainable development.

Free print copies of issue 82  
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Global  
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The next virtual seminar, on skills and competencies, will start at the end of March 2017 and will last for approximately two weeks. The following articles of this issue will be the starting point of the seminar:



## The New Skills Agenda for Europe

By Dana Bachmann and Paul Holdsworth, European Commission

## Enhancing competencies in the Arab world: issues to be considered

By Rabab Tamish, Betlehem University, Palestine

## The 5 skills it takes to build another possible world – Learning from and for the World Social Forum

By Alessio Surian, University of Padova, Italy

## Soft skills in non-formal education: building capacities of the youth

By Priti Sharma, PRIA International Academy, New Delhi, India

**The seminar is free of charge and open to anyone. Do you want to participate?** Send an e-mail to [voicesrising@icae.org.uy](mailto:voicesrising@icae.org.uy). Registration is open now and until the beginning of the seminar.

The virtual seminar runs via e-mail in English. Your contributions can be sent in English, French or Spanish and will then be translated into English.

If you have questions ahead of the seminar, do not hesitate to contact Cecilia Fernández ([icae@icae.org.uy](mailto:icae@icae.org.uy)) at the ICAE Secretariat in Montevideo, Uruguay.

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## Get Involved! Call for submissions

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### Inclusion and diversity

In the next issue of Adult Education and Development we look at the role adult education plays in building, fostering and understanding diversity. We are also curious how inclusion can be taught, if at all. If you are working with inclusion, or diversity, please write for us! We are looking for practical examples, research results, personal reflections, and projects. If you are critical and think too little (or too much) is done, we also want to hear from you!

Both inclusion and diversity should here be understood in the broadest possible sense. We want to cast our net wide, to catch a rich variety of understandings and realities, from all over the world.

Send us your suggestions, abstracts and ideas in English, Spanish or French to the editor-in-chief Johanni Larjanko ([johanni.larjanko@gmail.com](mailto:johanni.larjanko@gmail.com)) and the managing editor Ruth Sarrazin ([sarrazin@dvv-international.de](mailto:sarrazin@dvv-international.de)) no later than 15 April 2017.

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The interviews with well-known personalities are interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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**Many thanks for your support!**

# Artists in this issue

## Alexandra Burda

Cover artist and illustrator



### **Adult Education and Development: Which skills and competencies did you need to do the illustrations/photos for #AED83?**

*Alexandra Burda:* I would like start by mentioning technology skills – Internet/computer use and the use of specific programs for editing images followed by the English language. Next on the list: artistic skills – drawing/painting, critical thinking, research and analysis, creativity, communication and something that I consider to be very important: intuition.

### **How did you obtain those skills and competencies?**

Many of them I've learned at School/University and developed through continuous contact with that specific field, by that I mean: artistic skills, Languages (English and German), critical thinking. I have read books about what it means to provide service and some self-development literature as well as a few audiobooks. I have learned from my parents and I have learned a lot from all the people I have worked with, both about myself and about the world. I am very curious and this has served me well and I like that I can research a lot on subjects that are of interest to me trough the Internet.

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