

## **World Initiative on Lifelong Learning**

**Close down the Ministry! Rename the Schools and  
Universities!**

**Is that really so outrageous?**

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## **Close down the Ministry. Rename the schools and universities. Is that really so outrageous?**

People, even Ministers, Administrators and Vice-Chancellors are saying so much that is right nowadays - so much that is reasonable and logical, so much that is important and indicative that they have grasped the major issues involved in Lifelong Learning, that I believe that it's time to take the examination and ask how far they really are prepared to go to do what is necessary. If this means being outrageous, so be it. Because much of what is being said is only right and reasonable and logical in its own context - in the context of Adult Education, or of universities or of schools - or in the context of past and present structures. The existence of a new paradigm is recognised, but new paradigms are not inhabited by the past or the present - they are only influenced by the future and by what is different. So let's destroy the present, change the debate, alter the mind-set, to see what the future might hold for Lifelong Learning.

Therefore in reading this I ask you to use your understanding as well as your eyes - to take what I say not literally, but as a metaphor for what needs to be done in Lifelong Learning in order to make it happen. What we need is not more of the same or even better than the same. Lifelong Learning is altogether a different animal. It requires more and better of something completely different if we are to make it accessible to the millions of people who need it in order to survive into a very dissimilar and challenging future.

I have 7 recommendations - call them suggestions if you will - to force us to address the task of creating the future with something like the urgency it deserves. They may be startling to some, but none of us need to worry overmuch because they are extremely unlikely to happen anyway.

### **1. Let us now accept that the age of Education and Training is now over - dead - deceased - devoid of life.**

Let us bury it in the present and let us give it a decent funeral because it has served us well over the past 50 years. It's a difficult concept to grasp and we miss it, until we can also mentally accept that we should also celebrate the **birth of the era of learning**. Learning is alive and well and living in Bratislava, and Munich, and London and Ljubljana. *That's* the nature of the new paradigm and all sectors of society - government, education, business and industry, professional associations - need to work together to understand what it means in practice as well as in concept. From the present time the focus is on learners - their needs and requirements, how they, individual by individual, like to have their learning provided and where and when and by whom. The learner is customer and the customer is king - or queen. In Lifelong Learning we know very well what lifelong means - it means 0-90, hatch to despatch, cradle to grave, maternity to eternity. But we are not at all good in knowing what learning means - what learning styles are, how to use the new technologies wisely and interactively to provoke a meaningful response, how to switch people, many of whom have learning difficulties, on to learning on a mass scale. In some languages the concept of learning is not well expressed, but putting the focus on the learner is the name of today's game. Learning is surely not training, nor is it teaching and it is not even education any more.

### **2. Close down the Ministries of Education.**

They have served their purpose, so we can give them too a decent funeral. However, one week later open them up again under a new brand name - **Ministries for the Development of Human Potential**. Does that mean something different, something far more noble, something far more worth-while? Was it not Einstein who suggested that even his brain was underused by more than 70%?. How much less are the majority of our brains working unless we give them the stimulus of new thinking.

In the week that the Ministry is not functioning, every department should have a series of brainstorms about what exactly is meant by developing human potential, the results of which are written up into strategies, which everyone takes a part in formulating. External people from other Ministries, from educational organisations and from the general public might be

involved in this process. Each employee should then be invited to write a new personal job description which maximises his/her contribution to the development of human potential for the next year - and incidentally improves the development of his/her own potential.

A quotation from the British Science Fiction author, Arthur C Clarke, might be helpful here. In 1963 he said that minimum survival level of the human race is that '**everybody should be educated to the level of semi-literacy of the average college graduate by the year 2000.**' Science Fiction authors are allowed to be a) apocalyptic and b) wrong in their time-scales, but occasionally they say something which strikes at the heart of the matter and events happening in various parts of the world suggest that he is not far from the truth. Unless of course there is a fault in reality.....

3. The third recommendation is related to this. **Rename schools! close them down for a week and open them as organisations for the development of human potential, rename Universities similarly as organisations for the further development of human potential and the workplace as an organisation for the application of human potential.** Forget teachers as teachers - they are now **Learning Counsellors.**

During the close-down week, give the new learning counsellors the task of redefining their job under the new paradigm as developers of human potential. If this does not change the content, focus and methodology of what they do for the benefit of the children, they haven't made the necessary mind-set change. If they do we have what industry might call a win-win situation.

#### **4. Throw away all existing accreditation and qualification systems!**

Most of them are failure oriented, branding some as failures in order to celebrate the success of others. The result is often a mass switching off from education for the rest of peoples' lives. By all means keep tests and examinations but use them as learning opportunities, instruments to develop human potential, exercises in giving information in a non-humiliating or threatening way. Here some attention is needed in order to find acceptable ways of setting and achieving personal goals. Who wins in this situation?

- the system wins - it achieves success in the long term,

- society wins - it gets more relaxed human beings,

- above all the learner wins - there is no longer a stigma attached to the results if they are not judged in that way.

That isn't, as some may say, reducing standards - it's giving everyone a chance to raise them personally and collectively. Unless this question is tackled firmly and sympathetically we will continue to deny millions the opportunity of a learning future.

#### **5. Make Learning fun!**

Isn't this is the most preposterous of them all? The very idea of it - learning as an enjoyable and pleasurable experience! Everyone knows that Learning is pain, and hardship, and hours of drudgery. We academics and cerebral people have no problem with this, but if we want to get through to the millions, and for the sake of a stable society we must, a whole new outlook on learning is needed.

So here perhaps some research is needed into learning styles and methods. There are indications that better learning takes place when the learner is more relaxed. Many industrial education departments have experimented successfully with meditation techniques to improve performance. Interactive technology and virtual reality are just round the corner. Perhaps there is after all some hope for the future.

#### **6. Declare your own city or town or region a 'Community of Learning' -**

This is nothing new. Many centuries B.C. Plato introduced the concept of *Dia Viou Paedaea* - the idea of every citizen striving to achieve maximise his or her potential and of contributing to the general good of the city. Damascus in the 10th and 11th centuries was a City of great Learning in which everyone who wished, and most did, participated in learning. The crusades soon put paid to that.

In the modern day, several cities in the UK - Liverpool, Sheffield, Southampton, Norwich - have designated themselves as 'Cities of Learning' and others such as Goteborg, Bologna, Barcelona are part of network of 'Educating Cities' world-wide.

But unless a Community of learning is defined, it remains merely a label. Any city can apply it to itself. So we need to do some work on determining what a Learning Community is and how it differs from a community which gets on with its normal educational business. In figure 1 below there are some suggestions on what a Learning Community - it does not have to be a city - might be, its defining characteristics as well as some indications about what each sector might need to do to contribute to the whole.

I have a dream for Europe in two parts. Part one of the dream is that every major City should establish itself as a 'City of Learning', a city in which every sector of society - schools, universities, companies, professional associations, interest groups, adult centres, libraries, hospitals, etc - is working together and using all its resources, including human resources, in a holistic fashion to develop the human potential of all its citizens (see diagram 2 below).

Part 2 of that dream (figure 3) is that each one of these cities starts to interlink with other cities through electronic mail networks, joint learning programmes, information exchange - third age to third age, schoolchild and teacher to schoolchild and teacher, doctor to doctor, local politician to local politician, environmentalist to environmentalist and between the generations and the professions. Then we would see a new well-informed, cooperating Europe. The technology is there to make it happen. It's an infrastructure which offers possibilities. But then this is just a hopeless idealist's utopian dream isn't it? Is it?

I quote St Exupery - ***'if you want to build ships, don't try to call people....***

***collecting wood, preparing tools, delegating tasks, planning wood.....***

***instead - teach them to dream of the far distance and the endless ocean.....'***

I have made little reference to ELLI in this talk, but the organisation I represent is there in everything I have said. In Lifelong Learning there is still much to do - we know, and we help others to know, the what, the why, the when, the where and the who. What most need to know is the 'how to'. That is what ELLI is about and we invite organisations and people to join us in meeting the greatest challenge Europe faces in the coming years - to create a Lifelong Learning society, ready and able to make the most of its potential.

Which brings me to my 7th recommendation. It is to the European Union.

## **7. Designate the next 50 years as the half-century of Lifelong Learning.**

It's going to take that long and it's going to meet many obstacles - political, environmental, economic, cultural and lack of vision. But the end-result will be worth the effort. And if we don't.....? I leave with a quote from another British Science Fiction Writer, HG Wells.

***'The whole of human history is a race between education and catastrophe.'***

Like I said, none of this will happen, but it is a metaphor for a learning future in which Europeans understand the future and what they have to do to create it.

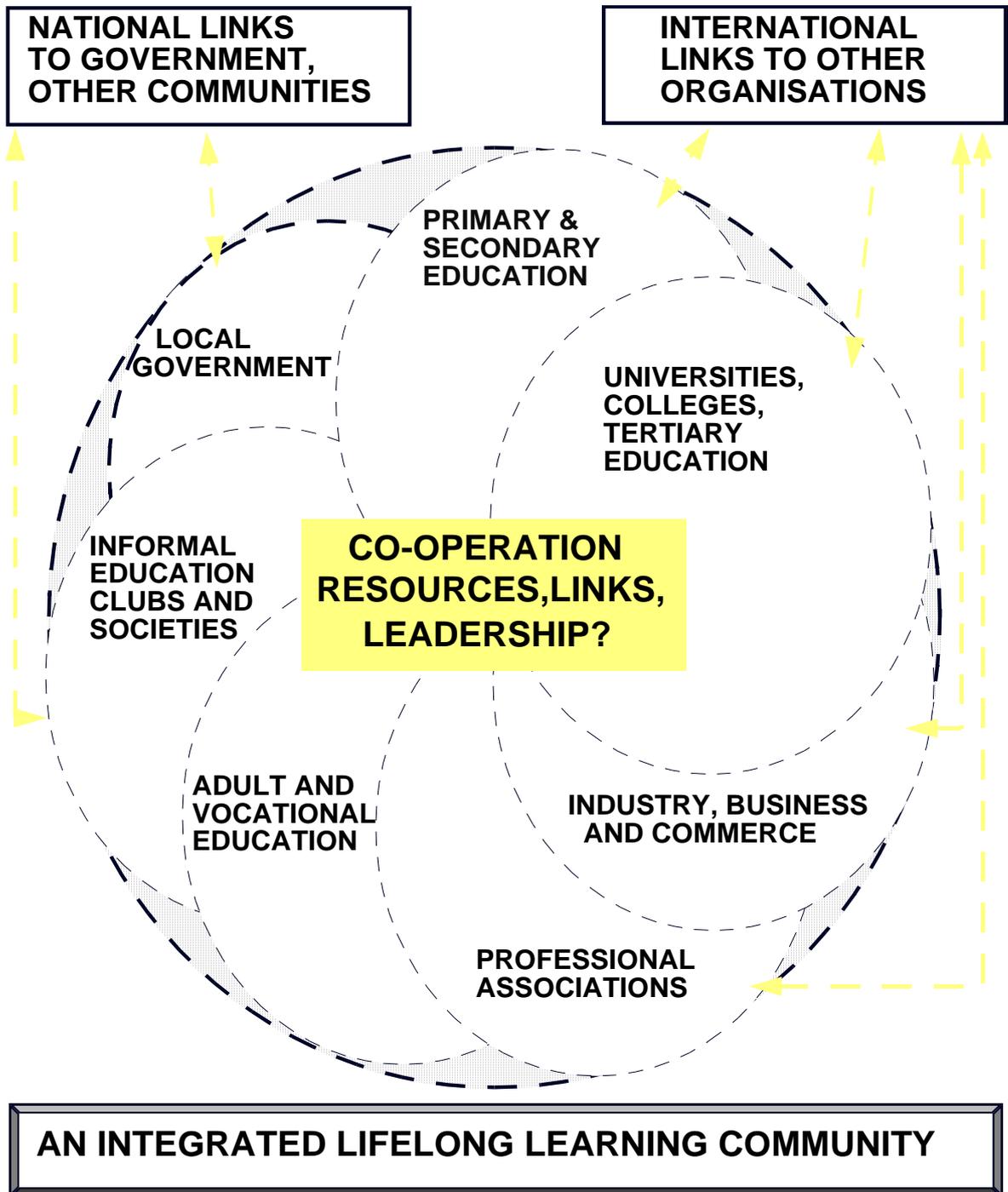
Figure 1

## LEARNING CITIES - FACING THE FUTURE

A Learning City is one with plans and strategies to encourage personal growth, social cohesion and sustainable wealth-creation through the development of the human potential of all its citizens and working partnerships between all its organisations

<b>L</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	Links its strategy to the development of leadership and Learning counselling courses and skills in and for the whole Community
<b>E</b>	<b>Employment and Employability</b>	Effects plans to define and develop skills and Competencies which make all its citizens employable
<b>A</b>	<b>Aspirations</b>	Activates the creative potential of its citizens through a Strategy for encouraging the use of personal learning plans, mentors and guides in citizens of all ages
<b>R</b>	<b>Resources</b>	Releases the full potential of community resources, Including human resources, by enabling mutually beneficial partnerships between public and private Sectors
<b>N</b>	<b>Networks</b>	Nourishes tolerance and outward-looking mindsets through projects to link citizens of all races, ages and creeds locally, nationally and internationally
<b>I</b>	<b>Information</b>	Increases participation in learning by devising innovative strategies to provide information where people gather, and pro-active publicity campaigns to promote learning
<b>N</b>	<b>Needs and Requirements</b>	Nurtures a culture of learning by proactively auditing the learning requirements of all its citizens and providing the Opportunities to satisfy them
<b>G</b>	<b>Growth</b>	Generates wealth through a defined strategy of developing its human talent and innovative projects with other learning communities
<b>C</b>	<b>Change Management</b>	Cultivates programmes which allow citizens to cope positively and without fear in a world of rapid change
<b>I</b>	<b>Investment</b>	Influences the future by linking learning strategies to cross-departmental financial strategies
<b>T</b>	<b>Technology</b>	Transforms the city into a modern centre of learning by the effective use of the new learning technologies
<b>I</b>	<b>Involvement</b>	Inspires citizens to contribute to city life and culture by building a database of their skills, knowledge and talents and encouraging them to make them available to others
<b>E</b>	<b>Environment</b>	Energises programmes which enable all citizens to take positive action to care for the environment
<b>S</b>	<b>Strategies for the Family</b>	Stimulates the community and whole families to learn by running festivals, fairs and other fun events which promote the habit of learning.

Figure 2 - An integrated Learning Community



Further Reading: Making Lifelong Learning Work – Learning Cities for a Learning Century by Norman Longworth, Kogan Page, London