

**Contribution of the Sector of Culture, UNESCO**

**Meeting on the University Community and EFA -  
*Creating and Sustaining Improvements* -  
3 and 4 November 2004**

## **Sector for Culture**

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The cultural aspects of education are now widely recognised in the educational community at large. Respect and understanding of different cultures, the promotion of multilingualism and the ability to work and cooperate with others, can best be taught from a young age. This view is an essential part of UNESCO's work on education, culture, and sustainable development. Point seven of the action plan for the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity has as its objective: 'Promoting through education an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education.'

The importance of cultural awareness and culturally adapted education has also been highlighted in Jacques Delors' introduction to the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, *Learning: the treasure within* (Paris, April 1996). This outlines the notion of four pillars that constitute the foundation of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. The latter two clearly involve learning about cultural identities and cultural diversity.

Many professionals working in the field of cultural policy and management have also expressed the importance of including the issue of cultural diversity in curricula for both formal and informal education. For example, this was one of the conclusions reached at the International Seminar on "Formation dans la gestion des politiques culturelles dans le cadre de la diversité culturelle et du développement" (Girona, 29 August – 2 September 2004).

Societies have different attitudes towards the value of education which may affect the achievement of EFA. It is therefore also vital that cultural backgrounds be taken into account when developing education policies and curricula.

#### **Suggestions for university involvement**

1. **Teaching about culture.** In light of these observations, we should like to suggest that universities play a role in EFA by promoting the notion of culturally-sensitive education, both through research and through teacher training in this domain. Universities and teacher training establishments could aid in the development of suitable culturally-adapted teaching strategies that take account of the local community traditions as well as teaching children about other cultures as well as about interaction and affiliation processes between cultures.

2. **Culture as a medium for teaching.** Music, dance, drama and other forms of cultural and artistic expressions have an emotional aspect that involve people and facilitates learning. Such medium can act as a non threatening tool for communication, awareness-raising and discussion. Universities could contribute to research in this area and train teachers to consider such techniques.
3. **Promoting an interdisciplinary approach.** In order to place culture at the heart of education, it is advisable for universities to consider how culture can be incorporated into the teaching of a large range of related themes, acting as a bridge between different disciplines. For example, cultural aspects can be linked to subjects including health, gastronomy, physical education, tourism, social development and the economics. Cultural education can also help to inform future generations of consumers of cultural goods.
4. **Promoting multilingualism.** Last but not least, UN Resolution A/RES/56/262 stresses the need to “strengthen the protection, promotion and preservation of all languages, in particular languages spoken by persons belonging to linguistic minorities and languages facing extinction”. Indeed, a serious threat is imposed on many languages of the world; a threat which jeopardizes the cultural diversity that they embody. The 2002 edition of the *Atlas of the world’s languages in danger of disappearing* reported that half of the 6000 or so languages spoken in the world are endangered, and with them a irreplaceable unit in our knowledge and understanding of human thought. The process of the disappearance of languages is a continual one and not a new phenomenon. However, the past 30 years or so have seen a dramatic increase in the death or disappearance of languages, concurring with the rapid processes of globalization. The causes of this phenomenon are multiple and complex.

The *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, reaffirms the need for urgent action to promote linguistic and cultural diversity through “safeguarding the linguistic heritage and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages”, “fostering the learning of several languages from the youngest age” and “promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace”. To appropriately address what should not only be considered as an irreversible loss for humanity and a reduction of the sum of human thought and knowledge, but also a factor of tension and potential conflict among communities, UNESCO has launched several programmes and activities aiming at the promotion of multilingualism and linguistic diversity, notably in the field of culture, communication and education. In the field of culture, four priority lines of action have been selected : (i) establishment of a clearing house/resource center; (ii) public awareness-raising; (iii) local capacity-building and promotion of language policies; and (iv) mobilization of international cooperation.

### **Others Suggestions**

The UNESCO Chairs/UNITWIN networks provide a structure to facilitate co-operation and research between universities. Many of these could be used to strengthen research on the field of cultural education. A sample list is supplied in the annex enclosed. Research could focus on the development of curricular to include the teaching of different cultures, and also on methods of teaching that are sympathetic to the cultural background of students.

## Relevant UNITWIN networks

- **Chaire UNESCO / Réseau regional pour l'amélioration de la qualité et de l'équité de l'éducation en Amérique latine** (lecture et écriture) (1996).

- **UNITWIN Network in Distance and Open Learning** (1997), China

Membership: open university Hong Kong (China), Korea National Open University (Republic of Korea), National University of Mongolia, Shanghai TV university (China).

It may be possible for these universities to co-operate in terms of teacher training education.

- **Asia-Pacific Distance and Multimedia Education Network- APDEM**, Japan

Membership: universities from Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand.

This network has the potential to aid in the development of multimedia products to train teachers because its activities include developing research on distance and multimedia education and to increase the number of specialists in the field.

- **UNITWIN Network in Distance Education for Development (Greater Mekong Subregional and South-Eastern Asia) (1998)**, Thailand

Membership: Indonesian Distance Learning Network (Indonesia); SEAMEO Regional Centre for Distance and Open Learning; Hanoi National Open University (Vietnam); University of Distance Education (Myanmar); Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand); Yunnan Radio and Television University (China).

The network deals with distance education and rural development and aims to develop centres for specialised training and advanced research that could assist in bridging training and research needs across national frontiers. Therefore, it could serve as a useful platform for developing distance learning training for teachers.

- **UNESCO Chair/Network in Gender, Culture and Human Development (1995)**, United Kingdom

Membership: Universities in Cameroon, Netherlands, Tanzania, Zambia, United Kingdom

Since this network's objectives are to promote education and research in gender, culture and development, it may like to consider developing research projects into gender and primary education, in particular to consider how to encourage more girls to attend school.

In addition, there is a range of **UNESCO Chairs** related to teacher training, such as the UNESCO Chair in Reorienting Teacher Education towards Sustainability (430), established in 1999 at York University (Canada), and the UNESCO Chair in Teacher Training through Distance Education established at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Brazil).