**OECD EDUCATION POLICY FORUM**

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***“New Thinking, New Approaches”***

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Education is perpetually in search of renewal. As a young teacher I was brought up on Piaget, who said: *“The principle goal of education is to create men (and women) who are capable of doing new things, who are creative, inventive and discoverers”*.

A decade ago, introducing UNESCO’s report on “Education for the 21st century”, Jacques Delors called for a “fresh approach” to learning. A really revolutionary idea took hold in the industrializing countries a hundred years ago. It was the idea of “Education for All”. It was enshrined half way through the 20th century in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26; *“Everyone has the right to education”.*

In the 21st century, “Education for All” is not anymore a new goal. The target was set in Jomtien in 1990, reaffirmed in Dakar in 1999, included in the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 and promised in G8 commitments from Okinawa in 1999 to L’Aquila in 2009. The call is not for a new goal, but for new thinking, new approaches to the achievement of that goal, which continues to elude us. And even as we struggle to achieve EFA, the industrialized, and the emerging countries, the ones in the OECD and/or participants in PISA, are rethinking their approaches to education.

We know that getting children and young people into classrooms – in any country – developing, emerging, industrialized – is but a first step. We know that **quality** in education is the burning issue. We know, too, that **equity** in education can go hand in hand with quality – and that when you succeed in moving towards both quality **and** equity, individuals benefit and so do communities – local communities, national communities, the global community.

Equity, or equality of opportunity, requires quality **public** education – a foundation not only of economic growth but also of democracy – all the more so in increasingly diverse societies.

Look at the Top Five actions to take in education today, the 27,000 votes cast in 90 countries on the OECD’s “Raise Your Hand” website. Barbara Ischinger read them to you at the start of this session. Look at Action Two: “Education is a public good and public responsibility”. Look at the others[[1]](#footnote-1).

In response to Charles Leadbeater, I say we must stop suggesting ad nauseam that innovation only occurs outside public education. There is a tremendous amount of innovation in public schools, in the classrooms.

For Quality Education we need Quality Teachers. They enter today into a profession of high expectations, they need support in their early years and ongoing professional development throughout their working lives. Their students and their communities will benefit from investing in people – the people of education.

Think about this statement, from my old friend Mary Futrell: *“When the untapped potential of a child meets the creative imagination of a teacher, a miracle occurs.”*[[2]](#footnote-2) The real challenge is to bring about fresh approaches where they count most - in the classroom. And the challenge for policy makers is to create the conditions enabling that to happen.

Over-emphasis on narrow “metrics” won't do it. There are things in education you can't measure. Policies like linking teachers' pay to student performance won't do it either. Such approaches are inherently reductionist. They overlook something essential about education: the miracle of opening young minds to knowledge, to their own capacities, to creativity, to motivation.

The reward for teachers actually comes from seeing those miracles come about, day after day, year after year. It doesn't come from performance-related pay.

Reforms must be reforms that work. As Delors said *“no reform can succeed without the cooperation and active participation of teachers”*. ILO and UNESCO Experts have said the same, repeatedly.

Teachers have strong unions. From four decades of experience, let me tell you that these unions defend their members’ interest, yes. But these unions are also dedicated to improving the education provided to children, young people and adults.

Education International, supported by TUAC, your consultative trade union voice here at the OECD, is committed to fostering representative, independent and ethical organizations that aim to improve education.

Ministers of Education have everything to gain by engaging them in the reform process. If trade union observers can attend meetings at OECD of Labour Ministers, of Environment Ministers, of Finance Ministers, and all parties find that participation productive, why not Education Ministers?

Quality public education is going to need the engagement of key stakeholders – **especially** in a time of fiscal consolidation coming out of the financial crisis.

We are working actively with the World Economic Forum, as well as OECD and UNESCO for the G20 to give priority to quality education and teachers. We are calling on the G20 to task Education Ministers with preparing specific proposals, working with OECD, UNESCO and EI, for the G20 Summit in France in 2011.

We want Education Ministers to have at least the same weight, the political “clout”, in national governments, as defence ministers or finance ministers. Why? Because of our belief that quality education for all is the foundation of every successful nation – successful in the broadest sense – and we want to help you achieve that.

1.  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mary Hatwood Futrell, Founding President of Education International [↑](#footnote-ref-2)