In 1993, UNESCO set up an independent International Commission on Education for the 21st century, chaired by Mr Jacques Delors. The Commission, whose members and advisors were drawn from the major world regions, has now completed its work. Here Mr Delors presents for "Courier" readers a roundup of the main issues studied by the Commission and previews some of its conclusions.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, intense thought and discussion are being devoted to the future of human society. Whereas advances in knowledge, especially in science and technology, bring hope of progress for humankind in the future, events each day remind us how the contemporary world is liable to drift off course, how exposed it is to dangers, in some cases extreme dangers, and how vulnerable it is to conflicts.

The increasing interdependence of peoples and nations, which is the hallmark of our time, is providing scope for unprecedented international co-operation. But the emergence of this global consciousness also reveals the extent of the disparities that beset our world, the complexity of its problems and the number of threats that are liable at any time to jeopardize the stock of human achievement.

Great demands are consequently being made on education, whose contribution to human progress is so vital. The idea is gaining ground that education is one of the most powerful tools with which to shape the future – or, to use more modest terms, to steer us into the future by taking advantage of constructive trends and trying to avoid pitfalls. What is education doing today to prepare the active citizens of tomorrow?

UNESCO has taken the initiative of bringing the light of its international experience to bear on this issue. Its Director-General, Mr Federico Mayor, asked me to chair an International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, mandated "to study and reflect on the challenges facing education in the coming years, and to formulate suggestions and recommendations in the form of a report that could serve as an agenda for action for policy-makers and officials at the highest levels".

The following question from the Commission's terms of reference formed our point of departure: "How can education play a dynamic and constructive role in preparing individuals and societies for the twenty-first century?" We were asking it some twenty years after another Commission, chaired by Mr Edgar Faure, had published a report – which is still topical – under the significant title "Learning to be".
FOUR CRUCIAL ISSUES

The Commission did its best to project its thinking on to a future dominated by globalization, to ask the right questions and to lay down some broad guidelines that can be applied both within national contexts and on a global scale. Here I shall examine four issues which I believe are crucial.

The first issue is the capacity of education systems to become the key factor in development by performing a threefold function – economic, scientific and cultural. Everyone expects education to help build up a qualified and creative workforce that can adapt to new technologies and take part in the "intelligence revolution" that is the driving force of our economies. Everyone – in North and South alike – also expects education to advance knowledge in such a way that economic development goes hand in hand with responsible management of the physical and human environment. And, finally, education would be failing in its task if it did not produce citizens rooted in their own cultures and yet open to other cultures and committed to the progress of society.

The second crucial issue is the ability of education systems to adapt to new trends in society. This brings us to one of the fundamental responsibilities of education – having to prepare for change despite the growing insecurity that fills us with doubts and uncertainties. Education must take into account a whole range of interrelated and interreacting factors that are always in a state of flux, whether it is dealing with individual or social values, family structure, the role of women, the status accorded to minorities, or the problems of urban development or the environment.

The third crucial issue is that of the relations between the education system and the state. The roles and responsibilities of the state, the devolution of some of its power to federal or local authorities, the balance to be struck between public and private education – these are just some aspects of a problem which, moreover, differs from one country to another.

The fourth issue is the promulgation of the values of openness to others, and mutual understanding – in a word, the values of peace. Can education purport to be universal? Can it by itself, as a historical factor, create a universal language that would make it possible to overcome certain contradictions, respond to certain challenges and, despite their diversity, convey a message to all the inhabitants of the world? In this language which, ideally, would be accessible to everybody, all the world's wisdom and the wealth of its civilizations and cultures would be expressed in an immediately comprehensible form.

The creation of a language accessible to everyone would mean that people would learn to engage more readily in dialogue, and the message that this language would convey would have to be addressed to human beings in all their aspects. A message that claims to be universal – one of education's lofty ambitions – must be conveyed with all the subtle qualifications that take full account of human being's infinite variety. This is no doubt our major difficulty.

LINES OF ENQUIRY

Three current crises – the economic crisis, the crisis of the ideology of progress and a certain form of moral crisis – formed the backdrop to the Commission's work.

With them in mind, I tried to trace out a few lines of enquiry, taking account of cultural diversity, the specific nature of different problems and experiences, and the diversity of the political and social
objectives of UNESCO's Member States, so as to gain a better understanding of a number of fundamental relationships: the connections between education and culture (culture being seen as a factor in greater self-knowledge and knowledge of others); between education and citizenship and, more generally, the sense of belonging (so that our contemporaries and descendants do not feel isolated in the world of exceptionally rapid change which they see on their television screens); between education and social cohesion (which is weaker than it was fifty years ago in the countries of both North and South). And then, of course, the connection between education, training, work and employment; the connection with development; and, lastly, the essential role which education must play in the progress of research.

If the proposals that emerged from the Commission's work were to have a real impact on education policies, three transversal problems also had to be tackled. These were: the effect of modern communication media on contemporary education systems; the future of the teaching profession; the systems to be set up and the funding to be found.

THE PILLARS OF EDUCATION

The four main pillars that the Commission has presented and illustrated as the bases of education are: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together.

The first of these is learning to know. Bearing in mind the rapid changes brought about by scientific progress and new forms of economic and social activity, there is a need to combine a broad general education with the possibility of working in depth on a selected number of subjects. In a sense, such a general education is the passport to learning throughout life, insofar as it should teach people to enjoy learning and also lay the foundations that will enable them to carry on learning throughout their lives.

Learning to do is the second pillar. In addition to learning to practise a profession or trade, people need to develop the ability to face a variety of situations and to work in teams, a feature of educational methods that does not receive enough attention at present. These skills are more readily acquired if pupils and students have the opportunity to develop their abilities by becoming involved in work experience schemes or social work while they are still in education. Increased importance should thus be attached to all schemes in which education alternates with work.

Learning to be was the theme of the Edgar Faure Report published under UNESCO's auspices in 1972. The Report's recommendations are still extremely relevant, for in the twenty-first century everyone will need to exercise greater independence and judgement combined with a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals.

Learning to live together, finally, by developing an understanding of others, of their history, their traditions and their spirituality. This would provide a basis for the creation of a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future, would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way. Some might say that this is utopian; and yet it is a necessary utopia, indeed a vital one if we are to escape from the dangerous cycle sustained by cynicism and complacency.
**LEARNING THROUGHOUT LIFE**

The concept of learning throughout life advocated in the Faure Report is one of the keys to the twenty-first century. It meets the challenge of a rapidly changing world, and it is necessary because of its advantages of flexibility, diversity and availability at different times and in different places. It also goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial schooling and continuing education.

The idea of lifelong education must be rethought and broadened. As well as adapting to changes in working life, it should also comprise a continuous shaping of the personality, of knowledge and aptitudes, but also of the critical faculty and the ability to act.

The truth is that every aspect of working life and social life offers opportunities for both learning and doing. There is a great temptation to make too much of this, and stress the educational potential of the media, the world of work, and cultural and leisure pursuits, even to the extent of forgetting a number of fundamental truths. Although people need to use all these opportunities for learning and self-improvement, they will not be able to make good use of all their potential unless they have received a sound basic education. School should impart a desire for and pleasure in learning, the ability to learn how to learn, and intellectual curiosity. One might even imagine a society in which each individual would be in turn both teacher and learner.

The basis for a learning society is a formal system where each individual is introduced to the many different forms of knowledge. There is no substitute for the teacher-pupil relationship based on authority and dialogue. This has been said time and again by the great classical thinkers who have studied the question of education. It is the teacher's responsibility to impart to the pupil the knowledge that humankind has acquired about itself and about nature, and the essence of human creativity and inventiveness.

Education should therefore constantly be adapting to changes in society, and also pass on the attainments, foundations and benefits of human experience.

**THE STAGES AND BRIDGES OF LEARNING : A FRESH APPROACH**

By focusing on the concept of learning throughout life, the Commission did not intend to convey the idea that one could avoid reflecting on the different levels of education. The fact is that learning throughout life makes it possible to reorder the sequences and itineraries of education, ease the transition from one stage to another and recognize the value of each.

The "three Rs" – reading, writing and arithmetic – get their full due. The combination of conventional teaching and out-of-school approaches should enable children to experience the three dimensions of education – the moral and cultural, the scientific and technological, and the economic and social.

Basic education should be provided worldwide for 900 million illiterate adults, 130 million children not enrolled in school, and more than 100 million who drop out prematurely. This vast undertaking is a priority for technical assistance and partnership carried out through international cooperation.
One major problem area in any reform concerns the policies to be adopted for young people after primary education. One might go so far as to say that secondary schools tend to be neglected in educational thinking. They are the target of considerable criticism and provoke a considerable amount of frustration.

One source of frustration is a demand for expansion and diversification of secondary education, leading to rapid growth in enrolments and congestion in teaching programmes. This gives rise to some classic problems of mass education which developing countries cannot easily solve either financially or in terms of organization. Furthermore, there is the discouraging problem of school leavers who face a shortage of opportunities, their distress increased by a widespread all-or-nothing obsession with access to higher education. Mass unemployment in many countries has exacerbated this malaise.

The only way out of this difficult situation seems to be a very broad diversification of types of study available. The latter should include both conventional education, which focuses more on abstraction and conceptualization, and approaches that combine school and job experience in a way that brings out other abilities and inclinations. In any event, there should be bridges between these approaches so that errors in choice of direction, which are far too widespread, can be corrected.

Furthermore, the prospect of being able to go back to education or training would alter the general climate by assuring each young person that his or her fate is not sealed between the ages of fourteen and twenty.

Higher education should be seen from the same angle.

In many countries, other types of higher education institutions exist side by side with universities. Some are highly selective, while others were set up to provide specifically targeted, quality professional and vocational training. This diversification obviously meets the needs of society and the economy, both at the national and regional levels.

Increasingly stringent selection in order to ease the pressures brought about by mass higher education in the wealthiest countries is neither politically nor socially acceptable. One of the main flaws in such an approach is that many young people are expelled from the educational process before they have been able to obtain a recognized diploma and find themselves in the desperate predicament of having neither a degree nor training appropriate for the job market.

There is a need to manage increasing university enrolment in tandem with reform of secondary education.

Universities would contribute to this process by diversifying what they offer: as scientific establishments and centres of learning leading to theoretical or applied research or teaching; as establishments offering professional qualifications, with courses and content tailored to the needs of the economy; as one of the main crossroads for learning throughout life; as leading partners in a form of international co-operation favouring exchanges of teachers and students and promoting the wider availability of first-class teaching through international professorships.

These proposals have a special significance in poor countries, where universities have a decisive role to play.
LONG-TERM STRATEGIES FOR REFORM

Without underestimating the obligation to manage short-term constraints or disregard the need to adapt existing systems, the Commission emphasized the need for a longer-term approach if necessary reforms are to succeed. By the same token, it stressed the fact that reforms introduced in rapid succession cancel each other out, since they do not allow the system the time needed either to absorb change or to involve all those concerned in the process.

Three main protagonists contribute to the success of educational reforms: the local community (parents, school heads and teachers), the public authorities and the international community.

Local community participation in assessing needs by means of a dialogue between the public authorities and social groups concerned is a first essential stage in broadening access to education and improving its quality. Continuing the dialogue by way of the media, community discussions, parent education and training, and on-the-job teacher training usually arouses greater awareness, develops judgement and helps build local capacities.

In any event, no reform can succeed without the co-operative and active participation of teachers. The Commission recommended that the social, cultural and material status of educators should be considered as a matter of priority, along with the tools required to deliver education of a high standard: books, modern communication media, and suitable cultural and economic support for the school.

This being so, one requirement for the improvement of education systems is responsible public policy. Policy-makers cannot assume that the market can compensate for the failures in the system or that laisser-faire is sufficient. The public authorities must propose clear options and, after broad consultation with all concerned, choose policies that set guidelines for the system and lay its foundations, and regulate it by making the necessary adjustments.

All the choices to be made should be predicated upon the principle of equal opportunity.

During the Commission’s deliberations, I put forward a proposal that may be regarded as radical. As education throughout life gradually becomes a reality, all young persons could be allocated an education voucher at the start of their education. This would entitle them to a certain number of years of education. Their entitlement would be credited to an account at a bank which would manage a capital of time available for each individual, together with the appropriate funds. Everyone could use their capital for schooling, on the basis of their own choices. Some of the capital could be set aside to enable people to receive continuing education during their adult lives. Each person could increase his or her capital through deposits at the bank under a kind of educational savings scheme.

The Commission supported this idea, though it was aware of potential deviations that might prejudice equality of opportunity, and considered that vouchers might be allocated not at the beginning but at the end of compulsory schooling so as to enable adolescents to choose a path without jeopardizing their future choices.

As far as the international community is concerned, as agent of the success of educational reforms, the Commission framed a number of suggestions concerning: a policy of strong encouragement for the education of girls and women; the allocation of a minimum percentage of
development aid (a quarter of the total) to fund education; the development of debt-for-education swaps to offset the adverse effects on state education expenditure of adjustment policies and policies for reducing internal and external deficits; the widespread introduction of the new technologies of the "information society" in all countries, to prevent the growth of yet another gap between rich countries and poor countries; enlisting the outstanding potential of non-governmental organizations.

These few suggestions should be seen in the context of partnership rather than aid. After so many failures and so much waste, experience militates in favour of partnership. Globalization makes it inescapable.

CONCLUSION

The interdependence of nations provides scope for – and requires – international co-operation on a new scale and in all fields. The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century is one of the ways of asserting the will to achieve this as the turn of the century draws near.

Without conducting a purely descriptive exercise or outlining a philosophy of education systems, its goal was not to construct "scenarios for the future" resulting in a set of precepts for educational policy-makers, but to provide decision-makers with facts to help them draw up educational policies and to spark off a debate that would go beyond the world of education and teachers, and involve parents, children, business leaders, trade unionists and associations engaged in giving education a more effective role.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

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Former French Minister of the Economy and Finance, was President of the Commission of the European Communities from 1985 to 1995. Chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century set up by UNESCO. His published works include "Le nouveau concert européen" (1992) and "Our Europe: France and the European future" (1994).