

G8 Education Ministers' Meeting and Forum: Chair's Summary

(tentative translation)

G8 Education Ministers' Meeting, April 1-2, 2000

In the 1999 Cologne Summit, the Heads of Government of the G8 countries and the President of the European Commission emphasized the importance of education in social and economic development for all countries, in particular, the eight countries. This conviction was incorporated into the "Cologne Charter - Aims and Ambitions for Lifelong Learning", in which they highlighted the role of education in achieving economic success, civic responsibility, and social cohesion. Thus, it was declared that education and lifelong learning would provide individuals with the 'passport to mobility' that they would need to adjust to the flexibility and change in transition from traditional industrialized society to the emerging knowledge society.

In 2000, the G8 Education Ministers and the Member of the European Commission responsible for Education have got together for the first time and taken up this vision in more detail from the perspective of "Education in a Changing Society". We met in Tokyo on April 1-2 with observers from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The following is a summary of our conclusions which we suggest to the Okinawa G8 Summit to be held in July 2000, to our own communities, and to other countries beyond the G8.

A knowledge society offers significant opportunities as well as real risks. Such a society requires fundamental changes in learning and teaching patterns, that is, a re-organization of content and structure of learning opportunities and re-understanding of learners' intellectual, emotional and social needs. The skill levels required in the labor market are high, and all societies face the challenge of raising their educational levels. Individuals who develop and maintain high skill levels can achieve considerable social and economic success, but those who do not are at more risk than ever of alienation with little prospect of finding stable employment and income needed for social and cultural activities.

In this context, lifelong learning is a high priority for all people. Based on the four pillars of learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together, lifelong learning provides sufficient opportunities to fully participate in the knowledge society. Lifelong learning is a base for national development; it underlies economic and social development, and gives individuals the capacity to contribute to and benefit from that development. In addition, it maintains and encourages both individual culture and overall culture of a nation, and builds mutual respect and understanding that transcends cultural differences.

Neither education policy nor its implementation can be framed and shaped in isolation. There must be consistency and continuity between primary, secondary, and tertiary education to realize a true lifelong learning system. There must also be consistency and continuity with other policies such as employment, science, technology, and information

and communication. Commitment should be made toward implementation both with entire society and local communities.

New strategies will best be discovered collaboratively across countries. With appropriate respect for the diversity of cultures, languages and country's education systems, that search will not be for uniformity, and the outcome will be enriched by understanding the experiences of others. Such collaboration will also enhance international understanding and appreciation, but it must not be restricted to the G8. We look for opportunities to collaborate with other countries and to work with international organizations to realize our vision. We believe that special attention should be paid to support developing countries in building their education systems. It is important that at the World Education Forum in Dakar on April 26-28, 2000, the international community strongly reaffirm its commitment to providing education for all.

1. Educational Challenges in Changing Society

With democratization of education and increasing access of young people to colleges and universities, diversification of education levels and types is necessary to respond to the more challenging needs of changing societies.

Education has created more opportunities for young people to participate in the complex and information-rich society and economy of the new century. However, these opportunities are not shared evenly by all in society. There are people disadvantaged by home circumstances or by limited educational opportunities and low motivation. As countries succeed in attracting more young people to continue to higher levels of education, those who drop out early are left further behind.

At the same time, social changes are creating new hurdles. In the midst of affluence, there is a risk that those who have the capacity to succeed would lose the sense of purpose needed for accomplishment. Community and family ties have loosened. Social and cultural pressures on young people, regardless of their backgrounds, have increased. Schools have to address such problems as school failure, absence, dropout, and misbehavior.

To meet these challenges, the G8 countries are continuously pursuing a variety of aims, particularly:

- to inoculate values of ethical behavior and civic consciousness as well as knowledge and skills for adult life
- to raise students' performance
- to develop metrics for monitoring and comparing school achievement and performance
- to cope with disadvantages of poverty and social neglect, and to provide a strong remedy for those at risk of social marginalization
- to find new ways of attracting under-motivated learners, including more individual support and better cooperation with workplace
- to enhance teachers' quality, particularly, by improving professional abilities
- to broaden access to lifelong learning for people who traditionally have not enjoy it
- to encourage involvement of parents and local communities in school activities.

The G8 countries will take up these problems in their specific ways so as to provide a brighter future for the young people. We believe that these issues can be tackled not through education policies alone, but through a combination of social and economic policies.

We agreed to encourage research, dialogue and international links between policy makers, educators, and researchers on effective approaches to the problems of educational disadvantage, ways to create better learning environments and strategies to foster tolerance and community spirit among students.

2. Lifelong Learning and Distance Learning

The Cologne Lifelong Learning Charter recognized challenges every country is facing in transition to a learning society and providing all citizens with the knowledge, skills, and qualifications they will need in the new century. The dramatic recent progress of information and communication technologies such as satellite communications, large capacity optical fiber, and the Internet have greatly expanded the power of distance learning as a means for lifelong learning and international understanding. Combining learning with work might be made much easier by distance learning. Properly applied, ICT can be a powerful means for expansion of learning opportunities in developing countries.

We agreed on the following:

- 1) to enhance opportunities for lifelong learning so that all people, from infants to the elderly, have access to education anywhere and anytime
- 2) to encourage international collaboration on distance learning in public and private sectors
- 3) to consider implications of increasingly borderless education for education systems in every country, first, through a meeting of experts
- 4) to encourage institutions and experts to share experience on distance learning.

3. Educational Innovation and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Interactions between different people and ideas are an essential part of education. Information and communication technologies (ICT) offer a prospect of enriching the contents and changing the mode of delivery of education so as to extend access to learning opportunities and deepen children's comprehension and creativity. ICT is also a tool to enhance individuals' capacities to acquire information and solve problems in school, in workplace, and moreover, in their whole lives. At the same time, however, we need to pay attention to the dark side as well as the bright side of ICT. Particularly, we must take into account implementation of policies that reduce the so-called 'digital divide' between the more and less advantaged members of society.

We agreed on the following:

- 1) to support research and share information on the content of 'technological literacy', effective practices to teach and assess the skills required for such literacy, and methods to effectively utilize technology for learning in schools and other places in future
- 2) to encourage applying ICT to the field of learning, including vocational education and training as well as learning at workplace

- 3) to share effective practices to lower barriers for access to educational technologies, thus reducing the 'digital divide' both within and between countries
- 4) to acknowledge the value of and strengthen material and intellectual support for projects aimed at developing clearinghouses or portals to access quality contents and software applicable to education
- 5) to share information on methods for teachers to use technologies effectively in education, particularly, to provide children with suitable technological tools to select accurate and appropriate information for discovery, learning and educational achievement
- 6) to encourage development of international networks of experts, including educators, researchers, engineers, and administrators, to work cooperatively toward using future technologies to address educational challenges.

4. Promotion of international exchange of students, teachers, researchers, and administrators

More than ever, international experience has a high value for students, teachers, researchers, and administrators at all levels. The increasing interdependence of the world economy has reinforced the need for mutual understanding through international cooperation and exchange in various fields and friendly relationship based on mutual trust among nations. Knowledge and skills are now readily transferable internationally.

The Cologne Summit confirmed the importance of promoting exchange of students, teachers, and administrators, and invited Education Ministers to clarify the main obstacles and to propose solutions.

We encourage further international exchange at all levels of education and training, not only through official exchange programs, but also through cooperative efforts between institutions as well as voluntary exchange of individual students and faculty staff. We give particular priority to providing teachers with opportunities for professional development through international experience.

The following problems are to be solved for further promotion of exchanges:

- evaluation of learning outcome and recognition of curricula, credits, and qualifications for overseas studies
- lack of information on exchange partners
- level and use of financial support
- difficulties of language and intercultural understanding
- regulatory barriers (immigration procedures, taxes, social security, medical expenses, labor restrictions)
- teachers' careers after teaching overseas and their substitution during teaching overseas
- shortage of accommodation.

As regards exchanges of teachers and administrators, the lack of recognition by policy makers of the significance and goals of international exchange is yet another obstacle.

We decided to work together with each other and make every effort to promote international exchanges of students, teachers, researchers, and administrators, and agreed on the following:

- 1) to explore ways to substantially increase the scale of exchange among G8 countries and with other countries (the target being to double the rate of mobility over the next ten years)
- 2) to encourage relevant structures and educational institutions to promote mutual recognition of qualifications and credits earned by international students
- 3) to share the experience of international exchange networks like Erasmus in Europe and UMAP in the Asia Pacific region, and to encourage further development of networks for educational exchange
- 4) to further enhance foreign language learning, area studies, and intercultural education at all levels; to encourage or support programs delivered in foreign languages, particularly in universities
- 5) to further strengthen the role of human resources development and personnel exchange programs in development assistance policies; with its universal nature, UNESCO should be able to play a useful role in this context.

Finally, the Ministers agreed to review and report to the leaders on progress of the agreements stated above by making use of existing international forums such as OECD. In addition, it was suggested that further meetings of G8 education ministers would be held in the future as necessary.