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Optimizing Talent - Closing Education and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide: Higher Education and Lifelong Learning



DeVry



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The divine wisdom present deep within every human being

By: Gerben van Lent

Thursday saw us further exploring and deepening our understanding. You can learn here in a very short time span about a diversity of initiatives worldwide ranging from cooperation and harmonization initiatives of African Higher Education in the different regions and across the continent, setting up accreditation of prior learning systems in Moldova to voluntary-based teacher support activities in the Philippines, just to name a few.

Next to it there is exposure to and exploration of wider concepts and critical factors that are relevant for developing actions and strategies to address achievement gaps and social mobility of which I will highlight three:

Focus on learning outcomes and (the portability of) qualifications more than on institutionalized learning

When you shift the perspective from the institutions that offer learning opportunities to the learners and their perspectives and needs, then aspects such as what do I know and can do, what behavior and attitudes do I need to develop, where can I learn when I want to further my options, how do I know that what I learn has value for and will be recognized in the labor market or prepares me for continuous learning, need greater attention.

Mobility becomes a much wider concept than the current horizontal and vertical mobility between Universities, including now also elements like mobility from learning to work and 'back', mobility associated with labor migration, brain drain and/or brain circulation. Articulated transparent qualifications are increasingly relevant but when 140 countries have qualification systems then that in itself creates a new issue. The future might be more skills focused than qualifications focused. In this view, skills transferability is really essential and the balance between supply and demand oriented learning will shift. Higher education in its



traditional form will continue to have an important place, but more as part of or choice within lifelong learning than as an end goal

Optimizing teacher talent for learner's success

Successful learning and providing opportunities for all to learn and to develop skills and talents will always be connected to those who facilitate the learning, in most cases the teacher. In many sessions and discussions in the Optimizing Talent series of seminars does this theme surface and this time the focus was on which quality assurance and 'accreditation' mechanisms could be identified that would nurture, grow and ensure availability of teacher talent. Exchange and sharing of best practices from the practitioners level up to the systemic level could be an important step in the right direction.

How to cater for the demand – New solutions

Whereas legacy learning systems in Europe and the US need to adapt to challenging economic situations, changing global positioning changing demographics and exclusion issues, the new big economies struggle with dilemma's related to the fast development of their economies, resulting in enormous needs quantitatively and qualitatively for growth in education and training at all levels. Some simple figures will illustrate this: The world has 7 billion people, 600 million 18 to 22 years-old, with some 180 million in traditional HE (30%). To achieve let's say 60% of some form of post-secondary training, you will need to cater for 180 million more. For a country like

Brazil, this target would imply some 5 million extra learners. Coming back to paying attention to skills improvement of migration groups: In China alone some 200 million people from rural areas come as labor migrants to the industrial centers and will need continuous training to stay employable over time.

It is difficult to imagine that these numbers can be taken care of simply by growing the number of public universities so alternative models are needed especially if we want to include wider access opportunities – two examples: In Brazil a change in the regulations in the mid 1990's making it easier to set up private universities resulted in significant growth in student enrollment.

Another new and 'audience-challenging' approach that was presented is the University of the People. It was introduced as a tuition free online university with courses in business administration and computer science reaching out to those who can't afford a traditional form of tertiary education; the concept combining open educational resources, open source technology and the new internet culture with social responsibility of partners at organizational and individual level.

Coming back to the title of the blog: My choice is related to Mozart's opera Die Zauberflöte paying tribute to Salzburg's most famous citizen and it describes the symbolism embedded in the character Sarastro. Sarastro in the opera's libretto is literally: "our idol" and he makes "life always rejoice in greater wisdom". Let us aspire to be Sarastro's for the days to come.

A FELLOW'S OPINION

Mainframe vs. PC?

Higher education in 21st century

By: Marybeth Gasman

During an open discussion of the Seminar's participants, Jim Applegate, vice president for program development at Lumina Foundation for Education, urged the participants to think radically differently about higher education, using an analogy featuring the mainframe computer versus the personal computer (PC).

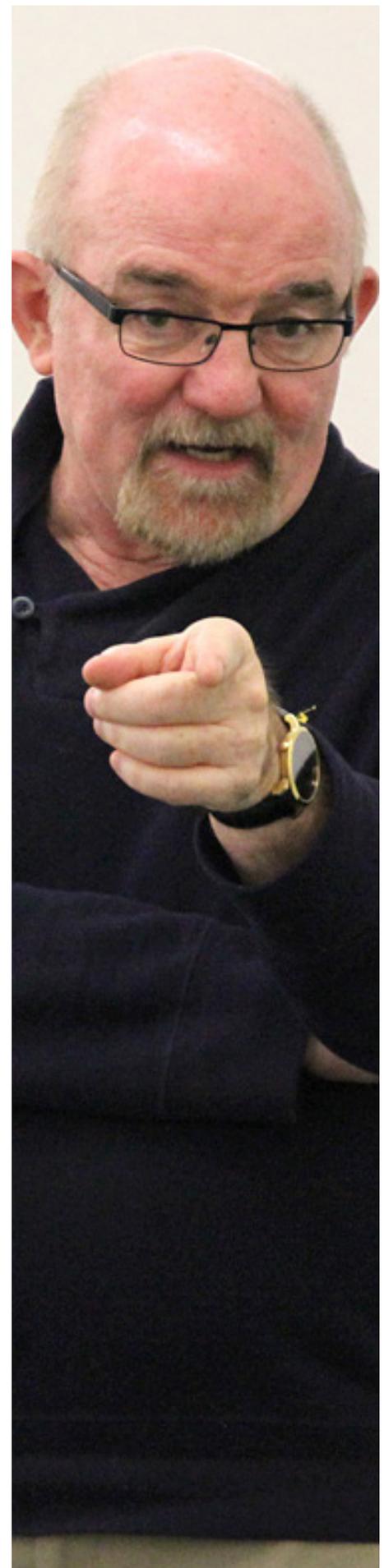
According to Applegate, while computer designers were working feverishly to make a better mainframe during the 1970s, there was another group of designers creating the PC. Those companies interested in the mainframe computers ignored this group; might have even chuckled at the group, wondering why they were spending all of their time on the PC. While the companies focused on mainframe computers were relegated to the back burner (with the exception of IBM), those companies investing in the PC thrived. They saw the future and it looked vastly different and was changing rapidly. They were ready.

Applegate used the analogy to set up a profound statement: "We need to fundamentally and radically change higher education and this change is going to make us uncomfortable." He noted that the "professor on the stage" model does not work for most students and that colleges and universities need to adopt new technologies to advance learning in multiple contexts and among multiple constituencies. According to Applegate, the only way to address the massive inequity in the United States is to change our educational practice – otherwise, we get the same outcomes, which are unacceptable.

The Lumina Foundation Vice President suggested that traditional colleges and universities invest in new technologies for learning, new settings for learning, and new methods of delivery. Interestingly, one of the other participants in the Salzburg Global Seminars, Shai Reshef who is the president and founder of the University of the People, might offer just the new format that Applegate seeks for educating more of the nation. The University of the People is a non-profit, online university (currently seeking full accreditation) that brings

together 1500 students from 120 countries; most of these students are racial and ethnic minorities from impoverished countries with little access to higher education; 20% of the students are from the US (but of those over 50% are foreign born). Through use of the Internet and social media technologies, students can earn both associate and bachelors degrees at virtually no cost. Classes are taught by volunteer professors and involve intensive peer learning via an online and social media format. The only fees involved are attached to taking course final exams and if students cannot afford the fees, the University of the People has a 'micro scholarship program' that raises money to cover their costs from ordinary people interested in providing higher education to others. The University of the People brings together many new ideas that make traditional higher education educators and administrators highly uncomfortable (Didn't Applegate call for that?). It includes social media (which makes many faculty members cringe), peer-to-peer teaching, online classes (which many faculty members don't respect), micro scholarships, a volunteer teaching force (which some will hold suspect) and mass education.

Of course, as a tenured professor at a rather old and very established university, it is hard for me to jump up and down in support for a major change – a change that basically causes an earthquake through higher education – as Applegate suggested. However, a shockwave could be what is needed to get the attention of those in higher education that want to make a difference but who are afraid or unwilling to give up their comfortable spaces. I do think it is possible to keep what is best about American higher education while letting go of the antiquated practices that no longer equip us for success, let alone greatness, in the 21st century. Both Applegate and Reshef give us food for thought. Those of us that hold fast to traditional modes of learning might benefit from opening our minds and rethinking the delivery of higher education. It will make us uncomfortable but we certainly do not want to be "off in a room talking to ourselves as the world goes by" like the mainframe computer companies.



Jim Applegate introducing UoPeople