



ATD Fourth World Movement

International seminar

“The poorest people are also partners in education that is really for everyone: what knowledge should we be basing ourselves on to open the future for all?”

Ouagadougou, February 25 to

March 1st 2013 - CONCLUSIONS

The seminary “The poorest people are also partners in education that is really for everyone: what knowledge should we be basing ourselves on to open the future for all?” came to life based on the question of this father whose son spent a long time on Ouagadougou’s streets: *“Children who go to school no longer want to work in the fields, and there are not enough office jobs for everyone. So what should we do?”*

The essential condition to answer this key question was to gather all stakeholders together.

Professionals who work in the field of education have the ambition that “schools should concern the whole community and the whole community should be concerned by schools,” a goal that much too often is never met.

Our communities are worried that “the modern system of education in our country seems to be the complete opposite of the traditional system of education.”

Both national and international institutions are striving to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the second of which focuses on education for all, and are wondering why this is proving to be so difficult to implement.

Very poor families make huge efforts every day to educate their children; these efforts are not recognized by the general society and the educative community.

“Even very poor people have ideas. If no one recognizes these ideas, poverty becomes even worse.”

We thus gathered together from February 25th to March 1st, 2013.

People came from Belgium, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Mali, Senegal and of course, several regions in Burkina Faso.

They came with different stories, some of them bearing stigmas of a difficult life. They all had different responsibilities: family, associative, professional and institutional ones.

All in all, we were sixty-five. Living together for a week, singing and drawing together, this all helped us to work together. We found that it was possible to think together, even though we didn't all speak the same language, whether we attended the university or never learned how to hold a Bic, whether we were farmers or never learned how to plant peanuts.

We started off by pair-work:

- Representatives of national and international institutions, university graduates and NGO leaders,
- Members of educative or associative bodies,
- Families living from hand-to-mouth,
- And concerned citizens.

Then we put partners into groups with a diversity of participants.

Those people who represented institutions were often astonished at the relevance of knowledge and reflections made by other groups, in particular those of families who so often feel that their experience does not count for others.

We were able to speak of our responsibilities, without accusing anyone to not have taken them. Quite on the opposite, we were proud to be considered as being responsible.

At the end of this seminar, we had a joint vision of what successful education is. We identified what hampers it, as well as what drives it. We were able to target a few proposals that promote education that truly is for everyone.

Success in education is firstly the expression of basic values:

It is solidarity:

“We learned that by seeing this dad. He lived by begging. But when one of his friends' children came back from school without having eaten, he took 100 francs out of his box to give him, without knowing if he would have enough for his own child.”

Solidarity is efficient.

It is dignity:

“My friends tell me to come and eat at their house, but I tell them that I've already eaten. If I told them I was hungry, it wouldn't be respectful to my father.”

It is respect, pardon, humility and courage:

“Without courage, I wouldn't be able to do anything today, and someone dead would do better than me.”

Successful education means being useful to yourself, your family, your community and society in general.

In many languages there are sayings that go like this: “Men and women themselves have the solution to all their problems.”

“Men make mankind.”

“Others made me what I am today.”

Successful education also means being respected, being an example for others to follow, being someone that other community members ask for advice...” “When children come here, I give them advice, just like I do to my own children. Their parents know that I won’t lie to them and that I won’t be showing them things that they shouldn’t do.”

Successful education stems from several roots: it is a permanent dialogue between the family, the community and the school and one that doesn’t allow anyone to be left behind.

“You can’t learn alone. “You can’t bring up a child alone.”

1 100 CFA francs = €0.15 or \$0.20

That means that for everyone to have an education, children must be a part of a broad and diversified educative community.

When you can't do anything good with all these values that have been conveyed to you, that is when you suffer. Because you were stopped too many times, you look like someone who didn't succeed in life.

We were able to note several things that hamper successful education for

all:

There is poverty and everything stemming from it:

The lack of a birth certificate: "It took me months to get a birth certificate. Without a birth certificate, I can't work, I can't even go anywhere. I'm afraid."
A birth certificate, however, is "life's very first diploma."

Hunger:

"We often didn't have anything to eat, even in the evening. If you go to school like that, your stomach rumbles, your ears are blocked, and only your eyes can see. I know that our stomachs were filled with our parents' courage, had we not had that, nothing would have been possible."

Illnesses:

"When someone in your family is really ill, all you care about is getting rid of that illness."

The non-recognition of efforts made by some parents:

"One day my daughter told me: daddy, at school some people told me that I'm going to school for nothing and that I'll never get my certificate because my father is poor. He empties latrines and makes ropes to sell them."

There is discrimination, humiliation and mockery:

"It was really hard when I was in school. The teacher said: your mom can't afford to buy you a school bag. And he made fun of me. Some students laughed at me. And, as I was only a child, I was ashamed and I often got angry. That's how violence begins."

Violence hampers success

It is especially difficult for little girls to finish their schooling and insecurity is even harder on them.

If the family falls apart, that also means that communitarian solidarity has been lost:

"Today, men have less pity in their hearts. They only take care of their brothers, children and wives. But if you're too poor, and you don't have a wife or a brother... Who will take care of you? And who will you take care of?"

There are over-crowded classes and teachers lacking motivation, who sometimes have up to 100 students in their classrooms. That is also an effort they make so that everyone can have an education.

There is the content of school curriculum, often poorly adapted or even contradictory to social

expectations.

People say that school is free. But in school there are always things you have to pay for, either the cafeteria, the PTA Association or others; these contributions are obstacles for parents with low resources.

Wherever we are, we nonetheless can push levers for success:

“I’m not afraid of poverty because I learned what it is and I know what it is. I tell my daughter that if she’s brave, she’ll overcome it. We don’t learn that in school, but we learned that from God.”

Our children give us courage:

“My daughter sells chili peppers at the market. She prepared what she needed for school by herself: she bought herself notebooks and an umbrella. My daughter understands how I live and when I encourage her, she’s proud of what she does.”

People told us about the strength that union, solidarity and cooperation between students had, and how it supported them: “Without them, I would be in the dark.”

We believe that there must be complementarity between what is learned in school and what is learned in the community:

“I want education in school, at home, everywhere! At home, we learn about life. At school, they teach me how to solve problems between me and my friends.”

“The teacher isn’t the only person with knowledge. In an open school, everyone with knowledge ignored by many can come and teach the class something.”

Teachers try to help parents:

“We heard about the example of a mother who sent her child to school every year. He started first grade five years in a row. He was excluded for five years in a row because his mother could not pay the 1,500 CFA francs of school membership. He became violent. The teacher talked to the mother and told her that she would do everything possible to help her. The mother paid a part and the teacher paid the rest. The child was elected to be the class leader, he was proud of himself and with this newly-found pride; he was on the road to success.”

Parents try to help teachers:

“When you send your child to school, you yourself become a pupil. You often have to go to school to follow your child’s progress, to make sure he or she is learning lessons well, that he or she is participating.”

“When I saved 150 francs, I bought a notebook and put it in my children’s school bag.”

“As my daughter really wanted to study, I bought some cement and I made a blackboard on the wall.”

But very often, efforts made by everyone are either not visible, or not understood:

“In May, I take my children out of school and they work on the farm. I do that because we have to eat and to be able to send the children to school the following year.”

We see the importance of adapting the school to the environment, as well as the possibility of acquiring practical and manual knowledge.

“If succeeding means working in an office or as a politician, I can say that there are not a lot of poor people that succeed. This is the reason why many poor families get discouraged from supporting their children in school. This is why I propose that at school, they also teach children practical know-how. That would allow us to believe that school is also for us.”

If there is humiliation, there will be violence. If there is violence, there will be rejection. If there is rejection, there will be abandon and exclusion.

If there is trust, there then will be reconnaissance. With reconnaissance, there will be pride, and with pride, there will be the courage to open new paths to success.

“These things that we said here, they remind us of things that we did know, but that we had forgotten, and now, we have to apply them.”

We, representatives of national and international institutions, heads of NGOs, players in the educative or associative world, families who struggle every single day, and concerned citizens, we are ready to enter together in permanent dynamic dialog, where we make sure that no one is left behind, where everyone helps everyone else.

In conclusion:

In conclusion, for us, successful education means:

- the acquisition of fundamental values (respect, dignity, solidarity, courage, pardon, humility);
- being able to be useful to yourself, to your family, to your community;
- being recognized by your community.

The five following educative guidelines must be followed, in order to promote education that is really for all children:

- Supporting recognition and cooperation between all stakeholders in the educative community including those who have the least consideration.
- Adapting the educative offer, through dialog including all stakeholders in the educative community, including those who are the most isolated. For example, adapting school rhythms to match needs of food security in communities.
- Continuing efforts to issue birth certificates to all and making sure that these efforts reach out to populations that are extremely poor and socially isolated.
- Continuing efforts to keep schooling free-of-charge, so that no children from an underprivileged environment is prevented from going to school because of financial reasons. The logic of privatization of schools currently observed goes against this objective of free schooling for children aged 6 to 16.
- Developing teacher training that encourages friendship and cooperation between children and promotes their efforts as well as the efforts made by their parents.