



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



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SALZBURG DIARIES

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Session Chair, Michael Nettles, welcomes participants to the seminar.

SESSION OVERVIEW

Daring to think the unthinkable Exchanging ideas, devising strategies to close the gap

By: Gerben van Lent

Yesterday, the third and last seminar in the series 'Optimizing Talent: Closing Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide' started. The focus this time is on Higher Education and Lifelong Learning and participants are asked to identify where educational and social mobility gaps still exist, what effect they have, why they persist – or even increase – with rapid economic change, and what steps can be taken to eliminate them.

From October 2 to 7 the second seminar on Optimizing Talent: Closing the Mobility Gaps in Education Worldwide will be convened in Salzburg, bringing again together participants from different countries to try to improve accessibility to education confront inequity and improve education quality.

With this three year effort to bind people worldwide who share the same commitment and dedication towards the injustices in society, 'who follow the need and don't suffer from lack of purpose', and with an anticipated possible extension to a world congress on access, equity and social mobility, it should become more easy to suppress the fear of

an unchangeable negative triple A- lack of Availability, Affordability and Accessibility.

We are challenged not only by this 'triple A' notion but also, amongst others, the notion that higher education supposedly sustains elitism; a theme that was hardly present when we discussed basic education. As it was succinctly put today: "They did go to college but left with nothing (except maybe debt)."

Whatever we come up with is embedded in the economic environment we live in. On the downside many economies are struggling these days leading to increased unemployment and cuts in funding for education including higher education. On the upside you could state that in most countries the value of higher education and lifelong learning for economic growth is undisputed and targets are set to include large percentages of the population that need to have post-secondary education diplomas of some sorts. This not only fosters inclusion but also supports diversity. In this respect it is worthwhile to quote from one of the introductory papers - Opportunities for All? The Equity Challenge in Tertiary Education by Jamil Salmi and Roberta Malee Bassett:

"A diverse and inclusive workforce is

necessary to drive innovation, foster creativity, and guide business strategies. Multiple voices lead to new ideas, new services, and new products, and encourage out-of-the-box thinking. Today, companies no longer view diversity and inclusion efforts as separate from their other business practices, and recognize that a diverse workforce can differentiate them from their competitors by attracting top talent and capturing new clients."

Besides exchanging information, ideas and best practices, a key objective of the Optimizing Talent series is to devise practical strategies and tactics for closing achievement gaps and to create a permanent means of addressing them over time and throughout the world, in developed and developing nations alike.

This is far from trivial and reminded me of a chapter of the book: 'The Universe in Zero Words' by Dana Mackenzie. For more than 2000 years it was undisputed that in geometry the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Only in the 19th century a few mathematicians 'dared to think the unthinkable'. New geometries were designed with a different concept for the shortest distance as one of the results; can we follow in their footsteps?



53 participants from 31 countries have come to Salzburg. This is the third meeting in the Optimizing Talent series following on from the initial meeting in 2010 and 2011's session on Closing Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide in K-18 education.

KEY QUOTES

Tuesday's opening session was full of facts. Here, SGS Editor Louise Hallman pulls out the key statistics.

“In the US, four out of five wealthy 24-year-olds have a four-year college degree. Whereas if you look at low-income, in the bottom quartile, only one out of ten have a four-year college degree.”

“In the USA, 22% of our workforce are what we call ‘some college, and no degree’.”

“80 percent of American children from the Black and Latino communities cannot read.”

“China, which quintupled its number of tertiary graduates over the past decade, wants 20 percent of its entire population to hold tertiary degrees by 2020.”

“Among OECD and G20 countries, the number of 25- to 34-year-olds with tertiary degrees leapt from 91 million in 2000, to 129 million in 2010...The OECD expects the number to exceed 200 million by 2020.”

“In Chile, the rate of tertiary enrollment for the wealthiest quintile is

almost four times higher than for the poorest. In Argentina, it is five times higher; in Mexico, 18 times higher.”

“In the French-speaking countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the children of the richest quintile account for 80 percent of tertiary enrollment, while only 2 percent are from the poorest 40 percent of the population.”

“Between 1994 and 2009, every social group in Britain increased its university attendance rate. Yet higher social groups outperformed lower ones by almost exactly the same amount each year, locking social mobility in place.”

“Last year, tuition, fees, and room and board for one year at private, nonprofit four-year colleges and universities averaged \$38,589.”

“At public colleges and universities, which receive varying levels of state funding, the cost of a single year was \$17,131 for a state resident.”

“American students who earned bachelor's degrees in 2009–2010 from the private nonprofit four-year colleges at which they began their studies, 65 percent accumulated an average debt of \$28,100.”