



## **Introductory Report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Future Education**

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Half a century before the Information and Communications Technology was to bring the world under one virtual platform, the founders of WAAS sought to establish an informal world university. WAAS has identified education as vital to ushering in a paradigm change in global development. Over the past several conferences spanning the last five years, it has been asking the question "If you wanted to create an accessible, affordable, relevant and world class system of higher education open to all human beings, how would you do it?" The founding of the World University Consortium in 2013 marked a milestone in a long journey of inquiry and research in answer to the question, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Future Education in Rome marks another. This conference was organized by the Chair of Social Pedagogy, Department of Education of Roma Tre University in collaboration with the World Academy of Art & Science and World University Consortium, and in association with Inter-University Centre, The Person-Centered Approach Institute, Il caffè' pedagogico, United Nations Academic Impact, International Association of University Presidents, Kyung Hee University, The Mother's Service Society, Council One and Global Institute of Integral Management Studies. The sponsors were Franco Angeli, Virtus Lab and Alpes Italia.

The uniqueness of the conference lay in the fact that it gathered eminent thinkers, researchers, university administrators, and professors of education and other disciplines with vast experience covering all aspects of education together with representatives from the business community, labor unions, international NGOs and various government departments. Most importantly, it also featured student representatives, including large groups from Roma Tre University, Rome and Kyung Hee University, Seoul, South Korea.

The plenary speakers declared at the start of the conference that they have come together to ask important questions, open up discussion, come to conclusions, make recommendations and thus co-create the future. The questions that were asked were not about how to incrementally improve the existing system of education. They were about how to meet human needs, utilize more fully the human potential, and how to educate differently and better than we do today.

It takes centuries of experience to create a little history, centuries of history to create a little civilization, and *centuries of civilization to create a drop of culture. Our education*

is the distilled essence of all human experience, civilization and culture over millennia. We extract the essence of all our learning, and provide it to every new generation in a concentrated, abridged form that is relevant and usable, so the next generation can start off from where the previous one has reached, and go forward. This organization of education is one of the greatest human inventions. It is the accumulative result of thousands of years of human learning and ingenuity, and innumerable educators have dedicated their lifetimes to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next. Human development worldwide owes much to the spread of education. Education as a process is also perhaps one of the most difficult things humans do. It is not enough that we know what happened in the past, remember it, construct theories around it, and pass it on. We have to understand the process of passing on the experience, this requires us to become conscious. Do we know how to do that? Do we even know the essence of our experience that we should pass on to others?

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*“The essence of education is about human accomplishment, in every sphere of our existence.”*

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The essence of education is about human accomplishment, in every sphere of our existence. It is the essence of being happy, successful, secure, content, healthy, responsible human beings, and building effective, responsible, sustainable societies. How is our present system passing on this knowledge? This knowledge is not found as information in text books. It does not reside in scientific equations, mathematical formulas, statistics, economics, art, history or literature. These subjects are all essential. They are all of relevance to everyone at some point in their lives. But they are not central to what carries us through our lives. They do not constitute the distilled quintessence of learning from human experience or the most essential knowledge that today’s youth need to cope with the challenges and avail of the opportunities of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The motive power for learning is an awakened, passionately curious mind. Questions constitute the heart of real learning. One of the questions raised in this conference was, what is worth teaching and learning? Another question posed was, in an age of information glut, how much information should students be made to seek for themselves, and how much should be taught in school? Can the time spent in the classroom not be used for better and more effective learning than simply transfer of information? Teachers have always known that we learn best when we teach others. Paradoxically, we have an education paradigm that maximizes the learning of the educators. The conference also inquired as to how we can flip the paradigm. It also inquired deeply into the process of thinking and creativity. It is easier to tell people what we know rather than to get them to think. We need a paradigm in which everyone becomes a source of learning. Is such a change practical, feasible, and if so, how can it be done?

Our schools and colleges fundamentally encourage competition. Every student is ranked against others. They largely study by themselves and compete against others. Whereas at work, the most important thing is to work as a team, cooperate, learn, discover and create together. Can we move from a system of competition to one of cooperation? Can we shift the emphasis from the subject to the person? From passive dissemination of information to active learning?

None of these changes are easy, and no one has complete answers. We see that we live in an increasingly globalized world of unprecedented complexity and uncertainty that is changing at lightning speed. Education is the single most wonderful invention of humanity, and the single most challenging one too. We have so far shaped it by a long process of trial and error. What we have today is a result of thousands of years of learning, and it cannot be unlearned quickly. However, when we look at the challenges, complexity and speed of change we face, it becomes clear that we need to do better than in the past. We cannot afford to improve slowly and incrementally. We need to be able to help the next generation learn and do much better than we have done so far. That was what the conference on Future Education was about.

During the conference there emerged a growing consensus of the need for a paradigm shift in education from the subject to the student; from passive absorption of information to active understanding and thinking; from academic knowledge to personality development; from abstract concepts divorced from life to richly contextual knowledge; from narrow disciplinary expertise to inter-disciplinary perspectives; from sanitized physical facts to values that foster sustained accomplishment and harmonious human relations; from individual competition to cooperative group learning; from the ability to memorize the right answer to the ability to solve problems, think independently, discover, innovate and create. Regardless of how many jobs one changes or countries one travels to, the one constant is the human individual. An education that values the person, teaches how to relate to others—as individuals, groups, societies and humanity—and work together successfully, such an education is most valuable.

### ***Contours of the Needed Paradigm Shift in Education***

<b>Old Paradigm</b>	<b>New Paradigm</b>
Subject-centered	Person-centered
Passive transfer	Active learning
Competitive individual	Collaborative group learning
Standardized competencies and Conformity	Customized, creative individuality
Information	Values
Abstract knowledge	Understanding & critical analysis
Mechanistic, reductionist thinking	Organic, integrated, interdisciplinary, & transdisciplinary thinking
Transfer of mental knowledge	Development of the whole person(ality)
Fragmented & compartmentalized knowledge	Contextual knowledge

The plenary speeches, parallel sessions, workshops and discussions at the conference were a rich and insightful examination of issues critically important to the change we need. It generated a plethora of important conclusions and recommendations for consideration

by educational institutions, governments, businesses and civil society. But clearly this conference only represents a step in a much larger process. Apart from the insights, ideas, perspectives and practical recommendations generated at the conference, there are also many questions that need still to be seriously considered and researched in order to arrive at satisfactory answers in the form of solutions, policies, strategies and methods for application. Moreover, these answers are themselves only steps in the process of moving from conception to implementation, from leadership in thought to effective action. The Future Education Conference in Rome is best conceived as a step—an important meaningful step—in a wider process as WAAS and WUC attempt to establish a world university that can provide accessible, affordable, relevant and quality education to all.

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