



CMA Forum Opening Speech - Alexandria March 2023

The health and education of a people are political choices

If there were any doubts about the intimate relationship between Health and Education, they have been fully clarified with the current COVID-19 pandemic: the more fragile the literacy level of a population, the greater the exposure to the risk of contracting the disease, the worse the consequences in case of infection and the greater the damage to the personal, local and national economy.

I

For centuries, it was assumed that it was enough to pass on generational knowledge to know how to be healthy and take care of others. It was therefore exclusively a family affair. Reality has shown that this information, although very important, represents only a small part of the body of knowledge necessary to be in good health, to obtain a longer life expectancy and, above all, years of life in good health. Something that can only be achieved through solid individual and collective education, to be obtained throughout life through formal, non-formal and informal means. For what?

The nature of the experiences determines the practices of behaviors and lifestyles, which, for these reasons, structurally modify throughout the life cycle, the norms of acceptability and inclusion at every moment of the organic functioning of the Society.

Social evolution in recent centuries has been positive, but history shows that there are also times of great setbacks, when political power moves away from humanistic values

and scientific and technological progress. For example, it was not until the 19th century that the standards of public sanitation and personal hygiene of ancient Rome and the same level of hospital care as in classical Greece were again achieved. What seems guaranteed today as a human or simply civilizational right is in reality not, it is always transitory and depends on the conscience that exists in society at a given moment, in defense of what one believes. Must do.

One of the consequences of the intense pace of technical-scientific progress is that it has itself become a new barrier: there are those who manage to keep up with developments in terms of learning and the ability to economically acquire the tools and those who cannot. This has been well reflected in the current pandemic: those who managed to access teleconsultations and those who had to go to the Health Center at risk of contagion; those who could get a prescription on their cell phone and those who needed it on paper, just to mention something that affects millions of people. A new type of racism therefore sets in: that of those who manage to keep up with health progress and those who cannot, the same groups of excluded being, as always, the socially vulnerable groups.

II

The philosopher Ortega & Gasset spoke in 1914 in his *Meditaciones del Quichotte* "I am myself and my situation, and if I do not save my situation, I do not save myself". There is in the sentence the contextual depth of Human existence in the ecosystem of the Subject with what surrounds it, whether living or inanimate, whether economic or conceptual.

We are Human insofar as we live in Society and through this experience we can learn to live together.

The condition of Humanity is only obtained through the Other, sometimes known, most often anonymous, but always in permanent processes of interactive learning which lead to the collective co-creation that is the Society itself. -even.

This is why lifelong learning is prior to any intellectual conception of education, it is endogenous to the human condition. Conceiving of learning only makes sense if it happens as a continuous process and not as a product, because in the latter case it is something instantaneous that disappears the moment it happens.

There is learning in each interaction where the intellect transforms what is environmental information into abstract and representative concepts. We cannot not learn. What we can do is waste learning opportunities or not use them effectively and correctly.

This human condition of continuous lifelong learning exists in all dimensions of conscious and sentient being. The same applies, and probably above all, to Health, because it requires wisdom and is sensitive in the most vestigial elements.

How we interact with the environment and in the community almost completely determines the health profile we present as a person and as a social group. Wealthy societies, which are primarily focused on money, manage to achieve a long life expectancy, in addition to creating long years of unhealthy life: metabolic and circulatory diseases predominate resulting from excesses, stress and social relationships dysfunctional - in short, to live against time and not in time. Then they are given names that indicate the damaged system, but never the cause: type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, etc.

In poor countries and in the poor strata of rich countries, people suffer much more from poverty than from the diseases themselves. They turn out to be the physical form of poverty: infectious diseases, poor quality food, malnutrition and addictions of multiple origins.

In all countries, violence is common, becoming one of the leading causes of death: in young age groups in many countries, it is the leading cause of death. Here too, it is given contextual names: suicide, homicide, accident,... never the cause that leads to violence, which is the lack of humanization of people and societies.

III

Humanization is built without ever ending. It is a learning process that we must enter at birth and only exit at death. This process must go through the construction of an orientation of the Society for the Human Being, where Health and Well-being are the essential elements, as recognized and integrated in the definition of Health by the WHO. In 2018, the concept of Health was extended by the WHO to the interaction with other animals and plants in a planetary approach under the concept "One Health". Mental health is also reaching levels of degradation without known historical precedent, and as the WHO says: "There is no health without mental health".

A humanized society is therefore an ecosystem society balanced in its social and productive relationships and aligned with nature. This is why there can only be a Society where the asymmetries are blurred, since in all the viable processes of Nature balance is sought.

In all existing processes in Nature where asymmetries increase, sooner or later they end up disturbing and eliminating the process, sometimes in a very violent way. This is the case with physical and chemical, biological and social processes.

Either the Human Being aligns himself with Nature by pulling on his good side, which brought him from the caves to today's technology and continues to progress in the future, or he will simply be irradiated by Nature in its permanent search for homeostasis. As Claude Lévi-Strauss said "The World began without Man and will end without him". I am not referring to Stephen Hawking's dire predictions that the Human

Being could become extinct within the next 30 years if he does not change his way of life, only that we are at a turning point in the History of Humanity, as has not happened for 12,000 years, in this case in a positive way, when agriculture appeared in this area of the Levant. Today, the moment is negative due to climate change, the destruction of ecosystems and the scarcity of energy, mineral and natural resources.

If we persist in current patterns of consumption and forms of relationships, the transience of the Human Being, identical to that of more than 20 million species now extinct, can thus accelerate in a destructive whirlwind . The history of the past 250 years has brought us to a point that demands awareness: the problems of social asymmetry, the scarcity of almost everything, the levels of disease experienced on a planetary scale, the danger of conflict, have a single source: the Vivendi modus of the Humane Society.

We must therefore relearn how to live together and with the planet. It is an unprecedented challenge that can only be resolved through political means. Defining the level of health of a population is a political option, and choosing the level of education of a population is also a political option. In essence, the solution for the Human Being on the planet is the panoply of policy choices facing the next few years, as we are very close to the point of no return.

Health and education are the fundamental pillars of this infrastructural change that we urgently need, and in this only lifelong education is viable for the reasons mentioned at the beginning.

IV

The holding of a World Forum on Lifelong Health Education in this city of Alexandria has a special significance. I would argue that very few places on the planet gather such historical weight of what education and health can mean if managed well and what

happens when political power moves away from knowledge and does not see the light of progress there.

The city of Alexandria is one of the cradles of human civilization. Its Library was for centuries a beacon for human thought of such importance that, even after its demise, it continued to be an example of how to deal with Culture, Thought and Reflection of Being. Human on himself, until our days. It constitutes the ultimate example of how by mobilizing what is good in the Human Being, the World can be changed so that it becomes a better place, more open to the Other, more modern, more conscious of what surrounds us, more sure of the weight that science and knowledge, in general, must have in the life of each one of us.

The third director of the Library of Alexandria, Erastóthenes of Cyrene (2nd century BC), produced, among many other astronomical, mathematical and literary works, for the first time and by the scientific method, the demonstration that the Earth was round and determined its perimeter so rigorously that it was not until the 19th century that it was possible to improve the accuracy of its calculation. Two thousand two hundred years later, we are faced with the need to fight against the action of the flat earth movements, which millions of people are joining, even in highly educated countries. Similarly, in the midst of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, negationist movements have raised their voices across the planet, boycotting most efforts to fight the pandemic and spreading fake news, thus increasing the spread of the disease. .

The link between the Library of Alexandria and Health is umbilical. The Corpus Hippocraticum was created and maintained there, in which the various thoughts on health of classical Greek authors were expressed, freely and without prejudice, in 60 volumes. Not only from Hippocrates himself, but also from those who distinguished themselves from him by a demonstration of freedom of thought which is still exemplary today.

As we know, the history that followed led to the regression of much of this knowledge, freedom of thought and definition of what it means to have Health and Well-Being and to be in balance with the world that surrounds each individual.

Contrary to popular belief that a great fire suddenly destroyed everything, reducing to ashes the greatest collection of knowledge ever accumulated up to that time, the truth is that the great library of Alexandria succumbed from the moment the political power has ceased to value knowledge and the creation of knowledge. There was no dramatic fire, but a decline of four centuries punctuated by multiple small fires and marked by the devaluation of knowledge and those who produce it, by the disinvestment of culture and, above all, by the intolerance towards those who think differently.

This political and sociological climate at the time of decline explains how Heron of Alexandria, who avidly frequented the Library in the 1st century, developed the first steam engine and how it and its technology eventually got lost in time, not returning to the service of humanity in the 18th century.

Committing to lifelong education means valuing and humanizing knowledge, recognizing that, if used well, it is a tremendous mechanism for improving living conditions and, consequently, life expectancy and well-being. A society that values education and knowledge is (history has shown) a society with a future. A Society, even rich and powerful, when it begins to devalue knowledge and its dissemination, ends up collapsing. History has also shown that this devaluation, over time, led to the extinction of empires and kingdoms, sometimes entire civilizations.

Educating throughout life means valuing each Human Subject within the framework of an ecosystem of relationships. The increase in knowledge reduces prejudice and mistrust in the face of change and evolution, it equalizes people, reduces the difference in access to knowledge and, therefore, to the mechanisms of power between any two groups of asymmetric power, whether by skin color, gender, social groups, etc.

Educating for health throughout life means applying all the presuppositions to the person's condition of existence, as well as providing them with the conceptual tools that allow each stage of life to have the body of knowledge necessary for the preservation of his physical condition and mental health, as well as those for whom they are responsible. It also improves well-being in multiple ways: by increasing the number of healthy years, improving the ecosystem of relationships with others, and improving relationships with the planet.

The viability of health education throughout life must be closely linked to the phenomenon of education as a whole. Without a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy, it is not possible to access health knowledge, without inclusion, it is not possible to access modern solutions to deliver health care and disseminate information. Without strong literacy, numeracy and inclusion in information technology, the person is exposed to the circulation of fake news and quickly becomes a victim. This was recognized in UNESCO's 2016 GRALE report and confirmed in the 2017 international CONFINTEA mid-term review agreement.

Coming back to the symbolic place where the Declaration is intended to be made, there is something that must be kept in mind: if the main cause of the decline of the Library of Alexandria, and in general of all the other libraries appeared in the Mediterranean Basin at that time, it was the progressive disinterest of political power towards knowledge and intolerance towards difference, there was also a minor cause, which was that of knowledge returning to its elite walls .

At the time, the need for disseminating knowledge as a tool to further progress, quality of life, peace, social equity, and citizen health was unheard of. We know it today and we cannot fall into the same error. Knowledge must be disseminated and be a fundamental condition of citizenship. Health knowledge must not only be disseminated but practiced by all, that is to say in the most democratic way, because it is the basis of the continuity and quality of life.

V

We are going to have a Global Lifelong Health Education Forum which seeks to cover in matrix form some of today's major issues:

1. The question of the health of women and girls, so often specific and so often minimized, as well as the role of women in society. It is important to contribute to equal access to care, to specific responses, to the crucial role that women play in society, as the poet Luis Aragon said, later sung by Jean Ferrat: "Les women are the future of man".
2. The issue of migrants and refugees, a phenomenon that is only emerging, given the foreseeable number of climate and economic migrants and war refugees in the decades to come. Their health education is specific and makes all the difference in terms of life expectancy, quality of life, healthy life years and well-being. However, it does not stay much further than an embryonic stage of development.
3. The problem of chronic disease, both from the point of view of the patient and of the family and caregiver. While progress is being made in increasing life expectancy, the same success in maintaining healthy life years has not been achieved. How to know to be sick? How do you know how to take care of the patient? What are the implications of chronic diseases on personal, professional and family life? What can communities do to alleviate this burden?

This will be followed by other forums for exchanges on the specificities of Lifelong Health Education in regions outside the usual western and westernized geography. We

want to give voice to the 80% of Humanity who are generally not studied and investigated, and for whom health responses are not primarily designed.

With the enormous importance of culture in understanding the concept of Health and the social roles played in the exercise of prevention and the provision of health care, it is absolutely necessary to reflect on the adaptations to be made to procedures and lessons already learned. so that they effectively serve these populations; one must learn what other solutions to the same problems have been developed in these places with interest in other parts of the world. It is only through the co-creation of knowledge and the sharing of experiences that we can progress safely.

Knowing not only what works, but with equal interest what fails, another element so often hidden in a biased presentation of results where we only show where we have succeeded. Failure is as rich in learning as success, so let's make failure as welcome as success.

The three major geographical areas that we will focus on in this Forum are Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In a Forum where acquired knowledge is discussed, where knowledge is sought and where co-creation is essential, there can only be room for an open debate, without restriction of content or perspectives. For this reason, the time for debate is identical to the time for presentation of communications. We will discuss everything!

VI

I end with a return to Alexandria.

In this city of the poet Konstantinos Kavafis, who was born and died there, a man who experienced poverty and migration first hand, who for various reasons was always part of what we now call a vulnerable group, from different types simultaneously at every stage of his life lives, he could not be forgotten.

The poetic genius of Kavafis tells us that more important than reaching great destinations, it is important to learn from each other and make life a journey of learning. Learning is a supreme way to live life, through it all, and through that learning, having the ability and the wisdom to say "no" when necessary, to be open to anything that might be different and to extract gains from this knowledge.

I chose this excerpt from his 1911 masterpiece Ithaca, inspired by the journey that another poet, Homer, wrote in the Odyssey. In it, Odysseus, after the victory over Troy, took 10 years to reach his home, the island of Ithaca. Kavafis sees in this voyage the gain of the Odyssey, not in the conquest of Troy, and, as if speaking to Odysseus, he says:

(Excerpt from the poem Ithaca) (...)

*Visit of many Egyptian cities,
and learn eagerly from their wise men.*

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.

Your end goal is to achieve this,

but do not shorten your journey:

it is better that it lasts for many years,

and you finally land on your island in the days of your old age,

rich with all that you have gained along the way,

without waiting for Ithaca to enrich you.

Ithaca gave you the beautiful trip:

without it, you would not have started.

(...)

(Traduction en Français de Marguerite Yourcenar)