The Most Important New Literacy?: Overcoming Seemingly Impossible Obstacles to Make 'Education for All' and Related UNESCO Goals and Policies a Reality in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Aspirations to achieve UNESCO's millennium goals by 2015 increasingly seem to many people as an ever remote possibility and even an impossible or utopian dream. With reference to the particular policy commitment of 'Education For All', this paper will explore two related questions. Firstly, it poses the question of whether UNESCO is projection of goals such as education for all by 2015 or indeed any date is really an impossible notion? Secondly, if we accept the proposition that a dramatic change in the global human condition should be and can be possible in practice and not just as utopian projection, then what is needed to overcome negative self-fulfilling prophecies of failure to achieve the 'right direction' of knowledge and action? In response to these two questions, the paper pursues a thought experiment which in practice as well as in principle refuses to accept the inevitability of the present reality that there is an ever-widening knowledge as well as economic gap between modern, rich and developed countries and traditional, poor and developing societies.

Keywords: education for all; millennium goals, knowledge-building, dialogical thinkers, digital divide, literacy education, new literacies, productive imagination; aporia, cross-cultural communication

Introduction

If the central strategy of the international *Education For All* (EFA)movement or 'commitment' (UNESCO, 1990) was to focus global awareness on the potential and general importance of particular educational goals for addressing human inequity and disadvantage in the world, then like other Millenium Goals it has

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been somewhat successful. However, the gap between rich and poor in the world has continued to increase – and, likewise, associated education and knowledge 'gaps' despite some progress in the six key goals of the Education of All commitment (free and compulsory primary education for all, etc.). As the EFA Global Monitoring Report puts it, the 'inequality of opportunity is undermining progress towards achieving Education for All by 2015' (UNESCO, 2009). In other words, as various summits on global climate change exemplify, 'growing awareness' is admirable but clearly not sufficient in itself to achieve significant change. This is especially so in light of a range of associated 21st Century challenges and obstacles to either achieving a global community where there is a much fairer and more reciprocal sharing of resources and even knowledge in light of the growing and increasingly urgent realization around the world of fundamental human inter-dependence.

There are endless examples inhuman history of individuals and also groups who have overcome very difficult circumstances or a lack of formal educational opportunities to realize significant achievements and contributions to different kinds of human knowledge in various ways. Although many would and do interpret this as evidence of a natural elitism of some kind (i.e. the exception proves the unlikely or generally 'impossible' rule), there is also the alternative perspective to such self-fulfilling notions of the human condition that such cases exemplify the potential of all individuals and societies for development or self-determination. To apply this analogy to the global human condition, there is perhaps a conflict of perceptions between those who view the achievement of UNESCO's *Education For All* concept in the near future (i.e. before it is 'too late') as increasingly unlikely or even simply impossible on one hand, and those on the other who hold that there must be a way to make such an important as well as ethically noble aspiration some kind of meaningful or emergent reality. This contrast of alternative perspectives is linked to the possible distinction between an *economic* and *cultural* concept of globalization. *Economic* globalization tends to look backwards to the past and represents the last vestiges of an industrial revolution model of historical progress focused on the exploitation of human as well as natural resources. In contrast, a *cultural* notion of globalization rather looks *forward* to a possible future social convergence of humanity and emergent notions of the human potential for 'learning' (e.g. Brown & Duguid, 2000; Stiglitz, 2006).

This paper proposes to explore some of the different ways the concept 'education

for all' might be understood as the basis for addressing its central focus question (and some related questions below in the three sections of the paper): *Is the concept of 'education for all' in any or all senses of the term simply impossible to achieve in the near future of humanity, or is there 'another way' which is possibly sustainable and achievable?* It will frame this inquiry as a potential quest for a 'global knowledge-building convergence' which addresses a myriad of missing links and obstacles in terms of a related proposal: that the truly convergent function of various senses of 'knowledge' is one of transforming *vicious circles of inevitability* (ranging from the poverty cycle to 'knowledge passivity' in the classroom and beyond) into 'virtuous circles' of social dialogue and cultural reciprocity on one hand, and innovative problem-solving, applied thinking, and meaningful inquiry on the other.

Thus the paper will identify, distinguish, and link together three different if related perspectives of the notion *Education for All* (see Figure- 1 below). Most commonly the concept of EFA is seen as directly linked to basic literacy provision in terms of an *access and equity perspective* that the required natural and human resources of support around the world are neither unlimited nor equally distributed. However, the concept of EFA is also often invoked in terms of how the lack of access and equity also limits and often denies the opportunity for expressing or realizing the naturally 'unlimited' learning potential of every child – a key to the associated human right to achieve a reasonable degree of human dignity (i.e. the assumptions of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights). This might be referred to as the *human possibility perspective.* Such a perspective is linked to various learner-centered aspirations and constructivist models increasingly informing contemporary educational theory and policy around the world – models of 'active' individual learners more effectively realizing their learning potential and taking at least some small control of their own basic capacity for self-determination. But neither proactive theories or policies on one hand, nor the provision of expensive learning resources on the other are sufficient in themselves to achieve the most effective and relevant learning, development or capacity building by either individual learners or their social context. Thus we will outline a third convergent *knowledge-building perspective.* In terms of the open-ended and future possibilities (rather than 'rear-view' inevitability or contingency) of 'dialogically' linking the first two perspectives, this approach views a globally applicable notion of EFA as a potentially *emergent* social and cultural process but also a potentially explicit

framework of knowledge-building by which individuals and societies might achieve a greater *convergence of human possibility* linked to a more equitable sharing of limited natural and human resources.

Figure- 1: Three distinct but related Education For All perspectives
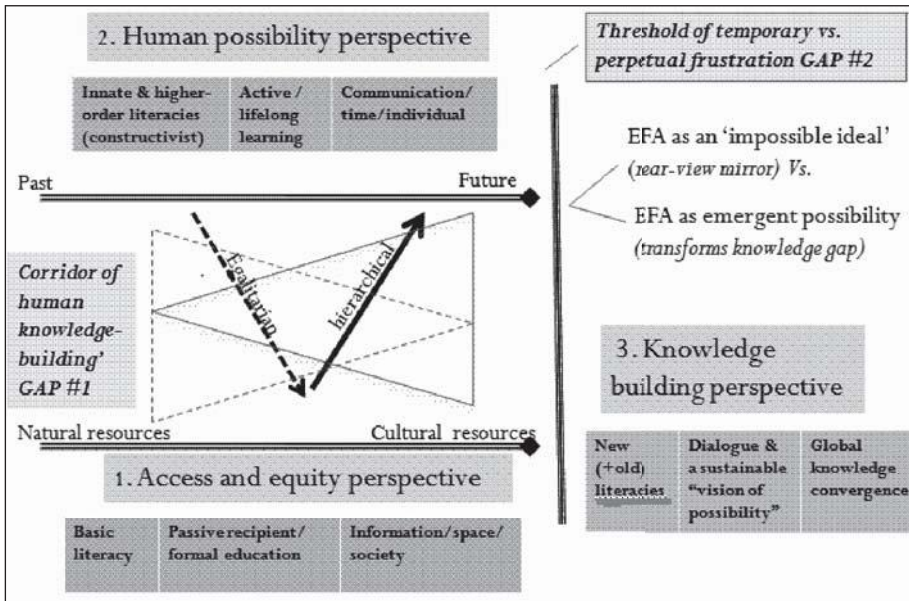
These three perspectives will be linked to the main three sections of the paper in terms of a developing and inter-connected (i.e. emergent) exploration of the 'most important new literacy' needed to transform: (a) the first two EFA perspectives indicated above into a convergent knowledge-building process and framework; and (b) 21st Century *obstacles* into 'Education for All' *opportunities.* As indicated above, the concept of EFA typically revolves around a basic notion of formal learning as a matter of learning to 'read and write'. As will be discussed, the 'gap' between those who tend to define *literacy* in terms of specific particular verbal skills and information access purposes on one hand, and those who rather identify this with communication and knowledge-building contexts of applied understanding and practical purposes on the other, also needs to be addressed in terms of the 'new literacy' implications and possibilities of an emerging knowledge economy, network society, and cultural globalization transformed by new information and communication technologies.

Thus the three sections of the paper will discuss 'the most important new literacy' in terms of: (a) the connection between educational technology and a digital divide; (b) the challenge of achieving more 'egalitarian' intercultural communication or cross-cultural understanding; and (c) the connection between new models of learning and knowledge-building (Richards, 2003; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c). This is in the initial context that a pessimistic perspective towards the Education for All commitment might be interrogated in terms of related projections about a growing 'digital divide' fuelling the forces of international and social disadvantage in the 21st Century global economy. Then, building on the original 'dialogical' insight of the literacy educator Freire, the papers further explores the idea that the greatest educational challenge for people in diverse contexts around the world is the ability to recognize how we can learn from other people with different perspectives or new experiences – and on this basis, to promote a globally convergent framework for knowledge sharing. To achieve such a framework there needs to be more than lip-service to the idea that every individual and society is potentially a productive and meaningful 'knowledge-builder' in any of various related senses of knowledge as a process of developing greater understanding and wisdom and not just the accumulation of information or achievement of 'progress' for its own sake. As another great dialogical thinker (Paul Ricoeur) has pointed out with 'productive imagination' what sometimes seem like impossible problems can also be changed into more positive scenarios or opportunities for change and transformation. In this way, the vision as well as humility to engage and overcome obstacles and realize 'education for all' opportunities are the key aspects of 'active knowledge-building'- perhaps the most important new literacy of the digital age, and one that more 'developed' peoples may well have much to learn about from the less advantaged.

The Real 'Digital Divide' in the Emerging Global Network Society

Does the so-called 'digital divide' of information and communication technology use in the 21st Century necessarily reinforce the perceptions of many that there is an increasing and potentially irreversible gap between modern, rich and/or developed societies on one hand, and traditional, poor and/or developing ones on the other?

The EFA concept is commonly associated with the formal provision of basic literacy education – that is, the opportunity to learn to 'read and write' in order to

effectively participate in extended networks and institutions of modern 'society' beyond the local. In this perspective the *EFA* commitment emphasizes the 'access and equity' principles of providing assistance to those in need to make this a reality. Thus such a perspective implies the notion of a significant global gap between modern, rich and/or developed societies where basic education provision is the norm and those traditional, poor and/or developing societies where such principles and goals are not yet a regular and sustainable reality. Hence also, despite progress in particular contexts with particular goals, larger developments such as war, famine, and instabilities in the global economy reflect a generally widening gap of human possibility, opportunity, and 'sharing' of finite resources.

There are additional '21st Century' factors and elements which further suggest not only an apparently widening 'opportunity gap' but new or extended notions of 'basic literacy' (e.g. UNESCO, 2004). In such wider frameworks of definition, 'literacy' is increasingly understood as (a) the generic ability to visually as well verbally access shared sources of human information and to use different forms of language-use to   communicate   with   others,   and   (b)   new   meanings, understandings, and contexts by which 'written or printed materials' are subsumed not only within the digital texts of new information and communication technologies but also recognized as extensions of human interaction with physical, oral/aural, and other visual aspects or semiotic realms of meaningful 'signification'. The distinction or connection between formal education and non-formal learning and knowledge-building has likewise become especially blurred in terms of the emerging possibilities and requirements of digital literacy in an increasingly inter-connected world (e.g. Lankshear & Knobel, 2008).

The concept of a 'digital divide' is often invoked to refer to aspects of this additional layering, with the result that any possible reversal of associated condition such as the *poverty cycle* and growing inequities in the global knowledge economy seems increasingly remote and unlikely at best (e.g. Servon 2002). Generally the concept of a *digital divide* is held to refer to a gap between 'haves and have-nots' when it comes to the access of not only computers and the internet more widely but also the associated knowledge and 'literacies' of these technologies and their possible applications (Norris, 2001, Compaigne, 2001). By extension the 'digital divide' in this view involves an important distinction between 'access' to global stocks of information or knowledge resources on one hand, and global networks of communication and knowledge building on the other. Thus it is a term which has particular relevance to formal education on one

hand (i.e. *rich vs. poor schools*) and social participation (e.g. disadvantages faced by rural margins in relation to urban centers) in a larger context of inequities both within and across different societies around the world on the other.

However, we propose to challenge such a 'hopeless' perspective in two distinct but ultimately related ways. One 'solution' is hinted at by the central principle of the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) that '*Education for All* should not be 'thwarted… by a lack of resources'. This was generally understood in terms of financial pledges by richer and more developed countries to assist those governments in poorer more developing countries which were committed to the concept locally. Perhaps predictably, many of those pledges were never honored (UNESCO 2009). However, faced with an access 'digital divide' many local communities as well as individuals around the world are not waiting for assistance which is often unlikely to arrive – and indeed, are thus not letting themselves be thwarted by a lack of resources (Richards, 2006).Around the world, there are inspiring stories in both non-formal and formal educational contexts (including 'new' as well as 'basic' literacy learning) where local educators with community support are 'doing a lot with very little'. Thus one of the most exemplary models of EFA is Bangladesh's 'total literacy movement' linked as it is with the national project 'integrated non-formal education program' (INFEP) and an associated community library program (Hoque, 1997). Many such examples and accounts have been linked to what has been called 'ICT for development' (ICT4D) – an increasingly central focus of UNESCO initiatives around the world. As Heeks (2009) has pointed out, ICT4D projects have often not been sustainable because of the failure of top-down approaches to sufficiently engage a local context. Yet, the more successful NGO-sponsored projects or, better still, wholly local initiatives in digital learning or ICT4D can provide models for others rather than be simply explained away as exceptions which prove the rule of typical failure, passivity, and inadequacy. Indeed, the initiative being shown by those who are either motivated by sheer survival instinct or the possibilities of a value-added approach to getting the maximal use out of a resource by wide cross-section of a community can be an inspiration to a much wider audience than just other traditional, poor and/or developing communities.

Schools, universities and other educational institutions in many modern, rich and developed societies generally spend a lot of money on providing computer and internet access to their learners and users. But often little is spent on appropriate professional development of teachers and the development of appropriate learning

resources (e.g. Healy, 1999). This contrasts with how the constructivist learning theories which have heavily influenced changing educational policy in many countries (e.g. in terms of the valorisation of generic skills and learning outcomes – especially the elusive goal of developing 'innovative' graduates) typically emphasize the active, learner-centered possibilities of new information and communication digital technologies (Jonassen et al, 2007). In short,for all the money spent on access and despite all the innovative policy and rhetoric about how technology can revolutionize education and schools in these societies, there is a general sense that: (a) modern educational institutions have generally failed to harness the great educational promise of computers, multimedia, and the internet (e.g. Robertson, 2003); and (b) there are 'missing links' which somehow obstruct the conversion of often well-meaning policy and rhetoric into effective and integrated practice (Richards, 2007).

This contrasts with the great interest and adoption of digital technologies outside the classroom by a generation of younger learners in societies around the world. Thus, for instance, Prensksy (2004, 2006) has insightfully described a digital divide between a younger generation of 'digital natives' who, he argues, are learning to think differently compared with an older generation of 'digital immigrants'. In similar fashion, other commentators have recognized the productive new literacy implications of: (a) such extra-curricular activities as digital and online games (e.g. Gee, 2006); and (b) the more interactive 'Web 2.0 paradigm of rich media lending themselves to innovative designs of customized 'mashups' or the blending of different resources and 'multimedia'. In contrast to the relatively passive medium of television, interactive digital games and constructive multimedia blending are increasingly recognized for their potential to encourage many of the kind of generic skills and 'active learning' approaches which educational policies are increasingly aspiring to internationally. In short, new media presuppose 'new literacies' which have extended basic reading and writing into active constructions of meaning through design and evaluation modes of interacting with internet and multimedia resources (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). What is also clear is that the preoccupation with exciting uses of new literacy and technologies 'outside' the formal classroom and the related inability of teachers and schools to harness the interest and fascination of the 'digital natives are reinforcing perceptions of a crisis in formal education in developed countries generally (Somekh, 2007) .

One of the most insightful models of the educational implications of new information and communication technologies was developed by the educator and thinker Seymour Papert (e.g. 1994). In contrast to humanistic educators such as Neil Postman (1992) who tended to emphasize only the negative aspects of technology for human knowledge-building and was not able to recognize the more productive aspects, Papert emphasized the 'constructionist' or 'active learning' possibilities and implications of computer-based technologies. Although much of his work focused on the cognitive implications of technological tools for learning, perhaps Papert's most significant model (Papert & Calvallo, 2000) was of a future 21st Century society where community ICT ' learning hubs' are increasingly key centers of human knowledge-building. This is a vision which goes beyond the influential concept of an emerging 'network society' governed by the 'spatial flows… of information'(Castells, 2000) to suggests the concrete possibility of a global 'knowledge-building' convergence encompassing both formal and non-formal learning.

The concept of an emerging network society made possible by, but not reducible to, new technologies has profound and significant implications for recognizing a fundamental paradigm shift in both human social organization and paradigms of knowledge building, many of which are still to be understood or explored. As Castells outlines in his influential work, the nodes of human networking encouraged and extended by new technologies can include both individuals and social groups of various sizes who communicate, express themselves, and share information in a way which cuts across the historical human tendency in both traditional and modern forms of society to delineate: (a) socially hierarchical as well as culturally networked notions of *us vs. them* (traditional) or *self vs.* other (modern); and (b) *dialogical* rather than *oppositional* views of the interplay between local contexts and global imperatives of the human condition. This larger notion of a networked global society provides a sustainable, interactive, and imaginative corrective or antidote to relativist, postmodernist and technologically determinist emphases rather on transient or specific interactions between concrete things and abstract concepts. However, there are certain versions of this model which blur or even ignore the distinction between technological and human agency on one hand, and social and individual agency on the other (e.g. as described by Latour and others, actor-network theory's notion of *material-semiotic networks*).

In other words, the internet and related digital technologies have been a critical factor in encouraging the global extension or convergence of personal and shared imagination: (a)beyond the 'separateness' of both modern individualism and traditional senses of local community; and (b) in light of greater educational and other awareness of the potentially endless and unlimited human possibility common to all societies and individuals. In this way McLuhan's (1982) prediction of an emerging *global village* builds on the anticipation of Ong (e.g. 1982) that digital technologies would productively converge with the history or social evolution of human knowledge and communications. Such a notion describes the possibility and knowledge-building perspective of a shared human consciousness and conscience which goes beyond merely the instantaneous and endless information accessible via the internet and related technologies.

Figure- 2: The far-reaching implications of an emerging 21st Century network society
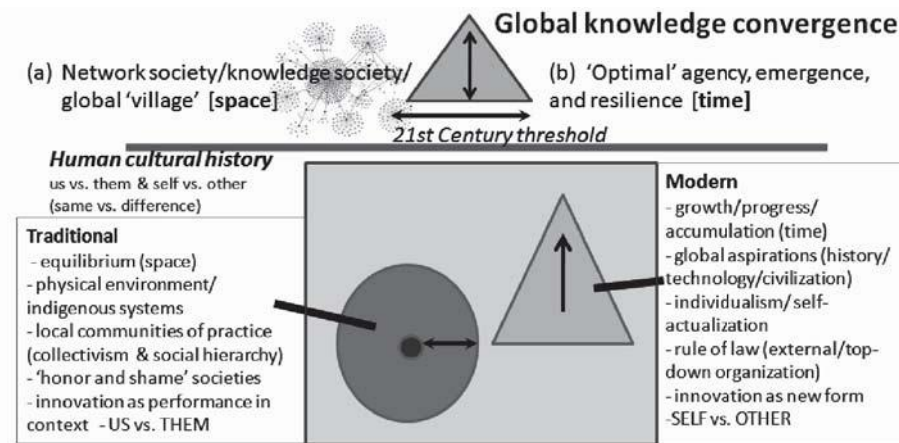

Thus as Figure- 2 above outlines, an emerging network society is encouraged by, but not reducible to, the 'technological extensions' *in space* of greater information-sharing, communication, and interactive dialogue between people around the world. Although this is not sufficient by itself for achieving a greater global convergence of human knowledge-building, it is a crucial and paradigm-altering foundation for both a more constructive, egalitarian, and reciprocal sharing of knowledge *in time* between humans in general, and for a recognition that even the richest, most technologically developed and educationally sophisticated people have much to learn from those that seem to have and know little worth sharing.

The *digital divide* is often or typically represented as a gap between the information poor and information rich in terms of how computers and digital networks provide a foundation for the acceleration and accumulation of knowledge (e.g. Compaine, 2001). In this way, technologically backward or undeveloped societies would seem to be also missing out on the whole process of knowledge-building understood as mere data and information accumulation. This is reflected in a model starting to become influential in such areas information systems and knowledge management referred to as the 'data-information-knowledge-wisdom pyramid' (Fricke, 2009).

Such a model essentially proposes that 'organized *data* produces *information* which is constructed as *knowledge* in time may even produce *wisdom* through human understanding'.

Figure- 3: Formal vs. non-formal perspectives on the human knowledge divide
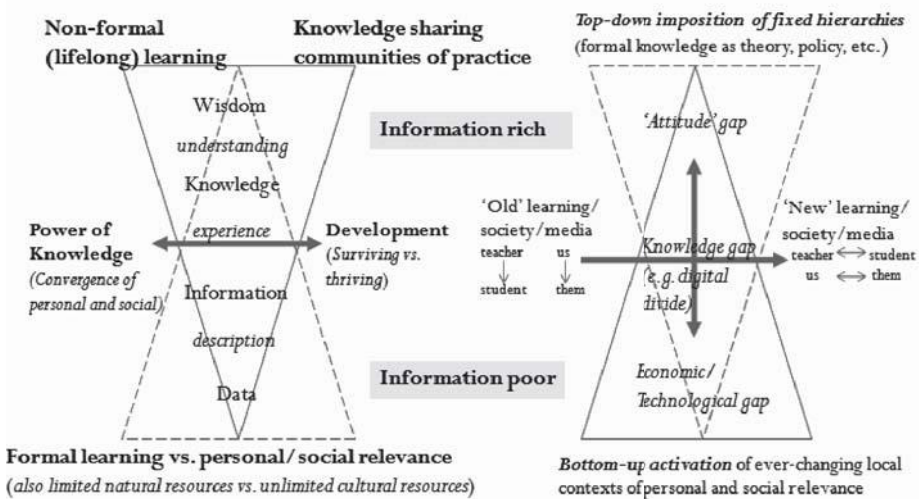
Generally speaking this model remains mainly focused on the process of accumulating data and converting this into information – with notions of higher-order knowledge and wisdom somehow possible but unlikely events. It is thus a self-fulfilling prophecy of such views that modern, rich and developed societies – indeed, even an emerging 'network society' - may have accumulated a great deal of data and information but not necessarily great stocks of understanding and wisdom. Hence, examples of people and especially teachers in traditional, poor, and developing countries doing 'a lot with very little' to harness

the educational and other uses of new information and communication technologies (indeed any educational or literacy resource) indicate the needs and possibilities of a convergence or sharing of different kinds of knowledge-building.

As further outlined in Figure- 3 the suggestion here is that like other *knowledge gaps:* (a) the 'real digital divide' is ultimately not so much a matter of technological access or social inequity *per se* but of applied knowledge and 'attitude' (that is, more appropriate *cognitive* as well as *social* strategies of constructive knowledge-building); and (b) in this respect, educators, administrators and policy-makers in modern, rich and developed societies can learn much from the 'models' of informal educators and community leaders as well as teachers in 'not-so-well-resourced' social contexts – that is from people who are 'inspired' more as a matter of necessity and possibility than by sheer policy or rhetoric. To put this way, the convergent human possibility for constructive knowledge-building in life as well as learning represents the key to transforming *vicious circles* of apparently negative inevitability into *virtuous circles* of emergently positive or constructive change. Of particular relevance to the EFA concept is the convergent notion that money and resources alone are not sufficient for an effective harnessing of educational possibilities - and, indeed the attitude or view that they are is perhaps somehow the greatest obstacle to be overcome. If the most productive knowledge-building is a gap between 'what we know' and 'what we don't know', then perhaps some of the tacit knowledge which is presently being ignored and dismissed out of hand by those who 'don't know what they don't know' (especially when it comes to both literacy learning and the digital divide) can provide a crucial foundation for a global convergence of different aspects and kinds of human knowledge generally.

New Literacies and the Learner- Centred Paradigm Shift in Formal and Non-formal Education

How can the 'active learner' models of literacy and other learning be most effectively linked to the diverse and changing contexts of an emerging knowledge society and new digital technologies?

As also suggested by the United Nations' 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', a second and related meaning of the term 'education for all' refers to the inherent possibilities of all people around the world to pursue and achieve a sustainable future in terms of different personal and social needs as well as

convergent aspects of human knowledge-building. As outlined earlier, an *access and equity EFA perspective* tends to focus on local contexts of formal educational provision in terms of related social justice issues of not only basic literacy provision but also the increasing need for a global sharing of information and technology as well 'economic' resources more generally. In contrast, a *human possibility EFA perspective* emphasizes the global potentials and ever changing requirements for individual learners to take active roles and responsibilities for their own learning in non-formal as well formal educational contexts. The growing importance of this view in contemporary education from a pragmatic angle is suggested, for instance, by how users of the internet are increasingly required to negotiate (critically evaluate, etc.) the often unreliable sources of knowledge distributed or shared online. Exemplifying a paradigm common-place to 21st Century educational theorizing and policy-making, this perspective is suggested or epitomized by various *constructivist, learner-centered,* and *outcomes-based* models of learning on one hand (i.e. the applied knowledge potentials as well as generic literacy and learning skills typical to such approaches as *problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning,* and *project-based learning*), and to related notions of *life-long learning* and 'informal' as well as non-formal notions of education on the other as extensions of or supports for formal education systems.

Just as formal education practices have generally failed to significantly or effectively harness the educational implications of new information and communication technologies, so too the 'learner- centred' paradigm shift of constructivist learning, outcomes-based education and related 'active learner' models (Weimer, 2002, Pass, 2004). This is despite the extent to which such a paradigm has been embraced in contemporary theorizing and policy-making around the world in relation to rationales extending from 'personal growth' to the need to produce a new kind of worker with a range of generic skills relevant to the emerging global economy and knowledge society. Just as there are exemplary models of 'ICT for development' so too for various notions of *digital learning* harnessing the educational possibilities of multimedia, the internet, and new communications technology (Richards, 2004). In other words, there has been a similar missing link between the *top-down imposition* of new theory and policy and the required 'cultural change' needed to support more extensive *bottom-up activation.* Or, to put this another way, the learner-centered paradigm shift in formal education has tended to be undermined by the kind of oppositional or 'either-or' thinking which tends to ignore emergent dialogue and reinforce

oppositional views of a *necessary vs. sufficient* relation between a range of related educational terms: content vs. process, curriculum vs. assessment; thinking vs. doing; theory/policy vs. practice, etc. If the concept of 'constructivist learning' has been central to such debates, even this term has been inherently confused or compromised by the uncritical alternation between distinct *cognitive* and *social* notions of constructivist knowledge-building (Pass, 2004).

To cut through the confusion and better appreciate the potentially convergent connection between the *active learner paradigm* and the *human possibility EFA perspective,* we propose to re-visit and re-claim an important insight of the great literacy educator Paulo Freire in light of new insights into the language and literacy acquisition process in children. Research into language and speech development (e.g. Kagan, Herschkowitz & Herschkowitz, 2005; Gleason & Ratner, 2008)in particular and into the cognitive processes of the brain in general (Souza, 2005) has produced a deal of evidence that there are common developmental milestones in young children open to variation within different physical, social, and cultural contexts. These effectively universal aspects and stages of children's language development also reflect greatly underestimated capacities of learning and knowledge-building inherent to individual cognition which: (a) get largely activated and demonstrated before formal schooling; and (b) reflect initial conditions of human possibility which are framed by the non-formal language community and environment extending from mother and family to include wider social networks. Every child who learns to speak the mother tongue of their immediate community gets to not only master (generally by the age of five) its basic rules of phonetics, syntax, word formation and speech rhythm but also basic rules for social and physical interaction with the world of human actuality. *First language acquisition* before the age of schooling is often taken for granted. Yet when we compare this to the difficulties of *second language acquisition* faced by older learners within a formal learning context we get a better appreciation of the inherent human capacity for knowledge building in terms of emergent possibilities. As both cognitive and social constructivists have recognized, such capacities compare with the assumptions of the dominant *transmission model of modern schooling* that learners are basically empty vehicles or passive recipients of information or skill transmission.

Many of the researchers into the extraordinary and prodigious talents of autistic savants (as well as other exceptional or accelerated learners) have similarly proposed that the kind of 'genius' demonstrated in such examples may reflect a

latent and basic human potential or capacity in everyone (e.g. Treffert, 2009). Such thinkers as Howard Gardner and Joseph Chiltern Pearce have likewise identified the imaginative capacity for 'metaphorical thinking' (as well as what Piaget called 'reversibility thinking') as the potential bridge between the apparently limitless learning possibilities of young children and the integrative emergence of abstract reasoning and applied 'intelligence' in mature adults. There are some important implications to be considered here for subsequent literacy learning as well as discussions about a convergent and achievable notion of 'education for all'.

Firstly, however this is interpreted, it is clear that the *active learning* styles demonstrated by all children in their first language acquisition reflects the importance of both authentic and imaginative interests on one hand, and social nurturing on the other, for guiding the emergence of the initial stages of human language acquisition and knowledge building. Secondly, as not just the constructivists but a tradition of both 'progressive' and alternative notions of modern formal education (from Rousseau through to Bruner and Gardner, including many others such as Montessori and Steiner) have long advised, children are generally 'wired' with much greater capacities than conventionally thought. However, the learning potential of individuals in general and children in particular tends to be severely underestimated and restricted in terms of 'vicious cycles of expectation' often encountered in the modern schooling system with its dominant 'transmission' assumptions reinforcing the concept of the typically passive, empty-minded learner. Thirdly, it would be seem to the case that in formal schooling children effectively lose or rather *forget* the significant and powerful capacities for effective learning and innovation as the price to be paid for acquiring the capacities of abstract reasoning and socialization (perhaps this is linked to a similar contrast between traditional and modern knowledge systems). Fourthly, then, whilst individuals learn to recapitulate the social structures, expectations and standards of either formal or non-formal education, they do so as part of a dialogical process in several related ways – that is, not just the cognitive and social interactions of actual 'talk' within a shared language community context open to change ever to some degree but also as an interplay of meaningful structures and emergent learning, thinking and communication. In this way, an important foundation of a projected global knowledge convergence perhaps lies in the kind of potentially limitless knowledge building possibilities demonstrated in early childhood language acquisition or in exceptional cases such as typified by autistic savants.

Such implications might be further discussed in relation to the great insights of the literacy educator Paulo Freire (1975). For many people Freire is synonomous with principles of social justice and the resistance to forms of imposed social or cultural tyranny and oppression. However, more importantly for our discussion here, he was also a great innovator of basic literacy education using a specific version of a *dialogical model* of knowledge-building. Challenging what he called the *banking model* of education (i.e. the hierarchical model of authoritative teacher transmitting information 'deposits' into the empty minds of passive learners), Freire insisted that basic literacy programs in poor developing countries could still be efficient and effective even with very limited resources. Perhaps Freire's most important insight was that the teaching and learning of basic literacy skills and knowledge will be more effective if strategically and dialogically linked to or situated in authentic human interests and concerns extending from *personal* domains of action through to the *cultural* aspects of local community contexts. It is this insight which has important implications and applications we believe for not only a more integrated framework of literacy in terms of new digital media of information sharing and global communications but also for engaging with the respective literacy education needs of the young in different contexts around the world within a larger convergent framework (see Figure- 4 below).

Figure- 4: The dialogical framework for an integrated model of literacy learning
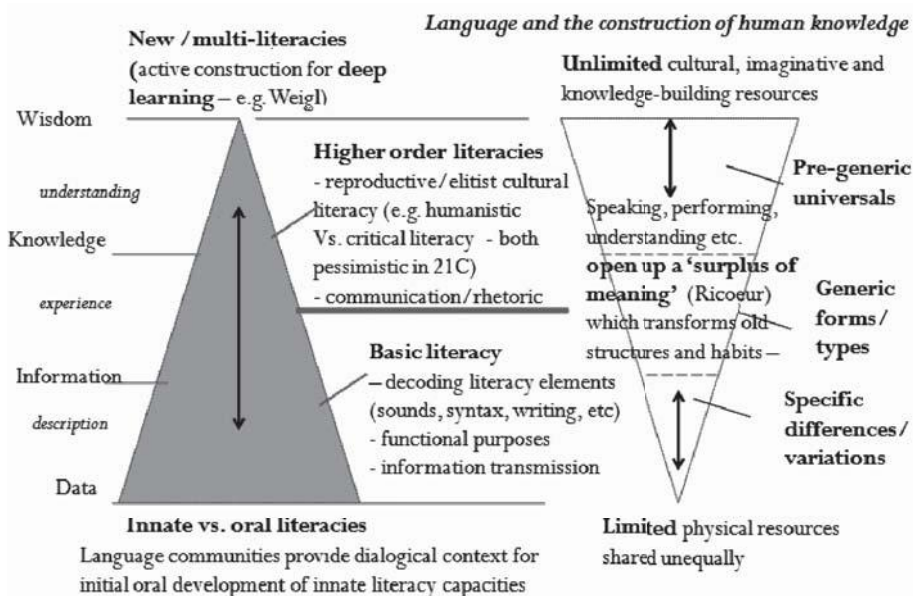
The bottom-up, egalitarian, and knowledge-building aspects of Freire's *dialogical methodology* can be distinguished from the 'anti-hierarchical' critical framework of a 'pedagogy for the oppressed' which he is perhaps better remembered for – that is, the promotion of the concept of *concientization* or critical awareness in resistance to educational, social and cultural projections of a ubiquitous and hegemonic oppression. As some of his critics have pointed out, the larger framework tended to not only inadvertently reinforce a deterministic or inevitable notion of *us vs. them* relations (also in teacher-student interactions) but also the very kind of formal pedagogy and curriculum which his dialogical model aimed to challenge and undermine (e.g. Taylor, 1993). In this way, it may be further argued, selective adaptations or interpretations of his work within a *critical literacy* and *critical pedagogy* framework have often tended to: (a) forget or underestimate the central contribution of his dialogical model of literacy grounded in concrete personal, social, and cultural interests as a basis for encouraging active learners as well as more effective basic literacy education; and (b) to view the cultural interests of the young condescendingly as much more a symptom of inevitable oppression than also ever an opportunity to engage active learners (i.e. to focus on critical literacy and pedagogy aspects of *top-down imposition* rather than *bottom-up activation*).

Figure- 4 adapts Freire's foundational 'dialogical methodology' of literacy learning and knowledge as a process of *bottom-up activation* grounded in concrete social and cultural contexts as well as practical purposes and interests of particular language communities. It compares this process with Ricoeur's (1976) dialogical notion that any discursive act or cultural 'performance' within a particular local context potentially opens up a potential *surplus of meaning* able to transform existing structures and habits of both personal and social meaning. In this way we are able to construct a *more integrated model* of: (a) not only the different oral, print and digital dimensions of 'innate' human literacy as a convergent process of 'transformational' and not just 'translational' information sharing and communication, but also (b) a continuum from basic or functional notions of literacy through to higher order modes associated with processes of active or constructive interpretation on one hand, and innovative knowledge building on the other. This includes the new literacy implications and 'active learning' possibilities of interactive digital technologies (e.g. Weigel, 2002). Such a framework also incorporates the concept of *critical literacy* as an important and provisional part of a larger constructive framework open to dialogical engagement.

There are two *either/or* tendencies which such a model avoids or rather goes beyond. The first is the kind of simplistic separation between *lower-order* and merely functional notions of especially written or print literacy and *higher order* concepts such as critical literacy as outlined, for example, in Luke & Freebody's (1990) model of the four key literacy competencies (*coding, functional, semantic, critical*) which might be taught or learnt. The second tendency is the either/or contrast between the reproductive elitism and naïve and exclusive 'humanism' of privileged cultural literacies on one hand (e.g. Hirsch, 1987) and the kind of ostensibly anti-elitism and anti-hierarchical thinking as outlined in the critical literacy model associated with Freire's work on the other. There is a common pessimism in both perspectives, as well as convergent condescension towards the new literacy interests of the young in digital media and popular culture.

An initial variation of the critical literacy approach which was adapted to ambivalently incorporate both new, digital literacies and global tendencies for multicultural pluralism was the concept of 'multiple literacies' (e.g. Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). However, as epitomized by the further refinement of this model by Kress (2003) especially, the emergent concept of 'new literacies' has increasingly embraced the notion that meaningful critical literacy is a convergent 'listening/reading/evaluation' phase or perspective which needs to be grounded in the productive 'speaking/writing/design' process of active learners constructing meaning selections and combinations of both personal and social meaning. In ultimately similar fashion to Ong's (1982) notion that new literacies represent a 'secondary orality' convergence of primary (traditional) orality and the modern technologies of writing and print media, Kress's (2003) focus on new literacies recognizes the 'multimodal' interplay and convergence of not just verbal and visual aspects of multimedia texts but the convergent speaking and writing aspects of online or digital communications (Cf. also Manovich, 2001). In other words, in a network society where the fixed meanings of the past are quickly disappearing or confused with the 'shock of the new', everyone can and should be able develop the new literacy (and rhetorical) design skills for particular communication or self expression purposes – and likewise be able to simultaneously evaluate and reconstruct the oral, literate and digital 'designs' of others in order to participate socially and culturally with an effective balance of 'active learning' and critical literacy on one hand, and competency and innovation on the other.

There are a number of implications of this framework for revisiting and re-framing the EFA concept. The knowledge gap between traditional non-formal learning and modern basic literacy programs has been 'reconciled' in terms of an *active learner* paradigm for emergent knowledge-building which cuts across (or, rather, dialogically reconciles) the top-down theory/policy imposition vs. practical bottom-up activation divide. Both sides of the divide can learn from the other. Just as the apparent failure of a learner-centered paradigm in modern education can be overcome through a 21st Century framework of 'global knowledge-building convergence', likewise basic literacy programs for developing countries which adapt modern transmission pedagogies and curriculum focusing on de-contextualised skills and knowledge need to be strategically rethought or transformed to become more relevant, effective and cost-efficient. As discussed above, such a needed global convergence lies naturally at the intersection between: (a) the kind of dialogical methodology of literacy learning with few resources and in difficult situations advocated long ago by Paulo Freire, and (b) the 'new literacy' implications of a younger generation around the world who need to individually and collectively find a balance between transient and enduring aspects of meaning-making (i.e. who need to be encouraged to achieve the sustainable knowledge and hopefully also wisdom to deal with the confusions and uncertainty of global change and information overload).

Any kind of effective individual or collective learning, development or capacity-building involves an often unacknowledged 'thread' of coherence in space and convergent purpose in time. Without this any *bottom-up* efforts will get lost in irrelevance and confusion. But, similarly, *top-down* (e.g. theoretical or policy) impositions of a particular direction or an objective which are not designed to engage bottom-up activation in particular local contexts are also likely to ultimately fail or be unsustainable. As reflected on the right hand part of Figure-6, the knowledge gap between an *access and equity EFA perspective* on one hand, and a *human possibility EFA perspective* on the other can generally be reconciled in terms of a productive as well as emergent convergence linking personal and social aspects of relevance. This can be achieved either as a convergent pedagogical and curriculum strategy within a formal educational context, or as a non-formal strategy of lifelong learning linked to various local (and also potentially global) contexts of community.

Figure- 6: The 'active learning' process and local vs. global community capacity-building
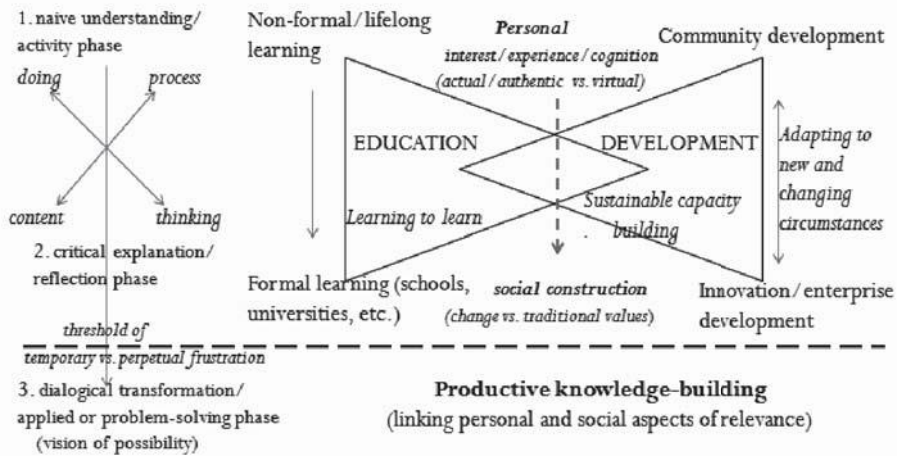
Adapted from Richards, 2010

Such a convergence involves the need to overcome an additional 'knowledge gap' in time between some particular or general *vision of possibility* and both initial designs and ongoing commitment to overcoming various obstacles in the process of attempting to realize or actualize this. Thus, as exemplified by the dialogical methodology of thinking for productive knowledge-building represented to the left of Figure- 6, a *thread of resilience* needs to be aligned to designed threads of coherence and purpose in order to achieve or develop productive outcomes, applications, and problem-solving resolutions.

Cross-cultural Communication as a Critical Basis for Crossing the Threshold of Human Possibility

What can people in modern, rich and/or developed societies learn from those in traditional, poor and/or developing ones? [Why is this such an important question?]

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to making the concept of *Education for All* concept a reality is a 'cultural' one rather than a financial one? We have already discussed how transmission models of teaching and learning have generally represented a negatively self-limiting and retrospectively 'condescending' educational

paradigm which has tended to not just ignore or deny emergent notions of human possibility but also 'active learner' models such as constructivism – linked as they are to national education policy aspirations around the world to produce innovative, thoughtful graduates with an integral range of generic skills and applied knowledge(s). As touched on already, we have noted how *traditional* and *modern* forms of society have in common a tendency to reinforce the kind of *us vs. them* (or *self vs. other*) delineations which either implicitly or explicitly reinforce constructions of social hierarchy as well as latent senses of exclusion, condescension, and superiority. Thus the challenge of intercultural communication represents not only a key obstacle to the achievement of a global knowledge convergence as an abstract concept, but also the ethical common sense of aiming to achieve a more egalitarian reciprocation or sharing of both (limited) natural and (unlimited) cultural resources. To put this another way, latent senses of cultural superiority (and the inverse of this, cultural inferiority) of different kinds in most forms of human society are ultimately the means by which significant human 'inequities' - or failures to address these - are often retrospectively explained or even justified and further reinforced.

The very concept of a *global knowledge convergence* implies that an effectively universal concept of human society will either reflect or be the product of a sufficiently *critical mass* of reciprocal knowledge sharing and/or collaborative knowledge building. However, on the face of it, modern developed societies would seem to be so advanced and 'information rich' and other societies so 'information poor' that there could be no real basis for any meaningful sharing, reciprocation or comparative 'equilibrium' of knowledge sharing or building. What if a case could be made that much of this 'superiority' is selective distortion and self-defeating arrogance in the grand scheme of things or from a more universal perspective? We will thus introduce here several related proposals which are developed more fully elsewhere (Richards, 2011): (a) that the only real and sustainable remedy for cultural exclusion and 'knowledge arrogance' lies in the humility to be gained from realizing that we have something valuable to learn *from another*; (b) however, it is barely possible to either learn from or recognize we can learn from others if we are 'looking down' upon them; (c) all forms of modern and traditional culture and society have much to learn from others (if we/they only realize it); (d) that what we have most to learn from others lies in their particular 'configurations' of universal insights and specific differences in relation to their own such configurations; and (e) that the prerequisite 'literacy' of being able to

effectively tell the difference (i.e. between enduring aspects of universality or commonality and transitory elements of '*cultural difference*') requires an 'active knowledge-building' approach.

There is an additional related idea which we propose to investigate in this section: that there is perhaps a connection between the cultural tendency to 'look down' on others and the historical dominance of a 'rear-view mirror' model of knowledge-building. By the latter we refer to a view of human knowledge as basically a process of mere information accumulation on one hand, but also on the other the top-down or positivistic reductionism and retrospective 'rationalizations' of viewing both human and physical nature as either a necessarily determined (objectivist) or ad hoc and contingent (relativist) process (e.g. Bernstein, 1981). In this view, the twin pillars of knowledge building (representations of *causality* and *classification*) tend to be seen separately except in retrospect and in terms of viewing any particular 'whole' in a de-contextualized way (as distinct from a 'systems' view) or reducible to the mere sum of its ostensible parts. As an antidote to how such a view tends to reinforce notions of 'vicious cycles' of apparent inevitability in human affairs and in nature more generally, we will further outline a dialogical and productive (as distinct from 'reproductive') model of knowledge building in terms of the self-sufficient principle of *emergent possibility.* This section of the paper will explore these related points in relation to the exemplary *knowledge building models* represented in the relevant ideas and example of several great 'dialogical' thinkers extending from the distant past (Socrates) to more recent times (Clifford Geertz and Paul Ricoeur).

As exemplified by his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1971), the work of Geertz is able to provide a useful reference point for reconsidering the role of particular cultural patterns as knowledge systems and symbolic 'storehouses of pooled learning' from several related angles. Geertz may not have been the only modern cultural anthropologist or ethnologist to have a non-superior, respectful, and genuinely interested attitude or approach to people from 'other cultures' but he was arguably ground-breaking in the way he exemplified this as an effectively universal method of dialogically linking outsider and *insider* perspectives to the interaction between different meaning systems. Such an approach thus lies 'in between' the conventional condescension and superiority of viewing especially 'others' from 'traditional' cultural contexts in relation to the standards of modern civilization and knowledge on one hand, and on the other the relativist 'turn' in various contemporary models of cultural studies which typically denies any

substantial importance to the concept of cultural difference per se beyond evidence of descriptive diversity. In other words, Geertz recognised that there are universally convergent insights to be realized in coming to understand not just the particular cultural contexts of other individual and collective agents but their specific actions, words and various texts of meaning. Thus the significance of Geetz's work goes well beyond the boundaries of anthropology and ethnography in its development and application of a 'cross-cultural' or dialogical notion of knowledge building and communication. Geertz's model of cultural interpretation represents a basis for going beyond the modernity-tradition divide and overcoming the historical human tendencies for *us vs. them* or *self vs.* other –both in concrete practice as well as emergent theoretical knowledge-building.

But as well as recognizing other cultures as effective 'ecosystems', Geertz's dialogical approach itself represents an *ecological* approach to knowledge building and sharing. His own demonstrated ability to contextualize and interpret cultural actions, words, and other texts within the coherent richness and cultural profundity of societies with no great external signs of meaning-making or 'progress' represented a knowledge convergence in which concepts of causality and classification are linked as an emergent process of *interdependence* and *interconnectedness* (i.e. very much in the manner of a 'network society'). Thus, in between the gap of *traditional mystification* and *modern reductionism* there rises an emergent notion for viewing both the concept of 'cause and effects' on one hand, and the 'description' of particular categories or types on the other, as a perpetual *process of transformation* in time which includes but goes beyond a subsidiary concept off *spatial networking.* Likewise, instead of ignoring the importance of either local or immediate context and judging a cultural configuration of knowledge and meaning in terms of its external 'parts', the relationship between any social or cultural 'whole' and its various parts might be approached as an interplay of both human universality and difference.

The ideas of Paul Ricoeur were an acknowledged central inspiration for Geertz's *The Interpretation of Culture.* This provides the clue to Geertz's indebtedness to or convergence with the dialogical model of knowledge building of the man credited with being the 'father' of western and modern thought and thus ostensibly responsible for the *modernity-tradition* dividewhich informs fundamentally conflicting notions of human knowledge. However, it might be argued that the full imports of Socrates' interactive strategy of knowledge building are even more relevant for a 21st Century context of potential global knowledge convergence

(Richards, 2009). Socrates' use of the so-called 'elenchus method' of inquiry through dialogue based around question-and-answer format is generally acknowledged as a seminal prototype for the scientific method in terms of its rigorous and uncompromising challenge to any pretence, contradiction or distortion which would obstruct the apprehension or adherence to universal principles and standards of knowledge (e.g. Vlastos, 1994). Some like Aristotle have approached the Socratric *elenchus method* as a prototype of an inductive model of the scientific method, and others focusing on it as 'negative method of hypothesis elimination' suggest it is more an indirect version of the hypothetic-deductive model.

As also evidenced in many of the Socratic dialogues recorded by his student Plato, Socrates was well-known for his understanding that arrogance and pretention represented a closed off denial of or distortion of people's innate knowledge and wisdom. Not so well-known but consistent with his essentially egalitarian perspectives and educational motivations, is the inverse notion that Socrates' method sought to bring out or 'emerge' the implicit or underestimated knowledge of every individual with at least some degree of an open mind. In other words, most people know much more than they think they know, but may need assistance to overcome their lack of confidence or feelings of ignorance to realize and apply this. Socrates' self-conception as a 'mid-wife' was reported in the *Theaetetus* with the associated claim that: 'Some of them appear dull enough at first, but afterwards, as our acquaintance ripens… they all make astonishing progress…the many fine discoveries to which they cling are of their own making. But to me they owe their delivery'.

This *emergent* rather than *transmission* model of learning and knowledge-building answers the criticism often made against Socratesthat his 'elenchai' (i.e. guided question-and-answer) threads of inquiry typically end up as 'aporia' (i.e. seemingly un-resolvable or impossible queries) rather than direct answers. Rather, such an approachmay be more accurately interpreted as part of a dialogical strategy that an indirect design - rather than direct lecturing or 'spoon-feeding' of convenient answers - is the most effective way to encourage active learning, productive thinking, and emergent knowledge building. Thus, also, the *Socratic questioning* model has not only remained a key tool for educators across the ages but also a key to *inquiry-based learning* – along with *problem-based learning* and *project-based learning,* a central pillar of the learner-centered paradigm of education (Paul & Elder, 2006).

Another important clue to the 21st Century relevance of Socrates' embodiment of applied wisdom is provided by Ong (1982) whose focus on new literacies was referred to earlier. Ong's work generally describes the decay of 'dialogue' in the emerging modern society of the West - the progressive 'literalization', spatialization, formalization, 'bureaucratization',and especially 'interiorization' of human thinking as part of the historical process of 'the technologising of the word' (the process of going from *orality* to various new stages and aspects of *literacy* including writing, print and mass communications). Ong's model also describes the paradoxical emergence of a new and 'secondary' form of orality in the global context of humanity increasingly defined by new communication technologies building on the 'chirographic conditioning' of modern peoples (pp.175-179). It is perhaps Ong better than anyone else who recognized that Socrates' famous resistance to writing (for 'destroying memory… and weakening the mind', etc.) represents a kind of anticipatory antidote for the 'decay of dialogue', loss of memory, and passive literalism of written and print technologies in the historical emergence of modern society in the West which he himself is indirectly responsible for (via the 'idealistic' writings of Plato). We might also propose that it represents and remains the crucial antidote to the negative aspects of 'secondary orality' and, in this way, a key to the most effective 21st Century knowledge building.

The 19th Century Philosopher Kierkegaard described Socrates as the first of the moderns in light of the very 'self-aware irony'which informed his use of the elenchus method – that is, an 'infinite, absolute negativity… [which potentially opens up] the infinity of possibilities' (Cited by Storm, 2009). Such references to Socratric irony typically describe Socrates' repeated claims of personal 'ignorance' when engaging with 'clever' people (e.g. Egan, 1997). But as indicated above (and as Kierkegaard later realized), there are consistent and solid grounds for distinguishing between a retrospectively imposed modern (or even post-modern) irony and what Kenneth Burke called 'consubstantial irony'. In the words of Ricoeur, this distinct kind of irony involves an *egalitarian* as distinct from *condescending* perspective of viewing 'oneself as another' (and vice versa). The elusive universals sought in Western thinking – even inversely in the 'absolute negativity' of modern forms of irony – are referenced in Socratic (*dialogical*) *thinking* by the very elements discarded by Plato, Aristotle and the whole western tradition of *either/or thinking* (idealism vs. realism, rationalism vs. empiricism, objectivism vs. relativism, etc.). In other words, universality lies

inherent in the very process of either implicit or explicit dialogue itself, and the ethical as well as knowledge 'reference-point' of an organizing or sustainable sense of 'self-knowledge'.

The pivotal distinction made by Socrates between the *ignorance of close-minded arrogance* and the *wisdom of open-minded ignorance* inform a consistent thread linking his particular philosophical ideas, educational methods, and rhetorical techniques into a consistent and powerful framework of knowledge building. In particular, Socrates used his questioning method to provisionally 'open up' and guide not just old, inaccurate, and simply lazy structures of thinking to a more dynamically relevant and universal reference point or perspective. In short this method was conceived to *produce* and not just *reproduce* various forms of new or innovative knowledge in the sense of practical and applied understanding. In this way, the elenchus method was not only a rigorously disciplined and uncompromising model of critical thinking but also a productive and innovative method of producing new insights, understandings, and knowledge in a convergent sense.

There are many connections between the ideas of Socrates and the dialogical framework of Paul Ricoeur, one of the greatest philosophers of the Twentieth Century. One such connection exemplifies and frames the notion of a potential global convergence of the human knowledge building of various kinds (e.g. ranging from the non-formal to the formal, and inclusive of social as well as cognitive aspects). In one of his final major works *Oneself As Another* (1992) Ricoeur outlined a *philosophical* ethics for the 21st Century which through a strategic interplay of *appropriation* and *critical distanciation* engaged with and went beyond the characteristically modern 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (i.e. the critical opposition between objectivism and relativism) to outline the vision of a truly global and 'reconstructive' human knowledge convergence. In contrast to nearly all his modern contemporaries Ricoeur viewed 'critical thinking' as a *provisional* phase (not just a fixed position) in the dialogical and emergent process of knowledge building as transformation. Ricoeur's debt here and elsewhere to Socrates is acknowledged in a short related paper 'Life in Quest of Narrative' (1992) which argues that the dialogical mediation between man and himself (the 'irreducible dimension of self-understanding') remains a key to the social (communicative) and *natural* (referential) orders of human knowledge-building. The apparently endless process of past 'sedimentations' (e.g. social traditions or ideologies) are ever transformed by the infinite human possibilities associated

with the principle of 'innovation'. In such terms Ricoeur (1986:235) identified how the greatest challenge for humanity lies in the growing disconnection between past and future: 'the entire present is in crisis when expectancy takes refuge in utopia and tradition congeals into a dead residue'.

One of the central ideas in Ricoeur's work is that the human capacity for innovation needed to redeem (or continue to transform) the sedimentations of 'past innovations' (and thus the central crisis of the modern age) lies in the function and 'perpetual new literacy' of *productive imagination.* In similar fashion to Socrates' linking of *self-knowledge* to a theory of knowledge building as 'recollection', Ricoeur viewed self-knowledge as the truly sustainable basis for human 'innovation' - as the dialogical or emergent antithesis of knowledge building viewed fundamentally (or even antithetically) as the objective accumulation of information. The capacity for *innovation* is exemplified by the ever-present potential for human actors and language-users to generate a 'surplus of meaning' in a particular event or text as an exemplification of some whole context. The opportunities for human innovation thus extend from the specific genres of typical individual or social patterns of interaction to more universal aspects and elements of knowing. This is especially so when guided by teachers or leaders who serve as 'mid-wives' to emergent human possibility. Also in terms of the alternately *linguistic* and *cognitive* functions of verbal 'predication' (especially in the posing of relevant questions), Ricoeur (1981) recognized that the innate human capacity for metaphorical thinking and language-use is the key to knowledge-building. This is so not just in the learning of children but in all human endeavors including the formalization of the most abstract concepts and scientific modeling. In other words, the key to the emergent interplay between the alternately *horizontal* aspect of associative thinking and the *vertical* notion of abstractly linear or 'logically' hierarchical thinking lies primarily with the former rather than the latter.

Ricoeur's (1981) pivotal concept of 'productive imagination' is to be distinguished from all variations of what he called a 'reproductive imagination'. Such a concept includes but goes beyond a reflective or empirical notion of visualization (the reception of external images) on one hand, and various 'passive' models and paradigms of learning and knowledge-building on the other to embrace what we earlier referred to as retrospective notion of both causality and classification. In terms of a *new literacy perspective*, productive imagination thus provides an integrating focus for not only reconciling but transforming both basic

and critical modes of literacy on one hand, and the connection between verbal and multimodal dimensions of textuality and communication in a human world increasingly mediated by new digital technologies. We adapt this concept here as the required element to overcome what might be called the *threshold of temporary versus perpetual frustration, confusion, and uncertainty* in human knowledge building. For instance, the most productive thinking and learning requires an active response to overcoming (the *virtuous vs. vicious circles* of) inevitable obstacles, challenges and restraints in order to sustainably achieve and apply some practical or conceptual *vision of possibility* in terms of a related *thread of resilience.* Such knowledge building represents an alternately disciplined and innovative convergence of thinking and doing on one hand, and content and process on the other.

Figure- 7 outlines how, as a model of essential human knowledge building, the crossing of this 'threshold of human possibility' represents a further convergence between Ricoeur's dialogical notion of how applied knowledge integrates and transforms both *naïve understanding and critical explanation* on one hand, and Socrates' similarly productive negotiation of the gap between 'what we know' and 'what we don't know'. On the other for both men, the endless *aporia* (i.e. the retrospective, ad hoc, and/or reductionist perceptions of seemingly impossible predicaments and apparently un-solvable or inevitable problems) of the human condition can begin to be more productively engaged or transformed at either the individual or global levels if addressed with the strategic indirectness of a simple question or insight. Figure- 8 also provides an outline of not only how a projected future knowledge convergence represents alternately the *culmination* of formal human knowledge building on one hand, and on the other the recovery of what Socrates understood as the (perpetually *forgotten*) innate human capacities for wisdom and universal recollection or remembrance. In terms of the crucial obstacles to the global need for greater and more 'egalitarian' intercultural and interpersonal understanding and communication, it represents a sustainable means of arguing that: (a) in the larger scheme of things every individual and every community in the world (past as well as present) is not just 'oneself as another', but (b) *really* is fundamentally and potentially no 'better' than anyone else. Whilst we can *often* learn some useful new information from other people if we are prepared to listen, we can *always* learn that our own perspectives are inevitably partial and incomplete in various senses. We can ever be humbled (a concept synonymous with the most effective learning and knowledge building, as Socrates

has taught us) by the insights or alternative perspectives of others which are a constant potential reminder of our own inevitably limited and inadequate efforts to directly negotiate the gap between 'what we know' and 'what we don't know'.

Figure- 7: Productive imagination: a key to the most effective knowledge-building
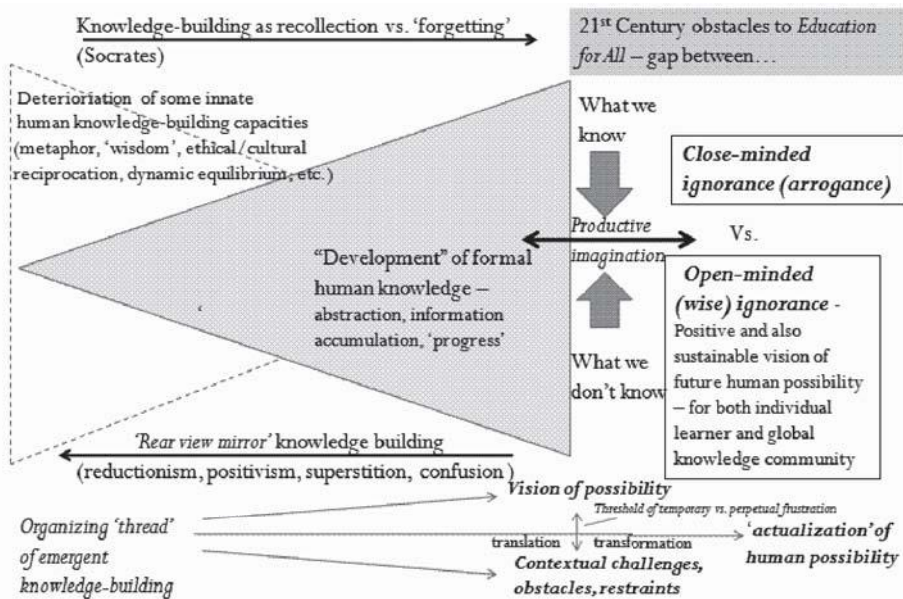
The diagram suggests the modern emergence of what Ong called 'human interiorisation'(the social and cultural externalization of egotistical individualism). Blind adherence to notions of 'progress for its own sake' epitomize other similarly passive, reproductive, and merely *externalized* social and personal ideologies of 'growth' or development in conflict with dynamic principle of balance and equilibrium. This is perhaps the hidden side of privileged, elitist, and condescending notions of achieving a 'formal knowledge' pyramid in terms of a merely cumulative notion of information. The price of such progress has arguably been the historical *deterioriation* or *forgetting* of early childhood, traditional, and generally 'innate' human capacities for thinking metaphorically, reciprocally, and ecologically. Or, to put this in terms of the renewed (i.e. 21st Century) relevance of Socrates' pedagogical efforts to reconcile *innate* human 'recollection' and the universal requirements of self knowledge, those who suffer

from close-minded arrogance might realize that they are not really superior to those who are prepared to acknowledge 'wise or open-minded 'ignorance'. Yet, of course, there remains genuine inequity between those who exercise (or not) their ostensible right not to actualize their potential or develop their knowledge and those who have little choice because they are unable to or denied access (sometimes by the latter) to basic natural or cultural resources required to do so. On the contrary, the same humility required of a genuinely *productive imagination* is arguably the most critical component for both achieving a future *global knowledge convergence.* This is also the key to transforming the *Education for All* concept – for going beyond just another unachievable utopian ideal and achieving an actual reality of the greatest importance.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the possibility of whether well-meaning but apparently idealistic policies or doctrines such as UNESCO's *Education For All* (EFA) might ever be transformed into actuality. It has done so in terms of how, from the outset of the 21st Century, the EFA concept really does exemplify some of the key dilemmas about and challenges to do with the historical human enterprise of knowledge-building in general, and new 'literacy' requirements in particular. The discussion of the paper has built upon the enduring knowledge-building' implications of Freire's dialogical model of literacy learning in traditional, poor or developing societies on one hand, and the 'new literacy' as well as global and intercultural implications of an emerging network society expedited in modern, rich and developed societies through the increasing use of digital technologies for ostensibly greater information sharing and communication. Perceptions that an apparently accelerating 'digital divide' is reinforcing the inevitability of the failure of the EFA concept have been challenged and re-framed in order to assist with investigating the potential convergence of different notions and aspects of knowledge building and sharing. Clarification was sought for how and why the greatest obstacles to global efforts to address various aspects of human inequity on one hand, and to achieve better knowledge sharing on the other, are not simply about technological, financial or even cultural resources *per se*.

In this way, we have argued that the most important 'new literacy' is an either recovered or sufficiently supported human capacity for 'active' learning and knowledge-building – that is, both the individual and collective capacity to transform vicious circles of inevitably into more positive and productive scenarios

and opportunities. Such a notion is perhaps most effectively conceptualized in terms of what Paul Ricoeur has called the often forgotten and denied but the ever-presently available and infinitely as well perpetually renewable egalitarian capacity for 'productive imagination'. Thus a projected future global knowledge convergence has been suggested in terms of the timelessly universal 'educational' methods of Socrates for encouraging *productive imagination* - the requisite humility to productively navigate the gap between 'what we know' and 'what we don't know' as an emergent human knowledge building process.

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