A Second Chance for Qualification: An Interview with Patrick Werquin

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Patrick Werquin was senior economist with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), directorate for education and CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation) from 1999 to 2010. He was a researcher at the French Centre for Research on Education, Training and Employment (Céreq, 1992-1999). He has a Ph.D. in economics and taught economics, statistics and econometrics at the Université de la Méditerranée (Aix-en-Provence and Marseilles, 1986-1998) and at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS, 1986-1998). He taught education at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2006-2009), and has supervised Ph.D. students in Canada, France and Morocco.

For many years, in all OECD countries as well as in many countries in Africa, North and Latin America, Europe and Southeast Asia, Werquin has been working and publishing on an array of topics relevant to learning and adult learning: lifelong learning, technical and vocational education and training, national qualifications systems and frameworks, literacy, adult learning, low-skilled individuals/workers, adult literacy, new competences and assessment of adult skills, school-to-work transition, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, credit transfer, statistical indicators for education and the labor market.

Thanks to Patrick for his time, his insights and his patience in working with us on this project.

Alan Mandell: What were you doing at the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI)? Can you please introduce us to your work and to your research interests?

Patrick Werquin: I was senior analyst and I was in charge of what was called "thematic reviews," trying to provide a comparative international analysis of a particular theme. So I was focusing on many countries but only on one theme: on lifelong learning, from cradle to grave, from zero until we die. We were looking at everything that could promote, could motivate, lifelong learning. In particular, I was in charge of examining the role of national qualification systems and frameworks to promote lifelong learning. And among the many things we identified that could promote lifelong learning was the mechanism of the recognition of formal and non-formal learning outcomes.

A.M.: And what countries were you studying?

P.W.: We had 22 countries: large countries like Germany, Canada, Italy and Spain; and we had many smaller

but very interesting countries, like Norway and Slovenia; and we had some non-OECD countries such as South Africa and Chile.

A.M.: Why do you think there is an interest in this topic in such a widespread way today?

P.W.: There isn't a single response to this. It came to me that "recognition of non-formal and informal learning" is at the top of the agenda everywhere because countries are faced with the same questions and issues about the labor market: bad demographics, high unemployment, unqualified labor force, which means that competencies are not visible, and therefore that job matching is a complex process to achieve. And there are different responses; that is, this "recognition" is done in different ways in different countries. There isn't a single response but a lot of countries seek "recognition of non-formal and informal learning" as a way to have a more qualified labor force at a lower cost – saving money and saving time. If you need two or three years to train someone in a formal educational training system until the person is awarded a qualification that has currency in the labor market, you may need a lot less if the person is already skilled. Some policymakers are under the impression that recognition is free! One of the challenges is to convince policymakers that recognition of non-formal and informal learning isn't free; however, it proves *cheaper* than formal education and training, assuming that people already have skills and competencies but they are perhaps not fully qualified, in the sense that they don't hold the *parchment* that makes their competencies visible and that employers value so much in many labor markets (university degrees or vocational certification typically). Providing just the piece that is missing is always cheaper than providing the full training.

But to return to your question about the interest of countries: Some clearly see recognition of non-formal and informal learning as the complement to *formal* education and training. That would be people with no qualification whatsoever but with some skills and some competencies but with no piece of paper, no qualification, no award; nothing making those skills and competencies visible. We could assess them and deliver to them only what they need. Some other countries are not doing that. It's more like two systems in competition with one another: someone moves *either* into a formal education and training system or chooses to have her or his experience assessed in the recognition system. One of our challenges is to convince people that the two systems could live together.

Nan Travers: But, in the end, labor force issues seem to be at the forefront of the conversation.

P.W.: Yes, the interest of countries is about having a more qualified labor force, a labor force with well-documented skills and competencies. For many, many years, lifelong learning has been "sold" partly on the concept of democracy, citizenship and popular enlightenment. (For example, look at the UNESCO publications of the 1970s.) My point is that even in the countries where the value of learning for its own sake – learning to become better people – has been a regular theme, even in those countries, very quickly lifelong learning has been tied to labor market issues — about labor shortages, about the unemployment rate, about a large fraction of population being unqualified. That somewhat came to me as a surprise. I was expecting a better balance between, for example, democracy-related issues and more concrete issues about jobs and finding employers better workers. But the successive crises have repeatedly hit countries very badly, and all countries have become pragmatic with lifelong learning. The sad point is that, because international organizations did talk a lot about lifelong learning in the past, there is a general feeling that lifelong learning is now done, and even outdated. This is a big mistake. Countries haven't solved the issues in their labor markets and international organizations haven't begun to respond to the key questions (such as the match between the supply and the demand of qualifications, the need of employers, the regular use of qualification in recruitments …). However, it seems more trendy now to focus only on some – important of course but, to me, a lot less critical – issues such as tertiary education or the repeated, often redundant, assessments of kids in school. International organizations, such as UNESCO and OECD, are wrong: countries that are in high demand for concrete solutions regarding their labor market and international organizations just do not deliver, and do not have their priorities right in a

context where research money is scarce.

To return to your question: I am convinced that the discussion about "recognition of non-formal and informal learning" is, in the end, about "unqualified," that is, undocumented, skilled people.

A.M.: In the countries that you studied, were systems of national qualifications already in place? If so, was that unusual?

P.W.: The field is now booming. But we need to make a distinction between two terms: a national qualification *system* is everything in a country leading to the recognition of learning. In this sense, every country has some kind of national qualification system. More recently, the word *framework* has appeared, that is, national or international qualification *framework*, such as the EQF, the European Qualification Framework. This is a rather new concept; this is a classification device. It's a sort of big matrix where you put all of the qualifications existing in a country and you organize them by descriptors (knowledge and more contextualized competencies, typically) and by levels (1 to 8 in the EQF). Thus, some systems have frameworks and other systems do not. When I started doing this work at the start of the last decade, many countries not only didn't have a framework, they didn't see the interest in having one. Little by little, countries have realized the importance of such frameworks, of developing a classification system. Things are changing. Policymakers have got to realize that a national qualifications system is a policy tool. It goes way beyond what we used to have, which is a system of organization of formal learning systems, especially true if you think of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as the unique tool over the last decades.

N.T.: You have also mentioned the word "transparency."

P.W.: Yes. A lot of countries in promoting lifelong learning have come to realize that they have a very black box system. If you are a learner, if you are a potential adult learner, you have no clue what to do, you have no clue where to go, and you have no clue what any qualification is going to bring to you — you just don't know what anything is worth. This situation is just inequitable because well-informed parents, for instance, are leading their children through the system in a more efficient way.

National qualifications frameworks, and international qualifications frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework – which is a meta framework rather than a template, by the way – is clearly meant to provide transparency and mobility. In this classification of qualifications, users can see the one at which they are aiming, and where it potentially leads – horizontally (other qualifications at the same level) or vertically (other qualifications at higher levels). The EQF is an output of the forum on the transparency of qualifications that took place at the end of the '90s.

And finally, there is the question of "experience," as well. When I started traveling, there were very few countries that were considering giving credit, giving exemption, giving qualification, giving any kind of recognition based on experience. And now it is everywhere: it is in Africa, it is in Southeast Asian, it is in Latin America, it is in Europe.

N.T.: How are these qualification frameworks, themselves, being assessed? How are their accomplishments, their qualities, being judged?

P.W.: That is the drawback. Quality is *nowhere* in the picture of recognition at the moment. The situation is better in the field of national qualifications frameworks where there are arrangements to control the quality, in particular for benchmarking national qualifications to the EQF. The European Commission (DGEAC) has established an advisory group for that.

Strictly in the field of recognition of non-formal and informal learning, it is important to say this first: right now, only a few people – whether middle-level policymakers or below, or whether people on the streets – are aware of the beautiful systems of the recognition of formal and informal learning that have been in place now for 10 years. Most of the activities leading to the awarding of qualifications in most of the countries I know are still based on the *formal* learning system: basically schools and universities. So what we have been discussing is a great idea, but one that has not been implemented on a large scale.

For example, in France, over the last five or six years, the Ministry of Education awards about 1.6 million qualifications per year. Over this same period, the validation of experience system, the PLAR or PLA system (or VAE [Validation des Acquis de l'Experience], as we call it), has awarded something like 40,000 qualifications. It's not on par. What is true, though, is that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning system is on par with the adult learning system in France, which has delivered about the same number of qualification over the same period.

What is frightening at the moment is that adult learning does not lead to any form of recognized qualification anywhere in the world. Most people reach retirement with the same official level of educational attainment they had when they left initial education and training, even if they have been consistently learning, formally or not, throughout their lives. About 90 percent of adult learning is not formalized and therefore precious pieces of information about what people, or workers for that matter, know or can do is unknown to employers or recruiters. This is a disgrace.

So, to get back to the quality question: people have been focusing on qualifications in formal education and training. The focus has been on curricula, on teachers, on the preparation of teachers and trainers, and they don't see that to be legitimate, to be a credible recognition system; it is necessary to deal with the quality issue. Few countries have in place a system for assessing the qualification framework (in France, for example, it is done through the inspectors of the ministries and through the catalog of qualifications, CNCP) or assessing the procedures for recognizing non-formal and informal learning outcomes. That is probably why most stakeholders and actors are unsure, to say the least, about recognition of non-formal and informal learning systems: the input system is unknown – by definition, those systems don't look at how competencies have been acquired, but assess people as to whether they know or can do – and there is **no** quality assurance either. In the formal learning system, the input system is completely under control, through the training of the teachers and the control of the curricula, typically – let alone that we all went to school and we all know what is delivered there – so stakeholders and actors do trust the system. The funny thing is that there usually is a high level of criticism about the initial education and training system – especially among employers – but overall it remains their benchmark, and ultimate reference. In almost all cultures – with the notable exception of the First Nations in Canada, for example – people are not ready to accept that one learns outside the classroom. A cultural shift is needed.

A.M.: May I try a formulation? It seems as if there are two ways in which some kind of qualification model might work. One way is to say that an institution teaches something, and that institution controls both the teaching of skills and the identification of the competencies that someone has gained to attain a particular qualification. That seems quite different from recognizing the skills that someone may have gained in a very different context, one that no institution has identified – skills that are not controlled by the institution that has provided training.

P.W.: This is exactly true. On the one side you say, "I teach and I control the quality of the teaching." So the input system is known. That's why so many people are only relying on the formal learning system because it's what they know, what they, themselves, have experienced. They criticize the school system all the time, but more or less they have confidence in it. This is opposed to the recognition system where, by definition, you don't care how, where and when the person has learned what he or she knows, what he or she can do. Because

what you want to know is whether he or she can deliver what you expect. The input is not the issue; the competency is.

Since people have started to think in terms of the recognition of non-formal or informal learning or validation of experience, they have got to realize that what matters is whether people know it or not, whether people can do it or not. So this is impacting back on the "I teach and I control the teaching" — the input system – that you described. A few years ago, the concept of "learning outcomes" – that, to make things simpler, we can take as synonymous with competency – was not used. Curricula were designed as follows: 200 hours of English; 200 hours of mathematics; 600 hours of car mechanics; and 12 hours of hygiene. Now, even in the formal education and training system, many countries are moving to outcome-based curricula. In fact, they claim they are, but when you talk to curriculum designers, they still have the tendency to think in terms of number of hours. Anyway, there is what we can think of as an intermediary system in the formal learning system – the institutions are still relying on control of the input (relying on the teachers to determine the quality), but they define qualification in terms of *learning outcomes*. So they move away from the number of hours, from where you were taught. It's a mixed system of what will be the future, and a change from what has been in place forever. It may take time, but it is necessary, so that the concept of learning outcomes becomes naturally accepted and can be used in the system for recognizing non-formal and informal learning outcomes. It is when the border between the initial formal education and training system and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning systems becomes blurred – because, for instance, learning outcomes are naturally accepted, rather than number of hours – that the latter will naturally fly.

A.M.: In this emerging intermediary system that you have described, who are the people who are determining outcomes, the competencies? Who has the legitimacy? Isn't the control of the outcomes, the criteria for evaluation, still in the hands of those who controlled the input system?

P.W.: The answer is "yes," they are the same people. I think that is one of the challenges for the future. First of all, this change of paradigm – looking at what people know or can do rather than the number of hours they were taught – this is emerging everywhere, but people are not ready for it. Again, if you ask people if their system is input or outcome based, they laugh: "Of course, of course, our system is learning outcome based!" And then in the discussion they say, "You need three years of this and one year of that … and then you get a master's." So, in effect, they are still functioning in their head in terms of input. The second point I want to make is this: For the last 100 years, in all the countries I know, who has been deciding what has value – the standards for assessment – is the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Education is extremely powerful everywhere. The key challenge is for the employers to realize that they are the ones who are providing the learning on the spot. They are the ones providing experience, and competencies. There is evidence that a lot of learning is happening at the workplace. And the employers are the users of qualifications, so they have to have a say, and they have started to demand a say. They want to be involved in defining the standards for assessment and for awarding qualifications. The point is that they are not organized to do this. But, this has become a big discussion and my guess is that little by little, the ministries of education will lose a little bit of their power in deciding against what criteria (standards) assessments should be made.

I want to open a small parenthesis about this because we are in a critical issue here. You were asking me earlier about what the countries are doing and about the interests of the countries. This is a very difficult point about the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. We have to realize that there is a continuum of practice. Some countries are only focusing on the labor market. They are *not* really interested in sending people back into the lifelong learning formal system. What they want is to get people a job. So, what they do is to create qualification out of nothing with standards that are invented by them in observing labor market needs. They say: "The education and training system – the Ministry of Education – is not providing these kinds of workers to the labor market, so we will create the qualification out of nothing; we will describe what we think people should know how to do; we will award the qualification, we will convince employers that this has

value, and they will get the job."

N.T.: Can you be more specific about how this works?

P.W.: Take the example of a call operator — the person you call when your computer is not working. For you in America, this might be a person is India; for us in France, it might be someone in North Africa because they can speak French. There are no qualifications; no standards exist in the formal education and training system. So, some countries are creating a qualification that is defined against standards provided by the labor market. In the case of call operators, it is about their command of languages, their fluency on the phone, their technical skills. … In short, this is getting people a job, but if these people, at some future time, want to come back or begin university and they show this qualification, the Ministry of Education will *not* accept it. And you have this continuum until the extreme opposite [happens] where the standards are directly provided by the Ministry of Education or some powerful ministry in the country and then, obviously, the qualification people get *does* have value in the lifelong learning formal system and then also maybe in the labor market, as well. This is the continuum of practice: Some countries are really focusing on the labor market – creating something out of nothing – and some countries want to give people an opportunity to resume formal education so they are assisting people against standards provided by the Ministry of Education. Having said all of this, there is a still lack of trust everywhere.

A.M.: This is a kind of Habermasian "legitimation crisis," isn't it? To what extent is any system or framework deemed legitimate and in whose eyes? Is the system legitimate in the eyes of the university, in the eyes of employers, in the eyes of a Ministry of Education? The question of legitimacy seems to be the central one here.

P.W.: That's a sad story. You have two kinds of practices in a country: in one practice, they call everybody around the table upfront – employers, trade unionists, university representatives, all the relevant ministries — and they try to do something together, which could eventually go to a parliament and become law. And in such a situation, at least there is a beginning of some confidence, some trust and some belief that the decisions are legitimate. Scandinavian countries are good at researching, and therefore creating, a consensus. Or, they don't do that, and then everyone is ballistic against the system. The frequently heard sentence is then: "You're giving qualification to people who don't deserve it." Or "You're putting too much emphasis on qualification where we want competencies." And my response is very clear: "This system of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is about equity." You say to the system, "OK, you value qualification from the formal learning system"; I'm saying, "There are people who didn't have the opportunity to go to school or to go to school long enough; they cannot afford to go back to university, to go back to school for two or three years, but they are skilled, they are competent, they have learned so much in life — they deserve another opportunity, a second chance for a qualification." Let me repeat: not a second chance for school, not a second chance of education; a second chance for qualification. And these people are adults, so they have a life, they have kids, they have jobs or they are searching for a job. These people must be given an opportunity to be in the qualification framework by means other than the formal learning system — a system that is costly and time consuming. I'm not creating anything; I'm just trying to make these people visible. It is about creating a new route to qualifications. It is about equity.

But here's where we also get back to the "quality" issue. I'm also saying to the countries that are those I think of as "champions of recognition": "Don't go too fast; don't shoot yourself in the foot. Create a system that is quality assured and be prepared to *fail* people." You cannot have a 100 percent success rate because if you do, you're killing the argument of legitimacy. In the formal learning system, some students just do not make it; they do not pass. So in the non-formal/informal learning recognition system, that should be the same. I'm talking with these "champions" and they have the feeling that when people engage in the system they should be awarded something. And I say to them: "No, if they don't deserve it, that's life. You have to fail people if they don't meet the standards." And that's where quality comes and that's where we have a lot of work to do

because quality is *nowhere*, almost nowhere, in the countries I know in the validation/recognition system. Having said that, countries are usually serious about awarding qualifications. Most of them have what I call "eligibility conditions": you have to meet some standards in order to apply to have your non-formal and informal learning outcomes validated and recognized. If you take into account this screening process when you do the math, you find that success rates in the French VAE system are quite similar to success rates in the formal learning system.

N.T.: I'd like to take an example from the United States. For our prior learning assessment, some universities use a course-match system, where criteria are set out and the student has to "match" them exactly. In such a model, there is no room for recognizing learning that does not fit a predetermined structured. In the polar opposite are institutions that allow for "emergent learning" – recognizing new learning that may not already exist within the academy. In this context, what are the processes and the practices that are being used to determine if people have met any particular qualification?

P.W.: That's a key question and very much depends on whether the country has decided to go with the standards provided by its Ministry of Education or not. What I find extremely interesting is that all of the practitioners will tell you that as soon as you do validation and recognition, you bump into so much knowledge and so much prior learning that you did *not* expect. For them, it is thus very difficult to prejudge, to know the categories beforehand. But I would thus say that practices vary a lot.

A.M.: I would also presume that some of this variation has to do with the *use* to which the system is being put.

P.W.: This is another way to describe the continuum that we were describing earlier. Some countries are really focusing on the labor market and on regulated occupations. And there, they have no choice: they have to assess people against extremely precise standards; there is no room for going off those standards and no flexibility. That is the extreme side of the continuum. But at the other end, you have people who are there for self-consumption — they just want to take stock of their learning, they have no specific project, they don't want to change jobs; sometimes they are retired people who want to self-reflect on their learning, to organize their competencies, or they just want to have legitimacy with their grandkids! It is the other side of the continuum. A lot of countries have organized that. In this continuum, it is difficult to say where the countries are, but what I can say is that, in general, countries are much more serious about this kind of work. As I've described, there are so many practices; it's a complex picture.

You know, this is new territory and there are a lot of misconceptions out there. In a nutshell, my input into this work – and my selling argument to the policymakers I'm working with around the world – is to say that all learning should be recognized. There is no such a thing as good or bad learning. However, the level of formalization of the validation and recognition should be proportionate to the objectives of the applicant and the resources of the system. For example, it would be silly to venture into expensive validation and recognition practice for retirees aiming at enjoying some self-consumption. On the other hand, it is critical, on the other hand, that you thoroughly assess – with quality assurance practice – assistant nurses wishing to become nurses because they will have the lives of their patients in their hands.

I find this point extremely interesting because that means the adjective "formal" does apply to both the validation/recognition process and to the learning. Think about it: you can have more or less formal validation/recognition or more or less formal learning. This research/policy field ranges from very formal validation/recognition of formal learning (what high schools and universities do, typically) to rather informal validation/recognition of informal learning (simple portfolio of competence for retired people), with the full continuum in between, according to your needs.

By the same token, let me add a key point: this thorough assessment process I'm talking about doesn't need to

be longer or more costly than the one in the formal learning system either. It should just be the same. I don't see why we should demand than assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is more thorough. In the formal learning system, everybody accepts that students are assessed based a selection of randomly selected tests: Your dentist may have failed one of two tests – she or he may have failed the pain control test – but, on average, she or he passed; and the assumption is that, with practice, she or he will become a better dentist. When I took my flying license, the assessor told me that I was good enough to fly alone, but he also insisted that it will take me hours of flying before I can say I'm a pilot. Countries should not ask or expect the system for recognizing non-formal and informal learning outcomes to do more or better. If/when they do it's because they don't trust a system where the input system is unknown – as we discussed earlier. Only quality assurance will help solve this issue.

A.M.: I wanted to briefly return to something Nan mentioned, that is, the relationship between these assessments of skills and competencies and a college degree. How do these qualifications fit within the university?

P.W.: This approach – one that I know very well – is barely what I have seen in the world. For example, about 60 percent of those qualifications awarded in these systems are at the first levels of vocational preparation, so they refer to those people who might be ready for the labor market at ages 16, 17 or 18. But I'd like to summarize in a different way what I see countries doing. I can think of three ways in which assessment of experience is being used. One is exemption of academic prerequisites for university entrance based on the assessment of experience (Flemish Belgium, South Africa). Then, a second, you have exemption from *part* of the curriculum. And lastly, you have the exemption from even taking the final examination. In Ireland or France, for example, you can have the full qualification without completing one hour of formal learning. You are just assessed, and if you do well against the standard, you are awarded the qualification. But, back to your question, it is rare that these practices are linked directly to the university.

N.T.: I wonder, Patrick, if you can predict the direction of all of this work.

P.W.: There are many challenges I see. Who decides on the standards? Who owns them? Who decides against what you assess the people applying for a qualification through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes? As I've described, right now, it has been the educators and the ministries of education that are deciding what you need to know in order to gain a qualification; i.e., what has value in terms of learning. This is going to be a fight for the next years because many actors are now popping up in the system and they want to have a say. For example, in France, seven ministries are involved in this because they want to use recognition but they want to define what they mean and what they want.

Second is demography. Some universities in Canada, and I believe in the U.S., and almost all of them in Europe are, little by little, dying because they don't have a sufficient flow of traditional students. So the smart universities have used recognition as a way to open up the pool of potential students, and here I am specifically thinking about the adult population which is told: "We will assess what you know already and only give you the piece you need." The universities get less in the way of fees from these nontraditional students but they get a much bigger pool.

There is another demographic challenge that concerns the labor market. Anyone entering the labor market today will have, on average, seven different jobs. You just can't ask the formal learning system to take care of all of them if they need a new qualification at some point in their lives, if they need up-skilling or re-skilling. It would not be efficient. We have to rely on a different system to respond to the greater and greater occupational mobility in the labor market. And we also know the reality that it is only a tiny proportion of the adult work force that is paying for the retirement of a bigger and bigger fraction of the population that is retiring. We have to find a way to re-qualify people that are being laid off before reaching retirement age, so that they can *stay* a bit longer in the labor market. The problem in Europe is massive. Here again, policymakers are wrong:

The issue with financing the pension systems of retirees is not about legal retirement age that most countries, at least in Europe, are constantly postponing. The problem is that a big fraction of the population is made redundant well before reaching retirement age, creating a burden on social redistribution systems. Keeping them, as workers, in the labor market would alleviate this burden, but this means re-skilling and re-qualification.

Finally, there is the challenge of communication – something we touched on before in terms of "transparency"; we have to explain what we are doing, we have to reach new populations and target groups, and we have to communicate more effectively with the users, especially with employers, trade unions and qualification providers. We have to talk about quality, we have to show that we are not giving out undeserved qualifications – we have to show only that we are offering a new and effective route to qualification. We need to provide a good information and guidance system.

A.M.: Finally, Patrick, I was intrigued by a piece you wrote entitled: "Moving Mountains: Will Qualification Systems Promote Lifelong Learning?" (Werquin, 2007). I wonder about your conclusions because, for me, they touched on some broader ideals that connect the movement in which you have been so involved and that we have been discussing and the dream of a fairer, more equitable and more democratic world.

P.W.: I'd respond in a few ways: There is a radical change in the "recognition" approach. It is that you tell people, you acknowledge, what they *do* know and what they *can* do, where the school system typically tells you the exact opposite: it tells you what you *don't* know and what you're *bad* at. Practitioners will tell you that people are so used to the school system that it sometimes takes recognition officers forever to convince applicants to view themselves as people who have skills, who have some knowledge. Our school systems are bad; they are leaving on the side of the road a big proportion of people who are discouraged and don't think of themselves as knowing anything. In contrast, the recognition system is extremely good for motivation and in offering people a second chance.

We also have strong evidence that people are interested in qualification – interestingly enough, people are pragmatic and, even those with low educational attainment, have got to realize that a qualification opens many doors in life, at work but also in their community – and *not* in formal learning. I have done many studies about the adult learning system and I have come across many situations in which the money is there, the programs are there, the teachers are there, the classrooms are there, and adults do *not* show up because they do not want to go back to school, often because they have a bad history with schooling. Whenever they went to an assessment, they failed. So we say to them: "We're going to send you back to school," and they say: "No!" But if we say, "We know you've been accumulating knowledge or competencies, we just want to talk with you about them, we want to help you document them, we want to analyze your learning in the past and maybe in the end, we can award something to you" – if we say this, then they are interested. Because these people who have failed at school realize that their neighbors with the qualifications have a better job, have better money and have more say in the community; they realize the value of a qualification, so the recognition approach is a very strong motivation and offers them something that the formal school system has *never* provided. In this way, it certainly can lead to a fairer and more equitable world.

N.T.: So we return to the *quality* of the recognition systems that we do develop.

P.W.: As I said earlier, there is no interest in quality – yet. I continue to say to people: "There is no good or bad system about recognition of non-formal or informal learning. You should decide for your country, for your city, for your enterprise what it is that you need for the next two to five years. You should be prepared to change it if you aren't happy with what you have done, but you need to decide. It may only be a portfolio of competencies; it may only be to find ways for people to reflect on their learning, on their competencies. Or you may want to have more nurses or more medical doctors or more pilots; and in these cases, you need a full-blown validation and recognition system with quality assurance and very precise, thorough assessment; you

need qualifications that employers are aware of and that they see as valid, and those employers have to be willing to hire people with that qualification." You need those qualifications to have currency in the society, especially in the labor market. What matters the most is not the validation process – which is merely technical; important but technical – but **societal recognition:** whether what you give people has currency in the society. Otherwise, participation will soon collapse. Word of mouth would kill the system.

I am really upset when I travel and see a group of consultants trying to implement their own system because they are not asking people, whether it's in Europe or Africa or North America or anywhere: "What is it that *you* need?" There is no such thing as a unique solution for the next 200 years. There are a bunch of possible options and they are directly tied to your needs, whether defined in terms of education, of the labor market or in terms of democracy. What we determine is *quality* in our recognition models – we have to determine it and integrate it into our regular practices – and this has to be understood within the context of that particular need.

Reference

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