

Project: Futures for higher education

Concept note

Luis Fernando Sarango Macas
AMAWTAY WASI PLURAL UNIVERSITY– ECUADOR
pushak1@yahoo.com

How would you like higher education to be in 2050?

In the first place, by 2050 I would like higher education to **recognize diversity**, i.e. the diverse reality of the world we are living in. This means the natural diversity of the human species, the flora, and the fauna, and all the different logics ruling the alive world, and thus, all its different knowledge theories and forms.

This acknowledgment of the diverse reality of the world would therefore encompass the need to re-acknowledge and practice a **pedagogical pluralism**, in line with the diverse reality of the communities of human beings who learn and teach in the different existing times and spaces. Knowledge is not unique; there is only official, historically established, or imposed knowledge. There exist a wide variety of knowledge that allows the settlement of theoretical and practical problems within diverse realities.

I would like education to be aware of the fact that this “pluriverse” contains **diverse education paradigms**, and I would also like that it, instead of favoring a single dialogue, could gather everyone for an actual **dialogue of knowledge with epistemic equity**. Diversity must be defined in terms of abundance of opportunities, and not as chaos or anarchy, the look unilaterally thrown by the Western world. Rather than being silenced or overshadowed, diversity should be promoted to allow us all to have a voice and to learn from each other from the individual to the collective sphere and vice versa; i.e., from the material to the spiritual world, and all along the inter-generational path.

In the case of the Abya Yala¹ continent, known as America, I would like education to fully recognize that we, native people, have our **own education paradigm**, the Education Paradigm of the Abya Yala.

The *Education Paradigm of the Abya Yala* is not rooted in the individual theories of a single person. Instead, it emerges from the collective reason, intuition, and praxis of the peoples who founded and compose today the

¹ Abya Yala, in Kuna language. Abya: Blood. Yala: Land. Land of Blood. Considering that blood is life, then, the meaning is the following: Land of Vital Blood or Land of Life. This is the name used by the contemporary native peoples to call the American continent.

Millenary Civilization Matrix of the Abya Yala. Essentially, this is a paradigm made of diverse but coordinated paradigms. This paradigm, unknown and intentionally neglected by the Centenary Civilization Matrix of the Western World constitutes an epistemology, by itself; it is a complete World View or World Experience, radically different from the Civilization Paradigm of the Western World, but which shares certain common ground with the civilization paradigms of the Eastern and African worlds.

The foundation of this paradigm is that human beings (both men and women) learn, in fulfilling themselves in community, *from life, with life, and for life*. (Sarango, 2014, p. 47).

Within the framework of pedagogical pluralism, in 2050, higher education should promote and encourage the implementation of **individual learning and research methods**, which up to date work within the communities of native people, and endure because of their informal nature.

Framed in the context of the reality of the indigenous communities in Ecuador, the “Amawtay Wasi” Intercultural University of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples implements the ***Relational-Symbolic-Experience-based Method***. This approach resumes the idea of the *complementary pair* for both theory and practice. It also prioritizes practice without annulling theorization, which will always be the fruit of the experience and the symbols. The *Relational-Symbolic-Experience-based Method* encourages learning through experience, and a full living of the facts, combining reason and intuition, as well as experience and expectations, in a close *relationship*² between individual and community, and between the material and the spiritual spheres.

Human beings need all of their senses to have a full life. We need love, intuition, harmony, and tenderness. Abstraction is a superior form of theorization, and to achieve it, no graph-based writing is needed.

The *relational-symbolic-experience-based method*, which is almost universal among the indigenous peoples of the Abya Yala, derives from the multiple individual pedagogies developed by each people or collective group along the centuries.

The recovery of the *relational-symbolic-experience-based method* has led to a snail-shaped sequence, with a returning flow of **horizontal levels of learning** both in theory and practice. These are known for their purpose to build up a reflexive set of theories and practices, articulated around reflection, research, and community or services entrepreneurship processes of different nature. There, students must overcome the following levels: 1) Learning by living in the community; 2) Learning

² Relational is linked to actual relation; the true tissue that unites human beings at the individual and community levels, in the material and spiritual spheres, with plants, animals, mountains, rivers, stones, the cosmos, and everything around.

to learn; 3) Learning to de-learn and to re-learn; 4) Learning to lead their life projects, and 5) Learning to be for the rest of their lives. (UINPI-AW, 2005).

How could higher education contribute to shaping better futures for all in 2050?

1.- Through the implementation of an education system that harmonizes universal and local or contextualized knowledge.

In Ecuador, for example, at all costs and on the shameful basis that we are an under-developed country, incapable to contribute somehow with any education process, the government in office clings to the mirage sold by the developed countries about their model being the best one. This education paradigm won't magically take us out of the under-development, neither will it make us become part, overnight, of the club of the developed ones.

Ecuador might not be a one-off case in the Abya Yala, but the underlying problem comes when the *Modern nation-states*³, blindfolded by their own paradigm, try to impose at any cost the lessons from the Centenary Civilization Matrix of the Western World or MCCO [in Spanish], disguised in universal knowledge, and like the single, true, immovable, superior, and even sacred knowledge, as they proclaim themselves as *scientific*.

At the same time, not only they neglect local knowledge and contextualized learning by the native peoples, the peasants, the less favored sectors, the women, among other groups, but they also feel ashamed of such knowledge and qualify it as indigenous, past-due, and stagnant, as they prefer to always look towards Europe and North America as the one and only role model.

This deviation is not only evident in the field of methodology, but it is also ideological and is linked to a concept of the world, with present and future grim consequences over nothing less than *our young people*. By getting rid of local knowledge to privilege universal knowledge, we lose our condition of human beings with identity, it means, the conjugation of the unique knowledge of every single being and the community and universal knowledge, and vice versa. We miss and will continue to miss the possible contributions of Humanity over the superficial love for a vicious paradigm that does nothing but supporting the unquenchable thirst for economic gains, at the expense of human beings themselves and Nature.

For the above-mentioned reasons, one of the main axes and challenges we have ahead is finding and applying harmony between universal and local or contextualized knowledge, as the key to rescue, develop, and consolidate the *Education Paradigm of the Abya Yala*, particularly, and the new higher education for 2050, in general.

³ This expression is used by the Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano.

2.- Through the encouragement of students to dream, build up, and implement their life projects.

When it comes to less fictional education processes, which propose learning *from life, with life, and for life*, the suitable option is to prepare content inspired by *Life* itself. Life is a short combination of time and space (pacha) within a bigger combination. Therefore, it is a collective and individual momentum. Life should be the materialization of our dreams, an opportunity to fulfill ourselves both individually and collectively. But life is also about facing daily problems, therefore, we are all pushing to find solutions for those problems, and that's when you learn. Within this context, the logical thing to do is to learn to solve our problems to be able to develop our life projects at the individual and collective levels.

Education, in general, and higher education, in particular, should be from 2050 and on, the time/space combination that can fit every young person or student; where they are allowed to develop their own abilities and expertise to build up and put into practice their own life project. In the case of native peoples, this includes a projection of the individual sphere over the collective sphere, and vice versa, i.e. between the material and the spiritual domains.

References:

Sarango, L. F. (2014). *El paradigma educativo de Abya Yala. Continuidad histórica, avances y desafíos*. Managua. Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense URACCAN.

UINPI-AW. (2005). *Enseñándonos en la Sabiduría y en Bien Vivir: Prospecto*. Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi. Quito.