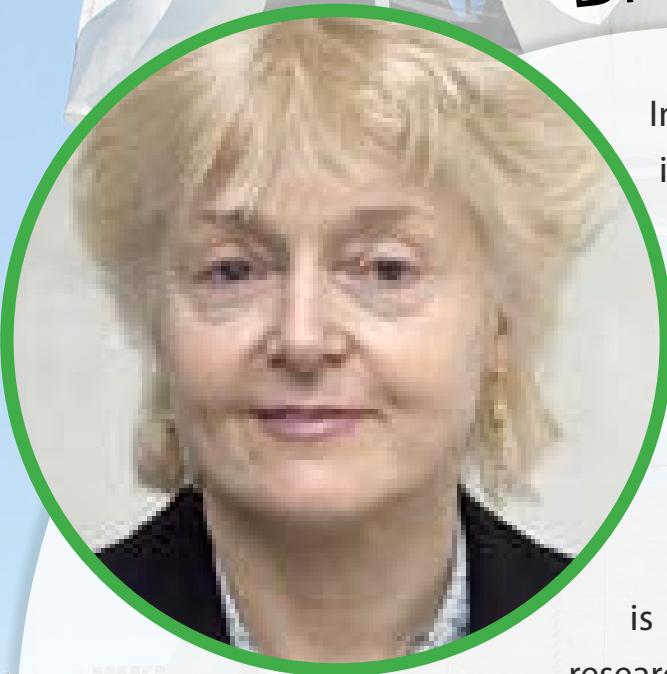


# Dr. Ulrike Hanemann

Independent international literacy and education specialist.



As a Senior Programme Specialist, Dr Hanemann managed the Literacy and Basic Skills Programme<sup>1</sup> of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) until 2017. UIL is a non-profit, policy-driven, international research, training, information, documentation and publishing centre of UNESCO and in charge of lifelong learning policy and practice with a focus on adult literacy and adult education, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Dr Hanemann has worked in research and capacity development in the field of literacy and non-formal and adult education from a perspective of lifelong learning in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Arab States. Before joining UNESCO in 2001, she worked for ten years as a lecturer and advisor at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in pre-service teacher formation and postgraduate programmes. Currently she is carrying out consultancy work for UIL, UNESCO and other agencies in different world regions in the fields of her expertise.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/literacy>

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by ANA M. VERNIA

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Universitat Jaume I, Castelló



## Ana M. Vernia

Hanemann, I would like to know about your experience when you worked for the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, how do you value your work at the Literacy and Basic Skills Programme?

### Ulrike Hanemann

The UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), which became the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in 2006, contracted me as a consultant in 2001. While I performed specific tasks such as the provision of technical assistance to the ministries of education in Kosovo and Afghanistan to develop learning materials for literacy and basic education programmes for girls and women in these countries, or conducting an evaluation of the intercultural bilingual teacher training institutes in Bolivia, I was also engaged in all staff activities of the Institute. In 2006, I was recruited by UNESCO as a Senior Programme Specialist and tasked with the coordination of UIL's literacy work until I reached the UNESCO retirement age in May 2017.

UIL's programme activities, including those of the Literacy and Basic Skills Programme, are guided by the objectives of UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy<sup>1</sup> which was adopted by the General Conference of the 193 UNESCO Member States. As the Institute has a specific mandate to promote lifelong learning, UIL's efforts are focused on the application of the lifelong learning principle or paradigm to the particular field of youth and adult literacy and basic skills/ education. This is mainly achieved through advocacy, policy support, capacity development, research and networking. A particular emphasis is put on the identification, analysis and sharing of promising practice (e.g. building the Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database – LitBase) and the strengthening of Member States' capacities for the development of policies, plans, programmes and innovative approaches to literacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently valid for 2014-2021

UNESCO is one of the few international organisations supporting youth and adult literacy and education. Although the available regular budget is extremely modest compared to the immense literacy challenges at the global level, UNESCO as an “influencer” can make a difference and mobilize political will and additional resources. While we cannot expect miracles, there are numerous examples of the impact that UIL’s and UNESCO’s literacy activities have caused in different countries.

**AV** We know the importance of lifelong learning, particularly in societies where many people are at risk to be excluded due to their low levels or lack of literacy and language skills. We also know that UNESCO is advocating for literacy through different initiatives. Do you consider that the results have been significant?

**UH** UNESCO is not a donor organization. It rather serves as a ‘laboratory of ideas’ and its role is to help Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular the SDG 4 (Education 2030) and their own goals through the development of educational tools and national capacities. This includes the literacy target (SDG 4.6) for the period 2015-2030, which corresponds with the Education for All Goal 4 during the period 2000-2015. UNESCO tries to strengthen political will and technical capacities particularly in those Member States that are facing the largest literacy challenges. This was done, for example, in the past through the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE – 2006-2015) and currently through the Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL). GAL was established in 2016 and is coordinated by UIL.

Taking into account the limited human and financial resources available at UIL, the results are impressive. For example, a number of countries were supported in developing policies, programmes and learning materials, hundreds of literacy providers were trained in innovative approaches, and more than 200 literacy good practices are showcased on the LitBase, just to mention a few results. However, much of UIL’s work has only an indirect impact in countries which is difficult to measure. It can also take a couple of years before results of UIL’s interventions become visible. Most importantly, it is necessary to mobilise many stakeholders to work together in coordinated ways in order to move the literacy agenda forward and make visible progress towards SDG 4.6. This is exactly the role of UIL.

**AV** Do you think it is possible that in the future a 90% or 100% of the population will stop being illiterate?

**UH** Understanding literacy from a lifelong learning perspective means seeing literacy learning as a continuous process that never ends. Nowadays we have to perform more complex and different literacy- and numeracy-related tasks than in the past, and the proficiency level acquired at school may not be sufficient. The binary view of categorizing a person as either 'literate' or 'illiterate' does not correspond any more to a contemporary understanding of literacy. We rather should ask if a person has literacy competencies at a proficiency level that allows him or her to do what he or she wants and needs to do in a specific context and at a certain time.

SDG 4.7 requires UNESCO Member States that 'by 2030, all young people and adults across the world should have achieved relevant and recognized proficiency levels in functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at successful completion of basic education'. This is a very ambitious target. If progress made by countries continues at the current pace, it will be impossible to achieve this target.

**AV** In your article "Lifelong literacy as a prerequisite for and the key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals"<sup>2</sup> you say that literacy is critical for the achievement of the SDGs related to poverty, food security, health & well-being, gender equality, water, environment, work, peace. Why do you think so?

**UH** The achievement of most, if not all SDGs requires learning and transformation. Within a lifelong learning framework, literacy and numeracy are viewed as foundation skills forming the core of basic education and are indispensable for full participation in society. Accomplishing the lifelong learning vision of the new 2030 Agenda will be difficult without tackling the issue of literacy and numeracy as the foundational level of further and independent learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Hanemann, U. (2016) Lifelong literacy as a prerequisite for and the key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In: DVV International – International Perspectives in Adult Education / N° 75, pp.46-54. DVV International, Bonn, Germany.  
[https://www.dvv-international.de/fileadmin/files/Inhalte\\_Bilder\\_und\\_Dokumente/Materialien/IPE/IPE\\_75\\_EN\\_web.pdf](https://www.dvv-international.de/fileadmin/files/Inhalte_Bilder_und_Dokumente/Materialien/IPE/IPE_75_EN_web.pdf)

My argument in the mentioned article is that the recognition that learning never stops over a person's lifetime also applies to literacy learning: the acquisition and development of literacy takes place before, during and after primary school. The same is true for life-wide learning taking place at home, work, school and other spaces in the community and society. In other words, the development of reading and writing skills should be closely associated with activities which are relevant – or even essential – for human and sustainable development. This is the link of literacy with the SDGs. And for this reason, in my article I advocate for a 'lifelong and life-wide literacy' approach.

**AV** From your point of view, what are the policies that should be reinforced from the richest countries to help the poorest?

**UH** In the case of financial and technical support for adult literacy, which currently is much too little, the international partner countries and donors should better coordinate. They should ensure that a contemporary understanding of literacy – as a continuum of learning – is promoted among those countries they are supporting. The support should not be limited to financial resources but also include the development of national, - and even local, - capacities for better policies and programmes. They should put strong emphasis on improved quality in teaching and learning, and bring a clear focus on disadvantaged population groups – such as women – to reduce disparities in the poorer countries.

Very important is a cross-sector approach which means that literacy programmes should be linked up with other development programmes focusing on the basic needs of the disadvantaged populations: food-security, health and well-being, water, sanitation, environment, decent employment, among others. Without peace there is no development, and as established in the UNESCO Constitution<sup>3</sup>: "Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed". In other words, any investment in adult literacy and education should be seen as a contribution to peace-building, which in turn is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

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**3** Adopted 1945

**AV** I am leading a research group on quality of life from education and musical training. Do you think that the arts are a good tool to improve literacy?

**UH** I believe that creativity and arts are excellent means and tools for any kind of learning including literacy. Music, dance, performing and visual arts are not only helping adults with literacy learning, but also motivating them to enroll in literacy courses because they become more attractive. Arts-based teaching and learning of literacy is definitely happening in many courses without seeing this as something innovative or special. It would be good to integrate arts more systematically in adult literacy programmes and also do some research on its impact.

**AV** If you had the power to change the world, what would be the first three actions you would do?

**UH** I think the Sustainable Development Goals nicely summarize what is necessary to change and what kind of actions to implement during the next years. However, the SDG Agenda 2030 is extremely ambitious. It cannot only be achieved with power and resources. It requires committed, conscious, critical, informed, knowing, skilled, courageous, and learning people. In short, my response would be: education, education, education!

**AV** Thank you very much for sharing your experience and views with ARTSEDUCA readers! ♦