

Education in 2030

What would education look like in a largely poverty-free world? And how do we get there?

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There are many complexities in seeking to answer our given questions. There is first of all the concept of 'education' and the question, what is it? Will the word have the same meaning all over the world in 2030 as it has in the Western world today? Will it even have the same meaning in the industrialised world in 2030 as it has today? In the West, education is equated with schooling. Children, often as young as five years old, are sent to institutions where they are subjected to a formalised type of education and a departmentalised type of knowledge, where they learn to be quiet, to raise their hands, to wait till they are called upon, to obey, listen, perform tasks they have been asked to do.

In the developing world too, the curriculum that is promoted is usually of a Western type aimed at urbanised middle-class children and is rather irrelevant for children in rural areas or those of a lower-class background (Breidlid, 2013). They learn to read and write, but in Africa this is often in a language they do not understand (Brock-Utne, 2012a, 2012b). They are being subjected to tests and learning to compete against each other. They are being 'schooled'. World Bank authors Burnett and Patrinos (1996:275) express it in the following way: 'Logic dictates that if the poor cannot afford schooling, then by definition they are less educated.' This claim may be contrasted to a passage from Nyerere's *Education for Self-Reliance*:

The fact that pre-colonial Africa did not have 'schools' – except for short periods of initiation in some tribes – did not mean that the children were not educated. They learned by living and doing. In the homes and on the farms they were taught the skills of the society and the behaviour expected by its members... Education was thus 'informal'; every adult was a teacher to a greater or lesser degree. But this lack of formality did not mean that there was no education, nor did it affect its importance to the society. Indeed, it may have made the education more directly relevant to the society in which the child was growing up (Nyerere, 1982: 236).

Seeing the context in which we live

Thirty years on, Swedish philosopher, teacher and activist Helena Norberg-Hodge has studied the effects of today's economic development models on traditional societies and local cultures. She was the first foreigner allowed to make her home among the people of the Himalayan province of Ladakh (Kashmir). Norberg-Hodge (1996a) experienced how education isolates children from their culture and from nature. Children in developing countries are trained to become narrow specialists in a Westernised urban environment. She found this process to be particularly striking in

Ladakh where modern schooling prevents children from seeing the very context in which they live. Children leave school unable to use their own resources, and unable to function in their own world. She writes about the education children in Ladakh receive in much the same way as Nyerere writes about African education.

For generation after generation, Ladakhis grew up learning how to provide themselves with clothing and shelter; how to make shoes out of yak skin and robes from the wool of sheep; how to build houses out of mud and stone. Education was location-specific and nurtured an intimate relationship with the living world. It gave children an intuitive awareness that allowed them, as they grew older, to use resources in an effective and sustainable way (Norberg-Hodge, 1996a: 37).

None of this knowledge is provided in the modern school the children in Ladakh now attend. Norberg-Hodge finds that the school in Ladakh has become a place to forget the traditional skills and, worse, to look down on them and think of their traditions as inferior. Most of the skills Ladakhi children learn in school will never be of real use to them. They learn from books written by people who have never set foot in Ladakh. They are getting what is claimed to be 'universal' knowledge. Some countries and institutions have the power to define the knowledge they deem important for their societies as 'universal'.

Stratification and exclusion

The education children in developing countries receive serves to separate a small segment of them from the rest of the population. This small segment is taught Western knowledge – in Africa, mostly in languages they do not normally speak – and is trained to be part of a small elite. This is the function education now has all over the world. The increased testing regime in the West, also forced on developing countries, serves to separate out a class of youngsters – the future elite. The authors of the book *The World Bank and Education: Critiques and alternatives* (Klees et al., 2012) argue that the newest World Bank Education Strategy 2020 (WBES, 2020) – like all the World Bank strategies before this one – is based on a neoliberal ideology (World Bank, 2011). Neoliberalism has been a three-decade-plus experiment on the disadvantaged of the world. Several of the authors make the important observation that World Bank policies are quite similar to those of US and UK aid to education in developing countries. I would add that they are also quite similar to the educational policies these countries adhere to in their own countries and which lead to increased inequalities there (Alexander, 2010).

Privatisation continues to be a central element in World Bank education policies, and WBES 2020 is no exception. But, as argued



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Informal education: where every adult is a teacher, to a lesser or greater degree

by several authors in the aforementioned book, the World Bank engages in a misrepresentation of research literature by providing a categorically positive view of markets and ignoring contradictory evidence. Examples from the state-run educational systems of Finland and Cuba (see Carnoy et al., 2007) are, for instance, ignored. Several of the authors also point to the fact that the World Bank uses its neoliberal ideology to select a very narrow set of recommended policies. They note that education needs to be restructured from the current World Bank model – which in reality leads to exclusion, failure and hierarchy and only serves elites – to a mass model of education that emphasises inclusion, success and democracy.

The question is: How can a mass model of education be constructed, for example, in Africa when the curriculum taught is irrelevant and teaching is done in a language children do not understand and teachers master badly? This question, to my great surprise, is not discussed among the group of critics of World Bank education policies (Klees et al., 2012). As pointed out in an earlier Education Note by the World Bank, ‘fifty percent of the world’s out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home’ (2005: 1).

How do we reach a poverty-free world?

An appropriate concern for us all is whether the available resources on our planet are being used in ways that:

- Meet the basic needs of all people
- Maintain biodiversity

- Ensure the sustained availability of comparable resource flows to future generations

Our present economic system fails on all three counts (Korten, 1996). It is my conviction that a largely poverty-free world cannot be reached on the basis of a neoliberalist agenda and a deregulated market economy. As I have argued elsewhere, this is a system that leads to the rich getting richer and the poor poorer all over the world (Brock-Utne, 2013). A thin segment of the richest people has formed a stateless alliance that defines ‘global interest’ as synonymous with the personal and corporate financial interests of its members. According to David Korten, ‘this separation has been occurring in nearly every country in the world to such an extent that it is no longer meaningful to speak of a world divided into northern and southern nations. The meaningful divide is not geography – it is class’ (1996: 25).

The effects of the capitalist system are well described in a book by Ravi Batra (1994). He shows that in the decade from 1977 to 1988, more than 80 per cent of Americans had become poorer while the top one per cent had increased their income by 49.8 per cent. Since 1964, when President Johnson initiated the war on poverty, the US population has been working harder to earn less. Ralph Nader and Lori Wallach (1996: 107) note that:

We must make the clear connection between our local problems and the multinational corporate drive for economic and political globalization. If we don’t, then others will blame these increasing problems on other causes. ‘It’s the immigrants!’ ‘It’s the welfare system!’ ‘It’s greedy farmers and workers!’

Nader and Wallach argue that thus ‘camouflaging’ the real causes of our multifaceted problems divides citizens against each other to the benefit of the corporate agenda. Nader and Wallach (1996: 107) show how democratic institutions are being built down in many countries, and they ask: ‘How will citizens reverse the devastating globalization agenda while democratic options and institutions are still available?’

Conclusion

There is no greater task, therefore, than for education in the coming decades to create a revitalised citizenry. This will require teachers who are conscious of the world we live in and who are able to speak up for those labelled as ‘losers’ in the education system. Creating local economies, which we must do to save this planet and eradicate poverty, will also mean rethinking education. As we have said, modern education is training children around the world for the centralised global economy and essentially the same curriculum is taught in every environment, no matter what the cultural traditions or local resources. Norberg-Hodge (1996b: 405) notes that ‘promoting regional and local adaptation in the schools would be an essential part of the revitalization of local economies’. Rather than educating the young for ever-greater specialisation in a competitive, jobless and unsustainable growth economy, creating a few extremely wealthy people and increasing poverty among the already poor, children would be trained for an economy that made appropriate use of available resources.

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