

Education and development in 2030

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'If the trajectory continues, look at the number of people living on a dollar a day by 2030: zero.' What if this prediction, voiced at TED 2013¹ by U2 frontman and philanthropist Bono, were to come true? What if, come 2030, there really is no one left living in extreme poverty? Development and eradicating poverty are often treated synonymously. In 2030, then, 'development' – as we know it – may no longer be necessary.

We think of education as being vital for development. Increasingly, we are called upon to justify investment in education not as an end in itself but instrumentally: for its catalytic role in achieving other developmental outcomes, particularly economic development. But if these other development goals have been reached, this nexus might no longer be necessary or valid. It might be that development policy-makers and practitioners, as well as educationalists, can return to valuing education for its own sake – as students, parents and teachers do.

The post-2015 global development framework will set out a vision of the world we would like to see in 2030. But attempts to realise this vision will be undertaken in a future we know only one thing about – that it is unknowable. As Ken Robinson has pointed out,² the children we are educating now will still be working in 2070, yet we don't have a clue what the world will look like in just *five* years. So the best we can do is imagine the world as we would want it in 2030 and work back from there. The question is this: what do we need to do now that will bring about that world? And we need to think through, as best we can, how a change in the development context (one as fundamental as Bono envisages) will underwrite the function and shape of education in 2030.

Geopolitical sea changes and their impact on development

Valuing education for itself arguably goes against current neo-liberal norms, which see instrumentality in everything. Neo-liberal thinking has been promulgated most strongly by the global North, by those from both sides of the political fence. Worldwide, encouraged by the Northern-dominated Bretton Woods institutions, we have become used to seeing education less as a public good that has strong positive externalities for society, and more as a rivalrous private good in which the individual must personally invest in order to reap future financial rewards.

But geopolitics is changing, and changing fast. Europe, Japan and North America will no longer dominate the global economy by 2030. It will be the emerging BRICS economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which are pursuing very different

models of 'development assistance', that will dominate. China in particular tends to take a non-conditional approach to co-operation with developing countries, preferring to prioritise mutual economic benefits. With a greater number and – importantly – greater variety in the types of development assistance, we will see the principle of market competition being applied to donors. Donors existentially need to disburse, so it's a buyer's market: aid 'recipients' may feel a new sense of empowerment as they can select from whoever offers them the best deal: the most money with the fewest conditions. Liberalisation of the aid market might thus precipitate the end of aid conditionality and, somewhat ironically, reduce the leverage some countries currently exert over others to liberalise their economies and education systems.

This assumes that there will still be givers and receivers of aid. But if currently developing countries have 'caught up' – a process likely to be accelerated by economic stagnation in developed countries as the policy options for dealing with recession reduce, as do the terms of trade imbalances that have underpinned developed country prosperity since colonial times – it must be asked whether aid will still be a recognised concept in 2030. It is possible that the reduction in international economic and therefore power differentials will mean that 'official development assistance' becomes a thing of the past. The loss of leverage this represents will have an impact on the international transfer of ideas, particularly if there is no longer any aid conditionality providing for ideological leverage or hegemony. Instead of being encouraged to choose principles, policies and pedagogies from a limited range promoted by their development partner, governments will be free to select those they feel are most relevant and useful to their particular needs, resources and ambitions.

Developed/developing: a false dichotomy

It may be that other methods will be found to leverage influence. A good question to ask right now is the extent to which the construction of the post-2015 development agenda will represent a last gasp attempt to retain influence and relevance by the global North. It is notable that it is developed countries' development agencies – often closely related to trade ministries – that are engaged in the discourse, rather than their ministries of education. Universality of post-2015 goals is a popular plea, seized on in the report of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Yet education ministries from developed countries have been noticeably absent from the post-2015 consultations. To me, this absence signals something about

developed countries' assumptions of their ability to maintain the status quo – the two-dimensional, arbitrary and contestable division of the world into 'developed' and 'developing' – until at least the end of the next development epoch.

Developed/developing may be a false dichotomy, but it is also a useful one – for some. It underpins the assumptions about power on which development assistance is currently predicated. The terminology demonstrates that being 'developed' *per se* is valued, conferring status – or the lack of it. This status is not just economic, but is manifested in assumptions about knowledge systems, 'expertise', cultural values, institutional and personal capacity, and the intrinsic ability to develop. So – another irony – it's interesting that developing countries appear to be developing faster than developed.

But if it ever were true that the world was divided in this way, it won't be in 2030. If countries are no longer encouraged or expected to view themselves as second best, we can expect, in time, a psychological 'peace-dividend' that will have a profound effect on education. With new-found confidence and freedom, countries will no longer be obliged to orient their education systems to short-term, measureable outcomes to satisfy donors' monitoring and evaluation requirements. Western-centric models of participatory learning, individualistic learning outcomes, and student-centred teaching will be challenged by revitalised indigenous or syncretic models. Pressure on governments to divest education service delivery to the private sector might lessen, and we could even see a return to government both conceptually and practically as the principal provider.

Development is dead. Long live development

At its most basic level, development can be conceived as the process by which poorer countries are empowered to reduce the gap between themselves and richer countries. If we see a reduction in international power and wealth differentials – the explicit or implicit effects of which have conditioned aid discourse, policy and practice since its modern inception (in Harry S. Truman's 1949 inaugural address³), perhaps the focus will instead be on *intranational* power and wealth differentials. Inequality is increasing within a great majority of the world's countries – including developed countries. But if currently developed countries won't join the debate on access, inequality and quality of education, that can only accelerate the demise of their domination. They too need to develop and, in the process, be persuaded that 'development' can be reconceptualised as internal equality, as opposed to merely reduced inequality between countries. In this conceptualisation, absolute measures of poverty referenced by relative comparisons between countries give way to relative measures within countries. In short, 'development' becomes 'progress'; and to bring that about you need progressive values, progressive policies, progressive taxation and progressive curricula.

To implement progressive policies, assertive state action is required – what used to be called a developmental state. There is a tension between, at the micro-level, this concept and technology, and, at the macro-level, between this and neo-liberalism.

Box 1

Technology, the individual and the state

Technology might obviate countries altogether as salient political entities influencing education paradigms.

We speak now of how individualised learning paths will be the future norm. Initiatives already in place in New York involve a computer making an assessment of each child's work at the end of the school day, and then automatically configuring the next day's work for that child, based on what they have learned, what they need to revise and their pace of work. These initiatives, for which a number of influential developed and developing countries have signed up, remove the 'subjective' teacher in the process of assessment, replacing them with computerised assessment processes. There is talk of schools in the cloud designed to allow groups of children to teach themselves using the internet: a self-organised learning environment.

While it needs an overarching policy decision to initiate this kind of education, once that step is taken we will see atomisation of education policy. With the technological capacity for an individual curriculum to be developed for any child, and for any child to access any education material in the world, education could lose the final vestigial elements of the traditional top-down, fill-'em-up approach. The institutions of 'school' and 'teaching' might no longer exist. School hours and terms become irrelevant with 24-hour internet access. Combined with the 'free' school approach popular with some politicians at the moment, which claims to return control of education to the micro local level, state intervention might be reduced to the minimum.

But governments implementing free schools are tending to do so by reducing local government control – and increasing central government and companies' control. Think for a moment about what integrating personalised education with technology might mean. We already live in a world where governments and companies can do the following: trace your every movement through closed-circuit television, transport use and mobile phone tracking; become more familiar than you are with your network of acquaintances through your emails; and know your innermost beliefs, desires and persuasions from your internet use. What power, therefore, will states and companies have over children's futures? If a child's performance is tracked against desirable measurable outcomes from the first day of learning; if their learning pathways are mapped out in complex but pre-determined algorithms; and if this information is available in their learning records, and made available in their school performance records – to what extent could they be said to be following their free will? What options will be open to them when they graduate? Will they have options, or will sophisticated psychometric software already have informed government, companies and organisations what tasks they will be suitable for? If every child is manipulated daily to conform to pre-conceived notions of desirable outcomes, how will innovation ever be possible?

And if learning is so intricately bound up with technology, how will children learn to socialise? I can foresee a software package that aims to teach children about negotiation, compromise, tolerance and valuing others, and a child looking away from the computer screen through the bedroom window to the empty street outside.

Box 2

Environmental impacts

We cannot talk of 2030 without mentioning the environment. Increased conflict and meteorologically induced natural disasters arising from environmental failures will result in increased forced migration. Some Pacific states are already speaking of the purpose of education as being to equip their citizens with the skills necessary to migrate with dignity. How will this impact on receiving country education systems, which will need to cope with greater cultural and linguistic diversity and, in all likelihood, the psychosocial disruption caused by major upheaval?

On the one hand, we will see the continuing reduction in the size of the state through the apparently inevitable continuation of the neo-liberal project. So there will be more non-state providers of education; there will be, notionally at least, greater choice in the site of, and perhaps means of access to, education. The options opened by technology, especially social networking and internet-based sources of information, will arguably 'democratise' education (to misuse the term, as is currently the vogue) in the sense that an individual may be encouraged to use the wide range of information available to them to work on their own initiative towards national curriculum targets.

On the other hand, as the scope of state action decreases, the *intensity* of state action will increase, due to its ability to use technology to intensify control and monitoring through – if current trends continue – growing non-democratic means, such as greater centralisation of control over the curriculum, enforcement of standards, and, as we have seen, individual level control of learning pathways. While the state's footprint might be smaller, its imprint will be deeper. Thus empowered, what will the state – or companies, or organisations – use education for?

Who benefits?

What will the function of education be in 2030? We can speculate about what education might look like, but what will be its purpose if one of its current primary functions – an instrumental means of lifting people out of poverty – is no longer relevant? We need to ask the most political of questions: *cui bono*? (Or whatever the Latin is for 'Who will be benefiting?')

There is considerable inertia in the system. The development business is huge. People and organisations within it are powerful. Vested interests are well established. One of the perennial conundrums of 'doing' development is how to avoid national elite capture of development benefits. So we undertake political economy analyses of countries. If we are to bring about a radical new vision of education, we need to address how those with vested interests in the continuation of development – development agencies, businesses (and I include NGOs in that category) and professionals – might behave if faced with the possible extinction of their benefits, their livelihoods. We might undertake a political economy analysis of development agencies in order to change the development trajectory, although I'm not sure who would undertake such an analysis. And one aspect of such a global political analysis might be to ask whether poverty has usefulness to

some. As some commentators have pointed out, real development *should* do harm – it should harm the interests of those who would seek to retard progression; those who benefit from poverty, because less for some is more for them.⁴

Providing a financial incentive for those who might otherwise thwart poverty reduction might be one way forward. Increasingly, private companies, foundations and NGOs are undertaking and funding development activities, through tools such as social impact bonds that provide a financial return on invested capital. As the traditional bilateral and multilateral development partners' influence and agency erode, we might well see the autonomy and influence of these other organisations increase. What might a political economy analysis of their incentives reveal? How will the factors driving these organisations be played out in education? And how happy are we to see the continuation by other means of the extraction of resources from poor countries to rich countries or companies?

(In)conclusion

The above questions approach 2030 from two directions: the macro-level – geopolitical influences on education – and the classroom-level influences. What education will look like in 2030 depends on where these two influences meet in the middle, mediated by human interactions realised in specific cultural contexts. It will also reflect a changed citizen-state relationship. The state acts as both ultimate guarantor of human rights and as the sole legitimate user of force – a delicate balancing act between citizen empowerment and disempowerment. This tension will be manifested through the state's evolving role in education – that most political of social development outcomes.

By definition, the post-2015 debate sets out our vision for education in 2030. Those who have power and influence over the current debate and its outcomes will probably want to be in the same position for the post-2030 debate. And that will, ultimately, determine what education will look like. We need to challenge this at every level and in every positive way possible to bring about the world we want.

But what about you, dear reader, the education/development professional? What will you be doing in 2030?

Endnotes

- 1 <http://blog.ted.com/2013/02/26/eradicating-extreme-poverty-doesnt-have-to-be-a-dream-bono-at-ted2013/>
- 2 http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html
- 3 <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres53.html>
- 4 Comment made at 'Evidence and Power in Development Policy' conference, 2 July 2013, London School of Economics.

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