

NATIONAL SEMINAR
ON
TEACHER EDUCATION 2015 +
FEB 27TH , 28TH , 2015

THE FOCUS OF EDUCATION VERSUS THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

----- B.VALLI*

'I walk slowly but never backwards'

INTRODUCTION

Education is broadly understood as learning designed by adults for the young. It is meant for their better adaptation in the future world. Therefore, whenever the focus of society changes, the focus or aims of education changes and consequently the future education scenario too changes.

One tends to believe that society is changed by schooling. On the other hand it is the demand and mind set of people that dictate what schooling should be. If schools follow society rather than lead it, they are likely to be discarded for not doing their role properly. If focus of education is decided by social whims and transient demands, then true focus of education will be lost. The basic assumptions that schooling has to be changed because contexts are changing and requirements of skills among the workforce are changing have to be replaced by a better vision for education.

TRUE FOCUS OF EDUCATION

Liberal education is the one that truly liberates an individual to be human, to be creative and to become aware of the possibility of transcendence and immanence. There is mistake of treating information as knowledge and training as education, coaching for teaching, cramming for learning, regurgitation for remembering. Just learning whatever is taught in the class is not the sole purpose of school education – ‘Intellectual freedom; intellectual curiosity and intellectual honesty form the characteristics of a truly educated person’ (Gowda, 2010).

Our experiences of education shape how we view and value education, and how we think it should develop in the future. If ideal things are not given focus the concept of education as we know is going to change.

SHIFT IN FOCUS OF EDUCATION

In the earlier years generally, education was provided by parents and family members. Over time, religious orders, craftsmen, and schools taught subjects and skills that required a higher or more-specialized level of learning. Children were taught the skills, values, and self-concept needed to contribute to their future role in society. In the beginning of the century it was for the industry and factories, man power had to be created. 'The contemporary manifestation of formal education whether it is schools or colleges coincides with the spread of industrialization in different nations and this education helped in adapting to various requirements of industrialized societies' (Cheng ,2014).

Now the work place is rapidly changing as a result of technology and concurrently the education which feeds the workplace with man power is also influenced. There are many multidimensional societal changes that are posing fundamental challenges for education as a social institution. Education as an institution however, has been slow to respond to the challenges. The institution and its protocols are so strong that it is not easy for the formal education system to respond rapidly to current changes in society.

There are a number of psychological factors and sociological factors that work behind the societal changes. The industrial development and consequent economic development has created a greater visibility of prosperity around. For the general public there is a strong desire and internal motivation to seek this better lifestyle. And people move towards making more efforts to obtain the knowledge and skill sets that may yield these economic prosperity. There is expectation from educational institution to provide such knowledge and skills which would help them reach such levels.

Another element is sociological factor. Mobility across the country and changing profile of occupation taken up by majority of the population is major societal change. 'The growing diversification of societies, largely as a result of migration, urbanization and cultural change is placing fresh demands upon education systems and is challenging assumptions about the purpose

and functions of education’ (Pigozzi, 2008). The burgeoning jobs created by market forces require government to train and educate today’s students to the highest achievable standards as possible. Entrants to workplaces need skills to function effectively in this environment that have not traditionally been taught in our schools and universities.

EDUCATION FOR URBAN JOBS

Industrialization saw the emergence of formal school systems and mass education where literacy and numeracy were taught essentially for urban jobs. The system of schooling that started in the western countries later spread to other parts of the world including India. ‘Contemporary school systems in other parts of the world have been largely modeled after schools in the West’ (Cheng, 2014). Education was designed to prepare young people for urban employment based on a very fine division of labor and for jobs that remained relatively stable over time. Job insecurity, changing occupations and organizations, varying expectations, precarious rewards have all made workplace life less predictable.

EDUCATION AS ECONOMIC DIVIDEND

At the systems level, education was seen to be essential in training manpower for industry. The idea of economic benefits of education was further strengthened with the emergence of the human capital theory. The formal education in the contemporary world is conceived in what is essentially an economic relationship. ‘The value of education was measured in terms of rates of return to investment in education’.

Education is considered as investment that would pay rich dividends. Does that mean if education doesn’t yield results it will be discarded? ‘Governments’ perceptions of education systems shifted from one inspired by a social welfare approach to one in which education was seen as an investment yielding economic returns’.

EDUCATION IN FREE MARKET

Mass production based on a clear division of labor of the earlier century is gradually giving way to quality products/services which are tailor-made for clients. Uniqueness and novelty are sought after by people than commonly available goods. ‘Less quantity and more variety’, has led to smaller one-stop-shop work units and simpler organizational structure. ‘New products, new

means of production, new technologies, new markets, new ideas, new networks, are continuously emerging' (Cheng, 2014). Individuals, even within work or personal lives, face endless changes and new challenges.

Even within the economic sector, manufacturers, service providers, investors, and the workplace in general, have to constantly adjust themselves, and hence, have to continuously learn and adapt. Now this kind of service can be done only if innovation is given importance; creative and free thinking is encouraged.

In the workplace, more workers are needed in multi-tasking, information and communications-based employment. It is widely regarded by industry as one of the skills lacking in young people and graduates as they struggle to secure stable employment. They are not being developed in schools or universities and in many cases when they are, there is uncertainty regarding how to assess and teach them.

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

There have been different utopian visions for education and educational policy framers want to gain control over the forces that shape the practices of schooling. An empirical question of 'what can we do' is sometimes overlooked by the philosophical question of 'what should we do'. Infrastructure, teaching faculty, learning materials, administration contribute much to the practices of schooling. After framing of policies, the overall goals and objectives of the curriculum are also planned through much deliberations and discussions by committed experts. Their plans include modernism, progressivism, and internationalism but when it comes to actual curriculum it is quite different. But in classroom transaction it is conservatism, parochialism and teacher autocracy that dominates and 'student learning, which should be the core concern of education, is often taken for granted, but neglected in reality' (Cheng, 2014). The educational reforms suggested in policies give importance to more stringent selection of teachers by putting them through many national level test and examination. Their agenda is also taking to task school administration and developing and implementing norm referenced common examinations for students than on student learning. 'The current drive to reform education in so many parts of the world runs the risk of reinforcing the institutional elements of education systems, rather than

attempting to fundamentally rethink education’(Cheng, 2014). Such approaches may be justifiable, but only if associated with genuine concern for student learning.

There has to be a consensus on educational goals and the rules of evidence. Gabrielle Matters envisions an educational system built around ‘evidenced-based practice’, the idea that decisions at all levels should be grounded in data. There is a fundamental danger of overemphasizing administrative “accountability” in lieu of professional accountability over schools and teachers, and to apply stringent management measures in place of professional improvement.

Current societal changes point to the necessity of restoring the central position of learning in education. Any educational reform should be based on the tenet that it is impossible to affect one aspect of the learner’s growth without affecting him as a whole. The reinforcement of multiple education protocols are at the periphery of learning process. And giving more importance to it is inducing negative attitude towards learning. Teachers are reduced to the position of being administered like business employees.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

We may be lead to believe that education is for all but ‘In most societies, education remains selective in one way or another. Although there are legal provisions for compulsory/universal schooling in most countries, screening and selection remain a basic feature of education systems’ Cheng (2014). In addition, technologies have changed the ownership, control, transmission as well as creation of knowledge.

EDUCATION IN FUTURE

Schools and teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge. They have to assume new roles. How students should become active learners, how teachers become learning facilitators, how technologies help liberate learners, and how schools become an environment conducive to genuine learning, have all become the prime goals of education of future.

First of all, the current economic discourse is increasingly invalid. Manpower requirements and individual career paths are increasingly unpredictable and diverse. It is no longer valid to assume

that education aims to prepare people for specific jobs or foreseeable manpower requirements. There is an urgent need to change the discourse in education to one of learning.

Environments for human lives have also become less predictable. ‘Catastrophic natural disasters, major man-made accidents, unforeseeable economic crises, mounting potential for armed conflict, organized and individualized terrorist activities, recurring diseases and emerging new epidemics, spontaneous social unrest, irresponsible party politicking, and the widespread practice of corruption, have all increased in frequency and intensity’ (Cheng ,2014).

Unlike the industrial era where production relied on depersonalized “impartial” design and systems, the human element has become increasingly important in today’s workplace. Driven by the global market, world-wide environmental concerns and pervasive digital networking, mutual understanding and tolerance of differences have become the essential ingredients of citizenship in a global world. Peace, justice and fairness come forth as major issues in the international arena.

New social relations and new social norms are created every day. They are also confronted by new moral and ethical dilemmas. Even governments are finding it increasingly difficult to claim that they are capable of solving all the major societal problems.

Attitudes, values, ethics, and other personal attributes have emerged as new foci of concern. In many jurisdictions, such learning is yet to be on the agenda of government education policies.

Yet, there are several imperatives that underline the need for educational change. The shift should be in even nomenclature used widely in education, the below points express them.

- learning leadership in schools, rather than school management;
- learning resources and learning environments, rather than educational finance or school equipment;
- teachers as professionals of learning, rather than as a teaching force;
- tests and examinations as assessments for learning, rather than assessment of learning;

→ technologies as a means of liberating learners, rather than as a way of replacing teachers societies' (Cheng ,2014).

CONCLUSION

The development in the field of education point out that human beings tend to adapt to changing circumstances to the best of their ability. When the requirement of mass production was there it was easier to mould curriculum in which general abilities had to be cultivated. Now future can be here if education realizes that it lies within human potential to move away from ordinary to extraordinary, provided opportunities are given to explore their immense potentialities.

REFERENCES

1. Pigozzi, M. J. (2008). '*Towards an index of quality education*', paper prepared for the International Working Group on Education (IWGE).

2. Delors, J. et al. (1996). *Learning: The treasure within*. Paris, UNESCO.

3. Cheng, Kai-ming, (2014) Chair Professor of Education University of Hong Kong '*Re-Interpreting Learning*' Education Research And Foresight, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization WORKING PAPERS10

Retrieved February 2015 from

mwa.itb.ac.id/wp-content/.../06/UNESCO_working_paper_10_E1.pdf

4. Gowda , N. Sukumar, (2010). *Learning And The Learner Insights Into The Processes Of Learning And Teaching*, New Delhi, PHI Learning Private Limited,