

# Education Put to the Question

## *Education and Man's Destiny*

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*'Very many countries regard the education of modern man as an exceptionally difficult problem, and all countries regard it as one of the greatest importance. And for all those who want to make the world as it is today a better place, and to prepare for the future, education is a capital, universal subject.*

(Faure, 1972, Preamble p. xix)

It is over two hundred years since Rousseau wrote *Emile* in which he expressed his stupefaction at the way men were educated in the mid-eighteenth century. Was it really necessary for human beings to adapt themselves to the educational system? Would it not be better for the system to be adapted to the needs of men? The fundamental question was clearly stated.

Regularly since then, for each succeeding generation, the relationship between education and life has been the subject of innumerable studies. The list of protests, proposals and projects are endless. After Jean-Jacques Rousseau came Jean-Henri Pestalozzi in Switzerland, Friedrich Froebel in Germany, Bertrand Russell in England, John Dewey in the United States, Celestin Freinet in France, Anton Makarenko in the Soviet Union, Maria Montessori in Italy and dozens of other pioneers of educational reform. Nor should we forget all those philosophers whose first concern also was the education and development of man. Reading the writings of Hegel, Comte or Nietzsche we find reference to this same preoccupation — how can man, through his experiences, his thought processes and his relationship with others, develop his personality, strive constantly to improve himself and achieve real, untrammled, tangible self-liberation.

What emerges, among other things, from these various theories and explanations is that man, besides his social nature, (for man is a social being) is also characterized by a certain intrinsic individuality, and that his claims as an individual can come into conflict with the claims made upon him by his social obligations. This fundamental dichotomy arises from the fact that besides the life he has to live with others, each man has his own life. He has a separate consciousness which expresses itself in impressions, in experiences, in hopes, loves, hates and dreams which are in a very true sense private to himself. So that although we may accept the contention made by Marx and other sociologists that man's consciousness is socially determined, we feel that there is an area of individual freedom on which it would be immoral for the state or other human being to impinge.

The central age-old dilemma in education has been that of reconciling the demands of individual freedom, uninhibited spontaneity and creativity, with society's demands for conformity from its members. The dilemma has generally been solved within particular societies in terms of the ideological position of their rulers, which has generally in turn expressed itself, partly at least, in terms of the nature of the political order, and more generally in terms of the relationship which is taken to exist between the individual and the state. Where the political order has been conservative, society has characteristically looked to its educational institutions to perform a fundamental role of social control and cultural conservation. Education viewed in this way becomes the keeper and propagator of a society's identity in terms of the politically adopted ideology. Innovation or change is viewed suspiciously as it tends to disturb the balance of stability. Emphasis is laid upon 'tradition' and the task of education becomes that of conserving, enriching and transmitting to succeeding generations the accumulated knowledge, skills, beliefs and values on which society's cohesion and permanence depends.

This is, to a large extent, the situation we are faced with today. It is true that we have an overabundance of ideological material at our disposal but it is evident that educational theory has only a very tenuous link with educational practice. The traditional structures have constantly exercised a passive, sometimes even an active, resistance to a transformation of the educational process in the interests of both the individual and society. Of all human undertakings it would appear that education is the one that encounters the greatest obstacles in the path of progress.

### Obstacles in the Path of Change

The obstacles in the path of change are well known. Some even have considerable justification. There is a handing down process in education that cannot be ignored. How, other than through teaching, can the present generation be linked with its predecessors? It is quite normal

and inevitable that the past, both that of mankind in general, and of each separate society, should occupy a position of honour in any body of teaching. It is a public treasure store and we are only too well aware of the feeling of deprivation experienced by those whose access to their cultural heritage has been limited. But, this 'tradition', precious though it may be, becomes an obstacle when it is not allied to a forward-looking view of life and when it becomes an alibi and a pretext for a refusal to give rein to the interplay of vital currents of thought. In fact, the whole system, as now constituted and operated, produces the obstacle.

Compulsory education, the good grounds for which no one would dispute, paralyse innovation. Why change? Why try to do better? Nor does the teaching profession, recruited and formed as it now is, greatly favour an imaginative or inventive spirit. By very reason of their profession teachers, at whatever level, are never participants in a dialogue. They do not have to justify themselves to their equals, but pass, by way of the examination system from the *statu pupillari* to one of full authority. Paulo Freire brings out his concern about this situation in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

'Education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration — contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity.

(Freire, 1972: 45)

The outstanding characteristic of this narrative education being the sonority of words not their transforming power. Freire describes this as the " 'banking' concept of education" (1972: 46) in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits. The alternative and desired goal being what Freire calls "liberation education".

As Hummel (1977) points out, with the amount of knowledge that is forever increasing it is no longer possible to assimilate what is merely a certain number of facts.

'It is important to accustom young people to extend their knowledge of their own accord and to make their way through the floods of scientific and political information. Much still remains to be done in this field.'

(Hummel, 1977: 19)

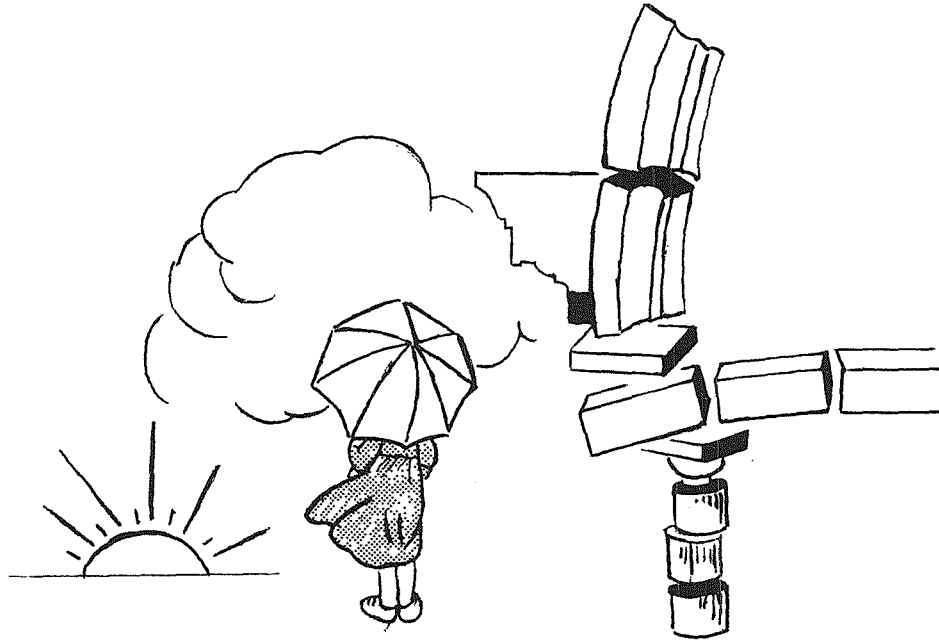
This last statement is unfortunately so true and still so today. Concern is evident and it has been growing for some time now. The Faure

Report (1972) and the report of the Club of Rome entitled *No Limits to Learning* (1979) show a deep concern for the future and stress that humanity is faced with what Botkin *et al.* call a 'world problematique' — an enormous tangle of problems in sectors like energy, population and food. We are faced with the choice of either unprecedented human fulfilment or else ultimate catastrophe. What will actually happen depends on another major and decisive factor — human understanding and action (Botkin *et al.*, 1979: 1). Botkin *et al.* show that a gap exists between humans, within humans, between sectors of humankind, between human actuality and human possibility, between an adaptational relation of man with nature and the destructive relation we now have, between current conditions of human development and what the imminent future demands; that the gap has been to a great extent created and perpetuated by our approach to and our use of learning, and that the only available instrumentality to avert human disaster and to begin to fulfil human potential is a new kind of learning.

### Man's Future Lies in His Own Hands

**P**aolo Freire and Aurelio Peccei stress the importance of the individual. They agree that 'the point of departure of the movement lies in men themselves. But since men do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality, the movement must begin with the men-world relationship (Freire, 1972: 57). This is what liberation education is all about. It means that we abandon the present educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of men in their relations with the world. Thus problem-posing education would involve a constant unveiling of reality. It affirms men as being in the process of *becoming* — as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. In this incompleteness and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of men and *the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity.*

Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to *be*, it must *become*. Education is no longer about hanging onto the past, it is about adapting to change and it is about anticipating and constructing a future. Why is it therefore so important to grasp the future through education? It is because human action depends on values, emerges from values. But values do not exist in a vacuum. They are personal feelings about what is worthwhile, preferable, useful, humane, dangerous, degrading, unjust or cruel. Our values are responses to situations or realities as we see them and as we 'know' them to be. Action always



*in search of... a better future*

expresses values, but values about what possibilities, what realities, what assumptions? The study of the future bridges the gap between values and action.

### Education for a New World

**T**he future means many things to many people. One thing is certain — it will not be exactly as each of us foresees it. The future is being shaped by decisions being made now. To secure our own interests in that future we must be aware of the direction current decisions are taking, the range of other options available, and we must know our own hopes and expectations. Yet, as futurists like Alvin Toffler and Wendell Bell point out the ultimate purpose of the study of the future is to assist people to create a better life for themselves. Perhaps the most important aim of contemporary human conduct should be to subject the rate and direction of social change to the will of human beings. The world of tomorrow rushes towards us at an ever-accelerating rate. We can either turn our backs and privatize our lives and so exist largely in the shadows cast by the futures that other people make. Or else we can confront the changes ahead of us and try to cope with them. This we can do, as Bell suggests, through adaptation. He goes on further to suggest that

‘Perhaps we can even enter the building of the future ourselves, not just in the small worlds of self, family and friends, but in the larger worlds of collective decisions and struggle on community, national, and planetary scales. No matter what we do we cannot remain unaffected.

(Bell in Toffler, 1974: 75)

Learning for tomorrow must deal not merely with what is possible or probable, but, perhaps more crucially, with what is preferable. By looking at the possible, probable, desirable and undesirable futures, we become aware that the decisions we make now will help or hinder the bringing about of the desired futures. Around two decades ago it was quite appropriate to think of the past fading into the present and the present flowing into the future. Naturally this is more evident in some countries than in others. Currently, however, the future has become so jammed with potentials, dangers and variables that there is an overflow from the future into the present. This means that every country, immaterial of wealth, size, geography, etc., will be effected. The issue is quite clear — the future is ours to make, the future does not just happen, it is the consequence of the choices, attitudes, values, energy, skills and imagination of a people.

This raises an important question. What futures do we want, and what values underlie our

choices? It is here worth quoting John Dewey who said:

'What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul; loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned, and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?'

(in Toffler, 1974: 257)

Now it seems that virtually every individual wants a favourable positive future. This is why the broad movement aimed at shifting education into the future tense also brings with it a heightened concern with values. A drastic transformation in our human values and commitments are necessary. We know that concern with values is not entirely new in education. However, what is new is the way in which this concern must express itself. In the past we taught values, or tried to, and in many cases we still are. Yet, simply 'teaching' values cannot and will not suffice for the future. Just consider the child of today. From every side s/he is bombarded with different and often contradictory sets of values. His/Her parents offer none, one or two sets of moralizations (communication on what to believe and how to behave). School teachers, which might have entirely different values, urge these upon the child. And, too, different teachers have different values. As the years go by other 'pressure groups' come into the scene: peer groups, youth movements, folk and rock heroes, sport figures, successful businessmen, T.V. idols, political leaders and even spiritual figures. As we look back at our childhood we realise that we have been taught values, we were taught what to believe and how to act. But in a world of confusion and conflict about values, this is not enough. I will not go deeper into the issue. I will end by referring to an article in Toffler's book *Learning For Tomorrow* entitled 'Values and the Futures Movement in Education'. In this article Howard Kirschenbaum and Sidney Simon suggest that there are powerful, non-moralizing ways to deal with values in education. They call for a clarification of values and that values should be seen as a process:

'If we want to prepare our children to meet the unknown challenges of the future, to be able to guide their lives through all the difficult value choices ahead, then we must consciously and deliberately go about teaching at least the following ... processes of valuing ... prizing, choosing, acting.

(*op. cit.*, 1974: 263)

This needs to receive increasing emphasis in the home and in the curriculum. What we need is a well-thought-out futures curriculum. Toffler claims that introducing the future is a direct, yet relatively painless way to begin the move towards necessary changes, not only in curricula, but in the internal links with the community. In our schools and universities we must include not merely the study of past change, trends and cycles, and the causes of change, but also possibilities for the future: the range of alternative futures which, at any given time, could emerge into reality. We must include the study of the preferences of different individuals, groups and the human race as a whole, as well as the scale of values by which different possible futures are evaluated, both wished for and feared.

Several final general comments should be made about the role of the future in education. Obviously the future matters politically, socially, as well as educationally. The deep, often deep revolutionary currents in the world today call for establishing the future into learning as a solid part of curriculum and not just introduced on rare occasions (for example when a catastrophe has taken place). It should be stressed that at the individual level the ultimate purpose of futurism in education, is not to create elegantly complex, well-ordered, accurate images of the future, but to help learners cope with crises, ambiguities and opportunities, to strengthen individual capacity to anticipate and adapt to change through invention, informed acquiescence or intelligent resistance.

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