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Reforms in the Basic Educational Compulsory System: A Reading of Primary School Arabic Curricula in Egypt

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TWENTY YEARS
OF
DEVELOPMENT
IN EGYPT
1977 - 1997

REFORMS IN THE BASIC EDUCATIONAL COMPULSORY SYSTEM: A READING OF PRIMARY SCHOOL ARABIC CURRICULA IN EGYPT

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Introduction

Reforms of the Egyptian pre-university educational system have been the concern of the government for the last fifteen years. As early as the 1980s the government called for a reform of the system addressing the problem of the low enrollment rates of pupils. The calls for reforms resulted largely from the need to absorb the growing number of pupils, specifically at basic compulsory educational levels,[1] and from the need to improve the quality of education in general. Thus, a "global, balanced, and complementary" approach was to be formulated (Saad 1995:446-447). In spite of the many efforts undertaken by the government over the last fifteen years, the core of the problems still persists.[2] With a population of over 60 million, of which nearly 28% are of pre-university school age (6-17) (UNDP 1995:162) the enrollment rates in all levels of education reaches 80.5%, and rates of adult illiteracy revolve around 42% of the total population. Female illiteracy reaches around 61% of the total female population above 15 years of age, while it is only 34.6% among males of the same age group (INP 1996:3, 96).

A few indications of slight improvement are seen; yet, the figures still remain far too low, and too limited to meet the increasing challenges of a growing population. The state seems unable to supply adequate educational

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[1] According to Law 139 of 1981 compulsory basic education covers five years of the primary school level and three years of the preparatory level. Thus, children between the ages of 6 and 14 are governed by this law (Rouchdy, 1995:5).

[2] It should be noted that the enrollment rate for all levels of education has increased by 10% from 1980 to 1990 (UNDP 1995:162).

services in spite of the increase in the government spending on education.[3]
In addition, the growing responsibilities of the state to insure and maintain
public/free education as stipulated by the constitution are concomitant with
the medium and long term economic reform program launched in the early
1990s, in which the role of the state in public services is to be reduced and a
further privatization of the economy is to take place[4] (Rouchdy 1992:6). An
even more challenging situation is thus facing the Egyptian government. On
the one hand, retreating from the educational system would stand politically
in strong opposition to one of the constitutional rights of citizens, and
would also mean the withdrawal of state control from one of its most
important ideological channels. Similarly, it would threaten the regular
supply from the educational system of semi-skilled and skilled workers as
well as technocrats to the labor market. On the other hand, the total control
of the state over the educational system stands in sharp contrast with the
spirit and the policies of the structural adjustment economic policy which
aim at freeing the economy from state control and linking it further to world
market requirements.

Conciliating both approaches seems to be the option of the Egyptian
government. While maintaining its control over the majority of educational
levels and sectors as stated by the Constitution, the government is trying to
reform the educational system qualitatively and quantitatively in order to
meet the objectives and the requirements of the structural adjustment policy
relating to the quality of human resources. In this context, most of the
reports and the available literature on the reforms of the educational system
are formulated within the context of the economic policies i.e., considering
education as the main supplier of the labor force and of technocrats to the
various economic sectors (Assaad and Rouchdy 1997:17-18).

In the present paper, I will attempt to show how both objectives--
controlling the educational system while orienting some of its dimensions
towards the requirements of the economic reforms--are taking place. Before

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[3] The share of government spending on education increased from less then 10%
in pre-adjustment years to more than 15% in 1995-96 (INP 1996:60).

[4] The economic structural adjustment policy is characterized by the removal of
government subsidies, direct control over the various economic and service
sectors, and further integration of the economy into the world market at
production and marketing levels (Rouchdy 1992:6).

embarking into this discussion it is important to examine first the present situation of the educational system, focusing on the first four years of primary compulsory levels since they remain the basis of government concerns and are the most problematic levels. Secondly, I will closely examine the Arabic curricula of the first four years of primary compulsory education as they reflect one aspect of the changes taking place in the educational system. Finally, I will attempt to draw some conclusions with regard to the political and ideological significance of these changes.

The Main Problems Facing the School Educational System in Egypt

To a large degree scholars and the dominant literature are relating the educational problem to employment and poverty conditions. It is has been advanced that open unemployment has been rising to reach 14% of the labor force (that is, 3 million) in late 1992. Most of the unemployed are young graduates with intermediate levels of education who are entering the labor market for the first time. The next highest rates are among those with no education, specifically among women and the poor. The rate of illiteracy is higher among women, and it increases in rural areas to reach 61% as compared to 35% in urban areas (Fergany 1995:10,17). Furthermore, the rate of basic education enrollment is estimated at 71% in the age group of 6-14 years. This means that nearly 29% of children at basic education age are not in schools.[5]

These figures are not so surprising but, according to Fergany, what is more surprising and perhaps alarming is that the government's concept of literacy remains very flexible and includes those who attend school but are not adequately educated and not fully literate. All those who attend a minimum of four consecutive years of primary education are considered literate (Fergany 1995:2,4). The criteria for measuring literacy seems to have neglected the quality of education, the rates of attendance, and the long period of vacation. Together, these dimensions seem to conceal the reality of

[5] According to El Baradei there is a great disparity in the regional and gender distribution of the enrollment rate, the gap being the highest in Upper Egypt and specifically in Fayoum. She explains this phenomena as being related to poverty conditions and poor educational conditions (El Baradei 1995:6).

the current educational system.[6] Thus, the criteria of registration for four consecutive years in a primary school establishment are not sufficient to determine the educational ability of a child or a person. To advance high aggregate figures about national literacy, based upon school registration, can only reflect the dreams and the hopes of wishful thinking.

There seem to be a consensus that schooling conditions are very harsh for pupils, parents, instructors and administrators. Basic facilities such as furniture, yards, sanitary services, and adequate classrooms are lacking. Also, the process of education is being hindered by uninteresting curricula, overwhelmed instructors, and exhausted families. All these factors make education unfeasible as an option for many children (Rouchdy 1995:7-8).

In the 1960s education was perceived by Egyptian society generally and The dominant and recurrent concepts traced in all the themes are the concepts of authority and obedience. Even when these concepts were not independent themes, they represented the conceptual framework of all the curricula and dominated the rest of the topics. Thus, social and individual relations were dominated by the concepts of authority and obedience. The concept of authority is emphasized, as is also the authority of the message and the text itself. The pupil is required, on the basis of the lesson and the exercises following the lessons, to register the information advanced in the texts and store it as the final word about the subject. There is no possibility given to expand on the information or even to challenge it.

According to this logic, the most important theme is God. He is the creator of all subjects on earth. He is the ultimate power that no one can challenge. God was omnipresent in the texts whether related to the topic or not. Implicit and explicit references to God were made the form of Quranic verses and the Prophet's sayings as well as in simple prose. God was also present indirectly through the systematic reference to His powers. For example, in a section called "Scientific Facts" and a lesson entitled "Man of Fiction" the author presented the life story of Walt Disney. The author commented in admiration on the achievements of Disney by saying: "Since 1937, he started producing magnificent films about animals. . . . His films invite us to contemplate God's creations as they all (the animals) spell out

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[6] It should be mentioned that Egyptian pupils in basic education are granted, on average, six months of vacation including summer, religious vacations, Fridays, and official national holidays.

God's greatness and miracles."[7] When reading this sentence one wonders about the relationship between Mickey and Pluto, Tom and Jerry and God's miracles! Instead of emphasizing the spirit of struggle which allowed Disney to reach this level of creativity and his objectives in this field, an idea that is explicitly illustrated in the text, the author chose to emphasis an idea remote from the subject, not mentioned in the text directly or indirectly. This type of interpretation presents a one-sided view of the world and it shows how fixed formulas that are not supported by text or context were used in the lessons. Further, it exemplifies simplistic positions, and an inability to understand or to explain and interpret. To make the situation worse, the exercises following the lesson checked whether the pupil had registered the intended correlation or not. The answers to the questions as provided by the book explicitly required the reproduction of the stated message. Thus, both exercises and texts worked hand in hand to insure the storage of information in a particular manner.

However, authority was not confined to the metaphysical sphere; it was used as the principal tool in dealing with all subjects. The same authority covered all levels of information and manipulated the necessary tools to acquire knowledge. Although the information advanced in the texts was largely diversified, starting with sciences and ending with public behavior, the authority of the narrator's voice was the only basis of the credibility of the information. Authority was represented in a hierarchical order starting with the providential authority and ending with the terrestrial one. It was represented in the images of teachers, fathers, mothers, grandfathers, and policemen. These various representations of power and authority were the sole judge in all matters, to a point where the pupil had no right to participate or even raise questions about any subject. In front of this authority all pupils were equal. Males and females, rural and urban pupils, were all subject to the same rule: total obedience to authority.

This type of discourse strongly supported the unequal relations that are already prevalent in the society, relations based on gender, class, and confession. This type of indoctrination would have induced pupils to reproduce, in the future, these socio-cultural, relations. If the pupil was

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[7] "*Rajul al-khayal*" (Man of Fiction), Forth Primary Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Third Part, Cairo, 1995.

subject to authority, once authority is delegated to him, he would be likely to reproduce a comparable pattern of relations, especially since family and school institutions operate on this logic.

b) Who is represented in these texts? The texts personified to a large degree urban middle class citizens who corresponded perfectly to the ideal type of Egyptian family: a married man, having an ideal family of four members--father, mother, son, and daughter. The children were ideal children, and lived happily in the ideal home and city, i.e., in newly emerging urban cities located in the desert, and in the ideal modern house. This ideal family was headed by a man who was always a policeman and a woman who was a teacher or a librarian. They lived ever happily because they obeyed the social order and norms. The children always had ideal friends, playing in the ideal garden of their house.

Women, on the other hand, were represented in an a-historical context. They did not have names, history, or location. They were also ideal types of women, subject to the traditional sexual division of labor. They were mostly represented in a home, a kitchen, or a school. They were the loving, kind mothers who sacrificed their lives for their children, and thus had to be obeyed. The stereotyped images of a mother were out of time and space as was also the connected ideas of sacrifice and of kindness.

c) The representation of time. History did not escape simplistic reductionism. It was presented in relation to touristic sites and through the eyes of the tourism industry. Nationalism was emphasized as related to national security. Egypt was to be defended from enemies, Egyptians were expected to sacrifice themselves, and defeat the enemy (Rouchdy 1995:12-15, 21-22). These are only a few examples illustrating the main ideological trend in the curricula.

Finally, the totality of the curricula was based on these representations, some of which are selected as examples in this study. Others are not discussed given the limitation of space, but they still adhered to the same logic. These representations followed an ideal social order with each member of the society represented in the texts playing his role in absolute harmony with the rule, governed by an authority as previously mentioned. No one was allowed to break the rules, and whoever did was condemned and brought

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back to order. Within this logic, the pupil was perceived in the texts and in the exercises as a passive recipient, to be manipulated in order to control the outcome of the process of education. The pupil was trained to react according to the specified norms and had no margin to maneuver or to question the contents. The pupil had no space and he/she was systematically excluded from any possibility of dialogue. Rather, the curricula were sets of monologues which the pupil was expected to reproduce literally (Rouchdy 1995:22).

The New Version of the Curricula: 1995-1996

In 1995, the Ministry of Education embarked on a reform of the school curricula. In the following section, I will examine in detail the nature of change that took place in the Arabic curricula.

With a more colorful and modern layout the books of the new version of the curricula are presented to attract the attention and interest of the pupils. The series starts from the concrete and progresses to the general under the titles of *Read and Write* (first grade), *Read and Learn* (second grade), *Read and Think* (third grade), and *Read and Express* (fourth grade). These titles reflect a sequential method in which, once again, main themes are elaborated as the pupil advances in grades. The structure of partition remained the same while the themes changed and the conceptual framework was modified. From a first reading of the texts a considerable effort was made to reduce the size of the curricula while maintaining the diversity of the themes and the information they carry. A considerable effort was also made to relate images to themes and colors to subjects. Unfortunately, this tends to be more confusing than useful as the color printing was very poor. The language structure seems less complex and the amount of Quranic and religious references are almost absent, to a point that the shift appears deliberate.

The stories of the texts are more related to regional and local conditions, but more rural then urban, and addressing the lower middle class rather then higher strata of the middle class. Thus, a shift of interlocutor is seen. Family ties and local regional resources are brought to the fore. References to God and to metaphysical power and authority are less in evidence, while the individual's capacity to achieve and to conquer the world is valued.

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Individual skills and abilities are the forces of salvation, without which there would be no solutions to man-made misery. Pragmatic and functionalist approaches to family and individual problems are heavily discussed.

In the introductions preceding the lessons, the authors argue that the curricula are based on a "global complementary" method for introducing the pupil to linguistic elements and skills. The texts are characterized by a diversity of forms, variously dialogues, monologues, prose, and poetry. At this level the changes are rather successful. A balanced choice is made between the various literary forms, short stories, informative texts, and to a lesser degree Quranic verses and *hadith*. The authors claim that the texts are directly related to the pupils' regional environment that allows them to bridge their personal social experience with educational knowledge. The reduction in the amount of religious texts seems to have been deliberate because they no longer dominate the curricula. This omission seems to reflect a choice of a more secular ideological orientation. In fact, comparing the content of both curricula one notices that there is a general change at the level of the dominant ideology. However, the extent of the use of Quranic texts does not necessarily render a curriculum more religious or less so. Rather, it is the fatalistic view of the world that shapes understanding and produces one-sided simplistic reductionism. In fact, the Quranic verses provide a great variety of texts from which more appropriate selections could have been chosen which would have allowed the pupil to associate Quranic teachings with wider cultural contexts.

Main themes. In as much as the new curricula exhibit a radical change in the choice of themes and the size of topics, a shift at the level of the contextual framework appears.[8]

By examining the Arabic language curriculum texts for the four grades a number of themes can be traced. Based on their degree of recurrence in the four curricula, the dominant themes are listed in the following table under main headings and by order of importance:

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[8] This shift is seen when the two tables of themes, that of the curricula of 1995 and that of 1996, are compared. Cf. tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1

1. Work	4. Egyptian nationalism	7. Public behavior
2. Income projects	5. Environment	8. Animals & vegetation
3. Tourism & civilization	6. Family	9. Health and nutrition

The main topics revolve around man's ability to work and sort out his problems without relying on others. The emphasis is on the concept of work. Work is a value that should be respected and practiced, and without which life cannot be organized. To work and produce depends on man's will alone, since favorable conditions exist and he only needs to grasp the opportunity. According to the texts, stereotyped perceptions of work need to be changed, namely in the way manual work is represented.[9] The texts are based on the assumption that the social value of manual work is underestimated and that it is necessary to upgrade this notion.

The next section discusses some of the important themes as illustrations of the nature of change.

One of the parts of the third grade curricula revolved around the stereotyped images of peasants, Bedouin, and fishermen. They are Egyptian families who survive through manual work and production. Manual work is achieved through solidarity based on kinship relations. The reader is also introduced to the National Project for Productive Families supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs. This is a national income generating project for poor household families who are involved in manual work. The topic starts as follows: "The family works and produces in exchange for a wage; the consumer buys at the cheapest prices. The Ministry of Social Affairs provides these families with the means of production, like a sewing machine, and the material for production." This statement is followed by a long description of how a poor family receives a loan from the Ministry of Social Affairs to start a small project, and how they work and sell their products to the consumer. These lessons are purely informative and the

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[9] "Al-Hiraf qadiman wa hadithan", (Old and New Skills), Fourth Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Three, 1996; "al-'Usra al-muntija", (The Productive Family) and "Sa`fan al-shaykh al-hakim" (Sa`fan: The Wise Sheikh), Third Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Two and Part Six, 1996; "al-Dhahab al-abyad" (The White Gold) and "Qisat qaryyat al-Salam" (The Story of al-Salam Village), Second grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Four, Lesson One, and Part Six, 1996.

exercises following the lessons make sure that the pupil memorizes the various steps of manual work and understands the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs in generating income. The lessons would seem designed to prepare the pupil to apply for an income-generating project. These applicants are eight years old! They are supposed to be receiving a general educational, not a course on how to apply for small credit loans. [10]

Within the same context, a lesson follows that deals with the question of child labor. When reading the title of the lesson "Shararah and the Chain," one would expect a text discussing the consequences of child labor, especially since the law forbids it. But contrary to expectations, the story revolved around a young boy named Shararah who was a thief. As he was walking by a blacksmith's workshop, he tried to steal an iron chain. The owner caught him and threatened to take him to jail if he did not find a decent job in a workshop. The author concludes by saying that Shararah followed the owner's advice and worked honestly ever after in a workshop, earning his living by manual work. The moral of the story is summed up in the following statement: "Whenever Shararah sees iron being forged, he remembers the chain which caused him to repent and he thanks God for guiding him on the right path."[11] Of course the reader does not know why Shararah does not go to school as he is obviously of school age, nor does he know why he steals. In the absence of context, it would seem the reader is led to deduce that he steals because he is lazy. With Shararah decontextualized from society with his sin is laziness, it follows that his salvation is in work. In thus valorizing work with a complete disregard for socio-economic conditions, the lesson is presented as yet another moralistic and rigid message, addressed to pupils who are eight years old!

History lessons are presented in two unrelated dimensions: the themes of work and of tourism. The only text that refers to ancient Egypt is seen through the theme of manual work, showing how Egyptians have been

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[10] "Al-'Usar al-muntija" (The Productive Families), Third Grade, Arabic Language Curricula, Part Two, Lessons One to Four, 1995.

[11] "Shararah wal silsilah" (Shararah and the Metal Chain), Third Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Two, Lesson Four, 1995.

gifted in manual works since the antiquity.[12] Ancient Egyptian civilization is explained through the types of manual work in agriculture and industry. In a very short lesson, not exceeding half a page, the pupil is introduced to a list of manual activities practiced by ancient Egyptians. There is no reference in the text to the nature of their beliefs, or to the culture of this civilization. The only emphasis is put on the fact that they were hard working members of the society.[13]

History is also presented in relation to touristic sites such as Islamic Cairo, Pharaonic sites, and other places included in guided tours for tourists. In the first grade, pupils are introduced to Pharaonic Egypt through a story of a school picnic to the site of the pyramids. The pyramids are of course surrounded by horses, camels and tourists. The pupils do not learn what the pyramids are, what their function is, or why they should admire them. In the absence of any other context they will likely end up by assuming that they have to admire them because they are surrounded by animals and tourists.[14]

Islamic and Arabic history did not escape these stereotyped images. Through lessons about trips to historical sites or devoted to tourism pupils are introduced to history as historical monuments seen through the eyes of the tourists. In most lessons the historical monuments are deprived of their history but are given value only as touristic sites.

While tourism itself receives a great deal of attention so also does the behavior of the pupils with tourists. Tourism would seem also to reflect the degree of our civilization. The Fifth Part of the third grade curricula is entirely devoted to the different aspects of tourism.[15] In a lesson entitled Tourism and Civilization, the author emphasizes the touristic importance of Egypt. The following two lessons are devoted to the greatness of Egyptian

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[12] "Al-Zira`ah wal sina`a fi Misr al-qadima" (Agriculture and Industry in Ancient Egypt), Fourth Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Three, Lesson One, 1995.

[13] It should be pointed out that this text is followed by a lesson on cottage industries, specifically dairy products, sericulture and horticulture. "Sina`at wa muntajat" (Industry and Production), Fourth Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Three, Lesson Two, 1995.

[14] "Rihlat Jamila" (A Nice Picnic), First Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Three, Lesson Six, 1995.

[15] "Al-Siyaha fi Misr" (Tourism in Egypt), Third Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Three, 1995.

history which is admired by the entire world. The last lesson in this part covers the importance of being honest with the tourists. The story is about a taxi driver who returns the money a tourist forgot in his taxi.[16] Each of the four lessons is followed by a poem on Egyptian nationalism, expressing the qualities and the uniqueness of the Egyptians.

National identity is thus related to how Egyptians are perceived by the outside world, and how Egyptians are loyal to the mother nation. But the mother nation is seen as a unique entity unaffected politically and economically by the rest of the world, except when it is threatened by an external enemy. This dimension is clearly illustrated in a series of lessons for the fourth grade entitled "For the Sake of my Country: A National Story."[17] In this part, a family living in a small village is involved in a military resistance movement against an enemy. The village has no name and is located on an unnamed sea. The reader is not informed about the history of this resistance, the only information provided is about the existence of an unknown enemy that is carrying out military operations against this unknown village in Egypt. The protagonists do have names. They are fishermen but the reader does not know who precisely they are otherwise or how they were involved in the military operations. One could assume that this event took place in 1956, in 1967, or perhaps in 1973. The problem is that Egypt went through so many wars within the same geographical location that it would be difficult to guess when these events took place. However, it seems that the historical background of the story is unimportant. The moral is that Egyptians must prove their absolute loyalty to their mother nation, a loyalty that lies beyond space and time regardless of the identity of the enemy. The question as to who is the enemy is not answered. The enemy could be within us or outside of us. How is the pupil to know his enemy if the enemy is incognito?

These are but a few examples illustrating the content of the curricula and showing the type of messages underlining the text. In addition to some of the criticism advanced previously, some topics are presented in a more

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[16] "*Amanat sa'iq*" (The Honesty of a Driver), Third Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Three, Lesson Four, 1995.

[17] "*Min ajl baladi*" (For the Sake of my Country: A National Story), Fourth Grade, Arabic Language Curriculum, Part Four, Lessons One to Three, 1995.

convincing and elaborate manner within a less ideological orientation, they cover themes related to environment, animal life and vegetation, health and nutrition. Other issues such as the family and public behavior remain as they were in the previous curricula. Finally, the gender issue was not modified in any form. On the contrary, the few lessons devoted to women's achievements in the previous curricula were totally removed from the new versions.

Conclusion

Many efforts are made to improve the quality of the curricula, but these efforts still remain problematic as they reflect once again a unilateral view of the world. Although the curricula tend to address a wider range of pupils, the changes are not successful in establishing a balance between pupils in urban and rural areas. To a large degree, the emphasis is put on rural areas and rural environment rather than on urban areas. The curricula are not successful in reflecting the social and cultural diversity of the Egyptian society that, I believe, is a difficult equation to reach at this level. However, because the curricula are concerned predominantly with details of pupils' surroundings, they do mot illustrate the social or cultural diversity at national or even international levels without falling into the stereotyped representations of the subjects. Such a task would require highly qualified specialists who would bridge the micro and the macro levels in an adequate pedagogical manner. This leads me to ask the following questions: What is the ideological significance of the dominant messages?   And what is the objective of the Ministry of Education in implementing these curricula?

One cannot argue that the changes of the curricula are entirely the result of the economic adjustment policy, but one can advance the hypothesis that there is a correlation between the orientation of the dominant discourse in the curricula and the economic changes witnessed recently.

Recent economic change carries with it implications that members of society, specifically young graduates, should rely on their ability and capacities to earn their living through income generating projects. It strongly suggests that young people should embark into projects related to manual work and cottage industries based on family enterprises. It equally incites citizens to rely on their individual efforts and skills. University

degrees or high diplomas are no longer sufficient criteria for employment. Rather it is the successful ability of the individual to diversify his economic activities in order to face the unstable labor market that is valued. The media plays an important role in this valuation and many television programs are devoted to it. Therefore, investments in education seem to be geared towards an early specialization of skills, which would allow the pupil to abandon school at an early age. Investments in knowledge are not considered useful, while investments in the diffusion of practical information for survival becomes the alternative utility. This discourse seems to be a response to the chronic problems of drop-outs, child labor, and to the general socio-economic constraints imposed on the pupils' families.

If the dominant discourse of the previous curricula, 1994-95, submitted the pupil to fatality and to the absolute authority of his superiors, the new version of the curricula, 1995-96, submits him to the conditions of the labor market. The world is represented from a practical, utilitarian point of view to whose requirements the individual should bend. Poverty is seen as the result of the failure of individual to comply with the rules of this world. Therefore, pupils are given a perspective that presents this view as the acceptable one. But the pupil's future is still pre-destined, particularly if he does not have the economic means and the social motivation to pursue education.

If the democratization of education in its broadest meaning takes this form, it can only lead to further and deeper social exclusion, an exclusion that is based not only on gender discrimination but also on class discrimination. According to the logic of the new curricula, all Egyptians of school age have access to education and it is their individual choice to pursue it or not; it becomes officially accepted and economically useful to abandon education for work and for income. In this context, the new orientation of the curricula will still contribute to an increase in the official rate of literacy among Egyptians, since it considers literate whoever attends four consecutive years of primary education, regardless of the quality of his education.

Such considerations lead me to continue to ask, what is the objective of the basic primary educational system in Egypt? If the objective of the Ministry of Education is to produce a generation of young Egyptians only capable of generating income, of reproducing literally without question the norms and values transmitted, and of willingly accepting the constraints of

their socio-economic conditions without challenging them, then the texts should succeed. However, if the objective of the educational system is to develop the capacity for criticism, evaluation, and creativity to be able to deal with the constraints of globalization and the freedom of democracy, I believe that we are far from reaching this objective and that the curricula do not by any standards relate to this type of thinking.

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