

# 1<sup>ère</sup> TABLE RONDE

## « QUELLE EDUCATION A L'EPOQUE DE LA MONDIALISATION ?

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## **GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO SOUTH AFRICA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Despite having only recently emerged from what could be described as physical colonialism, the developing world is yet again in danger of being re-colonized. This time, however, in a far more subtle and indirect way. Developing countries, lured by trade and aid agreements, are ensnared in a web of requirement compiled and enforced by developed countries and their regulatory institutions membership of the global economy is determined by adherence to a set of rules primarily devised to promote and protect the economies of developed countries. Physical colonialism has merely given way to an even more powerful, shrouded form arms-length, remote colonialism. Whereas physical colonialism entailed a controlling presence in developing countries, through which resources were depleted and basic human rights withheld, remote colonialism as manifested in globalisation, in essence, although in a shrouded way, still aspires to many of the original colonial goals.

Contrary to the justification given by developed countries, globalisation has spawned rising inequalities (due to the shift in labour demand), greater polarisation across countries (due to knowledge production primarily remaining concentrated in a small number of developed countries, and thereby reproducing their competitive advantages), and lower growth and employment rates that have widened the gap between develop and developing countries. Strong countries are using globalisation to deliberately advance their national interests to the detriment of the weak nations.

The choice developing countries face, as his been repeatedly stated by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, is not whether to engage with globalisation or not, but how to engage in a way that will positively re-shape and redirect its impact towards a more mutually beneficial arrangement of world affairs.

Globalisation impacts on may facets of life, including education. Rapid developments in technology and communication are fostering changes in school and tertiary systems across the world, as ideas, values and knowledge, vital to education, feely migrate across nation states. The rise of a global society, driven by technology and communication, is shaping school and university populations into global citizens that need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and intellectual capacity to meet the challenges of a dynamic and ever-changing global marketplace. The shift from the industrial economy based on muscle to what Alvin Toffler so aptly refers to as the super-symbolic economy based on mind, has necessitated a radical transformation in education, a transformation profoundly reconceptualising all educational ideas developed during the smokestack era, so as to prepare learners in a balanced way for a future that will be increasingly characterises by interconnectivity, mobility, convertibility, ubiquity and globalisation. This task goes far beyond what has traditionally occupied the minds of educators, namely curricula, budgets, class sizes and educator salaries. It requires of educators to develop a high-choice system to replace the current obsolete low-choice system.

### **EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES**

The forces associated with globalisation have conditioned the context within which educators operate, and have profoundly influenced the way formal and informal education is experienced. This has resulted in an ever-increasing tendency to relate educational policy to the dictates of the market.

### Marketization

Despite the desperate need in developing countries for governments to maintain a hands-on involvement in radically transforming educational systems that were often the tools of race inspired social engineering, there is a regrettable tendency towards the marketization of education. Educational systems in these countries are increasingly, despite the inequalities this perpetuates and even exacerbates, being transformed into arenas of commercial activity. The principles that are the drivers of commercial activity are increasingly becoming the determinants of future educational policy. Schools and tertiary institutions are consequently required :

- to reconfigure their goods and services to meet market needs, thus enabling these goods and services to be priced and sold, and
- to shift their focus from working for a collective aim with a service ethic to working for profit in accordance with market discipline

Education is gradually being commodified through a plethora of legislative regulations and managerialism. This is resulting in the standardization of educational product, with the emphasis on commercial considerations such as market requirements, and economies of scale. Although legislative provision is made in most developing countries for free basic education of an equal quality for all learners up to a certain educational level, this is often somewhat of a myth, as the free education provided to historically disadvantaged communities is more often than not considerably inferior to that available to learners in advantaged communities where high school fees are used to provide superior demand based education. This largely perpetuates the educational inequalities that still exist in most developing countries, in that only a very small minority of previously disadvantaged persons with financial means are able to acquire access to privatised or commercialised education that will enable them to fully actualise their true potential and reap the benefits of globalisation.

The developing world is, despite very distinct differences when compared to the developed world, following the dictates of educational systems in the developed world. Educators are increasingly encouraged to see themselves as managers and to reframe education as an exercise in delivering market related outcomes. This causes schools and other educational institutions to compete for learners and funding by marketing their activities in ways that attract learners and their parents as consumers. The focus is less and less on community and equity, and more on individual advancement and the need to satisfy investors and consumers. There is consequently scant appreciation for issues such as the unifying role education can and should play in building a strong democratic culture.

In South Africa marked related educational policy since our first democratic election in 1994 has increased the divide between privileged (mainly white) and disadvantaged schools recouping this loss by merely raising school fees to off their own accord employ sufficient teachers to maintain the historical learner-teacher ratio. A further widening of this gap was caused when outcomes based education was foisted upon schools without considering the lack of capacity within black schools to manage this highly sophisticated curriculum package.

Although the privatisation of education is a fairly new phenomenon in developing countries it is clearly set to rapidly accelerate, given the mounting pressure exerted in this regard by the developed countries on the governments of developing countries. They see education, from a business and ideological point of view, as a very lucrative new area for profitable investment, hence the moves to place education on the agenda of the WTO.

The South African Minister of education, Prof. Kader Asmal, recently pointed out that the key challenge facing educational systems in developing countries such as South Africa, was to determine how the skills and innovations needed to address the national agenda, as well as to participate in the global economy globally but acting locally.

Given the realities of the developing world it is not only premature, but also highly inappropriate to even suggest that education should be treated as goods and services to be traded on free and open markets subject to WTO agreements. In the developing world public education is, for very sound

reasons, still primarily a matter of state building. The wholesale privatisation of education, based on the assumption that good drives out bad and that social markets operate in similar ways to commodity markets, would create very serious problems in terms of community responsibility and democratic accountability.

### **Governance**

Although governments in developing countries would seem to be relatively free to determine educational policy, and they tend to increasingly intervene through funding formulae, and by prescribing the medium of instruction, national curricula and standards, this intervention is not primarily focused on the distinctive purposes, conditions and tasks of education, but rather on economic growth and competitiveness.

An area of increasing concern to governments in developing countries is the proliferation of foreign educational institutions operating as either independent entities or in partnership with public or private education providers in these countries. The *raison d'être* of most these institutions operating is unfortunately not to contribute to the national agenda, to promote and nurture democratic values and principles, or to instil a shared culture and a sense of shared nationhood, but rather to merely exploit new markets, generate new income streams and overcome financial constraints in their countries of origin. In South Africa this has complicated the national agenda to de-racialize our apartheid inspired educational system, and has regrettably led to a commodification of education, in which academic programmes are not primarily developed because of their intrinsic worth or their contribution to the attainment of cultural, intellectual or social goals, but rather to enhance profit margins. To countenance this new form of imperialism would only serve to further erode knowledge production capacities and capabilities and increase the knowledge gap between the developed and developing worlds. Left unattended this form of globalisation would, as is currently the case, deplete the numbers of learners at our public institution especially at postgraduate level, erode their funding base, and lure away their most competent educators with attractive financial packages. The low research output in developing countries would as a consequence be even further decreased.

Given the history of developing countries, it is not strange for these countries to be very reluctant to expose their public educational institutions to the open market. Although they appreciate that competition may create greater efficiency, they are understandably very weary of the many negative impacts this may have. Their struggle to re-establish their unique identities has not advanced to a point where they are ready to become part of an amorphous international culture in which they are recipients of intellectual, cultural and other trends that have originated elsewhere.

### **Localization**

Whereas parents and learners in developing countries previously has little choice as to schools or tertiary institutions, and were predominantly confined to facilities in close proximity to their place of abode, there has been far greater freedom of choice and mobility since the 1980s. Parents and learners with the necessary financial means are now able to choose between an increasingly wide selection of schools/institutions that are not necessarily located within or in close proximity to where they reside. The net result, especially in disadvantaged communities, has been a large-scale de-localization of community schooling, with parents and learners often choosing schools/institutions they perceive to offer a better education in preparation for entry into the global marketplace.

Rapid and continuous developments in technology and communication are redefining education as it was traditionally known, often enabling learners to use localized and highly individualised forms of learning that provide global interaction. This has stimulated a growing interest in informal, episodic and experiential learning beyond the traditional classroom, thus strengthening the concept of lifelong learning. It has necessitated a shift in our educational paradigm. Whereas we previously saw the school as the institution where learning is organised, defined and contained, the focus is now on the learner, an intelligent agent with the potential to learn from agrarian or industrial societies to knowledge or information societies in set to exert strong pressure towards further individualisation, and a market/consumer orientation.

Trans-national providers of educational materials such as short courses, self-instructional aids and electronic networks skilfully exploit the importance persons in developing countries attach to education as a means of improving their access to the global economy and elevating their standard of living.

They have developed strongly persuasive methodologies whereby they lock consumers into self-directed learning projects and activities that are highly profitable for them.

## **Branding**

Globalisation has brought with it the highly problematic intrusion of commerce and advertising into schools. The inability of governments to provide sufficient funds for education especially in developing countries, has led to these governments encouraging schools and tertiary institutions to develop to partnerships between education and industry to acquire better facilities, more educators, better teaching materials and technologically advanced instructional aids. Although this strategy seems fairly innocuous, these governments fail to appreciate that income derived from industry could, and often does, create a conflict of interest between the educational institutions' mandate to educate and its moral and ethical duty to shield highly vulnerable learners from exploitation by the consumer cultures.

The difficulty of governments, especially in the developing world, to fully provide for the needs of educational institutions, creates a distinct opportunity for corporates to step into the educational frame and assist schools/institutions to acquire educational equipment and facilities. Although such funding, from a superficial point of view, seems fairly altruistic, the provider very important market segment. Soon, however, the initial frame of a contribution with no strings attached, as Klein so aptly puts it, gives way to the desire to not merely be an add-on, but the focal point of education.

Philosophically the intrusion of corporates into the classrooms and lecture halls, and the redefining of the role of the teacher/lecturer as that of a classroom/lecture room manager, has led to a very disturbing market-based conception of the learner as a mere consumer of information.

## **Curricula**

The market-derived view of education as a commodity or an investment is seriously impacting upon the subject choice and curriculum content available to learners in free education public schools in developing countries. The financial constraints often experienced by governments in these countries and their consequent reliance on trans-national agencies makes them easy prey for the proponents of a market approach to education. This results in narrow, market focused subject choices and curriculum content based on bureaucratic perceptions of what learners in developing countries supposedly need to succeed in the global economy. Traditional considerations in which education was seen from a perspective of well-being and involvement in life in its fullest sense have had to yield to market derived considerations such as cost-benefit analyses and economies of scale.

In practice a market approach to education confines historically disadvantaged learners to market-derived subject choices and curriculum content, whereas advantaged learners are yet again able to afford a more broad based education that better equips them to actualise their full human potential.

Designing subject choices and curricula according to market needs has led to the humanities, specifically arts and culture, not receiving the same attention in public schools as science and technology. The arguments being that the latter subjects are more important when preparing learners to succeed in the global economy. Given an educational approach that primarily focuses on having rather than being there is a distinct possibility of considerable societal dislocation in due course.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Although market related assumptions of globalisation activists may hold true in some highly developed countries, and preferences shown by rational choosers may create superior opportunities, to those mandated and managed by governments, this is a very unlikely scenario in developing countries. Left to the vagaries of the market, privatised education would not contribute to greater equal educational opportunity, and would become a narrowing and demeaning process.

If the developing world is to build a strong civil society and democratic culture it is critically important that education continues to fulfil its role as a way of exploring that which may make for a good life, and is not locked into a narrowly defined rigid market paradigm.

The creators of educational policy should take cognisance of Erich Fromm's comments with regard to the dangers posed by market-derived educational policies.

*“Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions*