

GLOBALISATION AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

- Alternative ways to be explored

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*No matter what tests show, very little of what is taught
in schools is learned, very little of what is learned is remembered, and
very little of what is remembered is used.*

- John Holt

Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence, said that *"perhaps the most disturbing single piece of data in my book comes from a massive survey of parents and teachers which shows a worldwide trend for the present generation of children to be more troubled emotionally than the last: more lonely and depressed, more angry and unruly, more nervous and prone to worry, more impulsive and aggressive. If there is a remedy, I feel it must lie in how we prepare our young for life. At present we leave the emotional education of our children to chance, with ever more disastrous results. One solution is a new vision of what schools can do to educate the whole student, bringing together mind and heart in the classroom. I can foresee a day when education will routinely include essential human competencies such as self-awareness, self-control, and empathy, and the arts of listening, resolving conflicts, and cooperation."*

Education is an important investment in building human capital that is a driver for technological innovation and economic growth. It is only through improving the educational status of a society that the multi-faceted development of its people can be ensured. In the post-industrialized world, the advanced countries used to derive the major proportion of their national income not from agriculture and industry but from the service sector. Since the service sector is based on imparting skills or training to the students and youth, the education sector is the most sought after. It must provide gainful employment so that the sector is developed in a big way. It has also given rise to controversies relating to introducing changes in the inter-sectoral priorities in the allocation of resources leading to the misconceived policy of downsizing of higher education. It has also advocated privatization of higher education without realizing the danger of making the system a commercial enterprise.

To allow the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society... Robbed on the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as the victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation. Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighbourhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed. (Karl Polanyi 1957: 73, quoted in Leys 2001: 4)

Such is the nature and complexity of the forces involved in globalization that any discussion of its impact upon education raises fundamental issues and is a matter of considerable debate. The forces associated with globalization have conditioned the context in which educators operate, and profoundly altered people's experience of both formal and informal education. Schools and colleges have, for example, become sites for branding and the targets of corporate expansion. Many policymakers automatically look to market 'solutions'. The impact and pervasiveness of these forces of globalization also means that they should be a fundamental focus for education and learning - but there are powerful currents running against honest work in this area. In this article we will explore some of what we believe to be the more significant aspects with regard to the practice and experience of education. These include:

- Commodification and the corporate takeover of education.
- The threat to the autonomy of national educational systems by globalization.
- De-localization and changing technologies and orientations in education.
- Branding, globalization and learning to be consumers.

This is not an exhaustive listing of issues - but it does bring out some of the key dynamics and highlights some important areas of action (and reaction) for educators and learners with respect to globalization.

Commodification and the corporate takeover of education

What we have here is a process of commodification - and the development of attempts to standardize 'products' and to find economies of scale. We have also seen some very significant movements towards corporatization in schooling and non-formal education. In the 1980s and early 1990s this was initially carried forward by the rise of managerialism as in many 'western' education systems. Those in authority were encouraged and trained to see themselves as managers, and to reframe the problems of education as exercises in delivering the right outcomes. The language and disposition of management also quickly moved into the classroom. There has also been the wholesale strengthening of the market in many education systems. Schools have to compete for students in order to sustain and extend their funding. This, in turn, has meant that they have had to market their activities and to develop their own 'brands'. They have had to sell 'the learning experience' and the particular qualities of their institution. To do this, complex processes have to be reduced to easily identified packages; philosophies to sound bites; and students and their parents become 'consumers'. As Stewart demonstrated some time ago there is a fundamental problem with the way that such business models have been applied to educational and welfare agencies.

The result has been a drive towards to the achievement of specified outcomes and the adoption of standardised teaching models. The emphasis is less on community and equity, and rather more on individual advancement and the need to satisfy investors and influential consumers. Education has come to resemble a private, rather than public, good.

As might be expected, such marketisation and commodification has led to a significant privatization of education in a number of countries. In the United States, for example, schooling, higher education and training have been seen as lucrative markets to be in. Giroux (2000: 85) reports that the for-profit education market represented around \$600 billion in revenue for corporate interests. In Britain, education management, 'looks like it is about to become big

business'. It is not much different in the Indian context. One gets a fair idea when you find almost every major industry, construction company, politicians with large resources, jumping into start a school.

Seeking to turn education into a commodity, framing it in market terms, and encouraging the entry of commercial concerns could be seen as simply an expression of neo-liberal politics in a particular state or area. However, we need to understand the nature of the forces that have pushed (or seduced) governments into adopting such policies - and it is here that we can see the process of globalization directly at work.

Globalization and the governance of education

Globalization has impacted upon the nature of the agencies those 'school' children, young people and adults.

Further, education, as a service industry, is part of globalization process under the umbrella of General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). However, there is every possibility that this might force countries with quite different academic needs and resources to conform to systems inevitably designed to service the interest of corporate educational providers, and thereby breeding inequality and dependence.

Nobel Laureates T.W.Schultz and Gary Becker in 1961 and 1963 respectively propounded the new economics of education. According to this, all investments in education be they private or public, were guided by profitability. It was the profit motive that exhibited in the concern for the 'rate of return' to the money spent on education, which was the main factor, behind one's investment decisions in education. The private investments were based on the private 'rates of return' calculated by counting the private costs and gains that were expected as the result of acquiring one kind of education rather than the other. The objective of education was the same, be it for individual or for society as a whole, to get the best economic value for the money and effort spent.

In the process we have almost forgotten that education ever had any purpose other than to promote financial growth.

While there is some direct intervention in the governance of national educational systems by trans-national agencies such as the IMF and World Bank, the impact of globalization is most felt through the extent to which policies everywhere are now essentially market-driven.

De-localization and changing technologies and orientations in education

As well as conditioning the political context, globalization has found expression in some very direct ways - via , for example, the de-localization of schooling. Since the 1980s, there has been a degree of 'parental choice' within state schooling. It has been possible to choose which schools to apply to at both primary and secondary levels. While much primary school application is local, a significant proportion of secondary school application is not. This has both severed the link between locality and schooling and undermined the idea of community schooling.

To these developments must be added changes in educational technology - especially the use of the internet and other computer forms, and the growth of distance learning. At one level these can be seen as an instrument of localization. They allow people to study at home or at work. However, they usually involve highly individualized forms of learning and may not lead to any additional interaction with neighbours or with local shops, agencies and groups. They also allow people from very different parts of the world to engage in the same programme - and student contact can be across great physical distance.

It requires a shift in our thinking about the fundamental organizational unit of education, from the school, an institution where learning is organized, defined and contained, to the learner, an intelligent agent with the potential to learn from any and all of her encounters with the world around her.

Branding, globalization and learning to be consumers

It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not schoolteachers or university professors but filmmakers, advertising executives and pop culture purveyors. Disney does more than Duke, Spielberg outweighs Stanford, MTV trumps MIT. (Benjamin R. Barber quoted by Giroux 2000: 15)

As George Monbiot (2001: 331) put it, there are many ways of making money from formal education, 'but the most widespread is the use of the school as an advertising medium'. The attraction is obvious - schools represent a captive market. Through the use of teaching packs, sponsored videos, advertisements on school computer screen savers and the like, large companies are able to bring their brand directly into the classroom. In so doing they are looking to gain a certain legitimacy (after all the use of their materials etc. has been 'approved' by the school) as well as the raising general brand awareness. Schools also have the distinct advantage for corporates of organizing their students along key demographics such as age and supposed academic ability - so it is possible to target advertising and marketing. The shortfall of funding for key aspects of schooling such as computing, sport and recreational and eating facilities: fast-food, athletic gear and computing companies have stepped in. However:

... they carry with them an educational agenda of their own. As with all branding projects, it is never enough to tag the school with a few logos. Having gained a foothold, the brand managers are now doing what they have done in music, sports and journalism outside the schools: trying to overwhelm their host, to grab the spotlight. They are fighting for their brands to become not the add-on but the subject of education, not an elective but the curriculum. (Klein 2001: 89)

High ideals tend to fade away as State-provided finances decline and as the State 'encourages' closer partnerships between education and industry. Educationally sound and attractively packaged curriculum materials fill the hole in the resources budget of schools and offer technologically sophisticated 'solutions' to the pedagogical problems of overworked teachers. These pressures have created a conflict of interest between schools' mandate to educate, and their moral and ethical duties to protect children from exploitation by consumer culture. Corporations have recognized and taken advantage of this dilemma.

As educational systems become more marketized, colleges, schools and non-formal education agencies seek to build relationships based more on viewing learners as customers rather than participants

The result of this incursion by commerce, and the widespread seeping of managerialism, market-thinking and consumerism into the orientation of educators is a basic inability within many schooling systems and agencies of informal education to address critically questions around globalization, branding and consumption.

What is the way out?

We have not learnt the lessons that nature has been trying to teach ever since the human race evolved itself. Man would be happy and stable as long as his actions are in tune with the nature and every time he has transgressed nature or has gone against it, he has paid a heavy penalty. It is most appropriate that all the human processes should be aligned with the nature and this includes education as well. As long as child's education does not include learning from the immediate environment and culture, it would not enrich his personality but would remain superficial and transient.

A child is a product of the environment and culture. A tree is said to be as strong as the depth of its roots and culture is the root of human beings. Education devoid of native wisdom and culture produces dwarfed personalities.

It is in this context, *Poornapramati* experiment becomes significant. This is a commendable exercise to blend the wisdom of the Veda's with the utility of technology. Twenty-first century is the meeting place for the heart of Vedavyasa and the brain of Einstein. That is the holistic way of developing the qualities of head and heart. This is not an easy task. In fact, no good work is easy. It demands tenacity of purpose, clarity of goals and above all immense patience to hold on to their convictions very strongly in spite of the setbacks and shocks they may receive, though temporarily.

Conclusion

The perversion of education and the exploitation of learners that are catalogued here is a matter of profound concern. We have witnessed a fundamental attack on the notion of public goods, and upon more liberal ideas of education. Learning has increasingly been seen as a commodity or as an investment rather than as a way of exploring what might make for the good life or human flourishing. Teachers' and educators' ability to ask critical questions about the world in which they live has been deeply compromised. The market ideologies they have assimilated, the direction of the curricula they are required to 'deliver', and the readiness of the schools and agencies in which they operate to embrace corporate sponsorship and intervention have combined to degrade their work to such an extent as to question whether what they are engaged in can rightfully be called education. In a very real sense they are engaged in furthering what Erich Fromm described as alienation: *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.*

Just what is needed to push back and undermine this pernicious process is fairly clear. We need, for example, to adopt ways of thinking about, and acting in, the world that have at their core an informed commitment to human flourishing in its fullest sense.

This is possible only when we take the children to their very roots of culture and impress upon them the need to hold on to the culture, nurture it and then pass it on to the next generation as their legacy. It is necessary to reassert the public domain and to police the boundaries between it and the market sector with some vigilance. Furthermore, we need, as educators, to be able to do what is right rather than what is 'correct'. Alternative ways of educating such as the one being experimented at *Poornapramati* that looks to well-being and participation in the common life are to be encouraged. Whether these efforts can be successful depends in significant part to our courage as educators, and our ability to work with others with a similar vision.

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