



EDUCATION

International Young Professionals Summit 2001 Agenda Paper

"Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained. "

Abstract

This Position Paper on Education focuses on the differing roles or aspects of education both as a separate issue of concern and as a component to be considered in other thematic and agenda papers originating from the International Young Professionals Summit 2001.

Education is more than mere knowledge. It is crucial in increasing the awareness of other issues within society such as poverty and health. It is also about change. Providing people with the skills and abilities to utilise their knowledge and awareness of problems confronting local and global communities to facilitate change.

Education is fundamental to development and change within society. Traditionally there has been concern that education simply serves to maintain the status quo. However, education should be seen as catalyst for positive improvements within society. It is therefore crucial that governments, organisations, communities and individuals work to ensure that the many concerns regarding education within society are addressed.

The Position Paper is followed by an Annex, the "DRAFT Petition of Young Professionals to World Leaders on Harnessing Young People's Contributions to Global Education."

A second Annex, the "DRAFT Declaration on Young Professionals Contributions to Education as a Source for Progress made by Young People gathering at the IYPS, Australia, October 2001" serves as a draft paper to be circulated for discussion, debate, feedback, and agreement by young professionals, young adults, and youth between 14 and 35 years of age from all nations, ethnic and cultural groups, socio-economic status, sectors, and gender who are interested in this topic.

These documents are intended to:

- (a) Serve as draft documents for discussion and feedback among attendees of the International Young Professional Summit;
- (b) Provide senior world leaders and policymakers attending CHOGM with a petition on behalf of young adults and youth on this important topic to ensure that the concerns of young people are incorporated into their thoughts, policies, and actions on issues related to youth and social development;
- (c) Serve as seminal documents to inform and circulate among young people meeting in other venues who are interested in addressing this same issue and building upon this and related documents to feed an ongoing global conversation and set of decisions by key international and national leaders on the issues set forth.

A vision for the future

The delegates of the Education Action Area of the International Young Professionals Summit 2001 believe that:

- Education is a life-long learning experience.
- Education and learning is a right for all people.
- The provision and funding of quality, free and accessible educational programs is the primary responsibility of governments
- Education and learning must incorporate the entire community

- Education is not just about knowledge, but also about emotions and experiences
- Education must be appropriate, accessible and relevant.
- Education and learning are agents of change and play a fundamental role in redressing the social, economic and environmental problems within society

Education is?

Education should be viewed as a part of the learning process. Education and learning can take many forms and occur in any situation, including formalised institutions and in people's everyday lives.

Non-institutional education is a very powerful medium for passing on knowledge and culture.. There are many instances of education in non-institutional settings being as effective, if not more effective, than more formalised methods. For example, Indigenous peoples such as the Aborigines in Australia transmitted very sophisticated and complex knowledge and culture in the absence of formal structures such as schools.

Why Education?

John Dewey, a turn of the century progressivist, stated that education is a strong medium through which successive generations take their "place" within a society. It is the means by which decision-makers and the empowered frame the minds of individuals to accept certain ideas, adopt values and place normative constraints on the way people think. Unfortunately, the general perspective is that education is being used as an agent to promote globalisation and maintain the status quo. In many situations it effectively widens existing disparities.

However, delegates believe that education can and must be used to improve society and to assist people in acquiring the necessary tools to transform society. Education in various forms can influence the political processes that effect change in local areas, explore local needs to improve an area, inform people and communities, develop local opportunities, bring together groups, facilitate programs and activities, promote issues and create awareness and, most importantly, empower people.

Numerous studies indicate the variety of benefits education can have for individuals, communities and wider society. Better educated people earn more. Education also has additional benefits in areas such as health. Schools are a key source of information on health and are instrumental in promoting and reducing health-related issues such as HIV/AIDS. Each year of school for girls translates into a reduction in fertility rates and decrease in maternal deaths in childbirth. Education can facilitate the development of social capital and foster a sense of community.

Delegates believe that education, in all its many forms, is the engine that will drive forward any lasting change within our society through the development of social capital and a greater awareness of issues such as poverty, the environment and developing sustainable outcomes. Education of ourselves and those within our communities will be essential to implementing plans and achieving our goals.

State of the World

It has been recognised for decades by governments and multilateral organisations such as the UN and the World Bank that education is crucial in reducing the gap between rich and poor. There has been common agreement to the right to education. They have poured resources into educational reform. Governments have experimented with new curricula, new teaching aids and new teacher training.

Despite this priority only limited progress has been made and the fundamental right to education continues to be violated on a widespread and systematic basis. Education around the world still often gets a failing grade, with education systems not succeeding at their core tasks. Just a quick glance at some of the statistics highlights this glowing failure:

- 880 million adults are illiterate, the majority women
- 113 million children have no access to primary schooling, of which 60% are girls
- Students are dropping out of school in large numbers due to reasons such as cultural barriers, cost, gender and access.
- Schools often transmit information that is largely irrelevant to participants.
- Schools and education programs are greatly under-financed. In some African countries primary

teachers receive less than half the amount of the household poverty line

These problems can be overcome. Education for all is achievable. According to UNICEF the cost for every child in majority countries to attend primary school for ten years would only be approximately \$9.1 billion each year. This is not a great amount when you consider that:

- This equals four days of global military spending
- It is approximately what is spent in seven days on currency speculation in international markets
- Sub-Saharan Africa pays around \$10 billion in debt repayments
- It is less than Europeans spend each year on mineral water!

Education – The issues

Appropriate and effective quality education

Education must be appropriate to the needs of individuals and communities in which they live. Education programs in India must meet different needs than in Australia. Even within countries programs must be tailored to communities in which people live so that they are locally relevant and effective. Education must be culturally appropriate, relevant in content, delivered by effective means and take into account local conditions.

In many countries the heritage of colonialism has determined the structure of educational systems, language of schooling, and often the curriculum itself. Education acts as an instrument for cultural dependency cultivating a desire for Western lifestyles. This spread of dominant ideologies undermines local educational structures, wittingly or unwittingly, as they often have little to do with local intellectual, cultural or educational traditions. They may even devalue local culture leading to heterogenisation of cultures. Education needs to strike a practical balance between cultural traditions and social imperatives for change.

Delegates believe that current educational systems need to become more inclusive of local needs. Old methods of teaching such as simply feeding facts to children need to be replaced by methods that engage children in the learning process and are integrated into their lives. Education must be a relevant, interesting experience. It needs to be sufficiently relevant and attractive so families have an incentive to send children to school. Education must be diverse and cater for the individual. Arian Schaap highlighted in Internet discussions that “one size does not fit all”.

Case Study: India

“The Barefoot College” in India has been reviving and giving more respect and dignity to the knowledge, skills and wisdom of traditional indigenous practices. The skills taught are based on these practices and are aimed at providing basic services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, education and health care. The college is a non-formal training institute where young men and women are taught practical skills by village teachers. Teaching and Learning is based on the day to day needs of the villagers. The college has over 400 staff members. Some examples of programs they have conducted are:

- In 1997-98, through the use of centuries old technologies, a total of 12 million litres of rainwater was collected in 100 schools attended by 300 students. The cost was a mere ten cents (\$US) a litre.
- Over 150 young people from nine states in India have been trained as barefoot solar engineers. They have equipped over 200 houses in the Himalayas with solar electricity.

Participation and access

Whilst appropriate education is crucial, it is ineffective unless people are able to access it and participate. There has been some improvement in “education for all” and increases in the number of people accessing educational activities. However, access does not equal participation. For example, a student may be able to attend school here in Australia as it is supposedly “free”, but they are unable to participate fully if they can not afford books, stationery and excursions.

There are many barriers to access and participation in education. These can include lack of educational activities, lack of appropriate resources and funding, high costs and social and political barriers (such as children having to support families and girls not being permitted to study).

Sadashivan from Delhi made a very poignant point in Internet discussion groups that many families can not afford to send their children to school. Rather they send them to work due to a need for money or to clear debt obligations. Even if schooling were free, these families may still be unable to send their children to school. This is not always a matter of choice, but survival.

This clearly demonstrates the interrelationship between the multitude of problems that face people of the world. Peoples whose worries are about survival and just living through the next few days are limited in their ability to contribute to and influence society. Issues such as poverty, health, education and the environment must be examined and addressed holistically.

Participation in education should also be seen as the active engagement of participants in the design, development and implementation of programs. They should not be viewed as "end users" or "clients". The involvement of participants in all stages of programs creates ownership of the final product and ensures that programs are more likely to be appropriate, effective and sustainable.

The critical element is partnership across conventional barriers between government departments, educational institutions, educators, the community and students. Through involving children they learn important communication and decision-making skills. Involving the community and maximising community engagement ensures that schools become more than isolated institutions and become hubs for the community, developing new and changing roles for members of the community.

Sustainability

Maybe the most important issue related to supporting and growing the role of education and ensuring its objectives are met is that of sustainability. Too often positive and dynamic programs fail to be implemented or close down due to a lack of funds, weak political will, conflict, costs, inefficient use of resources, the burden of debt of majority world countries or the general misuse of education. It was highlighted by Arian Schaap that budgetary imposts will place considerable restrictions as to what can and can not be achieved from the summit.

According to OXFAM International, what is required is a global initiative to identify the finance gaps in all country education plans, and to mobilise the resources required to fill those gaps. UNICEF's current estimates put the finance gap for ensuring all children get a good quality and free primary education, at around \$9.1 billion a year. In global terms, this is a small price to pay.

In addition we need to look at new and alternative forms of funding. One growing option is to look to the business and corporate sectors. The ideal situation is where companies and businesses make contributions that are relatively untied to return benefits. This is perhaps more common in smaller businesses where the stakeholders (owners) are more directly involved in running the business. However, these altruistic acts are still relatively uncommon.

Most companies are driven to a large extent by a profit motive. For many, this creates a dilemma when considering social development in that the interests of shareholders maybe difficult to reconcile with the call for improved corporate citizenship.

This does not need to be the case. The interests of shareholders can be served through some specific form of involvement in the community. The Smith Family's web site (www.smithfamily.org.au) provides some useful insight into corporate citizenship and lists some reasons why corporates and businesses can be involved in assisting the local community whilst still providing accountability to shareholders, including:

- Investing in the social sector in part as a marketing exercise, as an investment in the company brand.
- Taking the marketing concept one step further, and developing a specific cause-related marketing campaign to promote a product.
- Investing in social programs aimed at specific segments of the community (the company's target markets), to help in customer acquisition or retention.
- Improving employee satisfaction and retention, either by developing programs where staff are directly involved, or by promoting the company's involvement.

A growing number of companies are striving to conduct business in more socially responsible ways. For them, corporate citizenship is not about pointing to isolated examples of "exemplary behaviour,"

but rather it is a comprehensive business culture that incorporates treatment of staff, the environment, the community and other stakeholders. For these companies, relationships in the community sector are long term and multi-faceted. There is an increasing understanding that good corporate citizenship actually benefits shareholders in the long term" (www.smithfamily.org.au).

Case Study: The Smith Family Learning for Life Program, Australia

The Smith Family is an independent, not for profit social enterprise providing a range of services to the disadvantaged and those in need in Australian society. They have embarked on an ambitious project called "Learning for Life" which aims to improve the access and participation of disadvantaged young people in educational activities and thus break the cycle of poverty. The program provides a financial scholarship and the support of an education worker for each student. It aims to support over 70,000 children by 2004. This represents approximately 10% of Australian children living in poverty.

The program strongly encourages businesses to invest in the future of youth and has found very positive support. It is funded through the financial and in kind support of individuals, local businesses, community groups and large companies. Supporters have a range of options to choose from, including sponsorship of individual students, support for administration and organisational costs, and direct involvement such as staff within companies being encouraged to volunteer in a wide range of capacities. Major corporations such as Westpac Bank, Cisco Systems, BHP Billiton and Colgate-Palmolive have become strong supporters of this initiative, providing support in a variety of ways.

Education – A Wider Role

Simply providing education for all will not resolve the challenges that society faces such as poverty, environmental degradation or inequality. What is required is a wider, more political type solution. It requires the creation of awareness and the empowerment of people to effect change. Without doing so education will continue to support and perpetuate the status quo. To achieve this education needs to be viewed as more than simply a passing on of facts and figures.

Education needs to blend essential knowledge with the understanding and skills to better equip people to face social challenges, today and into the future. Education must encompass different roles. We must educate people for knowledge, we must increase their awareness of important issues that society faces and we must provide them with the ability to facilitate change. Awareness, knowledge and capacity (and enthusiasm) to learn and re-learn all need to be developed in the education process. These differing aspects and roles of education must be considered if programs are to be successful.

Education for knowledge

There is an old quote that "knowledge is power". However, it is an increasingly complex question as to what knowledge? Educators must be careful that knowledge transmitted through educational systems does not merely put forward knowledge, ideas and beliefs of the dominant group. Programs should take the problems and needs of students and their community as a starting point. It must also be meaningful to students.

Education for awareness

Grant McPhail in the Education Forum Discussions noted that we need to move away from pure content knowledge. This was a point picked up on several times in the discussion groups. A requirement of education must be an awareness of the world we live in, both local and global. Education should include the many issues facing society.

Svea exemplified this in the discussion group on freshwater in arguing that ecological education must be integrated into every level of education. This will hopefully result in a focus on prevention rather than reaction. In doing so, we are ensuring that students are a step closer to facilitating change. It is "better to teach people how to recognise problems, formulate questions and devise systems to answering them, than to tell them what their problems are and what they ought to do about them" (Jerome Rodil, email contribution)

Education for Change

Simply informing students of the many problems that face society today can prove extremely daunting

and depressing to young people. They are left with a feeling of powerlessness and an inability to see that they can effect change. Conspicuous by its absence in most educational programs is a lack of practice and knowledge of how to deal with these problems and how people can challenge the claims, assumptions and ideology of authority. Education should not just be about providing people with an understanding of the troubles within our societies, but providing the skills and abilities to redress them. It needs to instil in people a sense of personal responsibility and empower them to act on these responsibilities.

This is not currently the case. Schools discourage activism and fail to encourage students to make the connection between learning, values and action. Curriculum often lacks relevance to the passion of adolescence and many students believe that they acquire little that enables them to make a difference in the world. This was of concern to Jerome Rodil in the Education Discussion Group who stated that “education should teach them, should inspire them, to break their limits, to enhance their capacities to influence society. Otherwise, we teach them nothing.”

Case Study: New Delhi, India

Some years ago a number of elite schools in Delhi added a compulsory community service component to their graduation requirements. By their final year at college, students were required to teach one illiterate Indian to read and write in order to graduate. Whilst there were difficulties in implementing such a program, many illiterate Indians benefited and students were exposed to a very important issue facing Indian society.

Recognition in formal educational circles is too often provided for participation in disconnected, decontextualised learning experiences that will not develop within students an understanding of wider social issues, compassion and an appreciation for justice. We must ask ourselves whether the relatively few students enrolled in the “right” courses with good grades are the best prepared citizens to address escalating social challenges such as poverty and environmental degradation. What in their academic preparation has helped them develop the tools to provide leadership and guidance for the issues that face society?

Conclusion

It is undeniable that education is fundamental to improving the quality of our societies. However, this realisation of its importance is slow to translate into actions. Too often it is constrained by economic, political and cultural impediments. If change is going to occur, if education is going to be made a priority by governments, then it is up to the people, the community, and us as individuals.

We must encourage governments and leaders within our society to adopt the points raised in the “Petition to World Leaders”. The “Call to Action” that follows provides a brief list of ideas for where people can start to facilitate change, both individually and as part of wider community groups. It is crucial for change to occur at both a local and global level that people adopt some of these actions as well as developing further ones.

Finally, we need to constantly remind ourselves and others that “you are what you do, not what you say”.

The Education Agenda Area was facilitated by Greg Mellis. The final content of this paper reflects the views of the original author (Greg Mellis), the IYPS Agenda Team, the Education on-line forum and delegates attending the summit.

References and Resources

Internet Sites

Café Progressive

<http://www.cafeprogressive.com/>

Alternative education, politics and culture

OneWorld Net guide to Education and Development

<http://www.oneworld.org/guides/development/index.html>

Good search engine for alternative resources on education matters and includes all the articles focusing on the issue of education and learning available on the OneWorld database.

Oxfam International – Education Now

<http://www.oxfam.org/educationnow/default.htm>

Great Site on global issues relating top education with some good links

The Informal Education Home Page

<http://www.infed.org/index.htm>

UNESCO Education Site

<http://www.unesco.org/education/index.shtml>

UNICEF Education Initiatives

<http://www.unicef.org/programme/education/>

State of the World's Children Report (UNICEF)

<http://www.unicef.org/sowc01/toc.htm#>

Alternative Learning Exchange

<http://www.alternative-learning.org/ale/index.html>

9thWorld Congress of Comparative Education

<http://mackie.edfac.usyd.edu.au/projects/wcces96/papers.html>

SEDSAN (Socio-Economic Disadvantage Support and Advocacy Network)

<http://www.sedsan.gut.edu.au/>

Local Network in Brisbane (Australia) focusing on educational disadvantage in the tertiary sector.

Index on Censorship

<http://www.indexoncensorship.org/>

A bi-monthly magazine for free speech, widens the debates on freedom of expression

International Save the Children Alliance

<http://www.savethechildren.net/newstc/>

UN Cyber School Bus

<http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/index.html>

New Internationalist Magazine

<http://www.oneworld.org/ni/index4.html>

Excellent source of articles and information on a variety of economic, social and political issues

Elimu Campaign for the Right to Education

<http://www.elimu.org/>

Network of campaigns from North and South for educational rights for all

Books & Articles

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Townsend, T. & Otero, G. (2000). *The Global Classroom. Activities to engage students in third millennium schools*. Australia: Hawker Brownlow Education.

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Petition of Young Professionals to World Leaders on Harnessing Young People's Contributions to Global Education.

The participants at the International Young Professionals Summit 2001 call upon international, national and private leaders to agree to:

- 1 Education and learning as a right for all.
- 2 Education is the primary responsibility of the state. The state has undeniable responsibility for assuring universal coverage of quality, free and accessible educational programs. However, all people have a stake in education.
- 3 Provide truly free primary education for all people, exclusive of fees and charges (such as textbook levies and administration charges).
- 4 Develop and implement clear plans to achieve the DAKAR targets in consultation with all stakeholders.
- 5 Deepen debt relief for countries with good plans for poverty reduction, including basic education. No country should spend more than 10% of government revenue on debt.
- 6 Encourage and develop educational programs that are inclusive and empower participants to work towards change. They should be student-centred, using a variety of situations, strategies and resources in order to ensure that each student achieves meaningful learning and *participate* actively in the process.
- 7 Ensure that curriculum contains culturally appropriate content and that participation is not restricted in any way based upon gender, race or religion.
- 8 Support the development of a variety of alternative education programs to meet the diverse needs of participants.
- 9 Commit adequate resources to ensure that these plans are achieved and assure the adequate and timely availability of human, technical, material and financial resources are available.

Declaration on Young Professionals Contributions to Education as a Source for Progress made by Young People gathering at the IYPS, Australia, October 2001

A call to action for young people to contribute to education and be actively involved in facilitating change as individuals and part of a wider community network.

- 1 Hold governments and international organisations accountable for their educational obligations
- 2 Lobby government and International organisations to ensure the adequate allocation of resources
- 3 Work to create quality educational opportunities that empower and inspire young people
- 4 Raise the profile of education in your local community
- 5 Identify educational needs in the local community and develop solutions to these
- 6 Share education projects experience and knowledge
- 7 Incorporate education programs within the wider community
- 8 Volunteer in local program and activities and become involved. It is important that young people become actively involved in educational programs at all levels, including program development, planning, implementation and evaluation.
- 9 Develop linkages with other young professionals to foster opportunities to support educational programs
- 10 Provide expert knowledge and experience to programs and activities