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A brief history of global education development

explaining why global education is failing and showing what to do for it to succeed

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The progressive period up to about 1990

After the Second World War a new organization, UNESCO, started to lead and coordinate global education development. With its **Universal Declaration that “education is a human right for all”**(1948) a rapid global education development started through reorganizing and reconstructing the century old, traditional education delivery system, which was assessed, scrutinized and updated for feasibility and efficiency. The basic principle of the traditional education delivery system - teacher led classroom teaching - could not be changed, as there were no alternatives available.

In 1960, Sweden had developed a new Basic Education System, which became a kind of standard for UNESCO and later the World Bank to replace the colonial schools in the developing world, and it will be used as a typical example of a modernized traditional education system.

Global education development was initially successful from an enrolment point of view, but the quality of education soon became a serious problem. UNESCO established, therefore, the first **“International Commission on the Development of Education” - the Faure Commission** - to comprehensively study **“the world of education today and tomorrow”**. It dealt in an objective and comprehensive way with all aspects of education as a vehicle for economic and social change. It made an in-depth analysis of the development potential of the traditional education system and found that it could never be expanded and extended to provide global quality education for all. In its final report, **“Learning to be”(1972)** the Commission suggested *“that education today is facing a critical challenge and that the time has come to overhaul education and .. think it out afresh in its entirety”*. It also *“.. underlined the fact that despite doubts and differing orientations, and whatever the progress or saving might be obtained from changes in the traditional educational system, the very heavy demand for education ... can only be met if instruments derived from modern technology, with its limitless possibilities, are put to use on an adequate scale and with appropriate means.”*

This came down as a bombshell for the global Traditional Education Establishment (TEE), which saw a giant potential threat to its survival and heatedly rejected the Commission's proposals as being utopian and totally unacceptable. **“Learning to be”** was, unfortunately, too far ahead of its time; the learning technology, which was required for improving education development, existed in 1972 only as a vague possibility. TEE branded UNESCO as being politicized and too liberal and influential countries like USA and UK left the institution. Because of this and lack of funds for development projects and research, during the 70s and 80s, UNESCO's leadership and influence on global education started to slowly diminish.

A new actor, the **World Bank (WB)** with big money for education financing and research entered the scene in mid-70s and started gradually to take over UNESCO's role as a leader of

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global education development work. It strongly promoted the traditional education system, despite the fact that new learning technology had developed rapidly in the 80s and the UNESCO recommendations seemed to be increasingly viable for solving education problems.

One of the vital questions for the WB was what criteria for financing education projects should be applied. Attempts to determine the standard “economic rate of return” for financing development projects turned out to be very difficult as far as quantifying the benefits of education. Therefore, for financing education development a “social rate of return” was agreed upon, which in practical terms meant that education development projects never needed to be subjected to strict economic scrutiny or being financially accountable, but financed out of a social need and necessity. This is still in effect and one of the very reasons why education development today is lagging far behind other sectors of the economy in development.

Instead of using economic criteria for development, the education sector now uses a system of international comparative testing to determine the “quality of education” – PISA, TIMSS, etc. Countries take the same test and are graded in relative terms according to the results, which never reveals the absolute and fundamental problems of education. Therefore, for the past 20 years, all global education research and development work has ignored the fundamental and critical education problem caused by an inefficient and obsolete education delivery system built on teacher led classroom teaching.

The regressive period since about 1990 to date

In 1990, The World Bank hosted and paid for the first **World Education Conference in Jomtien, Thailand**, where new goals and strategies for global education development were established for year 2000 and the Conference declared that “the world had decided” that the traditional education delivery system should be continued. The World Bank promised billions of dollars in support and was now firmly established as leaders of global education.

The progressive portion of UNESCO was not satisfied with the outcome of the Jomtien Conference, which had totally ignored the recommendations from “*Learning to be*”. In order to search for new and progressive solutions to the education development problems UNESCO established a second “***International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century***” - **the Delores Commission**. The Commission’s report’ in 1996: “***Learning: The treasure within***” could have greatly contributed to the efforts of modernizing and restructuring the education system. It offered good and workable approaches and new strategies for education development and introduced new, practical and important elements for the design of comprehensive education programs. It suggested an expansion of the learning process to encompass the four “pillars” or modules of a comprehensive basic education program: “Learning to know”, “Learning to do”, “Learning to be”, and “Learning to Live Together” and to “*enable each individual to discover, unearth and enrich his or her creative potential,.. to one that emphasizes the development of a complete person.*” As these proposals never could be accommodated within the traditional education delivery system the TEE managed to marginalize, ignore and disregard even this Commission’s excellent work and proposals.

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It is symptomatic for the decline of education that these two “landmark” UNESCO Commissions reports, which are the only ones addressing the fundamental education problems – the education delivery system and the content and scope for a comprehensive education program - never are cited or referred to in today’s global education research, which only deals with the futile question of how to get more, better, different and well-paid teachers.

Despite the facts that the Jomtien goals were not reached to any extent according to evaluations and that the education situation in the world had rather worsened, the TEE organized a second **World Education Conference in Dakar, Senegal** and there agreed upon new goals and the same strategies for education development up to 2015, still with no other alternative than using the traditional education delivery system.

The World Bank tried independently to find new solutions to the education problem and made an extensive global education review in 2009 – 2010. The results and findings were presented in the **World Bank Education Sector Strategy 2020, “Learning for All.”** In order to show a new initiative, it took up an old UNESCO theme and suggested a major strategic shift from promoting Education for All to Learning for All. This strategic shift was, in principle, well motivated, but not accompanied by any proposals for changes or adjustments to the traditional education system and today (in 2020) nothing of what it proposed has been realized.

All concerned UN organizations and all world governments took part in a thorough global review of the state of education in 2012 - 2014 and UNESCO presented their findings in **The 2015 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR)**. The Report states that the Dakar and UN Millennium goals for education development are “*far from reached*” and education is still in serious crises. The GMR report included recommendations for continued education development without any substantive changes in the traditional education delivery system.

The GMR recommendations were forwarded to a third **World Education Forum in Incheon, Korea**, (May, 2015), which set new goals and strategies for education development up to 2030. The “Incheon Declaration” presents and calls for “*a new vision for education, with bold and innovative actions*” but it does not present proposals or recommendations for changing the traditional education delivery system. On the contrary, all calculations of the “*increased financing need to reach the ambitious goals by 2030*” are based on a continued use of an outdated and inefficient education delivery system.

A sparkle in the education darkness, presenting a new and extraordinary education development possibility was the “International Conference on ICT AND POST-2015 EDUCATION” (May, 2015) organized by the People’s Republic of China in Qingdao. It was follow-on from “Incheon”, with many of the same participants, and it showed that “*Technology offers unprecedented opportunities to reduce the long-existing learning divide*”. “The Qingdao Declaration” presented a modern variation of what UNESCO’s “*Learning to be*” outlined in 1972, but its suggestions and recommendations could not be accommodated within the framework of the limited traditional education system and have been ignored by the TEE.

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After these world conferences, the **The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity** was set up to reinvigorate the case for investing in education. This, the most prominent Commission in education history (www.educationcommission.org) delivered its final report “The Learning Generation” to the UN Secretary-General on the 18th of September 2016. The Report states that “*education systems must develop new and creative approaches to achieving results..*”, but gives no indications of any significant change to the present education delivery system. The Commission misses completely the point that the lack of financing for education is because of nobody in their right economic mind want to invest in a grossly ineffective and obsolete education delivery system, while efficient learning systems built on modern technology like e.g. the Kahn Academy has no problems to attract private investors and financiers (Bill Gates, Google, etc). This Commission has not been able to contribute to anything to solving the global education development problem and is slowly closing without result.

The latest global report dealing with education development is the World Bank’s **WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2018**, which had the theme and the subtitle **Learning to Realize Education’s Promise**. Expectations were high that this report would be able to come up with new proposals for a constructive transformation of education and learning to better respond to the needs of modern society, trade and industry, both in the industrial and the developing world.

WDR 2018 ignored to deal with, present or discuss any of the many excellent possibilities for education development that modern technology presents. It only picks up an old theme about learning, which two previous UNESCO International Commissions’ reports “Learning to be” (1972) and “Learning: The Treasure Within” (1996) have more comprehensively dealt with and even presented proposals for introducing new learning concepts in modern education.

With massive statistics, the WDR 2018 shows that learning still is dismal in our schools, but it fails to present any new and viable ideas of how to tackle the giant global learning problems. It suggests only, in conclusion, three vague and insignificant strategies for improving learning: *First, assess learning to make it a serious goal; Second, act on evidence to make schools work for learning; Third, align actors to make the entire system work for learning.* In a world desperately needing practical and viable solutions for the education problems, WDR 2018 is a massive letdown for global education development.

The only way forward.

During the past 20 years, all global education research, commissions conferences, reports etc. have failed, because the not dealt with the primary, crucial and decisive education problem, which is **the teachers’ limited teaching capacity as regards both time and amount**. This problem has today a solution, presented, inter alia, by the **Khan Academy**, which now is “*providing free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere*” and has an enrollment of about 100 million students in 190 countries. They use “digital technology”, which has a teaching capacity of 24/7 all the year around, as compared to about 700 hours per year for our present

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classroom teachers. With that they can provide each student with an individual, personalized, equal, consistent and first-class tuition and learning support in all knowledge-based subjects and use the whole year for education programs. The cost will be about US\$ 0.4/hour/pupil as compared to about US\$ 8.0 for the same cost in today's basic education school programs. This is presented at www.khanacademy.org and/or www.youtube.com; search "Salman Khan education" for information and inspiration like; "*Let's teach for mastery -- not test scores*"; "*Education Reimagined*" and "*Microsoft CEO Summit Innovation in Education*" with Bill Gates.

Conclusion

The circle is closed. We are now back where we started in 1972 with the first UNESCO Commission report **Learning to be** stating that global education for all can only be developed with the help of "*modern technology, with its limitless possibilities*". This technology, which in 1972 was only a vague possibility, is today fully developed and available everywhere.

Digitalizing all knowledge teaching makes it also possible to increase and improve the content of education and learning to meet the demand of the twenty-first century as expressed in the second UNESCO Commission's report in 1996: **Learning: The treasure within.**

Modern technology and two UNESCO Commissions' report combined makes it possible to provide free, top-quality, comprehensive, full-time and equivalent education and learning for all, anywhere in the world for a total cost that is about half of what we spend for education today. An outline of this is presented in a separate document **An efficient, sustainable and affordable Global Learning System**, which also can be found on the website www.sweducation.info.

Under UNESCO leadership a third **International Commission on Learning in the Digital Age** should be established to investigate, prepare and make recommendations for a new global education development, which will be the greatest in history.