

Changing Education for a Changing World: Internationalizing Education*

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That change is permanent has never been an issue, but how to anticipate, adopt, equip, and re-position to optimize benefits of change is the heart of research. Thus, true to Marshall McLuhan's prophetic foresight, the world, indeed, has become a village where otherwise local events now exert profound global consequences. In this paper, the phenomenon of change in the context of globalization is briefly examined, vis-à-vis some cardinal aspects of philosophical foundations of the theory and practice of education. Consequently, it is recommended that the principle and practice of education should be re-worked, with significant provision for moral (or character) grooming of the young (who are said to be digital citizens) for the preservation of posterity, among others.

Keywords: education, globalization, change, philosophical foundation

Introduction

When Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian sociologist, "prophesied" in 1968 that the new electronic interdependence would recreate the world in the image of a global village, one wonders if he realized the import of his enthusiastic declaration, especially for education. Since then, the world indeed has grown to "shrink" into a village, with erstwhile well-defined boundaries gradually becoming hazier by the season. New inventions and discoveries, with the concomitant improved systems of doing things, expectedly, have significant implications for current practices and methodologies.

The global village image of the world has engendered growing economic, political, and technological synergies that connect individuals, communities, business, and governments across hitherto sacrosanct boundaries.

The Matrix of Change

That change is the only permanent characteristic of life has never been an issue for polemics, more so, in the face of an avalanche of variations in the packaging of people and events. Change can be subtle, almost imperceptible, or loud, with accompanying eye-catching drama. But, however, change comes, it has a penchant for altering existing status.

Robertson (1992), in examining change in the context of globalization, presented a four-stroke concept as

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follows:

(1) **Relativization:** Here, Robertson argued that each unit in the emerging world order takes shape relative to the others around it;

(2) **Emulation:** Although globalization does not create a common culture in which everyone holds the same beliefs and values, it does create a single arena in which participants pursue their goals by deliberate comparison with others, using some common standards;

(3) **Ideas and processes are interpreted and absorbed according to the peculiar point and history of the different “globalizing” groups;**

(4) **Interpretation:** Robertson explained this as the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism. That is, particular ideas (or processes) do not just become universally available and accessible, they become universal.

The broad implication of change, as embedded in the globalization phenomenon from Robertson’s point of view, is that although people will continue to live as citizens of a single nation, they are culturally, materially, morally and physically involved in the lives of people in other countries and climes as never before. Thus, it becomes so easy for “distant” events to have an immediate and significant global impact, blurring, traditional boundaries of private worlds.

Broad Objective of Education

The flurry of events activated by change and globalization has tremendous implication for the principles and practice of education. It is true that units in the emerging world order take shape relative to the others around them. It is equally a fact that globalization has created a single arena in which participants jostle for vantage positions in order to pursue and actualize their goals by deliberate comparison with others. Most significantly, ideas and processes are now interpreted and absorbed by emerging groups according to their peculiar point and historical and cultural identity.

Thus, any proposal to internationalize education must factor in Robertson’s globalization theory. In other words, the theory and practice of education need to be re-calibrated to produce personnel who are empowered to function in the global arena in which they are now required to make productive contributions to the overall well-being of the commonwealth.

Re-examination of the Philosophical Foundations of Education

The nature and character of a structure or system will naturally be a function of its foundation. In this light, it becomes necessary to highlight the thrusts of philosophies that have anchored education principles and methodologies over time:

During the Age of Reason in the 18th century, the anchor belief was that people could improve their lives and society by using their reason, their powers of critical thinking.

The goal of education is moral development; good character rests on knowledge while misconduct results from inadequate education. (Johan Herbert)

Things are entirely what they appear to be, and behind them, there is nothing. (Jean-Paul Sartre)

There is no objective, rational basis for moral decisions. The highest good is for individuals to find their own unique vocations without the aid of universal, objective standards; individual existence, freedom and choice should be emphasized. (Soren Kierkegaard)

Personal experience and acting on one’s own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth. The individual must

decide which situations are to count as moral. (Friedrich Nietzsche)

Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau)

Close examinations of these highlights will reinforce the need to urgently re-define the principles and practice of education to address the gaps for which tsunamic consequences now threaten human existence.

Mindless riots tear through cities of the world, both in developed and developing worlds, leaving in their wake unquantifiable toll on global human and material infrastructures. Hitherto “civilized” communities across the world have erupted into waves of murderous destruction and killings, shocking their leaders into numbness.

The world is gradually coming to terms with the damning consequences of the error of liberalizing education. The much-vaunted confidence in man’s critical thinking, his right of freedom and choice to find his own unique vocation without the aid of universal, objective standards, the teaching that there is no rational basis for moral decision, all have led humanity, and predictably into a culdesac.

Where does civilization go from Nietzsche’s preachment that the individual must be left to decide which situations are to count as moral, where his convictions only are essential in the process of arriving at the truth? David Cameron, prime minister of Britain, described the orgy of violence that swept through parts of United Kingdom as “sheer criminality” which cannot be justified. Is Nietzsche’s doctrine true that understanding of a situation by someone involved in that situation is superior to that of a detached, objective observer? That the looting, murdering mob running loose on the streets of Birmingham, France, Egypt, and other volatile turfs of the world had superior understanding of what they were doing and why than the bemused publics and their security operatives? British prime minister, David Cameron’s response to the mindless riots in his domain was “No!” to this question.

Suggested Direction of Change in Education

There is no doubt that civilization is in a lurch, placing tremendous burden on education to provide stability and guarantee of humanity’s corporate survival.

Masri (1999) suggested that education should be designed as developmental life experiences that have their own social dimension, cultural extension, and spiritual tenor. Although he agreed that the dynamics and changing demand of the labor market require more and more replacement of physical with mental skills, he recommended that a rational and balanced approach can be realized if work activities are assessed both by their material and economic returns on the individual and society on the one hand, and their social and humanizing influences, on the other hand.

According to Dreyfus (2009), quoting Johan Herbert, there is the need to relate the goal of education to moral development. Good character still rests on knowledge. Education—whether residential or long distance, formal, informal or semi-formal—is a critical tool in forging peace across boundaries. As it turned out, in 2001-2010, the International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, without being cynical, witnessed more than its fair share of violence. Education must be harnessed to transform community culture to reflect peace, build, strengthen, and change values based on freedom, tolerance, and justice. There must be an objective commitment to the promotion of respect and tolerance among people of different cultures, religions, and races.

“The Commonwealth of Learning’s Community for Peace” initiative is a positive platform for education to address the gaps in existing educational theories and practice. The process involves the transformation from negative relations, behaviours, attitudes, and structures to those that are positive and

beneficial for the community.

Education needs to be strengthened to promote and sustain social justice. According to Wikipedia, social justice, a concept reportedly coined by Jesuit Luigi Taparelli, refers to the idea of creating a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, and that understands and values human rights, recognizes the dignity of every human being. To this end, education should promote socio-economic equality in the learning environment across boundaries of race, class, ability, language, appearance, gender, etc.. This is why social activists and educators have called for a realignment of educative practices towards a conscious, deliberative practice of engaging society in fostering justice for all.

Educational practice must expunge Jean-Paul Sartre's teaching that things are entirely what they appear to be, and that behind them, there is nothing. This philosophy has done grievous harm to the human psyche, as it has done nothing but encourage anarchy and nihilism. Of course, there is "something". Education must promote respect for "something" if the current retrograde motion of human civilization is to be halted. Too bad for Rousseau, education must create new length of chains to further curtail man's dark tendencies, otherwise, he will self-destruct!

Education should promote character development. According to Okoema (2011), Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, believed that character is the greater ingredient for success than any other attribute. He quoted Lee Kuan Yew, former leader of Singapore as saying that, "Man needs a moral sense of right and wrong, that there is a thing called evil". According to him, many of the social problems in the United States (and indeed across the world) are the result of the erosion of the moral underpinnings of society and the diminution of personal responsibility. Okoema concluded his argument on the note that values are more potent ingredients for national, and by implication, global transformation than natural resources and even human endowments.

It must be noted that no education is complete, if it does not harness the immense spiritual and moral energies of the learner and convert such into a positive force that enhances the preservation of society as a corporate organism (Eshiotse, 2010). Buchner (1971) quoted Immanuel Kant as saying that any effective moral education programme must be anchored on what he called "categorical imperatives", which are: (1) existence of God; (2) immortality of the human soul; and (3) the freedom of man's will.

Kant argued that even if these "truths" cannot be proved from reason, they should be accepted for the good of the individual and society. Little wonder then, that Buchner concludes that although a headless heart may be destructive, it does not have the same potential for destruction as a heartless head. The reality of this is stark.

According to Hilliard (1961), it is difficult to see how an education which leaves out religion and moral training can claim to be doing its job in bringing to the young the main parts of the culture and tradition which are his, as well as legacies from his past. John Perry Barlow, according to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, corroborated this view. He argued that since there is no teacher without a religion, a teacher cannot possibly teach in total independence of his "faith", whether orthodox or esoteric, this "faith" becomes part of the critical transmission system of ideas in a teaching/learning situation.

Therefore, noble and ennobling aspects of cultural beliefs and practices of major and so-called fringe civilizations of the world that promote human dignity, respect for the sanctity of life, dignity of labor, racial/ethnic equality, justice and fair-play must be studied and encrusted in school curricular. If this is done, hopefully, products of the school systems should be able to operate in relative comfort in an atmosphere of acceptance wherever they find themselves in the global arena.

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