EDUCATION AND THE GLOBAL CONCERN

by
Torsten Husén

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Preface

My interests as a researcher in education have since the early 1970s focussed on the school as an institution and its problems in a modern, highly industrialized, society where formal education has become an increasingly important asset in the life career of the individual and the economic development of society at large. I have been studying the problems the school has been facing and how they are related to lack of compatibility with other institutions in society, particularly the family.

The external framework of formal schooling has over the last few decades rapidly changed. It has become considerably prolonged, and the structure of basic schooling has, in a double sense, become comprehensive. It caters to children from all walks of life in a given area and offers all its curricular programs under the same roof. But changes and innovations affecting the framework have by and large left the content of schooling unaffected: the curricula and—above all—the methods of teaching.

Over a long career as a social scientist I have taken particular interest in studying educational change and innovation, how such processes are initiated and the role played by research.

The essays included in this book were chosen for their relevance to the areas of interest mentioned above. The first part of the book aims to 'take stock' by identifying the problems and describing their setting. The second part takes up the role of research and what it can achieve—and not achieve. The emphasis here is on the compatibility between the 'paradigms' and the aims of that research. A distinction is made between policy-oriented research and research aimed at the needs of the classroom practitioners.

The third part discusses strategies of educational reform, in particular their social and political ramifications. Some pedagogical problems are also dealt with in a discussion of what modern educational technology can do.

The readership I have in mind for this book consists, of course, of educators, particularly those who take a special interest in the conditions of their field of work and study. I also hope that the book will serve as a reader for students of education preparing themselves for

the classroom and that it may help to widen their horizon beyond pure pedagogy. The latter being important in its own right, the teacher candidate also needs to view the classroom problems in their broader context, which in our time has not only national but international dimensions as well.

Stockholm, September, 1989 T. HUSÉN

Introduction

THE ESSAYS in this book have all been written since the mid-1980s. But they reflect, as mentioned in the Preface, interests and preoccupations which have absorbed me over a longer period. They also reflect how the perspectives of my scholarly endeavors have widened. Education as a practical pursuit tends to be rather provincial, not to say local. The typical educator in the field is after all faced with children here and now. International co-operation and communication has, however, in a few decades widened his horizon enormously. Typically, comparative education as a clear-cut speciality had its breakthrough around 1960 at a time when most colonial empires disintegrated and new nation-states, for which education played an important role in building national identity, began to emerge.

The present collection reflects the interests and activities of an academic who for more than forty years has been preoccupied by educational research and reform both in his home country, Sweden, and in other parts of the world. Although structural changes which made provision for greater equality of opportunity was the top priority, it was also clear that one had to study in depth how the school curriculum could be reshaped so as to prepare young people for a society in flux. Rapid urbanization, high occupational mobility and a shift towards a highly technological society was bound to have strong repercussions on education.

In 1961 I published a collection of papers, some of which were originally prepared for the 1957 Swedish School Committee, under the title *Schooling in a Changing Society*. The overriding idea behind my thinking about the new curriculum, given the rapid economic and social change, was that specific areas of competence (as defined by school textbooks) were bound to become rapidly obsolete. Therefore, the main emphasis in the curriculum should be on equipping the students with the basic skills for a broad range of largely unforeseen situations. Traditional formal schooling acquired during the early part of life was no longer enough to prepare the individual for coping with the complex and changing exigencies of modern society. We would have to envisage a system of 'lifelong' or 'recurrent' education which would help the individual to meet the demands of adult life better than the limited fare provided by the

basic school. These ideas were later spelled out in my book *The Learning Society* (1974).

In conducting studies leading up to these publications I became increasingly convinced that the school as an institution in modern industrial and high technology society had to be subjected to critical scrutiny. Failures of the school to meet the needs of an increasingly achievement-oriented society were dealt with in my book *The School In Question* (1979). Some years later my thinking about the school in modern society was brought together in *The Learning Society Revisited* (1986).

In the late 1950s—under the auspices of the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg—I became involved in cross-national evaluations of national systems of education. These efforts became institutionalized as the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement* (IEA) whose Chairman I was for sixteen years. At the core of the IEA research stood the quality of education.

Having spent almost my entire career in educational research it was time for me to evaluate its role and conditions, epistemological and others. After the Second World War education was conceived as the main vehicle for economic and social development, particularly in the Third World. Educational planning became a centerpiece in the development strategy. I had the privilege to serve on the Committee which prepared the establishment of the *International Institute for Educational Planning* in Paris and served for a decade as Chairman of its Governing Board. Given the perspective I gained in that role as well as Chairman of IEA, and as Director of the Institute for International Education at the University of Stockholm, I became interested in building research competence, particularly in developing countries in the process of planning and building national systems of education.

In recent years I have studied the role of research as related to policy-making and classroom practices. Some of these studies were reported in *Educational Research and Policy: How Do They Relate?* (1984) co-edited with Maurice Kogan. This relationship is much more problematic than the one between the natural sciences and physical technology. Educational research as a separate field of inquiry developed later than other fields of research. It draws heavily on the social sciences which were already drawing on the paradigms of the natural sciences at the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, it was expected that educational research would be able to bring about improvements in school practices equal to the improvements that the natural sciences, via technology, were contributing to in industry, for instance. The gap between expectations and promises on the one hand and actual performance on the other led to frustrations, not least among the practitioners, and sparked in recent years a debate on the proper role of educational research. This debate in its turn has inspired a controversy on the adequacy of the prevailing

positivist research paradigms in education. An epistemological debate emerged.

A central issue dealt with at some length in this book under the overriding theme of 'Reform' is the problem of 'global learning' which, in a way, is an extension of another, perennial and overriding issue in modern education, that of general versus vocational education. 'Global' is conceived here with a double meaning. It has to do with substantive issues central to mankind and relevant to the entire world. They are in that sense 'global.' But the teaching and learning about these problems as well as about all major issues has to be conducted in a global way, that is to say, by integrating perspectives and specific pieces of knowledge from many different traditional disciplines. 'Global learning' is a way of trying to overcome the fragmentation that comes from the rapid specialization of research as well as of vocational training in all fields.

The development of the content of education has been strongly affected by the intrinsic development of the historically given disciplines which constitute school subjects. Specialization, as well as the enormous output of new knowledge generated by scientific research, has made the cognitive landscape increasingly fragmented, multifaceted and difficult to comprehend. The overriding problem for curriculum planners, not least at undergraduate level, is how to ensure intellectual coherence in what is taught. This modern, complex and highly technological society needs not only specialists for its extremely diversified functions but also 'generalists', people who can 'put it all together'. This is the background for my preoccupation with 'global learning', an expression originally coined by the former Rector of the United Nations University, Soedjatmoko.

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I

Taking Stock

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Observations on a Future-Oriented Education (1986)[5]

Introduction

HAVING DEVOTED half a century to education and educational research, I have tried to 'take stock.'[6] This exercise has been conducted in several essays with a double perspective, both a retrospective and a prospective one. The first essay in the thesis section is an attempt to identify 'milestones' in the development of education since the mid-nineteenth century. This was a period when institutional schooling in the industrial countries became universal, first at the primary and then, much later, at the secondary level. Desperate attempts have, in recent decades, been made in developing countries to universalize primary education against considerable demographic and economic odds. In the rich countries 'continuing' and/or 'recurrent' education became part of the adult life pattern in rapidly changing economies. In trying to cope with the 'enrollment explosion' in the 1960s, high hopes were attached to new educational technologies. But the school is, by its very nature, a highly labor-intensive 'industry' and new technologies have not been labor-saving.

There is a growing realization that the school as an institution today is beset by problems which will become even more difficult tomorrow, problems which have to be conceived and dealt with in the context of society at large. The school is not operating in a vacuum. Problems can

not be resolved solely by bringing about changes in the structure and practice of the school in isolation. They have to be tackled as social problems, not least by bringing other institutions, such as the family, into the picture.

To be young in the modern society is in several respects something fundamentally new. Formal schooling has been prolonged. Preparation for tasks shouldered in working life and to become fully-fledged workers takes more time. There is a period after what was previously regarded as adolescence when young people tend to be 'superfluous.' A new stage in life, 'young adulthood,' has important implications for the educational system.

Striking a proper balance between general and vocational education has been a central and pervasive issue in the debate on reforms of secondary education. The main point in the chapter on this topic is that the best vocational education is a solid general education. The realization of this has, in most countries, led to a postponement of vocation-specific subjects and topics in the school curricula.

Notes

[1]Published in the UNESCO *Courier*, May 1983 (in some 20 languages) pp. 13–18.

[2]Originally presented as a lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1984. An adapted version was published in the February 1985 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* (pp. 398–402) under the title 'The School in the Achievement-Oriented Society: Crisis and Reform'.

[3]Paper prepared for OECD as part of the OECD/CERI project *Transition to Adulthood*. Part of the material was used for Husén and Coleman, *Becoming Adult in a Changing Society* (Paris: OECD 1985). An adapted version has been published in the *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 13:2, 1987, pp. 165–76.

[4]Paper prepared in 1988 for the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) in Berlin.

[5]Adapted from a paper prepared for the Fundación Santillana, Semana Monographica in December 1986. Published by Fundación Santillana in *Los Objetivos de la Educación*, Madrid 1987, pp. 26–31.

[6]The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences invited the author to give a lecture in the series '50 years with science.' It was given in the fall of 1987 and published under the title *Femtio år som utbildningsforskare* (Fifty years as an Educational Researcher) in the Academy series *Documenta*, No. 45, March 1988. Another attempt to take stock is an article in the UNESCO journal *Prospects*: No. 3, 1989 p. 351–360, entitled 'Educational Research at the Crossroads.'

1

Milestones to the Learning Society

WHAT CONSTITUTES a 'milestone', or even a 'revolution', in education is, of course, a matter of judgment. Important institutional changes in education do not occur as abruptly as revolutionary upheavals on the political and social scene. Furthermore, it is not always easy to distinguish lasting milestones from ephemeral fads, such as the so-called new mathematics, and only time can tell one from the other. In education we can, however, in retrospect, at certain points in time, identify sequences of events that together constitute a change that over a long period has had a strong impact on the social fabric.

Looking back over a century and a half it appears to me that one could identify five sets of milestones on the road to the learning society of today. The first was the introduction by the mid-nineteenth century of universal primary schooling in the northern hemisphere, when legislation on mandatory schooling was passed in many countries. This occurred mainly during the period 1815 to 1880. Thus, there was some spread between countries.

The second set of milestones marked the gradual introduction of a common basic school, sometimes referred to as a comprehensive school, catering to students from all walks of life in a given area or community. This occurred well into the twentieth century with the Soviet Union and the United States taking the lead and Western Europe trailing behind with a more class-stratified system, particularly for the age range 10–15.

The third set of milestones could be placed after 1960 and indicates the 'enrollment explosion' at all stages in both the industrialized and non-industrialized world. The fourth set signals massive literacy campaigns in Third World countries and a new conception of adult education under labels such as life-long, permanent or recurrent education. A fifth milestone, finally, is represented by the entry of new technology onto the educational scene, something that happened after 1960.

There were certain socio-economic, ideological and political forces behind the legislation on mandatory schooling (either mandatory attendance or mandatory for the communities to set up schools). Important changes occurred in the role of the family in connection with industrialization and the concomitant urbanization. There is no doubt that the need for children to be cared for while parents worked long hours in the factories gave a strong impetus to the provision of schooling. Typically, in several European countries, in rural areas where the children's labor at home was needed they attended school only part-time, whereas in the urban areas they went to school full-time. Many farmers were by no means enthusiastic about parliamentary decisions forcing them to send their children to school.

Two new educational institutions emerged in industrialized England during the first part of the nineteenth century: the Bell-Lancaster system for providing elementary schooling (by using more advanced students as tutors) on a massive scale with a minimum of adult teachers, and infant schools for children in the age range 2–7.

A Swedish social statistician who went to England in the early 1830s to study the infant schools recorded his observations in a travel report 'Notes from a Journey to England at the End of the Summer 1834'. The infant schools which were run by philanthropic organizations took care of the small children when their parents were away working. They taught the children certain skills, such as very elementary reading and arithmetic. This was, however, not their main aim. In these schools 'children already from the age of two are getting used to attentiveness, order, obedience, reflection and self-initiated activity.'

When in the 1830s child labor was prohibited or limited by law in Britain, children in the age range 7–12 came into focus, and demands for their schooling began to be voiced. The need for custodial care of children in urban areas was in the interest of several parties, such as parents and owners of enterprises. But it would be a serious mistake to believe that this was the main force behind the introduction of universal elementary schooling. The liberal quest for universal suffrage, for democratic participation in the decision-making process both locally and centrally as well as for greater equality of opportunity was also an important motive for establishing a universal elementary school.

During the decade after the Second World War, largely under the prompting of UNESCO, mass literacy teaching became a prime task in Third World countries. In spite of the fact that universal primary education was proclaimed a top priority for educational policy, for instance at the meeting of African Ministers of Education in Addis Ababa in 1960, the most striking feature of educational efforts in the developing countries has been the massive literacy campaigns. They are, with the

exception of the Soviet Union, without any historical precedent in preliterate Europe.

A characteristic of these campaigns was the attempt to integrate literacy with vocational skills with the aim of helping to improve the economic plight in particular of the small and poor farmers. But, again, as was the case in the attempts to make primary schooling universal, the chief impetus was a strong belief in literacy as the backbone of a functioning democracy with the participation of enlightened citizens.

The demand in Europe and North America for a common school for children from all kinds of homes can be traced back to the time when legislation was enacted introducing universal primary schooling for 'the people'. Typically, the elementary school established by law at various points in time in some European countries was for the next century referred to as the 'people's school' (*Volksschule*, *folkskola*).

It was a school that reflected a highly class-stratified society. Different types of schools for the various social strata were in most quarters taken for granted. For a teachers' conference in 1881 a Swedish conservative educator, teaching in the classical *gymnasium*, published a brochure entitled 'What Direction Should a Reform of Our Schools Take?'. The overriding idea was that each of the three main social classes should have the type of school that corresponded to its 'needs.' The general elementary ('people's') school was meant for the 'working classes and the lower classes of artisans.' The grammar school was for the upper class. What was now needed was a third type of school for the middle class of skilled artisans, business men and farmers. The three types of school should run parallel to each other without any organizational connections.

Two years later in deliberate criticism of this a young elementary school teacher, Fridtjuv Berg, who some twenty years later became Minister of Education, published a brochure called 'The Elementary School as the Basic School' in which he advocated a basic school which would cater to children from all walks of life.

Comprehensive versus a stratified and selective education was a major issue in European public policy in the years following the Second World War. The word 'comprehensive' denoted from the outset a secondary school which ideally served all the students from a given area under the same roof and offered all types of program, both academic and vocational. In Europe, with its traditionally segregated school structure, the comprehensive school was advocated as a replacement for the socially and academically selective school. The breakthrough for a comprehensive conception of schooling in Europe came after 1960.

Enrollment statistics in the twentieth century relating to secondary and higher education show certain striking features. In the northern hemisphere, well into the middle of the century, formal education beyond a

minimum (compulsory) primary schooling was the prerogative of a small social élite, although there was a limited flow of academically gifted young people from the lower classes to schools which prepared pupils for the universities as well as to the universities themselves. But by and large the industrialized countries were still what sociologists call ascriptive societies, where social status is more or less determined at birth.

By the mid-twentieth century the enrollment pattern had changed dramatically in both industrialized and non-industrialized countries. Both types of countries experienced what has often been referred to as an 'enrollment explosion.' Since the turn of the century enrollment in post-primary education in most industrialized countries increased in a linear fashion. This had been the case with elementary education in the preceding century. But since 1950 the growth in secondary and higher enrollment in these countries has, to express it in mathematical terms, been exponential. There are countries in which the number of students doubled or even quadrupled in less than ten years. Similar patterns of growth have occurred in Third World countries but they apply there to *all* stages of the educational spectrum.

Equality of opportunity has become a major objective for educational policy in countries all over the world. It is a growing concern as the employment system tends more and more to use formal education as the first criterion of selection among job seekers and as educational achievements increasingly determine social status. The expansion of the number of places in further education has led to an increase in both the absolute and relative number of young people of lower class background who have won access to upper secondary and higher education. It appears that social background plays a less powerful role in educational attainments in non-industrialized than in industrialized countries. This has been an important factor in the expansion of post-primary education in the developing countries.

Many developing countries have experienced an almost explosive increase in secondary school enrollment. The financial implications have been serious for poor countries running schools mainly on public funds and with a population structure dominated by young people.

The social structure of the enrollment has, as indicated above, tended to become more balanced than in the highly industrialized countries, and this in turn has made formal education an even more powerful vehicle of social mobility. In other words, formal education is playing a central role in an increasingly meritocratic society. Educated intelligence tends in our days to become the substitute for social origin and inherited wealth. No wonder, then, that formal education is regarded as an almost endless ladder up which one should try to climb as high as possible. No stage or level of the system tends to have a goal or profile of its own. It is regarded merely as a step to the next level.