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Should Young Professionals be Bothered about the State of Education in their Countries?

*The Indian education system should be drastically changed so as to be structured around critical processes and desired outcomes, argues **Prabhu GUPTARA**, Independent Board Member, Executive Director, Relational Analytics Ltd., Cambridge, Honorary Chairman, Career Innovation Company, Oxford. Instead of rote learning from books, as the system does at present, the focus should lie on challenging individuals to develop skills for modern-day jobs.*

When I was 17 years old, I happened to glance at the first page of a new report on the future of education in India. The report's first sentence was: "The future of India is being shaped in her classrooms".

To me, that was self-evidently and powerfully true. All intelligent people know that their personal future is deeply dependent on the state of their nation and indeed on the condition of the world as a whole. And the fact is that the future of the world is entirely dependent on what happens in education – not only in schools and universities, but more widely nowadays through e-learning and latest developments in IT.

No wonder I have been hooked on education in one sense or another ever since the age of 17. Now I am nearly 70 years old! So what has been the result of my interest in education?

Most substantially, over the years, there have been lectures and publications on different subjects. On education itself, there have been two earlier books "Succeeding as a Student" and "India in the Classroom: Teaching about India in British schools" (both now sadly out of print). Due for publication soon is a collection of essays by various well-known authors covering almost every conceivable aspect of the subject indicated in the book's title, "Where did we go wrong? Reflections on 200 years of modern education in India". Though this book underlines the challenges of education in India, it clearly has implications for all countries. The key issues are:

- The number of seats available in schools (a question of quantity: 287 million adults are illiterate, amounting to 37% of the global total!)
- The quality and the relevance of education offered (India's overall youth unemployment rate has remained stuck above 10 percent for the past decade; 60 percent even of engineering graduates remained unemployed in 2017; and a slightly older (2013) study of 60,000 university graduates in different disciplines found that 47 percent of them were actually unemployable in any skilled occupation!)

New developments in technology are going to compound the challenges for countries such as India: now even relatively underdeveloped countries such as Nepal are able to make their own robots so there will be huge over-supply in the world even of robots – which means that the marketable price for robots will drop – and that, in turn, means that robots will become even more commonplace and will penetrate more deeply into poorer

countries, increasing unemployment even among the most highly educated: in India's most-educated state, Kerala, it was once common for people with a postgraduate degree to find it difficult to find a job even as restaurant dish-washers. Perhaps that is still the situation, I don't know.

What I do know is that, just a few months ago, for 62 lowly posts of office messenger (peon), in the State Police of Uttar Pradesh, which only requires that an applicant have passed her or his Class 5 exam at the age of 11 or so, there were 93,000 applicants, including 50,000 university graduates, 28,000 postgrads, and 3,700 PhDs. That is why, on the basis of fairly exhaustive discussion of such issues going over 200 years, "Where did we go wrong" recommends that the Indian education system should be drastically changed so as to be structured around critical processes and desired outcomes:

Critical Processes

Not encouraging rote learning from books as the system does at present; instead, encouraging, supporting and challenging individuals to develop their individual knowledge, skills and abilities (linguistic, logical, mathematical, musical, artistic, kin-aesthetic, spatial, etc.) through action projects, and not primarily for individual advancement, but primarily for excellence in team-work, as that is the key challenge in modern-day jobs;

Desired Outcomes

- Able to use the latest and most appropriate techniques, methods and models for the purpose of helping actual development at the ground level (homes, energy-use, water supply, agriculture, sewage, environmental issues, efficiency gains, income generation, etc.) as well as at more abstract levels – e.g. for finance or law or policy formulation and implementation (including being able to explain why existing good policies are not implemented locally, and then initiating or participating in actions to ensure that the policies work in their own context and preferably in a wider context);
- Being able to articulate and discuss the oppressive structures that hold back our own families and communities, as well as the nation as a whole, in the context of the global challenges that now face humanity – i.e. school graduates being able to demonstrate that they are fully freed from the hold of ideas, values and practices that mire India in the past: not only caste-based discrimination but also the basis for such discrimination, which is notions such as human reincarnation, cyclicity of time, and the illusory nature of personality, morality and reality;
- Seeking the welfare not only of her or his own self and family and clan and caste, but also of "their own" wider community and chosen profession (whether in or business or in civil society or in government), both in the country, and in the world;
- Able and willing to challenge ideologies, structures, values and practices that hold back the country and the world, in order to help both to progress

Achieving the transition to such a transformative system of education is a huge challenge in any community and society, but it is especially so in India, given our ponderously slow culture.

Meanwhile, to make up for the shortcomings of the system, is there anything that individuals can do?

It was to answer that question that I was invited to write a column in an Indian magazine, and the publisher (with my consent) compiled a selection from those columns in order to publish that under the title "[Make the Best of Your Life](#)" (letters to Indian youth on education, life skills and careers). Perhaps it might interest you to read the book or give it to someone as a present. Whether or not that book interests you, I hope you are interested in how to make education around the globe suit the needs of our century. Do comment and engage with that debate, because that is what is shaping and will shape the future of our world.

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