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Educating

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Key points:

- Education can be defined as the steering of learning towards particular desirable ends, which are defined differently in different societies, cultures and contexts.
- Sociology of education examines the politics of knowledge production focusing on social, cultural and historical processes that frame the relationship between education and society.
- Schooling has been used in different ways often to reproduce - and sometimes to challenge - social hierarchies, and regularly as a means of subjugation and oppression, but also contestation, liberation and/or social transformation.
- Whoever decides the curriculum (i.e. the knowledge of most worth to be reproduced in schools) decides the types of identities, ideologies and relations of power that will be reproduced in the future.
- The present day international market logic of better value human capital generates a demand for education to be economically rationalized in terms of cost effectiveness, efficiency and international competitiveness.

If learning is defined as the creative and continuous process of producing meaning and creating the world around us, education is the steering of learning towards particular desirable ends, which are defined differently in different societies, cultures and contexts. Native American scholar Gregory Cajete (2000) explains how different ideas of education and educational strategies are connected to a culture's guiding vision and narrative of itself. He affirms that "throughout history human societies have attempted to guide, facilitate, and even coerce the instinct for learning towards socially defined ends" (25). He defines education as the complex of activities societies use to steer learning to maintain their survival and to express their unique cultural ideals. He states that such ideals reflect what a culture values in terms of qualities and behaviours to be instilled in its members.

Therefore, education, seen as a process of life-long and life-wide learning can take different forms in different cultural contexts. Some propose a key distinction between education and 'schooling' (see for example LaFrance 1994). They highlight that the association of the word education with classrooms with students sitting in desks and teachers in front of them is a historical and problematic phenomena, rather than a natural and neutral event. Another important distinction in this field is between psychological and sociological approaches to education. Psychological approaches emphasize different aspects of individual and collective learning, cognition, and activity, as well as the improvement of instructional design (see for example Piaget 1972; Vygotsky 1978; Mezirow 1990; Lave and Wenger 1991; Nardi 1996; Shon 1990; Kolb and Kolb 2001; Landis, Bennett and Bennett 2003). Sociological approaches emphasize the politics of knowledge production focusing on social, cultural and historical processes that frame the relationship between education and society. In this chapter, which is based on a sociological approach, we affirm that

the connections between mass public schooling, the development of Nation States and globalization are key in understanding contemporary discussions in the field of education today.

National education systems emerged as a response to demands generated primarily in two key historical contexts: the requirements for a workforce with standardised skills in the context of the industrial revolution; and the need for the production of national identities in the context of international relations framed by European expansionist colonialism and internal wars. These events were themselves framed by parallel historical processes such as the Reformation, the emergence of capitalist economies of scale, and the Enlightenment's tenets and ideals (e.g. universal reason, Cartesian subject, Christian work ethic, property ownership, etc.), all of these contributed in different and competing ways to the construction of mass schooling as we know today, including the notion that it should be paid for by the public sector and be free to students at the point of delivery.

It is also important to highlight that, on the one hand, the organization, management and aims of schooling have been largely built upon a model inspired by factories, which came to be known as a 'Fordist model' with reference to the manufacture of cars (see Callahan 1962). Therefore, the segmentation of knowledge, the distribution of work, and the control of quality have historically been organized in schools based on the idea of factory production lines. Thus, students have been grouped according to age and sorted in relation to ability, knowledge has been split into disciplines, the environment, time, and relations of authority have been organized accordingly, and the resulting product of education has been judged in relation to standard 'market' criteria. On the other hand, the influence of the Enlightenment and the Reformation also meant that schools were perceived as a means for national elites to define and shape national identities, to manage social order and to steer social and economic progress. As Roger Dale (2007,296) explains:

Education may be seen to represent the quintessence of the central claim of modernity – that humanity was capable of understanding the social world in the same ways as it did the physical world; and, moreover, was as capable of controlling and changing it on the basis of that knowledge as physical science had shown itself to be in respect of the natural world. We can see this in a number of ways. For instance, the formal and systematic provision of 'education' is the key means through which such pre-modern features of social life as the allocation of privilege on the basis of one's father's place in the social order – what is known as ascription – could be replaced by a system of allocation of status on the basis of individual achievement. People's fate would no longer be determined at birth. Education offered the means of breaking the tight link between social origins and social destinations. At the same time, it promised to liberate each individual's full potential, and to make available to all the knowledge of most worth.

However, social aspirations and concepts such as the 'knowledge of most worth' have always been highly contested. As the global context shifted as a result of world wars, modernisation, and changes in economic relations, ideas about education have been reproduced, challenged and re-articulated in different ways in different contexts.

Education and power relations

In this sense, it is important to emphasise that during colonial times, (and today, in different ways), educational ideals have been defined differently in societies at different sides of the colonial or imperial divide (see for example Spring 1973; Willinsky 1998; Rizvi and Lingard 2011): between those (mostly in the global North) who can internationally define and control the rules and laws of trade, and territories, the

allocation of resources, the production of knowledge, and the dissemination of meaning (what counts as good, ideal, normal and abnormal); and those (mostly in the global South) who are forced to accept (and also choose to contest) relations of dominance, subordination and territorial occupation. Schooling has been used in different ways often to reproduce - and sometimes to challenge - social hierarchies, and regularly as a means of subjugation and oppression, but also contestation, liberation and/or social transformation.

The indigenous residential schools in Australia and Canada are good examples of how schooling has been violently grounded in unequal colonial and economic relations imposed through cognitive imperialism (Battiste & Henderson 2000), and how it has been used to eliminate local languages and forms of knowledge (Dasen and Akkari 2008; Pennycook 2010; Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh 2011). A famous quote by Thomas Macaulay in the minute on Indian Education delivered in 1835, also illustrates how colonial administrations have used education to support and enable different forms of colonialism:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (1835, 729).

The contemporary legacy of these types of education are widespread educational practices that construct cultural difference of colonized and marginalized people as problems, deficits or pathologies that needed to be eliminated through education itself (see for example Valencia 1997; Bishop and Mazawi 2005, Coloma 2009, Andreotti 2011).

In education, whoever decides the curriculum (i.e. the knowledge of most worth to be reproduced in schools) decides the types of identities, ideologies and relations of power that will be reproduced in the future. Therefore, education is always considered highly political, but the contested nature of this politics and the politics itself are rarely acknowledged or discussed in official policies. The questions: What counts as knowledge? And whose knowledge counts? are only addressed in specific fields of educational inquiry such as sociology of education, critical curriculum studies, ethnic studies or anti-racist education, to cite a few. Konai Thaman, UNESCO chair of culture and teacher education (a professor at the University of the South Pacific) summarizes how colonial patterns still at work today make questions about knowledge often difficult to address in international conversations as one form of knowledge and one type of schooling are perceived to be universal. She observes that these forms of knowledge and schooling are transferred from the North to the South in international interventions through strategies connected with human resource development, capacity building, human rights, educational reform, democracy and so on, with several unexamined implications. She states:

People who participate in these interventions rarely ask: How do people in this community, this place, conceptualise wisdom, learning and knowledge? Nor do they wonder if the values inherent in and propagated by their agendas are shared by the majority of people whose lives are meant to be improved as a result of their intervention. Few even realise the ideological and philosophical conflicts associated with differing perceptions of championed ideas, leaving many communities confused and, in some cases, angry. In international forums I have often felt obliged to ensure that different [knowledges], especially those of indigenous peoples, are included in discussions because

of the continuing impact that these forums have on our future development. In the context of considering [...] instruments such as the Millennium Development Goals, Education For All or Education for Sustainable Development for example, some important questions are still rarely asked such as: What development? What education for all? What and whose sustainable development? Whose human rights? Good governance for whom? And, most importantly, what and whose values underpin the conversations that we are involved in? These norms and rules of global engagement in education are often defined by experts in so called developed countries. They reflect the cultures of the people who make the decisions. They emphasize individual rights at the expense of collective rights, and they promote an individual-centred view of the world rather than a relational view of the world. And what do you get from such an education? The idea that wealth equals material accumulation rather than the enhancement of social relationships. (Thaman, 2008,3)

Thaman's critique is echoed by many educators and academics internationally, however, these critiques seldom affect decisions in formal contexts of governance. On the other hand, it is important to understand how education has also historically been reclaimed in academia and in schools as a space of dissent and site of contestation.

Critical influences: thinking education differently

In the last two centuries (and before) academics in universities and teachers in schools and communities have opened possibilities for critical and alternative thinking in relation to schooling and education in general. Some have left legacies that have made it possible for educational research and practice to encompass plural, critical, creative and alternative orientations today. We very briefly refer to the works of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Jiddu Krishnamurty and a few others in this section to offer a glimpse of past and contemporary contributions to forms of thinking that have pushed the boundaries of what is possible in education. These educationalists from the North and South, conditioned by their cultural, social and historical positions, have contested prevalent ideas of education and schooling and made important contributions towards the diversification of educational ideals.

John Dewey (October 20, 1859 – June 1, 1952) was an American philosopher of education who argued that education should give children real-life and guided relevant experiences in community with a view to enable them to learn to participate in and contribute to democratic societies. He stated that it was impossible to prepare a child for a prescribed future because no one knows what this future will look like, therefore, preparing for the future meant equipping children to have command of their capacities to think and act in society, starting from the child's interests and experiences within their social contexts. Dewey believe that for education to be effective, it could not privilege individuals over societies or societies over individuals:

I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests, and habits. It must be controlled at every point by reference to these same considerations. These powers, interests, and habits must be continually interpreted - we must know what they mean. They must be translated into terms of their social equivalents - into terms of what they are capable of in the way of social service. (1897:77)

Dewey's ideas became associated with the 'progressive education movement' (see Dewey 1897; Nearing and Kohl 2007), experiential education (see Dewey 1938; Green 2000), pragmatist strands of educational philosophy and inquiry (see Dewey 1916; Lipman 2003, Biesta and Burbules 2004), amongst other orientations.

Paulo Freire (September 19, 1921 – May 2, 1997) was a Brazilian educator who challenged the idea of education as a 'banking system' where students are de-humanized and viewed as empty vessels in which to deposit the knowledge identified by the dominant class. Influenced by liberation theology, he proposed that education should serve as liberation from oppression for disadvantaged communities. In his most popular book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) he affirmed that education is never neutral and suggested that, as an educator, one is either on the side of oppressors or on the side of the oppressed:

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (1972:13)

Freire believed oppressed people should be the agents of their own liberation. In his campaigns for adult education, he combined alphabetic and political literacy to enable illiterate adult learners to 'read the word and the world', creating meaning about and acting on their own reality rather than conforming to what was imposed as reality by oppressive ruling elites. He championed dialogue in the learning process where students and teachers learn together and from each other (his later work focuses more on dialogue in general, see Freire 2002). His ideas have had an enormous impact within and beyond education, especially in adult and community education, literacies and the area of 'critical pedagogy' (see for example hooks 1994, Freire, Macedo and Giroux 1985; Darder 2002; McLaren 2006; Kincheloe 2008).

Jiddu Krishnamurty (May 12, 1895 – February 17, 1986) was born in India and founded a number of schools worldwide based on a holistic outlook of the world and of humanity which rejects dualism and sectarianisms of nationality, class, ethnicity or religious intolerance. He argued that world crises, including those related to war and poverty, stem from the ways people have been conditioned to think in self-centered and dogmatic ways, creating a world that is deeply divided and where people feel justified to kill each other for believing in different things. Krishnamurty advocated a form of education that could address a crisis of the intellect caused by individualism by shifting the focus away from thought itself. From his perspective education should be about helping students to be and feel alive and present by being connected to their inner selves, to other people, to their environments and to the world at large through practices that included stillness, contemplation and meditation.

Looking at the historical process, the appalling travesty of peace, one must have ask oneself what life is all about. There is the enslaving of whole masses of people; there is corruption and talk of democracy; religions have failed, only superstitions remain. There is the dead weight of tradition, the innumerable gurus, soothsayers, monks, astrologers. There is poverty, degradation, the squalor of existence. And there is also a sense of deep despair. So, seeing this immense suffering, what is our answer to it all?[...]How can one bring about a good mind, a mind that sees all these correlations, not only at the superficial level but a mind that can penetrate inwardly? It seems to me that the problem of education is to see whether it is possible to cultivate an intelligence which is not the result of influence, an intelligence which is not the learning of certain techniques and the

earning of a livelihood. They are part of education but surely they are not the only function of education? Now how do you educate a child so that he is able to face life and not merely conform to the established patterns of society, to certain modes of conduct? So that he can go much further, deeper into the whole problem of existence? (1977, 128)

Krishnamurty's ideas offer a counter point to common beliefs in education shaped by industrialization that focuses solely on individual reasoning as the basis for agency. The schools he founded are one example of alternative forms of education. (for other examples including home schooling, un-schooling, de-schooling, Waldorf schools, Steiner, Montessori and Quaker schools, see Martin, 2002 and Woods & Woods 2009).

Contemporary examples of female scholars who have had an impact in dissenting educational thinking and practices include: Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Marie Battiste (2000) on indigenous education, bell hooks (2009) on African-American feminism in education, Maxine Green (2000) on the role of the arts in education, amongst many others. An increasing number of educational scholars have focused on multiculturalism, anti-racism and the needs of diverse learners in formal education, these include Jim Cummins (2000), James Banks (2001), George Dei and Agnes Calliste (2002), Ofelia Garcia (2008), Ladson-Billings (2009), Sonia Nieto (2009), Christine Sleeter and Steven May (2010), Crain Soudien (2012), amongst others. Post-structuralist, post-modernist and psychoanalytic influences (i.e. discursive approaches highlighting relationships between knowledge/power, subjectivities and otherness) can be found in the works of Patricia Lather (1991), Ian Stronach and Maggie McLure (1997), Elizabeth Elseworth (1997), Megan Boler (1999), Michael Peters and Nicholas Burbules (2004), Michalinos Zembylas (2005), Thomas Popkewitz (2007), William Pinar (2009), Deborah Britzman (2009), Sharon Todd (2009) and Gert Biesta (2011), to cite a few.

Recent developments

More recently and as a consequence of globalisation, the discourse of 'knowledge societies' has dominated educational debates around the globe. Powerful economic transnational institutions, like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, have defined education as an investment to be made by countries with expected and predictable returns in terms of national economic growth represented by a country's 'human capital' (see Becker 1994; Odden 2011) – in other words people who will have the aspirations and competencies to live and work in global fast-changing economies and who will be able to increase the economic competitiveness of their countries. The argument is that globalisation (often defined as the advance and expansion of technology and of neoliberal capitalism) has shifted how societies, economies, knowledge, learning, personal identities and relationships operate. From this perspective, people in the global North no longer live in industrial societies with strong national identities and economies of scale dependent on factories and extraction, but on information societies with more fluid and unstable economies of scope based on the provision of services, which do not promise the welfare securities of the previous century. Therefore, education and schooling are seen as the mechanism to prepare workers for this new understanding of reality and to convey the message that each individual is responsible for the deficit in their market value (i.e. human capital) and therefore inequalities are not a problem of the social structure, but of individuals themselves, who should seek more education as a cure for their deficit (Hickling-Hudson, 2002).

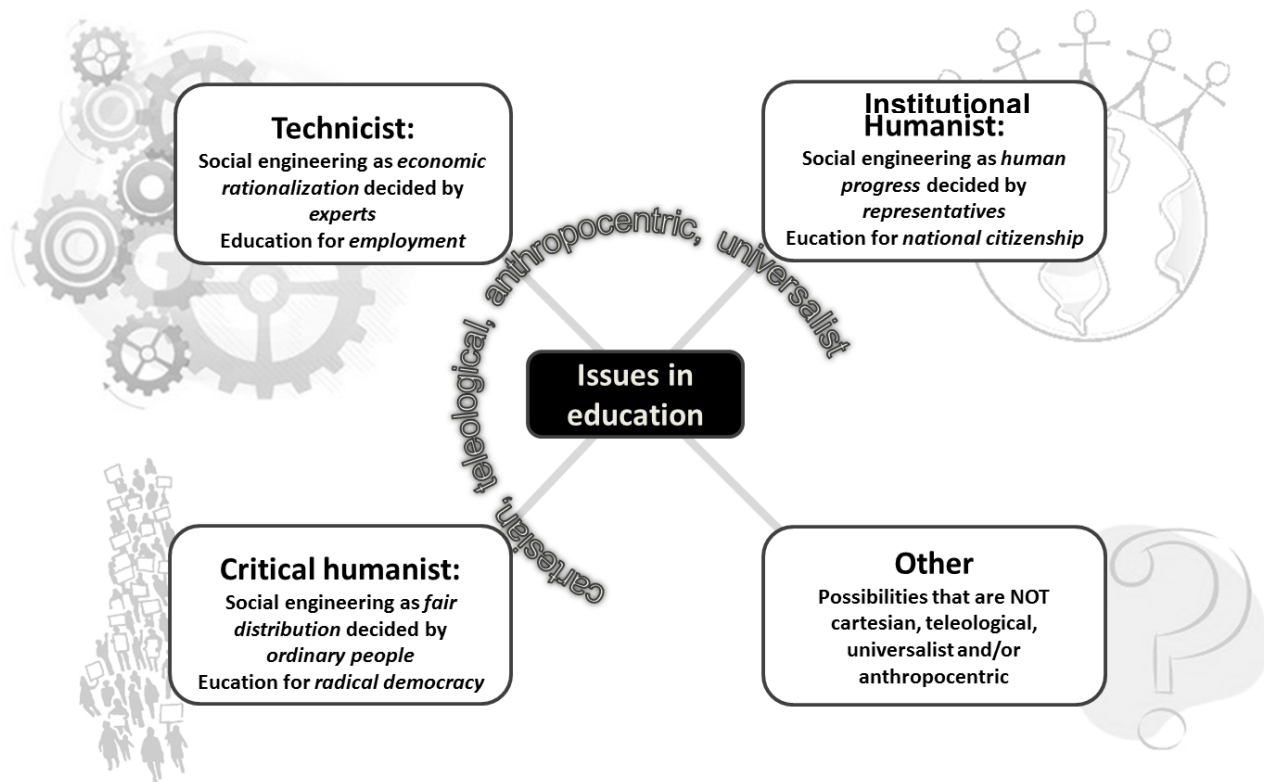
This international market logic of better value human capital generates a demand for education to be economically rationalized in terms of cost effectiveness, efficiency and international competitiveness. Therefore, different international evaluation measurements have been created to compare and rank

national educational systems against each other in an attempt to predict the returns of investments in education. The PISA instrument is arguably the most famous amongst those (see OECD 2009; Salbergh 2011). This thinking has also generated a rush towards standardisation and comparability of educational credentials, especially in higher education, which can be illustrated by the 'Bologna process' (see European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005). In terms of North-South relations, this way of thinking creates an interesting phenomenon: in the global North the emphasis of educational reform is placed on life-long learning, creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and internationalization, while policies of aid for international development of the global South focus and restrict investments to basic education in poorer countries, which reproduces historical inequalities in terms of possibilities for economic development. Several scholars have challenged these rapidly advancing trends in educational policy, including the Pisa instrument) from different philosophical angles (Roberts and Peters 2008; Dale and Robertson 2009; Olssen 2009; Pereyra, Kotthoff and Cowen 2011; Rizvi 2011; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen Segerholm, Simola 2011; Ball 2012), which attests to the inherent complexity of the terrain of education as a discipline, particularly at this point in time.

Mapping configurations of thinking about society, education and social relations

In our attempt to address the complexity of education as an academic discipline and as a practice, we would like to conclude this chapter with a mapping exercise. We propose a simple conceptual map that can offer glimpses of the multiple voices and trends in educational debates and their imaginaries for social change. Our map suggests a heuristic (i.e. tentative) distinction between four different and inter-related *configurations of thinking* about the relationship between education, Nation States and social relations: technician, institutional humanist, critical humanist and 'other' configurations of thinking (see Figure 1). As an educational exercise, we do not encourage readers to choose the best of these four configurations, but to understand the social, cultural and historical origins and ethical, political and pedagogical implications of each perspective applied to the understanding of education itself in a specific context. In our heuristic map, the technician, institutional humanist and critical humanist configurations of thinking are concerned with social change conceptualized as 'social engineering'. Each configuration of thinking offers different interpretations of the role of education and individuals in society, as well as engagements with other cultures.

Figure 1: Configurations of thinking



The technicist configuration of thinking frames *social engineering as economic rationalization decided by experts*. This configuration can be seen at work in educational reforms concerned with the creation of human capital for national economic growth in knowledge societies. As mentioned before, from this perspective education is perceived as a way to maximise the performance of individuals in global markets driven by services and innovation, in order to improve their employability or entrepreneurial capacity with a view to contribute to their country's competitiveness in global economies. Economic growth is associated with the acquisition and accumulation of universal knowledge (in contrast, for example, to the explanation that economic growth is based on hegemonic control of means of production) and poverty is defined as an individual or a country's deficit of knowledge, competencies and skills to participate in the global economy. The rationale for education is presented as a business case, as an individual responsibility of lifelong learning and adaptation to ever-changing economic contexts. From this perspective, social responsibility involves the export of expertise from those heading the way in terms of economic development to those lagging behind. Engagements with other cultures are defined in relation to national interests, such as the protection of national labour markets, the expansion of consumer markets, and the perceived threat of unwanted immigration, creating a need for controlled and market oriented internationalization based on nationally defined objectives.

A configuration of thinking based on institutional humanism frames social engineering as *human progress decided by national representatives*. From this perspective, education serves as enculturation into a national culture defined by its political or intellectual representatives, as well as an international culture perceived as an encounter between nationally defined groups of individuals primarily concerned with a combination of individual, national and humanitarian interests. What human progress looks like is decided by national representatives in supranational governance institutions like the United Nations, through a process of international consensus on key universal aims to be delivered by Nation States, generally focusing on human rights and substantial freedoms. From this perspective, education should disseminate

the international consensus on universal human progress defined in terms of access to education, healthcare, democracy and economic development. In this sense, obstacles to human progress become the focus of government agreed targets (such as the Millennium Development Goals), campaigns (like Education for All), and other charitable and humanitarian interventions which generally define help as the moral responsibility of those who are ahead in terms of international development. Poverty is explained as a deficit in terms of human progress, thus education becomes a vehicle for poverty eradication through partnerships between donors/dispensers and receivers of aid, knowledge, education, resources (e.g. books, computers, etc.), technical assistance, human rights, or volunteer labour. From this perspective, education is a means to prepare world leaders to bring order and progress for all (generally through education itself). Engagements with difference are also defined in national or ethnic terms: global learners are encouraged to acquire knowledge about different cultures/nationalities, including different perspectives, in order to be able to work with diverse populations towards common/consensual goals (predefined by national or supranational governance institutions). Therefore, different perspectives and critical engagement are welcome within pre-defined frameworks (i.e. as long as there is acceptance of human rights, specific ideas of development, progress, governance, etc.).

A critical humanist configuration of thinking frames *social engineering as fair distribution done by ordinary people* (rather than experts or representatives). This perspective is based on a critique of both technicist and humanist configurations of thinking highlighting injustices and inequalities created or maintained by their ideals and means of implementation. In terms of State governance, this perspective emphasizes the complicity of initiatives based on economic or humanist ideals in the creation and maintenance of poverty and marginalization in order to sustain exponential compound economic growth and improvements in quality of life that benefit only small sections of the world population. A critical humanist perspective also criticizes the primacy of economic growth imperatives in Nation State agendas, as well as the erosion of autonomy and accountability of governments to their own populations due to lobbying and increasingly closer relationships with corporations. Some critical humanists attempt to expand the notion of consensual human progress to include the rights of those who have historically been marginalised working against patriarchy, sexism, class divisions, racism and hetero-normativity (e.g. approaches grounded on critical pedagogy). Others claim that the consensus on human progress, based on modern development, is manufactured by elites and imposed around the world as a form of imperialism that eliminates other conceptualizations and possibilities of progress and development (e.g. discursive approaches). Education, from this perspective, is concerned with the transformation of society and the creation of a new social order more inclusive of those who have been silenced or exploited by the current dominant system - it involves an emphasis on critical social analyses of unequal power relations, distributions of labour and wealth and the politics of representation and knowledge production. Education, therefore, is about the creation of a critical mass of people who could see and imagine beyond the limitations and oppression of the current system in order to bring a different reality into being. Engagement with difference involves listening to and empowering those who have been marginalised and insisting on the need for spaces of dissent where other alternatives can emerge. The World Social Forum, the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the occupation of the Syntagma square in Athens are examples of initiatives based on critical humanism in civil society. Several educational initiatives inspired by anti-colonial, feminist and anti-oppressive movements since the 60s also enact critical humanist ideals.

Through education in contemporary metropolitan and industrialised societies people are exposed to different degrees to the three configurations of thinking described so far. The common theme of social change as social engineering in the three configurations is also not a coincidence. The technicist,

institutional humanist and critical humanist perspectives in our heuristic map can be traced to common roots in the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the Reformation, European colonialism and resistance to colonialism, and, particularly, the European Enlightenment. They present different interpretations of key Enlightenment tenets and share specific ideals of being, thinking and relating: the Cartesian subject (self-conscious of himself and splitting minds from bodies), universal reasoning (based on the idea of only one possible rationality), teleological thinking (focusing on a foreseeable end goal), dialectical modes of engagement (based on hierarchical binaries and the elimination of difference), and anthropocentrism (privileging human beings). We propose that these basic tenets should not be seen as all good or all bad, but as historically situated, and potentially restrictive if *universalised as a single story* through social, political or educational projects, as they prevent the imagination of other possibilities. Since our education has constructed our ideas of what is good, ideal and normal, it is important to acknowledge our constitutive blindness to other forms of seeing, knowing and being in the world that do not fit what we can recognize through the frames of references we have become used to.

Therefore, our fourth configuration of thinking is introduced as a question mark in the form of an absence – a sanctioned ignorance - that is very difficult to address without looking first at our schooled selves, our ways of being, speaking, listening, knowing, relating and seeing. If we have been over-exposed to and over-socialized in specific European Enlightenment ideals, and if we need to amplify our constellations of meaning, this starts with an acknowledgement of our own inadequacy to even recognize other possibilities – our epistemic blindness (see Souza Santos 2007; Andreotti 2011; Andreotti and Souza 2011). This blindness prevents us from listening to possibilities that, for example, are not framed by Cartesian, teleological, universal, dialectical or anthropocentric reasoning, the essential categories we have learned and used to define reality if we were educated through Western-style schooling. Therefore, in order to learn to listen to, learn from and/or work with other peoples and knowledges, we would first need to learn to unlearn and to work without the guarantees promised by the ideals of social engineering. In this sense the education of those who have been previously schooled should aim to support unlearning, learning to learn and learning to work without guarantees (Souza and Andreotti 2009).

The attempt to understand and address educational challenges, such as curriculum reform in a specific country, or whether a school is needed in a specific community, through these four configurations of thinking may point to many of the difficulties and dilemmas in educational conversations past, present and future. The exercise of comparing and contrasting these different perspectives also illustrates that, if education has the potential to bring people together to address questions of justice and inequality and to open different possibilities for collective futures, equipping people to live with the complexity, plurality and uncertainty of the world seems to be an important first step in that direction.

Further Reading:

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Todd, Sharon. 2009. *Toward an imperfect education: Facing humanity, rethinking cosmopolitanism*. London: Paradigm.

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Case Studies

Case study one: what is education for and who decides?

A broader definition of education encompasses all processes of learning people go through in their lifetimes – including the learning that does not occur in institutions, for example the learning that happens in people’s interactions with other people and with their environments. However a good number of people associate education exclusively with schools. But the very idea of a school (as we know it) is a relatively contemporary invention that was created to meet the demands of the industrial revolution. It then also became an important tool for colonial rule and marketing during colonialism. From that time onwards schools gained an unprecedented power – the power to shape society. Whoever decides the curriculum defines how identities, allegiances, values, aspirations, cultures, nations and social relations are shaped. From this perspective, discussions and decisions about the school and the curriculum relate to governance, the distribution of resources and the exercise of power and control over populations. That is why many people say that schooling (or education) is always a political issue.

This concept of education (as schooling) has been used as a banner in many ways: as a solution to all evils or as the cause of all problems. But, what education/schooling is for has always been a matter of debate. Some people see schooling as a way of preparing economic units (people) to produce economic growth (for their Nation). Some see this kind of schooling as a tool of cultural repression and social manipulation that propagates urban consumerist materialist ideals and eliminates other possibilities. Some defend the idea that schooling should aim to liberate people from oppression. Some think that schooling should prepare individuals for a happy life according to their choice. Some defend that it should prepare individuals for life in a specific community. Some say education should prepare people to address inequalities. Others defend the idea that schooling (not learning) is damaging to people and should be abolished.

- Who should education and/or schooling be primarily accountable to – the individual him/herself or society as a whole? Why?
- Who should be involved in the decision making process about the type of education and/or schooling for a specific community?
- Are there any groups in your country who reject the mainstream educational system? If so, what are their justifications?

Case study two: the PISA international study

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) designed an international study to evaluate education systems worldwide by assessing the knowledge and skills of learners near the end of compulsory education in ‘principal industrialized countries’ (OECD, 2012). The study is called PISA: ‘Programme for International Student Assessment’ and it tests students in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy, as well as problem solving skills. PISA claims to measure whether students have acquired essential knowledge and skills for full participation in society, whether they are prepared to face future challenges, whether they can analyze and communicate effectively, and whether they have the capacity to continue learning throughout life. . Every 3 years, since 2000, the OECD produces a list of countries ranked by the results of the survey. The higher a country is ranked, the better its educational system is perceived to be. The

comparative scores often spark intense debates when reports are released, especially when powerful countries are repeatedly ranked low in the study (e.g. the USA and Germany).

For the first three waves of the study (2000, 2003 and 2006), Finland's educational system was ranked first. The results were surprising because Finland has educational policies that do not follow international trends: all education is free, Finnish teachers are well regarded in society and have a great deal of professional autonomy, and students who are not doing well have easy access to support. On the other hand, Finland is also a small and fairly homogenous country where there is historically a high level of social consensus around social norms and the value of education. In the 2009 PISA report Finland was ranked 3rd, after China (Shanghai) and Korea, and followed by China (Hong Kong) and Singapore. The PISA report has been used by governments internationally as a basis for directions in terms of educational investment and reform.

- What are the knowledge and skills necessary for full participation in society? How do we know that? And who should decide?
- What are the reasons and implications of trying to impose a standardized curriculum and qualifications worldwide?
- Given the results in 2009, what could the first four contexts (Shanghai, Korea, Finland, and Hong Kong) have in common that could explain their success? Do you think the survey results can predict whether learners in these countries are better prepared to face future challenges than learners in other countries?

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