

Cost of Past Rationales for the Future Support of Education

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As someone who has been involved in the concerns about education for almost three decades, I find enough experimentation, goodwill, and practicalities have passed. There is need to pause and consider the costs for actions taken in providing financial support of education. For the purpose of this paper, education is restricted to public education from kindergarten (normally age 5) to high school (normally grade 12). The costs that I will direct your attention to are not the dollars and cents. This monetary measure of reflection is useful in terms of the economics of education but not as helpful in other dimensions of consideration. These other dimensions can be found to be the basis on which dollars and cents are eventually allocated. Consequently, it is essential for the non-monetary costs to the allocation process to be understood.

Education serves the purpose of opening the minds of youths to appreciate the circumstances of society (including culture, communication, politics), to develop the ability to think logically and abstractly, and to use one's abilities and skills to make a positive contribution. These purposes implicitly puts the youth in the active as opposed to passive role of understanding and even challenging the whys behind the way society (both non-business and business sectors) functions. Although these purposes are generally echoed by the education systems, education systems, at times, have served the echo of a more conflicting purpose. This discerning echo is one of indoctrination of a particular belief. Here, questioning of the belief is suppressed within the individual being educated. This indoctrination is often associated solely with religious belief but it has been associated with corporate belief (although this latter association has been less explicitly acknowledged). But, for the most part, the support of education has been provided to enable youths to grow towards their potential. This support is exemplified in the financial structures that are put into place.

The financial objective for the generation of revenue and their redistribution to the education system is in essence the same no matter which countries are our focus. The objective is to remove inequality of educational opportunity. The strategies adopted have demonstrated successes and failures. The successes have been celebrated but they also have caused pauses of reflection. The failures often have been associated with accusatory finger pointing.

Judgments in all instances have been based on a combination of basic values and political orientation. In terms of basic values, they can be categorized as self-interest, general social, democratic, and economic. *Self-interest values* reflect a utilitarian social philosophy. Here it is believed that individuals are motivated entirely by their own financial interests or the economics of the group they identify with. Often the economics are dealt with through action that increases the individuals' power base. The power strategies are frequently cloaked by seemingly neutral policies or rhetoric. *General social values* are values that are commonly held regardless of ideological, philosophical, or religious commitments. Values pertain to order and individualism. Order in the sense that all individuals want and need to live in an environment that is relatively safe. In terms of education, a high value is placed on orderly schools. Individualism has two dimensions -- utilitarian and expressive. Utilitarian refers to the belief that people can and should take the initiative to advance their own economic success at the expense of other pursuits such as community involvement. Expressive in many ways is a reaction against the utilitarian emphasis on one's economic interests. Instead, it stresses the deeper cultivation of the self and the freedom to express that self and

feelings with minimal restraint from social conventions. *Democratic values* are complex and often contradictory. In essence these values are imbedded on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Liberty sometimes is referred to as freedom, choice, or independence. Yet, this apparent infinite interpretation is exaggerated. Liberty must constantly be balanced against existing laws and customs. Equality is dependent on interpretations of social equality, political equality, economic equality, and equal opportunity. It is often truer to state that it is equity that is strived for within democratic values. Equality is the lowest level of equity. Fraternity means the ability to perceive other members of one's society as kinder spirits, and to have a sense of responsibility for each other. Finally, *Economic values* are ones based on efficiency, economic growth, and quality. Efficiency, in terms of education, would mean high student achievements with a relatively low expenditure. Economic growth is achieved through population increase, greater domestic consumption, and an expansion in foreign trade. Quality is most frequently tagged with excellence and high standards. The value of quality is not necessarily financial but could be linked to a social or philosophical or otherwise framework.

Political orientations can be generally grouped along four orientations -- liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and social democracy. Each orientation have basic positions that distinguish it and at the same time embrace one of the values set described above.

Liberalism assumes the position the individual is the supreme unit in society, the role of the state is to create conditions where individuals can pursue their own definition of happiness, everyone in society is equal, individuals work for their own interest which will in turn benefit all of society, and individual freedom is paramount. Thus, it is clear that self-interest values lay at the foundation of liberalism.

Conservatism for the most part is at the opposite end of the political spectrum. Here, natural inequalities within society are seen to exist. From this position a respect for lawful authority, tradition and continuity, concern with the sound administration of existing laws instead of forming new ones, economic development over political reform, hierarchical structures, and the reduction in the role of government in society and the economy is lobbied. In so doing, the conservatism position is founded on economic values.

Socialism in comparison criticizes the existence of social, economic, and political inequalities and pushes for the redistribution of power and wealth to ensure equality. Limitation of private ownership and expanded public ownership is often the vehicle used to oppose economic divisions leading to the creation of inequality. Forefront in this orientation is the position humans are fundamentally equal and social in nature. As such, the socialism orientation is grounded in general social values.

Social Democracy with its opposition to communism and capitalism in favour of an activist, interventionist state that provides extensively for the less privileged is steeped in democratic values. Not surprisingly, the thrust of the social democracy position is towards a mixed economy with an expansion of public ownership together with increased collective power for the lower classes.

Within these combined dynamics of values and politics an educational system has received and graduated students. The extent to which the entire process was understood and the fixes that were decided on was fairly well geographically bound. Rationales and fixes were imbedded on the known basis values and political orientation of the day.

The definitive nature of the context enabled us to develop a comfort level in rationales that could be reasonably argued and applied. To this end, we have witnessed a global objective of equality of educational opportunity result in a maze of support mechanisms. The maze

has provided society citizens of provincial or state or country perspective. It has resulted in an education system that mirrored the immediate basic values and political orientation of a defined society. What the maze has not necessarily accomplished is an education system that is adaptable to a shift from an industrial sector to an information sector to a knowledge based sector. It is this adaptability that has been the cost of past rationales.

The context has become anything but definitive in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. Geographical boundaries in terms of education are fast fading. This reality was acknowledged at the April 2001 meeting of the OECD Education Ministers in their statement that competence building for all is essential in a knowledge-based society: "*Sustainable development and social cohesion depend critically on the competencies of all of our population* [emphasis author's] -- *with competencies understood to cover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.*" The previous geographical comfort levels no longer are realities in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. The knowledge economy has no geographical boundary.

The allocation of governmental resources is subject to a priority shift as well as a reduction in availability of resources to draw upon. An often cited strategy, and one repeated by OECD, is to link schools more extensively with providers of health and social services, particularly for meeting the needs of students at risk. The complexity of the situation is much more intense when it is extended beyond the boundaries of provinces or states or countries. Here, the desire to remain distinct while becoming part of the new global economy becomes a factor that is important within the equation. The question of whether the support of education is to produce a citizen of the world is causing internal discomfort. With this consideration comes a response to whether developing individuals' competencies is a shared responsibility. A pause for reflection within this deliberation is the following observation:

It is vital to enhance the quality of our communities. Some of us are seeing increased discontent among young people reflected in disaffection and anti-social behaviour in our educational institutions. Although many of the causes lie outside the educational institutions, they must be part of the solution because they both reflect and shape their communities.

Past rationales have addressed the concerns now reflected by OCED and others on different forums. The rationales have resulted in support mechanisms that mirrored these rationales. However, these rationales and support mechanisms have ill prepared the education system that needs to function in a knowledge-based society.

Understanding how and why previous and existing support of education operated and is operating provides the option of removing the restrictiveness. In replacement, a rationale that moves support whereby education assumes its new global position in the reflection and shaping of the new global communities is able to be substituted.

The varied and mixed combination of basic values and political orientations has created a situation not easily adaptable to the new agenda in which the demands must be met. The support mechanisms of the past are restrictive as opposed to enlightening. They had not been put in place to accommodate a rationale defined by the acknowledgement and adjustment for a multitude of arguably sound basic values and political orientation. In the past, it is these differences in basic values and political orientations that defined change in governmental power and shifts in policies that led to revised support mechanisms. Now, the differences must be mediated for they exist across traditional geographical boundaries. The mediation must result in rationales that lead to support mechanisms which enable educational systems to be adaptable.