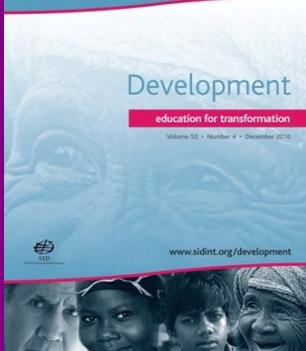


Education for Transformation



A conversation between Stephen Moseley, Mark Ginsburg, Mary Joy Pigozzi, and Ana Agostino.

Q1: Why is education so important for the attainment of the MDGs?

SM: Goal #2, achieving universal primary education, is an important goal by itself where we must continue to ensure that all children have access to at least six to eight grades of education and with quality. Education, however, is also the necessary foundation for achievement of all eight MDGs. Without education, families seldom adopt new technologies that would improve their farming and entrepreneurial endeavors that can alleviate their poverty and address hunger. The gender equality and empowerment of women must be built on the foundation of literacy, knowledge about human rights, and understanding of organization capacity building, and to ensure that their intellectual knowledge can equal and surpass those of their male colleagues. We know from five decades of research that Goals #4 and #5, the reduction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health, are improved by more than 50 percent when women have the opportunity to have improved education enabling them to understand how, why, where to obtain health services, to ensure their children will access and utilize public health technology.

So too combating HIV-AIDS especially, and malaria and other diseases is effective when girls stay in school through primary and secondary education. The understanding of the prevention of malaria is enhanced by children obtaining full literacy and bringing new ideas for public health home to their parents. Schools that incorporate the practices of treating the environment well will be the engines for this planet to achieve MDG #7, environmental sustainability, and address the horrors of climate change. Investment in education is the foundational requirement to accomplish all of the MDGs.

MG: Education is a process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes. To achieve each of the MDGs various people have to become more knowledgeable, extend their skill set, and have the requisite attitudes. This applies to the population in general as well as specialists focusing on certain sectors. It also applies to local, national, and global leaders in the public, NGO, and private sectors. While knowledge and skills are crucial, what seems to be missing is attitudinal, that is, real commitment – backed by resources and actions – to achieve the MDGs. Moreover, while universal access to primary education is

included in the MDGs, the goal should actually be quality lifelong education for all.

MJP: Rather than look at the MDGs separately, I wish to focus on the overall purpose of the MDGs, which is sustainable development across our globe. Using this approach, I believe we need to focus on education FOR sustainable development. Sustainable development depends on a literate and skilled citizenry. It requires caring and informed decision makers at all levels and across all sectors: people capable of making the right choices for a sustainable future. Developing these attitudes and capabilities among decision makers and citizens is the task of education for sustainable development. Education must face the challenges of our Century and help us learn our way to sustainability. For me, this comes directly to the concept of a quality education that is fundamentally about the practice of values including:

- Respect for the dignity and human rights of all people throughout the world and a commitment to social and economic justice for all;
- Respect for the human rights of future generations and a commitment to inter-generational responsibility;
- Respect and care for the greater community of life in all its diversity, which includes the protection and restoration of the earth's ecosystems;
- Respect for cultural diversity and a commitment to build, locally and globally, a culture of tolerance, non-violence, and peace.

This does not negate the importance of academic subjects or conventional approaches, but it does argue for education's role in understanding global systems and in applying ethical values as we seek ways to live together now and in the future—this is an important aspect of quality in education.

AA: The MDGs are about creating the conditions for a better life for millions of

people around the world. The eradication of poverty, the completion of basic education, the reduction of child and maternal mortality, the attainment of gender equality in all spheres of life (access to relevant quality education being an important one), the creation of sustainable environments, the elimination of diseases that kill millions of people around the world and the responsible commitment to ensure a global partnership that will benefit humanity as a whole, they all need educated role players in many respects: people and societies who know their rights and have the tools to advocate for their fulfillment; people and societies with the skills and knowledge to respond to the challenges posed by these problems, including the necessary technical and scientific knowledge; people and societies with enough sensitivity and understanding about the need to look at these challenges as a holistic reality that impacts on all of us. Education is one of the privileged spaces where these tools, knowledge, skills and sensitivities can be learned, shared and built.

Q2: What is the relationship between education and human rights?

SM: Over 50 years ago, the United Nations enshrined the right to education as an essential ingredient for human freedom, civil treatment, and humanitarian recognition, and as the bedrock for long-term economic development for all human beings, women and men. Education does not ensure peace nor prevent people from inflicting violence on others. However, the integration of human rights education, at the primary and secondary levels, including for adults, with quality, enhances the understanding of human rights in our behavior toward others. Today, more education curricula at all levels are beginning to recognize and adopt an orientation to human rights that will strengthen our opportunity toward more

peace, tolerance, and understanding within and among societies.

MG: Education – more specifically, quality education – is and should be a human right. And, by helping individuals to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes, education can contribute to realizing human rights for all. To do so, formal and nonformal education needs to focus on human rights, what they are, what government and private-sector policies and actions undermine human rights, and what individual and collective actions are needed to realize fully human rights for all. The current situation is far from the ideal, in that all people do not gain access to educational programmes, let alone ones of high quality. Moreover, those who do participate in educational programmes do not always learn about human rights or have a chance to develop the capacity to critically analyze the policies and practices that contradict human rights. Finally, few educational programmes prepare people to engage in effective individual and collective action to transform local, national, and global societies so that human rights are realized for all.

MJP: There are three important aspects of education as a human right:

- Participation in quality education itself;
- The practice of human rights in education; and
- Education as a right that facilitates the fulfillment of other human rights.

These aspects emerge directly from a number of international instruments that identify education as a human right, including the first Human Rights Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The various instruments indicate the nature or quality of this education, which is why it is possible to indicate that the right to education is not limited to access, but also includes the content and processes of

education and the role of education as an enabler in fulfilling other rights.

AA: Education is a human right, but it is also a privileged tool for learning about human rights in general. The practice of human rights education is very important for the construction of societies where values of solidarity, cooperation, reciprocity, non-violence, non-discrimination and celebration of diversity are recognized as essential for the possibility of living together and respecting the rights of everyone. It can be argued that education per se is about this, not just human rights education; that in fact one of the mandates of the educational system is to create environments of diversity where these values are practiced and learned. The marketization of education though, has led in many parts of the world to a very segregated system of formal education where this approach is simply not possible due to the very homogenized populations they attend. At the core of human rights is the respect for the other, particularly the other who is different from us, either for his or her appearance, beliefs, history, etc. The more the educational institutions or informal programmes integrate diversity, the more they can create enabling environments for the understanding and respect for human rights.

Q3: How can education transform society?

SM: In this new century 2000, we see that every country emerging as a great leader in economy, justice and improved health and greater satisfaction and happiness for their people are those countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, Malaysia, Ghana, which have made extraordinary strides to address and offer quality education for a growing majority of their citizens at the primary level, at the secondary level, and on to technical and higher education. These countries' success also depends on an education which introduces the concepts of

equity and parity between men and women and also social justice and opportunity across races and cultures within the national framework. That education access, when delivered with quality for national goals of peace and human justice, is the bedrock of transforming societies to join the global community of successful nations for their citizens.

MG: Formal and nonformal education can contribute to transforming society at the local, national, and global level. However, historically and today, education tends to serve more often to reproduce (perpetuate and legitimate) unequal and unjust social relations. For education to contribute to societal transformation, it must be organized in concern with social movements and other actions designed to change society in similar ways. This does not mean that the blueprint for the new society has to be fully developed before such actions are initiated, but it does mean that the general outlines (e.g., human rights-based, socialist, theological liberationist) need to be identified and shared.

MJP: Not to be contrary, but I am not sure that education can transform society, unless we consider it as the institutionalized processes through which societies change—even so, it would not be the only one. I do believe that education can (and possibly should) be transformational. I think that people transform their societies and that education is one of the tools that allow individuals and groups, as actors, to transform themselves and become agents of transformation in the world in which they live.

AA: As the various articles in this journal show, education is understood in many different ways and people also join the educational system or informal education opportunities throughout life with different motivations. But what most people would

agree with is that education is key for understanding the world we live in, for acting upon it and, on the basis of the multiple and diverse dreams that people carry with them, for aiming at its transformation. Education, in the very broad sense of an enabling process for deepening and creating knowledge, motivates us to question the familiar, to search for “other ways of doing things”. On many occasions the educational systems go in quite the opposite direction of this, but when a dialogical educational process takes place, and all actors are open to the diversity and richness of knowledges, transformation is the natural consequence.

Q4: How can we make sure that the quality of education is improved as well as the quantity?

SM: The quality of education is dependent upon the vision of the leaders for education at the community, the provincial, the state, and nation levels. That vision must see education as a movement which encompasses honest and transparent administration; adequate resources delivered to the majority at local levels; teacher training which recognizes and supports the professional development of teachers in pre-service and for lifelong learning thereafter; ensures a space with adequate materials and new technologies; and, finally, provides a safe and sanitary environment for girls to be comfortable when they are attending school and traveling away from their homes to be there. So the tools for quality education are mainly what happens inside the classroom with learning materials, excellent instruction, and creation of a safe learning environment which allows the education process to be centered on children’s learning and the opportunity for teachers to know how to measure their instruction and know that the children are succeeding. Delivering a quality education requires our global commitment to support ministries of education in all

countries to receive the highest priority of international foreign assistance investments which can leverage and improve local and national ministry investments in their children.

MG: Educational quality can be defined in terms of the inputs, processes, outcomes, and/or outputs. If a society (or, better, a world) is committed to providing high quality educational experiences and consequences for every person, the resources (human and financial) need to be mobilized in this direction. Very few communities/societies reflect real, sustained commitment to this ideal. Moreover, providing everyone with access to education – even lifelong learning experiences – might mean that such education contributes to reproducing unequal and unjust social relations rather than helping individuals and groups to (re)construct society. It boils down to a question of priorities and values. For example, in the area of weapons of war, political, military, and business elites don't seem to have major problems in developing, producing, and using large *quantities* of high *quality* devices and strategies for killing people.

MJP: Ensuring that the quality of education is the task and responsibility of many people. The "we" varies according to the context. Educators do know, however, that people do "vote with their feet" and where education is irrelevant and the quality does not meet expectations either attendance or performance or both decline. This is a strong indicator that the quality needs to improve. At a macro level, I believe that we as educators have a major role to play in advocating for an understanding of quality that points to the multiple purposes of education and not only one or two of them. So in addition to being concerned about

science or math achievement, we should acknowledge education's role in the development of an informed citizenry, in building and understanding a person's identity (in family, community, nation and the world), in developing thoughtful and visionary leadership, in linking to meaningful work, and in contributing to a sustainable world, for example.

AA: A simple answer would be "to make the funds available". While it is absolutely necessary that governments, international institutions, and also the private sector need to invest much more in education (currently expenses in education are being cut in many parts of the world, particularly for adult education) the money per se does not guarantee quality. This is a very complex issue that has to do with the visions of what is education for, what is relevant, what skills are needed and so on. I think it would not be an overstatement to say that in many parts of the world (in Uruguay certainly) the educational system is in a crisis, particularly at the secondary level where the numbers of youth dropping are very high and those who remain in the system are skeptical about its usefulness. Quality, but particularly relevancy, is at the core of the problem. The world is changing extremely fast and there are what sometimes seems as irreconcilable differences among the various role players with respect to their world views, aspirations in life, methodologies of learning and communication, among others. The involvement of all these role players and the mutual understanding of their needs and aspiration is probably one of the conditions to move towards some form of agreement on how to achieve quality and relevancy. But this issue is certainly one of the key challenges of our time.

About the contributors

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