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"What Sort of UNESCO for What Sort of EDUCATION"

Gaitskell Lecture, University of Nottingham
22 May 2008

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WHAT SORT OF UNESCO FOR WHAT SORT OF EDUCATION

Mr. Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Ambassador Omolewa, Professor Boksenburg, Professor Morgan, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

I am doubly honored to be here. First, it was a great honour become a Special Professor a year ago. Now it is an even greater honour to give the annual Gaitskell lecture, following in the footsteps of giants – Harold Wilson, Max Beloff, Clare Short, Hilary Benn, ADG predecessor John Daniel, the late Steve Synott etc. I feel very humble to be in such a tradition. I should also make clear now at the outset that I am speaking for myself, not for UNESCO.

The title of the lecture is perhaps incomplete. What kind of UNESCO for what kind of education? Moreover Gaitskell did not, as best I can ascertain, say much if anything about UNESCO. Though as I hope to show, his life was in many ways an argument for UNESCO or for what I believe UNESCO should be. Anyway, the title omits the important prior question of what kind of education for what kind of society?

Let me start there: what sort of society. Gaitskell had a lot to say about that.

Gaitskell legacy

1. Gaitskell believed passionately in the need to *take the side of the downtrodden and disadvantaged*. "He was", as Hugh Dalton recorded on meeting him in a miners' cottage while he was an Adult Education tutor here at Nottingham, "out to change society from top to bottom. He was against all privilege and social injustice."

2. Gaitskell. recognized the *power of education as a key instrument for achieving social justice*. That is why he became an adult education tutor.

3. Gaitskell had a *global vision.* Opposing British entry to the EEC during the debate of the late 1950s (perhaps he was wrong about that?), he argued: "I sometimes wonder whether the great problems of the world today are to be found in the unity or disunity of Western Europe. I would have said that there were two problems outstanding above all others: the problem of peace and the problem of poverty.

4. Gaitskell recognized *the need to adapt as the world changed.* Thus, while in 1947 as Parliamentary Secretary to Manny Shinwell, Minister of Fuel and Power in the postwar Labour government, Gaitskell moved the Third Reading in the House of

Commons of the bill to nationalize the mines, by 1959 he was arguing, presciently but unsuccessfully, at the Labour Party conference in Blackpool that it was time to revise the party's commitment to common ownership of the means of production (the famous Clause IV) because of the need to work out "principles of British democratic socialism as we seem the today – in 1959 – and not 1918."

So what sort of society did Gaitskell stand for:

a) A just society – not necessarily an equal society but certainly one with equality of opportunity
b) A peaceful society – coming out of World War II and living in the midst of the Cold War with its then very real threat of nuclear extinction.
c) A society free of poverty. Remember Gaitskell's two outstanding problems: peace and poverty.
d) A society that adapted to changing realities.

Would any of us disagree? I think not.

But if Gaitskell were alive today, what would his list look like? Very similar, I think, but with some important twists and adaptations:

a) It would be explicitly global.
b) Justice would remain a key element – we cannot live in a just world when a billion people still live in abject poverty on less than $1 a day (even though progress since 1999) , when infant mortality rates remain so high, when not everyone is able to exercise such fundamental rights as that to vote (either because democracy is still absent or because illiteracy prevents active political participation), when HIV/AIDS continues to decimate societies in Africa in particular and antiretrovirals are not available to all who are infected, when (to turn to education) 72 million children (10% of the age group) don't even go to primary school, when by official count 774 million adults are not literate (1 in 5, 2/3 women) and by real count well over a billion.
c) Poverty would, unfortunately, still figure very prominently. Not just the issue of the billion living in absolute poverty but also the very, very worrying trend since the 1990s toward inequality *within* economies and societies. Around the world, the share of the poorest 20% in consumption has declined e.g. from 7% in East Asia in 2000 to 5% by 2004 and indeed is at extraordinarily low levels in some regions, around 3% in Latin America and Africa.
d) Peace would also remain a key element – but with much more of a focus on peace within (rather than between) countries. Most conflicts today are not between states, but within states, though importantly with consequences for other states, as refugees and other displaced people seek shelter elsewhere. Intolerance and conflict remain rife throughout the world.
e) There would be a new element – the need that development be sustainable. Currently characterized above all by need to deal with global warming, with, for the first time, natural environment issues caused by humans, not by external

shocks. (Mention Coming Crisis of Extinction – Lord May lecture in honour of my late father this past April in Oxford – 5th crisis is coming, the first man-made one, following four natural ones such as the earth being hit by a major meteorite, etc.). But sustainable development is not just about the physical environment, it has also to do with Gaitskell's two big problems; peace (living together) and poverty.

f) There would be another new element: the explicit recognition that we are going to have to adapt but that we don't yet know to what, as has been said, "we are the first generation that knows for sure that we do not know the future." What we do know for sure now is that we have to deal with climate change, and that we are currently in the age of the knowledge economy and knowledge society. But we don't know what new problems we may face in a couple of decades or what new technologies we may have available.

Education the Key

So how can we achieve a *just, peaceful, sustainable, adaptable society without poverty*? Obviously there are many elements to what is needed, ranging from further nuclear disarmament to reducing carbon emissions to recognizing and promoting cultural diversity.

Central, however, is education. Without education these issues cannot be tackled. This may seem obvious to us here today, most of us concerned with education. But it is not so obvious when we look at the global issues that world leaders are currently concentrating upon e.g. difficulty of getting appropriate treatment for education at the coming G8 Summit.

And justice requires that this be education for all. The world is committed, of course, through the Education for All movement for which UNESCO is the lead coordinating agency, to the six goals of universal primary education, gender parity in primary and secondary education, early childhood care and education, literacy, skills for youth and adults, and quality.

How is the world doing on these goals? I won't go into any great detail, as previous lectures have talked a lot about these and as we have a publication, the EFA Global Monitoring Report that annually reviews progress. But let me summarize briefly. The answer is mixed. There is enormous progress towards universal primary education, driven in part by major shift in attitudes towards girls' education. Though still 10% of children don't go to primary school, we stand now on the edge of an extraordinary achievement – we can now envisage that during the lifetime of everyone in this room, every single child in the world could attend primary school. An extraordinary historical achievement, and not one that is yet secured by any means, but one that is certainly within our grasp. This is a future that we could – and should – all know.

We are not doing so well on the other goals. I have already mentioned the over a billion people who do not have basic literacy skills. This is, as UNESCO's Director-General Koichiro Matsuura frequently says, "a global disgrace". We know that quality is a major issue in education systems in all countries, whether it is here in Britain or in Africa, but we also know that by all measures of cognitive achievement the average levels are lower in developing countries than in OECD ones.

We don't really know how we are doing on skills, because we have not figured out properly how to define them and measure them.

Finally the picture on early childhood care and education is extraordinarily mixed – with very major progress, for instance, in Latin America and the Caribbean but relatively little in Africa and among Arab states.

Are the EFA goals sufficient, however, for the type of global society we all want, the type that a modern Gaitskell would call for? And, within them, is this mixed progress acceptable?

I think not, though they are a fine foundation, and I am personally very proud to be associated with the EFA goals.

First, they don't pay sufficient attention to equity and social justice. Of course, it could be argued that equity is implicit in the very notion of education for all, and in the rights-based approach that underlies it. True, but I think experience shows that attention is only paid to equity if equity is explicit. Already, for example, and very worryingly, many countries that are doing well on universal primary education but have certainly not yet achieved it, are moving on to other things, especially secondary education. (The same comment is increasingly being made, by the way, about the Millenium Development Goals, that the absence of an explicit equity provision about, say, the bottom 20%, is itself hampering their achievement).

Perhaps the key EFA goal in terms of achieving social justice is that pertaining to early childhood care and education, or early child development as some call it. As Nobel economics laureate James Heckman has said, this is an almost unique policy area as it both contributes toward economic growth and social justice. ECCE is, I believe, the single most cost-effective intervention for offsetting disadvantage and achieving social justice. Yet the international goal is somewhat nebulous – without explicit quantitative targets - and there are important issues we must recognize in some societies about what is perceived as the role of the state versus that of the family and about whether policies should be universal or targeted. Moreover, ECCE, while an EFA goal, is absent from the MDGs.

Second, the EFA goals don't pay explicit attention to the content of education. This is probably too sensitive an area to be subject to international goals but it is hard to think that we can achieve peace and tolerance, on the one hand, or sustainable development, on another, without dealing with content. And this content is wide-ranging, from imparting

values of respect for diversity to ensuring an adequate knowledge of mathematics and science. So wide, in fact, that many now complain that school curricula are becoming overloaded with the introduction of all these topics, many supported by UNESCO. Thinking is needed about the balance of the curriculum and the way all these important topics can be included without overloading it.

Third, they don't deal at all with the need for adaptability in society. Adaptability requires new learning throughout our lives, whether it is acquiring new skills for employment or to adapt to changing concepts of community with migration. As the draft strategy for UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning says, "Learning can no longer be seen as something that is confined to childhood, schools or what previously was seen as the 'educational' sector. Learning takes place in many arenas, settings and forms. It must be lifelong and life-wide; it must embrace all sectors; and it is essential that different forms of learning be available – formal, non-formal and informal, depending on the context."

Fourth, the EFA goals don't recognize political realities. Since I have become Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO I have met over 80 ministers of education. Almost all, at least from developing countries, report that the areas where they are under the greatest political pressure are secondary education and technical and vocational education. Secondary education is the political demand of parents (at least those who are powerful enough to exercise political pressure); technical and vocational education is the demand of prime ministers and finance ministers, faced with major issues of unemployment, especially of youth. (To some extent, I personally think this demand for TVET is misplaced, based on a false belief that unemployment is because of a lack of skills on the supply side rather than a lack of demand – but that would be the subject of a whole lecture in itself). The point is that the political pressure for TVET is very real.

Fifth, they do not include the crucial role of Higher Education and Research. It is sometimes said that Higher Education is essential to EFA as teachers are trained at this level. This is true, and this is important. But this is not really the point – the point is more that societies cannot adapt to changing realities – the point I just made – without leaders, without technocrats and technical people, without research, and these all come from Higher Education.

Sixth, they don't take account of new knowledge about learning, or of the changing characteristics of learners. Again, we could spend a whole lecture on this, but let me just mention three interesting and important areas:

a) Economists have for some time known about important external economies of individual learning, in which it is in each individual's interest that others with whom he works are more educated. To put it more simply, my productivity depends not only on my level of education (a well known result, and much of the basis of human capital theory, of course) but also on your level of learning (ref: Romer, for example). Implication: we know this in the workplace but intriguingly we haven't brought it back to the classroom and other learning environments, though it may have quite a bit to do with

the finding that countries that do well in such international assessments of learning as PISA are also ones in which there is not much difference across classrooms and schools in learning, though there is of course considerable difference across individuals.

b) Neuroscience (brain research) is advancing very rapidly and has important implications for learning. To its credit, the OECD has recognized this and produced some very important work. We now know that:

(a) The brain is much more "plastic" than was previously thought and can literally reshape itself – forget the old stories that all learning was hopeless after one's early 20s because of the gradual reduction in the number of neurons. Implication: lifelong learning is not only desirable for policy reasons, it is very possible technically.
(b) There are some periods of critical development for the brain – more research is needed on when these are, throughout life. One period that is now well-established has to do with the early years, under the age of three, when so much brain development occurs. Implication: again the importance of early childhood care and education. Further implication, combining these two notions: even if a person does not experience ECCE or even primary school, she or he can become an effective adult learner.

c) Learners, at least those who are growing up in computer-rich environments such as those in countries like Britain, don't learn as they used to. Thanks again to the OECD for some of this thinking. So-called NMLs – New Millenium Learners – are adept at multitasking (texting, surfing the internet and doing homework simultaneously) and don't learn in the same way as, say, those of us who were born over 50 years ago. Interestingly, this again emphasizes the plasticity of the brain. Implication: Current classroom environments in OECD countries are not well adapted to NMLs especially in their already very old-fashioned use of ICTs etc. Further implication: there is huge scope for revising old models of teaching and learning, even for those who are not – or not yet (digital divide) – growing up in such environments, as it emphasizes again that people's brains are plastic and that we can learn in different ways. Research need: how can this be applied not only to new ways of learning around the world, but also to teacher training, given the huge needs for new teachers in some parts of the world (4 million in Africa alone by 2015, just at the primary level).

So there are several reasons that the EFA goals alone are not sufficient, though they are certainly necessary, to achieve the type of society that we would all want, as I have here framed in terms of Hugh Gaitskell's legacy.

<u>And now to turn to UNESCO</u>

How is UNESCO positioned to deal with these educational matters that are so fundamental to achieving what I have tried to characterized as just, peaceful, sustainable, adaptable societies without poverty?

(note: will focus on the E part of UNESCO but in fact the entire house should be considered)

Again, stress personal nature of remarks. Not speaking for UNESCO.

The answer is, not surprisingly, mixed.

First, we have an outstanding basis in terms of principles. UNESCO was founded some 60 years ago around the time G was nationalizing the mines, in the same wave of calls for peace and social justice that occurred at the global level as did the Labour government's policies in Britain. There was a special British connection, also, of course, with the eminent scientist Julian Huxley being UNESCO's first Director-General:

a) The vision of UNESCO's founders, which remains as applicable today as then, in the wake of World War II, was to "construct defences of peace in the minds of men". This inevitably meant education. For Huxley, it was clear that education was fundamental and one of UNESCO's very first education activities was to do with basic education in Haiti.
b) The right to education is central to UNESCO's mission. Established in the universal declaration of human rights and since agreed again and again at one conference after another, lying fundamentally beneath the Education for All movement, initially at Jomtien in 1990 and then again in Dakar in 2000.

Second, we have over time embraced education from different perspectives as to why it is important, all of which, very interestingly, are relevant to the arguments I have been making today. I won't go into any historical detail but it is worth noting that the emphasis has variously shifted from that based on individual rights, to one based on the social and economic importance of education, to the notion of human capital, to the argument that education is crucial for social cohesion, and, even more recently, for democratic participation. I find it so interesting that there was at each stage so much debate about why education was important, and an attempt to find one reason (a different one at different times) when, to me, at least, and perhaps I am naïve, the importance of education encompasses <u>all</u> these notions which are themselves the reasons why education is key to the just, peaceful, sustainable and adaptable society without poverty that we all seek.

Third, we have had, for over ten years now, the extraordinarily useful four pillars of education that came out of the 1996 Delors Report: learning to do, learning to learn, learning to be, and learning to live together. I think you are all very familiar with these, so I won't say any more.

Fourth, we have the notion of Education for All, which I won't go into again, but which is the major driver of what we do in education at UNESCO.

Fifth, as a UN agency we have an extraordinary advantage over many other agencies, in that we can be, and can be seen to be, neutral and objective. We have access and convening power. We have technical expertise on education, though this is declining (I will return to this in a minute).

These are all extraordinary advantages. However, we have some big problems, also, both in terms of what we do and in terms of our ability to do what we ought to do. These are somewhat linked to the comments I made earlier on the limitations of education for all.

First, we don't do enough on the fundamental areas for equity. Particularly key here are the right to education and, as I have indicated, early childhood care and education. We produce reports for our Board on the right to education, and they are considered without discussion. I believe UNESCO should take a much more active role in monitoring countries' compliance with the right to education. This would get us into trouble with some countries, of course, but that would mean that we were doing our job. And we should promote ECCE much more strongly – not necessarily in terms of projects, for we are not a financing or project-implementing agency (nor should we be) and can leave projects to others, particularly UNICEF. But we need to do much more to ensure the inclusion of ECCE in countries' education programmes and to make the global case for it, even, I believe, when it is sensitive in terms of some of the issues I have indicated such as the role of the family.

Second, we need to embrace lifelong learning much more explicitly. Distinct from adult education (Gaitskell's old role, though linked of course). Perhaps we should try to establish a right to lifelong learning, or at least to interpret the right to education as being one to lifelong learning? Several have suggested that the four pillars of Delors need to be supplemented with a further pillar capturing this concept, suggestions including "learning to change" or "learning to transform" or "learning to become". We also need to do much more to promote not only the concept of lifelong learning but also the enabling environment for it – this can and should involve a very wide range of things that we need probably to make more precise, and some of which we are already doing. As just one example, we need to promote further, as we are already doing, the idea of open software.

Third, we need to respond to member states' political needs, in terms of secondary education and in terms of TVET. But our response should be multifaceted – we should not, for instance, simply agree that a country needs to pay attention to secondary education but rather do so in the context of reminding that country of the continuing need also to pay attention to the EFA agenda, notably adult literacy and ECCE, and to equity. We should not simply agree that a country should promote TVET but should clarify the global debate about the role of vocational skills, indeed their very definition (are they in fact so very different from academic ones, as the world becomes smaller? ICTs, English, communications, entrepreneurship, etc.).

Fourth, we should not be so shy to talk about the content of education as it pertains to crucial areas such as living together and sustainable development. We do this already, with important programmes around rights within education and inclusion, for example, and indeed even have a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, but I think we could do more, in these areas and also around cultural diversity, for example, a crucial aspect of UNESCO's broader mandate. We do not necessarily have to advocate any type of universal approach or universal content but, I would argue, we should be bolder in talking about such subjects. Controversial for sure, but that way we could have an impact.

Fifth, we should definitively end the ambiguity over our support for Higher Education and openly embrace its importance, together with that of research from which it is inseparable. Even the World Bank has essentially issue a mea culpa for its past positions. UNESCO never had such an extreme position, but it has been ambiguous, especially in the EFA context, and we should now clearly emphasize its importance, probably particularly at the World Conference for Higher Education that we are organizing next year.

Sixth, we should embrace more science. Whether it is the findings of microeconomics, or brain science, or learning science, we should be constantly seeing what might be its implications for education and learning around the world. And we should be promoting more science and mathematics within education. It is a little ironic that the E part of UNESCO takes so little account of S.

Seventh, we need to strengthen our technical expertise and, particularly, the ways in which we deliver it. With a declining staff, with an almost zero professional development budget, and with all the rigidities of the UN employment system and its "posts", this is very, very difficult. A lot more flexibility is needed and, I believe, almost all of UNESCO's internal policies need revision – be they concerned with strategy setting, with human resources policy, with budget, with IT within the house, with incentives for staff and managers etc. (subject of a whole lecture in itself, or at least a debate with our Board, that I won't bore you with today). We need also to rethink how we deliver expertise in the field – is it best done as now by having small programmes in most countries, delivered typically by mid-level staff, or might we provide more service to the world through very experienced people in the field, whose day to day advice governments could count upon, as neutral and expert, in a much smaller number of countries critical for achieving EFA, and through improving our knowledge clearinghouse function dramatically.

We can't do these things, and many of the other things that our member states want us to do, unless we have resources however. I have touched already on our human resources. Now a final word on our financial resources. Our total budget is $316 million a year ($631 million for a biennium). Of that only $54 million is for education, or about a sixth, even though education is our largest programme area. Do you really think that one can run what ought to be the world's premier international education agency on so little, on

one-sixth of the WHO budget, for example, which could be said to be roughly equivalent for health as should be UNESCO's education budget.

Clearly not. So two things are needed. First we must prioritise within our small budget – and this is not easy with demands from 193 member states, but I think that we could perhaps secure support for focusing in some of the ways I have indicated above. Second, we must over time secure more resources, and this will come from an initial focus and also from clearly showing that we are an agency that matters, an agency that can promote the right type of education for the right type of society, the sort of just, peaceful, sustainable, adaptable society without poverty that Hugh Gaitskell wanted and that we all want.

Thank you very much.