
Open Education Leadership Summit

Accelerating global progress in open education

The Role of Education

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Try to put away your philosopher stone just for a few minutes. Yes, I know it's hard, but let's see whether you know the answers to the following quotations.

So who do think said this? "*Man is nothing but what education makes of him.*"

And this: "*Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed.*"

Try this one: "*Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.*"

And finally this one: "*Don't let schooling interfere with your education.*"

All witty and profound. Here now are the answers: Kant, Stalin, Einstein and Mark Twain.

They don't seem to agree on much except maybe on the underlying truth in Stalin's reflection whose roots can be traced back to the so-called "Prussian School System": "*Education is designed to create obedient workers and soldiers who do not question authority*". This is the philosophy that shaped education from the 18th century around the world and arguably the true driving force behind mandatory schooling. Education had little to do with self-realization, enfranchisement, emancipation, enlightenment and human betterment.

Fortunately, the "obedient citizen dogma" underwent severe criticism in the 20th century epitomized by John Taylor Gatto's: "How Public Education Cripples Our Kids, and Why". The dogma was abandoned in favour of a human centred approach rather than power conservation. The time has now come to revisit yet again the role and purpose of education - and this time in a completely new paradigm: The knowledge free world. The reign of Homo Zapiens. Should education shape the world or should it shape citizens to adapt to the world in the least conflictual manner? Political leadership and vision have disintegrated into nebulous cyber space and no one seems to be capable of outlining any meaningful direction. Democracy has been transformed into tweetocracy - a continuous slalom the purpose of which is to avoid the steep slopes and hope you make it past the next tweet. No vision, no leadership. Society is created by supernatural forces. Technology has reduced politics to the frightening next tweet.

How does this affect education?

If the course is determined by currents and winds - if navigation is reduced to staying afloat - maybe the role of education is in the old Prussian model (a horrible thought). If that is the case education will be all about creating obedient consumers living on basic universal income. From a cost-benefit point of view (the only "value" that applies) there can be no doubt that the role of education in the absence of political leadership must be reduced to consumerism. The less knowledge the better. It's just an irritant and serves no economic or commercial purpose. Reading and writing won't be necessary (the philosopher stone speaks all languages). This time the dogma will be immensely more powerful: Artificial Intelligence does not enhance intelligence, it destroys it. Only this time there will be no renaissance.