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EDUCATION**Abstract:** Proposes that it is essential to point out that economic development depends on educational progress. Challenges to providing education in low-income countries; Purpose of public schooling; Suggestions for the proper use of education.**Lexile:** 1080**Full Text Word Count:** 2164**ISSN:** 0887-9346**Accession Number:** 9846726**Database:** Points of View Reference Center**Section:** CURRENT ISSUES

Are We Our Brothers' Keepers?

The challenges to providing education in low-income countries are daunting, but wealthy nations are responsible to reach out to the less fortunate.

How can the United States and other Western countries effectively help the development of low-income countries? How can we lower the tensions and misunderstandings that derive from large discrepancies in wealth and social opportunity? Fortunately, the answer to both questions is the same. First we need to understand the nature of the problem and then propose solutions.

It is axiomatic to point out that economic development depends on educational achievement. Multiple sources and common intuitive judgment give rise to this evidence. Nations with a more educated population are more adaptable economically, healthier, and more innovative. The challenges to providing education in low-income countries, however, are daunting. Generally, they can be divided into three categories:

Access is the easiest problem to identify and in fact is limited to parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Universal access to education has been achieved in most countries in east Asia, Latin America, Europe, central Asia, and the Middle East. Unfortunately, gains in school enrollment made in the 1960s and '70s have sometimes been offset by declines in the 1980s and '90s. Full enrollment declined to 90 percent in Zambia and Cameroon, 62 percent in Uganda, and 60 percent in Tanzania. Thus the problem

is not only to put children in school but to keep them there.

In terms of educational quality, countries can be divided into four groups. Even the poorest countries (e.g., Indonesia, which spends \$120 per annum per elementary student) have a range of school quality; some classrooms and teachers are as well equipped and prepared as many in the United States. More typical is the situation in which the teacher has the only textbook available and is forced to copy content onto a blackboard. Sitting cross-legged on the ground, 80 or 90 to a room, children copy the information from the blackboard onto a slate or a piece of paper. If a poorly educated teacher copies the content incorrectly, the students then copy it incorrectly. Nevertheless the children memorize whatever they copy because it is their sole source of information. This "copy/copy" circumstance is the norm throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa, Yemen, Haiti, Bolivia, Nepal, rural India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

If a country can reach the second level of quality, each child has one textbook in every subject each year. If the textbook is well written and the graphics are clear, the change in the level of understanding can be a quantum improvement. The People's Republic of China and the Philippines are two countries that have reached this level of educational quality.

If a nation reaches the third level of quality, each child has a range of education programs and electronic and print resources from which to choose. Malaysia, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, Mexico, and Romania are at this level.

At the fourth level, the teachers have access to a wide variety of sources of information and must fulfill the new function of being a manager rather than a provider of information. Much of the jump in spending is due to the increased cost of this level of professionalism. These nations include Japan, Sweden, Germany, and the United States.

The purpose of public schooling is broader than providing information about science or teaching the skills of arithmetic and literacy. Public schools are supposed to help bring citizens closer together and make the general public more understanding of the wider world, more tolerant of different cultures, and more socially cohesive. But public schooling can be misused. History and civics curricula can be hijacked to inflame ethnic interests, religious intolerance, and racial or nationalist ideologies. Instead of ameliorating social tensions, schools can exacerbate them.

While the content of schooling is the responsibility of each nation, it is also true that extremist curricula may have a multinational impact. Our question, then, has three parts: how can greater educational opportunity be provided to low-income countries; how can the quality of that opportunity be improved; and how can the international community appropriately guide the purpose of schooling and reduce the risk of international tension stemming from extremist nationalist and religious curricula?

Suggestions for the proper use of education

Millennium Challenge Account. One possible solution has already become a part of the international discussion. The U.S. government has recommended a fivefold increase in foreign education aid to low-

income nations through the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). On March 14, 2002, President Bush announced that the United States would increase its core assistance to developing countries by 50 percent over three years, resulting in a \$5 billion annual increase over current levels by 2006. This increased assistance will go to the MCA, which funds initiatives to improve the economies and standards of living in qualified developing countries. The goal of the MCA is to reward sound policy decisions that support economic growth and reduce poverty. Other industrialized nations and multilateral development agencies are expected to contribute as well. This program will help address the issues of low access and low quality but not the problem of understanding and direction. For that, other solutions must be found.

International Teacher Corps. One idea might be to expand a successful program, the Peace Corps, to a new level. Of the 6,700 Peace Corps volunteers in the field today, only 2,230 are teachers. But the Peace Corps itself is not enough. By sending American volunteers (usually young) to serve low-income countries, it brings many local children and parents into contact with fine Americans and excellent values. It has drawbacks, too: it perpetuates the idea of charity and does not generate a sense of interdependence--one of the prerequisites for social cohesion. We need to look beyond this.

I would propose that we initiate a program called the International Teacher Corps, consisting of new and experienced teachers. It should be much larger than the Peace Corps and should be cofinanced by local and state communities in addition to the federal government. Most important, it should provide opportunities for foreign teachers to experience American education.

We must challenge the idea that "they" have something to learn from us, and not the other way around. Also, we must admit that sending our experience to other parts of the world is only a temporary solution. When volunteers leave, their experience and influence usually return home with them. That is not sufficient.

If well-trained teachers with high math and science skills from low-income countries were to spend up to two years teaching in American schools, they might well return to their countries profoundly influenced by their experience. Their influence would be a permanent feature of their local school systems. Would they be welcome as instructors in school systems in the United States? Would they be able to adjust to the rigors of the curriculum and the behavior patterns of American pupils? I think so, and their efforts would help communities in the United States to better appreciate and understand conditions in their homelands.

Opportunities for American higher education. There is one more necessary ingredient, and it involves higher education. The multiple systems of U.S. higher education are a world resource. The United States has a greater number of higher-education institutions than all other industrialized nations combined. There are more colleges and universities in the state of Tennessee than in sub-Saharan Africa. What can be done to maximize this kind of opportunity for highly qualified students from low-income countries?

The number of foreign students in the United States has grown from 50,000 in 1960 to 549,000 in 2002. International student expenditures on tuition and living expenses last year contributed \$11 billion to the American economy. Two-thirds of these expenditures came from their families, and one-third from

governments, especially their own. At the undergraduate level, over 80 percent of foreign students pay their own way--a higher percentage than for American undergraduates. While U.S. higher education may seem expensive by world standards, it is also that a large number of families outside of the United States wish to purchase it.

About one-half of international students come from Asia--21 percent from China and India alone. About one-half of foreign students are crowded into three fields: 20 percent in business, 15 percent in engineering, and 13 percent in the mathematics and computer sciences.

Although American higher education is popular, the United States is losing popularity to other Western countries. In the last few years, the share of international students studying in the United States has dropped from 40 to 30 percent; as a proportion of the overall student population, it is still small. Foreign students account for less than 4 percent of the U.S. student population but total 8 percent in France and Germany and 11 percent in Britain and Australia. In terms of the percentage of foreigners in the overall student population, the United States ranks twelfth among industrialized nations.

I would suggest the creation of a new higher education program to support qualified students from low-income countries who wish to study in U.S. universities. The program should emphasize humanities (particularly history), social sciences, fine arts, and education--areas where the world does not understand our assumptions, dilemmas, or prospects. It could be modeled upon the successful Muskie Fellowships serving former Soviet-controlled countries, in which students are given the opportunity to study and work in the United States for up to two years and then return home. This program should be financed from many sources, including state and local governments, charitable foundations, and the federal government.

Conclusion

The United States is at a critical juncture. We are at war, and many around the world do not understand our reasons. It would be tempting as a reaction to retreat into our own communities. I think this would be a mistake. Extremism, while associated with poverty, is more closely related to a lack of intellectual experience. This cannot be provided by having most of our international students concentrating in engineering; their broadening in values will come through exposure to wider fields.

The challenges we face will require solutions that address the problems of both poverty and purpose. I believe we should expand our foreign aid programs through the Millennium Challenge Account. We should create an International Teacher Corps that facilitates teachers going to low-income countries and teachers from low-income countries coming here to teach our children. I would also recommend that we open up our universities and colleges to the many highly qualified students from low-income countries who wish to study humanities, arts, social sciences, and education. In this way we will all have a much better chance to emerge from a period of conflict into an era of more equitably distributed prosperity and better mutual understanding.

The Importance of Teachers

In the poorest countries, the teacher has the only textbook available and must copy its content onto a blackboard. The poorly educated teacher may copy the content incorrectly, which the children then copy incorrectly.

One step above, each child has one textbook in every subject each year.

At the next level, each child has a range of resources and educational programs from which to choose.

At the highest level, the teacher has access to a wide variety of sources, including the Internet sources, fulfilling the new function of being a manager rather than a provider of information.

The challenges teachers face require solutions to the problems of poverty and purpose.

The United States should create an International Teacher Corps that sends teachers to low-income countries and recruits teachers from those countries to teach here.

National Literacy Rates

A country's literacy rate is the percentage of its adult population who can read and write. Nations may have unique methods to define literacy; for example, categorizing people as young as nine as adults. Some of the data are decades old.

Legend for Chart:

A - Nation or Territory

B - Percent Adult Literacy

A	B
Denmark	100
Finland	100
Norway	100
Australia	100
Czech Republic	100
Germany	99
United Kingdom	99
France	99
Japan	99
Korea, North	99
Netherlands	99
Sweden	99
Switzerland	99
New Zealand	99

Poland	99
Hungary	99
Italy	98
Ireland	98
Austria	98
Bahamas	98
Korea, South	98
Russia	98
Canada	97
Spain	97
United States	97
Romania	97
Argentina	96
Cuba	96
Chile	95
Philippines	95
Greece	95
Israel	95
Vietnam	94
Singapore	94
Taiwan	94
Hong Kong	92
Colombia	91
Venezuela	91
Mexico	90
Jordan	87
Portugal	87
Lebanon	86
Jamaica	85
Zimbabwe	85
Turkey	85
Malaysia	84
Indonesia	84
Brazil	83
Bolivia	83
South Africa	82
China	82
Oman	80
Qatar	79
United Arab Emirates	79

Kuwait	79
Zambia	78
Kenya	78
Libya	76
Honduras	73
El Salvador	72
Iran	72
Syria	71
Tanzania	68
Nicaragua	66
Ghana	65
Guatemala	64
Cameroon	63
Saudi Arabia	63
Uganda	62
Algeria	62
Iraq	58
Malawi	58
Nigeria	57
Laos	57
Bangladesh	56
India	52
Togo	52
Egypt	51
Rwanda	48
Sudan	46
Haiti	45
Pakistan	43
Namibia	38
Yemen	38
Liberia	38
Ethiopia	36
Burundi	35
Cambodia	35
Senegal	33
Afghanistan	32
Mali	31
Sierra Leone	31
Nepal	28
Eritrea	25

Somalia	24
Burkina Faso	19
Niger	14

Source: CIA World Factbook, July 1, 2002

PHOTO (COLOR): • Middle school in Kenya: Students will learn as long as their surroundings are conducive to understanding.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): • Peace Corps teacher in the Philippines: An International Teacher Corps is needed today, consisting of new and experienced teachers from developed and undeveloped nations.

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