

Guest Editorial

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Education and the World's Well-Being

Since 1979 Harold Shane has worked periodically with Unesco's Division of Educational Policy and Planning, headquartered in Paris. A few weeks before our issue on global education went to press he helped prepare an international panel's first draft of "The Future Development of Education," a report commissioned by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the Director-General of Unesco. I thought it timely to ask Shane to prepare this editorial—particularly since all but a few of his colleagues who shared in developing the report were from Third World or Soviet Bloc countries.

—Ron Brandt

Because of the revolution in telecommunications made possible by micro-electronics there are no remote places in the world. Ours has become a "wired planet" tightly bound together; one in which socioeconomic, political, and educational futures can no longer be considered in the narrow context of a single nation. This was my conclusion after months of work with the Unesco panel.

Drawn from more than 20 countries on five continents, many from the ambassadorial or ministerial level, panel members quickly learned that despite political differences and tensions reflected in crises during 1979-1982—Iran, Afghanistan, and Poland, for instance—our respective nations shared many opportunities as well as dilemmas in striving to improve the world's well-being through broadly conceived roles for education. In this realm at least we found ourselves pulled together by common concerns rather than torn apart by ideological differences.

The small sampling of shared concerns, aspirations, and goals that follow reflect challenges to educators in every quadrant of the globe.

- Education during a time of rapid change should be evaluated in terms of its relevance for the broadest, least-privileged social strata.

- We must learn to react more quickly through curriculum changes suggested by such factors as the worldwide weakening of traditional family structures or the nascent feeling of responsibility for protecting the environment.

- More heed should be given to providing equal access to education while recognizing that equal outcomes are impossible.

- A cure must be found for the "diploma disease" lest (with more and more credentialled people) the "paper qualifications" for even menial jobs rise so rapidly that they further limit opportunity for those who lack the certification schooling provides.

- Widened preschool education and cooperative, globally-shared support for primary level schooling must be vigorously pursued along with provisions for lifelong learning for persons displaced by technology and for the increasing population in older age groups.

Dozens more educational channels, our international panel believes, must be opened as the 21st century draws near. These range from grouping strategies designed to improve opportunity and diminish the frustration of failure, through coping with the new information society, to development of the "new literacy" and interesting possibilities in "distance learning" through the microchip, and individual use of computers to obtain and employ information.

As our Unesco panel adjourned, I was left with the impression that all the participants sought certain common ends even when the best means to attain them were in dispute. I also carried away the positive thought that improved global education promises to be one of the most important ways to improve the world's well-being. In Wendell Wilkie's words, "We must be prepared to extend it to everyone, whether they are rich or poor, whether they agree with us or not, no matter what their race or color." ■

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