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Can education change the world?

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“One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.” Malala Yousafzai, an advocate for equal schooling, believes passionately, as I do, that education can change, shape and redefine the world. Humans are animals and it is in our nature to pass on our skills to our offspring, in order for them to survive, reproduce and keep our species alive. However, humans have evolved past just educating for survival - we are now able to create, invent and to inspire others. Education can change the world in a positive way; without it we would not have a foundation for life, but it can also be used to manipulate society to satisfy people’s lust for power!

Firstly, education can be extremely beneficial for society - it can teach communities about birth control, which in itself will empower women and encourage them to have careers. Education can also help communities to become more accepting and forgiving, for example, to treat people equally irrespective of gender, colour or sexual orientation. It can energise the population to develop, change and adapt, teaching us not to repeat mistakes from the past. This is especially important when it comes to military tactics and diplomacy. Education can also help to preserve and continue traditions and cultures. However, these ideas all contain built-in contradictions. For example, education can teach communities to be more open, but it can force communities to become more intolerant!

Education can also be detrimental to society. For instance, it can teach people blind patriotism, brainwashing them into accepting a system. This has happened in the past with the Nazis and is happening again in North Korea. Both of these dictatorships employed education to indoctrinate the population. The Soviet Union also did not underestimate the power of education. Lenin’s phrase, “Education, education, education” is still quoted today, most notably by Tony Blair. While many people today, particularly in Western Europe and North America, are aware of the problems in North Korea, fewer people are aware of more low-profile difficulties, such as triumphalism in the USA and their anti-scientific tendencies. The whole of their education system is centred on manufacturing patriotic Americans, even at the cost of numbing children’s curiosity. Before the fall of the British Empire there was also a myth that the empire was the greatest good. This idea was reinforced through history books, such as the one written by Kipling entitled, ‘History of England’. Education is changing the world as we speak - and not necessarily for the better!

Although this sounds incredibly negative and pessimistic, there are plenty of examples of education changing the world for the better. For example, through education, feminism has come to the forefront in the media. Prominent women, such as Malala Yousafzai and Sarah Brown have been campaigning to increase the number of girls educated in the world. In less developed countries, where sexism is still widespread, many girls do not have the opportunity to go to school. Their lack of education reduces their options and requires them to stay at home at the mercy of their male relatives. Education can change these outdated views of women and prove that gender does not

affect brain power or mental ability!

The truth is, education is a deeply political activity. Although the power it has to change the world can be debated, it is still incontrovertible that education is part of the reason the world changes as it does. The question is, in which direction will change happen? Politicians can control what information we receive and therefore that gives them access to our minds and a way of controlling our actions. If leaders want us to see Communism as the greatest good, then it will be presented to the population in a certain way. Lenin said, "Give me four years to teach the children and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted." To achieve positive change throughout the world, education must be organised to ensure that debate can take place. To stifle curiosity is to rob people of their right of free speech - the right to decide and the right to question.

There is also tension between personal education and public education, otherwise known as 'the herd'. Society needs herds as they will often lead us to do the morally right thing, such as campaign to fight Ebola. However, society can also be deeply endangered by herds. As humans, we have become conditioned to conform to expectation, rather than to make the most obvious decision. We are often paralysed by fear that we will be judged by others if we do something different or stand out from the crowd. Education can either teach people to be individuals or it can teach people to follow blindly whomever they have been told to follow.

In conclusion, yes, of course education can change the world. It can teach people how to think, and therefore how to act. So the question is, what kind of critical scrutiny can an education be subjected to and does the education provided in a particular society include the possibility of criticism and the admission of debate? No education system is perfect, but countries should strive to make education systems as good as they can. After all, the students of today are the leaders of tomorrow and narrow-minded people never make the best leaders. They say that ignorance is bliss, but I disagree entirely. Knowledge may be harsh and unpleasant at times, but it is better to know than to walk through life unconscious of the possibilities.