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ABSTRACT

A landmark document, the out-of-print volume prepared for the first session of the UNESCO general conference, provides a preliminary outline of the proposed plan for fundamental education. Fundamental education is used to indicate a global field of activity that includes and goes beyond mass education, adult literacy, popular education, and primary education provision. Chapter 2 consists of first-hand accounts by educational specialists of efforts in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as well as accomplishments in a single nation, the Soviet Union. It includes tentative statistics and reveals forces at work and the institutions and classes of persons concerned. Chapter 3 through articles and excerpts on major theoretical issues, reflects the tasks of fundamental education from a world-wide perspective of cultural values, social analysis, and fundamental assumptions (minimum standards of living, adult education principles, priorities). The fourth chapter outlines seven major issues of fundamental education policy and method: (1) scope, (2) content, (3) governmental and State role, (4) language problem, (5) provision of reading material, (6) mass communication, and (7) motivation for learning. A final chapter by the editorial committee recommends establishment of a panel of fundamental education and suggested action guidelines. (EA)

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FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION

COMMON GROUND FOR ALL PEOPLES



REPORT OF A SPECIAL COMMITTEE
TO THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION
PARIS 1946

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FOREWORD

This volume, a first fruit of the labours of the Education Section of the Preparatory Commission's Secretariat, was prepared for the First Session of the General Conference (November-December 1946) in explanation of the proposed plan of work in the field of Fundamental Education. Inevitable printing delays prevented its being submitted in full to the Delegates, but the first and final chapters were issued as a separate pamphlet for the Conference, with an introductory statement covering the contents as a whole.

The volume is now presented to a wider public, not as a considered treatise on the question, but as a working document. It focuses attention upon a world movement of increasing magnitude, in relation to which Unesco may perform a number of helpful functions. This movement frankly faces the existence of immense numbers of people who lack the most elementary means of participating in the life of the modern world. Such a situation is not only a threat to peace and security, none the less real because indirect, but also a barrier and a challenge to science and culture. Unesco has good reason, therefore, to take Fundamental Education as one of its primary fields of interest.

Abraham Lincoln, in his famous metaphor of the house divided against itself, gave it as his judgment that a nation half slave and half free could not stand. The same may well be true of the world. Where half the people of the world are denied the elementary freedom which consists in the ability to read and write, there lacks something of the basic unity and basic justice which the United Nations are pledged together to further. Fundamental Education is only part of the wider and fuller human understanding to which Unesco is dedicated, but it is an essential part.

JULIAN HUXLEY,

Director General.

. . . . that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed:

that ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war; . . .

that the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace, are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfill in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern; . . .

and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

FROM THE CONSTITUTION OF UNESCO.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Origins of the Present Document

Like a simple but impressive pattern which recurs within a more elaborate design, the theme of Fundamental Education is brought forward again and again in those discussions which have thus far advanced the programme of Unesco. And the pattern has itself developed, as these pages will show. The attack on illiteracy is not the whole of Fundamental Education: other elements, spiritual as well as material, appear as factors in the problem.

The development of the idea is evident both in the proceedings of the Preparatory Commission and in the work of the Secretariat. The record is revealing.

Within half an hour of the signature of the Final Act establishing the Organization, 16th November, 1945, Sir Alfred Zimmern, then acting as Executive Secretary, speaking before the First Plenary Meeting of the Commission, expressed his conviction that Fundamental Education should become one of the major concerns of Unesco. With respect to the long-term programme of the Organization, Sir Alfred said,

If I sense aright the feeling of the Conference — the purport of the resolutions put in, for instance, by the United States Delegation and speeches made by numerous delegates [it] is that in the field of education the direction in which the new Organization would wish to direct its labours is in helping . . . the countries . . . which are faced with large masses of human beings living in conditions not only of poverty but of ignorance, and of removable ignorance. It seems to me we cannot act too quickly in selecting the direction in which we propose to place our work; and the subject that occurs to me . . . is 'Illiteracy among adults and the means to be taken throughout the world to combat it.' That is a subject which interests a large number of our member states . . . it interests a number of states which have very few illiterates amongst their metropolitan populations. . . . If we could decide here and now to take this up, . . . it would give our National Commissions in the various countries something immediate to work on and make them feel our sense of urgency . . . and that we were really going to turn into

action the provisions that we have made about removing poverty and ignorance and helping the poorer sections of the world community. (Applause.)

In addition to the general approval with which these remarks were received, the delegate from Mexico, Dr. Jaime Torres Bodet, and the delegate from Brazil, Senor J. J. Moniz de Aragao, spoke more specifically of the urgency of the task. Dr. Torres Bodet voiced explicitly what appears to have been the sense of the meeting. "that this should be one of the subjects to be dealt with in the first Session of the General Conference of this Organization."

It need hardly be said that this single incident in the earliest days of Unesco has an historic background in the development of the social theory of education; nor is it unconnected with the evolution of the social sciences or the long effort of mankind to achieve an ever larger measure of freedom and of self-control. This is not the place, of course, for any part of this greater human story; but it is worthy of note that in the discussions of Fundamental Education as an interest of Unesco, as indeed in the discussions of other urgent tasks of the Organization, there was evident a sense that the issues involved and the action to be taken had critical significance in the light of history.

Even before the first meeting of the Preparatory Commission it had been said that if the new Organization was to succeed, it must raise the level of general education in the various societies of the world. The Hon. Nils Hjeltnveit, Minister of Education of Norway, speaking to the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education, had pointed to the removal of illiteracy as a necessary first step in countries where illiteracy existed. He went on to say, "We must give depth and breadth to the education of the common people if we are to lay a firm basis for democracy within the individual nation and for understanding and collaboration among the peoples of the world." Here was a preliminary but weighty statement by a responsible Government representative.

Government proposals of a formal character were received on this topic within a few weeks after the Secretariat had begun its studies. In February, 1946, a Memorandum was submitted on behalf of the Iranian Government by Mr. G. A. Raadi, representative of Iran on the Preparatory Commission. It argued the importance of universal education as a means toward peace, security, and social justice and presented a working programme for Unesco in this field. The concrete proposals of this Memorandum will be considered later in the present document. It is significant to note here the argument that "great masses of men in many parts of the world are deplorably frustrated and deprived" in respect of education, and that "this condition creates a disequilibrium incompatible

with peace, universal goodwill, and mutual understanding among nations." It is further of interest to note that one of the steps recommended by the Iranian Government as deserving of "special attention" in the discharge of this "primary function of Unesco" is "The search for the social and economic causes of wide-spread illiteracy." Thus illiteracy is presented, not as an isolated fact, to be treated out of connection with its causes and its setting, but as one element in a complex human situation.

At about the same time — February, 1946 — a Memorandum was received from the Mexican Delegation under the title "Organization of an International Campaign against Illiteracy." The major proposal of this Memorandum and its valuable information on the situation in Mexico will be taken into further account in another place. What is especially pertinent at this point is the statement that "ignorance is not an isolated social fact, but one aspect of a condition of general backwardness which has many other features, like paucity of production, absence of industrialization, insignificant exports, poor transport and communications, deficient capital and income, bad conditions in regard to food, clothing, housing, and public health, and a high death rate." The complexity of the problem is again asserted; but the Mexican Memorandum goes on to argue that "the United Nations cannot afford to wait for [the] slow evolution" of a complete economic and social solution of the problem of ignorance, but that Unesco must, in the interests of peace, organize immediately an international campaign against illiteracy. An issue of major importance was thus brought formally before the Secretariat.

In addition, also in February 1946, at the Fourth Session of the Preparatory Commission, the Cuban delegate, M. Luis Perez, urged the view that "the primary aim [of Unesco] should be action which benefits the greatest number and touches the lives and welfare of the masses of men and women in all our lands. . . . [It] should be directed primarily to reducing inequalities in education, science, and culture within each nation and community and between the various nations and communities which form the United Nations. . . . That is what we mean by human betterment. . . ."

Encouraged by these memoranda and expressions of opinion, as well as by the obvious interest displayed by most of the delegates, the Education Section of the Secretariat included in its suggested programme a recommendation for the appointment of a Commission on Fundamental Education; and the Section also presented to the Education Committee of the Preparatory Commission a special paper on this subject. This paper was drafted in May, 1946, discussed late in that month with the Education Committee, and subsequently revised in the light of the comments made by members of the Committee.

In presenting the recommendation for the appointment of a Commission on Fundamental Education, Dr. Kuo Yu-Shou, Senior Counsellor for Education, explained why this new term was chosen. One might speak (he said) of "Illiteracy", "Mass Education", "Basic Education" or "Popular Education." One should, however, think not only of an attempt to liquidate adult illiteracy but also of the problem of providing elementary education for all the young people of all the world. The expression "Mass Education" corresponded to some degree to what the educational staff of Unesco had in mind but evoked unpleasing connotations of educational methods which paid insufficient attention to individual differences. The phrase "Fundamental Education", which at least has the merit of indicating an education on to which more could be built, seemed to have fewest disadvantages. It would be used to indicate a field of activity which would include and go beyond mass education, adult literacy campaigns, popular education, and the provision of primary education.

The special paper referred to above was discussed with the Education Committee of the Preparatory Commission on the 25th May, 1946. The paper proposed, in effect, the preparation of the present document, and it outlined a procedure for that purpose. It also presented the views of the Education Section of the Secretariat as to the reasons for choosing this field for early consideration and action.

The reaction of the Education Committee was favourable. In an interesting examination of the proposal advanced by the Secretariat, it became clear that no one concerned would be content to regard literacy as an end in itself. Like any tool, literacy may be used for bad purposes as well as for good ones. The whole content and direction of education come into question; and the utilization of education as a means toward war and conquest — as lately in Germany, Italy, and Japan — cannot be forgotten. The importance of work with youth organizations was emphasized. "In the next ten years," said Professor Paulo Berredo Carneiro, of Brazil, "the youth between 15 and 20, trained by Mussolini and Hitler, will inherit the reins of government. . . . The essential problems of youth have not yet been touched. . . ." And M. Henri Vallon, of France, referred to ceremonies as "a means of using collective feeling to the advantage of youth." Others spoke to the same effect, yet all admitted the urgency of effort to spread, in the widest possible way, the values to be achieved by education broadly and humanely conceived. These points of view are reflected in the final proposals of the Secretariat for its entire programme in education and also in its development of the idea of Fundamental Education, as described later in these pages.

The records of the meetings of the Preparatory Commission held in July, 1946, contain various references to the pre-

ject in Fundamental Education, as finally put forward in the first draft of the Program prepared by the Secretariat.

The comments of the delegates show marked differences in their approach to the problem, but they show no conflict of opinion as to the basic merit of the undertaking. Said Dr. Alf Sommerfelt, of Norway, ". . . People ask 'What are you going to do? What can you do?' Therefore I think it is necessary for the future of Unesco to take up something that people at large can readily understand, which can be an element in the work for peace. . . . At first we must concentrate upon one project which will really catch the imagination of the world. . . . Personally I would be in favour of a campaign against illiteracy. . . ." Dr. J. Idenburg, of the Netherlands, emphasized the need of a spiritual objective for popular education and of co-operation with church agencies. This was instanced again by Dr. I. J. Haarhoff, of the Union of South Africa. The President of the Preparatory Commission, the Rt. Hon. Ellen Wilkinson, pointed out that religion, as such, lay outside the jurisdiction of Unesco, whereas co-operation with church bodies in education remained entirely possible. M. B. Drzewieski, of Poland, spoke of the importance of psychology in dealing with educational problems and he pointed out, as did other delegates, the great need of improving the social and economic conditions of teachers. Dr. Esther Brunauer, of the United States, called attention to the need of proceeding co-operatively within the framework of the United Nations, without thought or hint of pressure or compulsion. There were other reactions to the idea of Fundamental Education, none in opposition, during the course of an extensive discussion of the proposed Program.

In this document which covers all the undertakings then proposed for consideration, the following passage concerns this topic:

A. *Commission on Fundamental Education*

It is proposed that twelve to fifteen world authorities in combating illiteracy, in furthering primary education in less developed countries and in conducting mass education, prepare summaries of their experiences and observations in these fields as related to Unesco's place in such programmes. A small committee of such experts would then edit this material and propose a programme of action concerning fundamental education by Unesco to the First General Conference. These summaries and proposals would be published in the autumn of 1946 as an essential preliminary step in the on-going programme of Unesco in Fundamental Education.

It should be made clear that the immediate action proposed was not the establishment of a Commission but the enlistment of a group of competent persons who could bring together and

edit a body of materials useful to the General Conference or to any Commission in this field which the Conference might decide to establish in the future.

This proposal was listed among the educational tasks of Unesco to be undertaken forthwith. Concerning all these tasks, the Education Committee said, "We believe them to be of educational significance, representative of the broad scope of education, demonstrative of Unesco's relation to other agencies, and affording opportunities for growth in the right direction."

Proposal "A" was adopted at the seventh meeting of the Fifth Session of the Preparatory Commission, on Tuesday, 9th July, 1946.

The Secretariat was thus enjoined to seek the services of a number of persons experienced in the main phases of Fundamental Education: to obtain from them written reports and reactions; to bring these materials together under editorial supervision; and to propose a programme of action for consideration by the First General Conference.

The present document is the result of this effort on the part of the Education Section of the Secretariat and of its collaborators.

Dr. Julian Huxley, Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission of Unesco, writing of the problems "which need to be given a place in Unesco's educational programme in the near future", expressed as follows the conception of Fundamental Education which had emerged from the discussions mentioned above:

First, the attack on illiteracy. This demands a high priority in view of our general principle that the lightening of the 'dark zones' of the world must claim a major share of our efforts in all fields. It demands it also, specifically, because literacy is a prerequisite for scientific and technical advance and for . . . better health, more efficient agriculture, and more productive industry: for full intellectual awareness and mental development: for . . . democracy and national progress: and for international awareness and knowledge of other nations.

On reflection, however, it is speedily seen that . . . mere literacy is not enough. It needs to be linked with the general system of education, and, with illiterates above school age, . . . with general social education, notably in relation to health, agriculture, and citizenship. That is why, in Unesco's programme, literacy campaigns have been merged in a more comprehensive study of Fundamental Education.

. . . Literacy is not enough, for by itself it by no means guarantees the benefits mentioned above. . . .

Certainly for some people literacy has meant merely new ways of filling time, new forms of escape from reality — in the shape of cheap newspapers and magazines and films — instead of sending them to the stored treasures of art and wisdom or promoting a fuller enjoyment of reality and a deeper understanding of nature and human life.

Nor is literacy necessarily going to lead to democracy. or, if it does so, to a right development of society. Nazi Germany demonstrated all too clearly the way in which one of the most thoroughly literate and highly educated peoples of the world could be led into false ways and undemocratic developments; and in democratic countries the manipulation of the press and the debasement of literature and the cinema is all too possible. Again, knowledge may easily be incomplete and information distorted, and these are among the most potent sources of international ill-will.

Thus, here, we are again brought up against the need for study from the widest possible angle, with all the consequences and implications of the project in view; and the value of an organization which, like Unesco, is by its constitution many-sided and concerned with all the higher activities of man, is once more demonstrated.

The Scope and Purpose of the Present Document

The general setting within which Fundamental Education has been envisaged by the Secretariat and the Preparatory Commission can best be understood by a careful reading of Chapter II of the Final Program Report, the chapter entitled "Unesco and Education". In this chapter the programme of action to be suggested in the document here presented is numbered 8 in a series of 13 projects. It is among those projects which are conceived as a means of adjusting education to present needs.

To quote in part the statements introducing the project in Fundamental Education:— "The Charter of the United Nations points out that stability and well-being are necessary if peaceful and friendly relations among the nations are to be created. Such conditions imply advances in economic and living standards as well as the universal acceptance and observance of fundamental human rights and freedoms. Where industrial development has not gone far, the most important and urgent issue is felt to be that of providing for the whole population that minimum education which would enable them to make better use of the tools and equipment of a scientific age to promote better standards of life in larger freedom to play their rightful role in the comity of nations. . . . The present educational inequality between

nations represents a danger to the peace of the world, which cannot become One if half of it remains illiterate. . . .” Unesco, accordingly, (it is proposed) “should launch upon a world scale an attack upon ignorance, by helping all Member States who desire such help to establish a minimum Fundamental Education for all their citizens.”

The purpose of the present document is to suggest ways in which Unesco may proceed with an enterprise so vast yet so urgent, so difficult yet so inspiring, so complex yet so challenging in the breadth of its human appeal.

The persons who took part in the task of preparing the document are named in an Appendix, and the part each of them played is there briefly indicated. Much of the work was done, of necessity, by correspondence and by conferences of individuals or smaller groups: at no time was it feasible to bring the entire group together for prolonged discussion.

Fortunately the object in view had about it no character of finality or completeness, nor could it have. Fundamental education is an on-going process. Unesco is a new agency, preparing to help in fundamental education from a new, a global point of view. Choice was to be made of means — not for doing everything that could possibly be done, but — for “launching”, where it might be desired, an “attack”. The choice of means was itself to be suggestive only, since it is the General Conference that must take final action as to the programme to be adopted. Fundamental education had to be grasped and presented in its essentials as an actual undertaking in the world of reality; but all the facts about it would not have to be assembled by November, 1946. The major difficulties to be encountered would have to be analyzed; the objectives already announced, and the objectives conceivable for Unesco, would have to be reviewed and classified; but only the history of the world, of education — and of Unesco — could provide the last word on such matters. In this understanding of their task, with humility but not without hope, the group concerned began the work of preparing the present document.

Chapter II gives *instances* of fundamental education which are at least worthy of thoughtful attention. *It makes no pretention to completeness.* Presumably the examples given are sufficiently varied to cover almost all the problems and issues of fundamental education as an effort of nations, associations, and devoted individuals. Chapter III consists of analyses and reflections on these problems and issues. Chapter IV deals with problems of a somewhat more practical kind; that is, with problems of policy and of method. In all three of these chapters articles solicited by the Secretariat have been used, or excerpts from such articles; and memoranda gathered in various ways have also been woven into the text. In general, the facts adduced and the views expressed have

been attributed to the persons from whose contributions they were derived; rarely has the Editorial Committee offered comment or judgment of its own. In one respect, however, the Editorial Committee was forced to use its own discretion; for not all the material submitted could be included in these pages, and it therefore became necessary to decide what would best serve the final purpose of the document and be of most use to the General Conference.

The final chapter is the work of the Editorial Committee, as amended and approved by the Secretariat. It is here that a programme of action has been drawn up for consideration by the General Conference.

The hope that has sustained a multitude of eager teachers in many lands, a hope that shines in the life and words of Comenius and Pestalozzi and Horace Mann, a hope that is corrected but not defeated by modern science — this hope has upheld also those who have served in the definition of this programme. The admission of difficulty, of danger, of the stringent need for judgment in the choice of means and policies, cannot obscure the vision of a new possibility — that the yoke of labour may be measurably lifted “from the worn neck of the race” and that education may yet help the great masses of mankind “to rise and look about them and have knowledge ere the grave”. Without peace this cannot happen; but unless it happens, peace can have no deep and enduring foundation.

Our ancients said. " People are the foundation of the nation. If the foundation is firm, then the nation will enjoy tranquillity." I apply that to the whole world. If the foundation is firm, then the world will enjoy tranquillity. But three-fourths of the world's people to-day are underhoused, underclothed, underfed, illiterate. . . . Now as long as this continues to be true we have a very poor foundation upon which to build the world.

JAMES YEN

as quoted in *Tell the People*

by PEARL S. BUCK, N.Y.,

The John Day Co., 1945. p. 11.