

EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING⁽¹⁾

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It has always been a task for the school to adapt itself to the trend of the general development. A generation or two ago in my country we adapted the education to the new society based on modern democracy. Today we have to take the next step: to adapt our education to a society that is more and more affected by the needs of international aspects. In other words, we have to give the young generation an education that can help them to be good and efficient world citizens as well as Filipinos or Americans or Swedes.

In this new way of thinking of education we are confronted by an obvious difficulty. At the same time we have to educate for the society of our own national country and for the world society. Which is the most important one? Of course the answer is that the most important task of the school is to give the students a good knowledge of the society where they probably will spend the biggest part of their life. They have to know its conditions and its problems, economic, social, political and religious. To give them an insight in all this must be the most urgent task of all education. What is outside must come as number two.

Perhaps this is especially important in countries that recently have become independent as in your beautiful country. The main task here must be to find yourself, to establish your own ways of living, to combine the patterns of life and society that have influenced you for centuries with what is really your own. You have to find your own ways, you have to be very much centered on what is really yours. And thus in a country like yours it must be a very important task to arouse in your generation a knowledge of and an admiration for what is really your own, a pride in

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your history and culture and traditions. This can be done in a spirit of sound nationalism, but it can also be done in a spirit of bad nationalism. In other words, just as nationalism can be very healthy and provide many positive values, it also can be an alarming and perhaps a dangerous base of education.

We have always the right and duty to love our country, but our pride of our own country must never be permitted to be unlimited. Sometimes we are right but sometimes also wrong.

When I was sent on a mission to a country for education for international understanding, a prominent representative of this country said to me: "Why did they send you to my country on a mission for education for international understanding? We are very peaceful and internationally minded! You had better go to our neighbor country!"

This reveals a way of thinking highly of your own people and lowly of your neighbors. It's an attitude that reminds me of the self-conscious attitude in the history textbooks of my boyhood, when my country always in the wars and the disputes with other peoples was right and they were wrong. "Right or wrong, my country!"

I think the time is definitely passed, when we could be only nationalists. We know, all of us, that today, with all our wonderful modern communications, our own country is only a part and usually a very small part of the wide world, and we know all of us, that today we are of no real value if we don't recognize the fact that we are living close together and that we, all of us, are depending on mutual contributions to the development not only of the world as a whole but also of our own country. No one of us today is self-dependent.

So we must recognize the need of not only national but also international aspects in our education. This is what we used to call education for international understanding.

This term, this expression, "education for international understanding," is probably not a very good one.

It is also just now discussed by the Unesco authorities at the headquarters in Paris to get another term for what we now are talking about. Especially they are interested—in the term “education for peace.” I am not quite sure that this would be better. Can you really educate for “peace”? “Do you really think that by your teaching in a classroom can stop the war in Vietnam?” This question was given to me by a student in Thailand. My answer was very conventional and superficial. Through teaching for international understanding we hope to create better attitude to other peoples, and if there is a general opinion in a country in favor of peace and cooperation it is possible that a government will follow this general opinion and avoid steps that could lead to a war. But is this really true? The tragic thing is that we don't know for sure the real reasons behind a war. We know that there can be a war in spite of the fact that the peoples involved are definitely in favor of peace and that a war has rather little to do with the general opinion, the attitudes of the peoples involved. Oil field control? Disputes about certain territories? Disputes about certain commercial or communicational favors? We don't know for sure. The Dag Hammarskjold Institute in Uppsala has recently been established for a special peace research.

And because of this it is very uncertain if we really can achieve any obvious results from an education for international understanding. There is no reason for a cheap optimism. But ignoring this I still think there are many and strong reasons for what we call an education for international understanding. One reason is that in a world where we, with each day, come more and more close together it is simply necessary that we have a far better knowledge of each other. We have to adapt our education to the demands of world citizenship.

A knowledge of the world and of its problems has shown to have a favorable effect on our own national feelings. It makes it possible to moderate our national pride and to promote a sound self-criticism.

We Swedes often feel proud of our own country and our ability to give help to other nations. But when we acquire a better knowledge of the suffering in our world, our pride is change into shame; we are ashamed that we do so little, that we in fact give nothing compared with what we really could give, only some crumbs from the table of our welfare. A better knowledge of the gigantic problems in other countries can make us more humble and give us a more proper evaluation of our very small efforts.

Another example: We Swedes in our quiet corner of the world have a tendency to play the role of world conscience, which of course, is very little called for. We condemn the ways in which some countries are solving their race problems. We feel a well founded indignation on behalf of how black people are treated in some countries. Don't they know that we are all brethren, in spite of color? But it is an established fact that black students on scholarships can find it difficult to get boarding rooms in the university cities of Sweden. It is really easy to feel indignant, when you live far away from these problems, but when you get them at home you can find that you are not a bit better than those horrible peoples! We had prejudices without knowing it. And I have found that also among peoples, who are so anxious to declare their good will and friendly attitudes to all the peoples of the world, they sometimes are not aware of the fact that they treat minorities in their own countries with disgust and contempt.

You will acquire a better knowledge of yourself, when you really try to penetrate the important questions of human rights and human dignity and get some real knowledge of the problems and the gambling for power behind the racial conflicts and injustices. Such knowledge can give us a more real knowledge also of ourselves, and at the same time a more true evaluation of our own way of living.

Of course I don't mean to say that the most important aim or result of teaching at school for international understanding is to get a better picture of yourself or to give you material for self-reflection. The most important pur-

pose, of course, is to achieve a better knowledge of other peoples and their history and problems. The pedagogical points of aim can be expressed in three words: imaginations, comparisons and cooperation.

The main purpose of our teaching is to create true imaginations of other peoples, their customs, their way of living, their material and spiritual culture. You have to try to understand that which is strange to you from its own connections. Much of our prejudices and contempt are caused by insufficient knowledge of other peoples.

It is natural to make comparisons of conditions in our own country with those in other countries, but it is not quite safe. Perhaps there is a way to understanding if we go from the known to the unknown. We in Sweden can thus get a better understanding of the African village democracy, if we remind ourselves of the fact that we had a similar kind of democracy in our own peasant society. Probably you can find similar examples in your own country. The differences are often smaller than the similarities.

The third point of the aim for an education for international understanding is cooperation. It is easy to state the fact that technical progress gets the peoples closer together, and at the same time the increasing food problems make peaceful cooperation necessary. We are all familiar with the three steps of development, that we express in the three words dependence, independence, interdependence. We all of us recognize the necessity of interdependence, of a mutual dependence on other nations. The generation of students that we have nowadays in our schools will probably get important duties in this cooperation. Some of them will need a special education for this international cooperation, and all the other students also must get the possibility of understanding and appreciating this international cooperation.

It is impossible to foresee what the coming world will look like. That will be the result of the transformation of

our technical age. You can find different tendencies, that seem to be inconsistent, but probably each of them will be components in the process, from which the world society of tomorrow will develop.

One of these tendencies seems to be a normalising one. We find it in the mass product, both in form and function; we find it in house building and city planning.

As to the spiritual culture the mass media are working with the same tendencies. Wild Western stories come rushing in European as well as in African and Asian houses with the same pattern. Small peoples and economically developing countries have no means to create striking programmes of similar strength. Thus, the American style or the Soviet Union style is influencing our cultural patterns, but in good and bad sides of other cultures. This is a very delicate problem of international cooperation. Will it be possible to avoid a conquest of the souls of peoples through printers' inks or TV or films, when colonial conquests of raw products are not possible any more?

An alternative to this normalising is a mixing of different cultures. We can see this done in several religions and customs and arts.

The cooperation between the peoples must be founded on respect and regard for inherited ways of living and on mutual exchange of cultural values. It is not desirable or necessary to smooth down all tensions. There must remain a freedom to form opinions. No one's feeling must be offered and no one must be prevented from expressing it to another. This freedom of expressing your own opinions will perhaps never be complete, but in a world of manifoldness with different traditions, different ways of living and different religions it must be final aim of education.

It is for this world with different evaluations and different conceptions of life that schools must prepare their students. And in this teaching there is no need for other

pedagogical methods than those that we use in all education.

Teaching facts is the basic method, here as in all our subjects. Only if the students get solid facts and objective facts is there is hope for a better understanding and a smoothing down of antagonism. Most of the subjects at school can give good international views. Not only social science subjects but also sciences and arts and music can give wonderful contributions to understanding of another culture, if you know how to interpret it.

Exercise of skills, of course, here as always is closely connected with learning facts. First of all, this means teaching foreign languages. A practical skill of using one of the world languages is more important than ever. It must be considered as a practical need in all countries to improve the teaching of foreign languages.

Creating good attitudes is, last but not least, of elementary importance in a teaching situation like this. Creating attitudes is mostly done not deliberately but through accents, small accents of admiration or contempt, that not always the teacher is aware of but that have a tendency to give colours to his information and comments.

The attitude of understanding fellow-creatures, of understanding what is different, which we want to promote through our teaching, is not at all self-evident to the teacher. We have all of us, our prejudices and there are prejudices that we ourselves are not aware of, but that we interpret as true descriptions of foreign cultures. The teacher always has a need for good preparation if he will be able to give his students real and true imaginations.

Education for good attitudes towards fellow human beings is the purpose of international guidance on all school levels. And the older students must be aware of the fact that they belong to a generation that will have definite importance when it comes to building up a world community.

The future belongs to the youth. Let us prepare the youth for the future!