

CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: WHAT IT IS DOING TO THE YOUNG

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In my forty years working on educational development and reform, I have taught school and walked around Africa with no money; launched Uganda's first five year plan (and shared offices with Idi Amin); helped pilot an education reform in Thailand, whilst at the same time working for human rights, and training in non violent action; and spent six years in a remote corner of Nepal designing and implementing a Gandian type development program through action oriented education. I have joined Jerry Rawlings' revolutionary spirit in Ghana only to see it captured by middle class respectability; fought corruption in Cameroon; and cried as the Ethiopian Government saw the destruction of its neighbour as more important than the feeding of its starving people.

I thought I was prepared to face the temptations and diversions that would be thrust on my path throughout African and Asia, but realized later that I was not fully prepared for either its magnitude nor its frequency. Rarely a year has gone by over the past four decades without some direct or indirect attempt. to influence my decisions, from my employers, contractors, consultants or clients. One Christmas I was unwrapping a bottle of whiskey from a school contractor, throwing away the paper as I did so, only to be challenged by one of my daughters for putting money into the bin. I realized that the inner wrapping was made of many \$US 100 bills. Another time a painting, which turned out to be valuable, was left on my doorstep, and another time a sack of groceries. All these were not designed to buy any immediate favour, but merely to have an influential

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friend, in case one was needed in future. Quite obviously these gifts had to be returned to the contactors or consultants, which involved considerable embarrassment. Other offers were far easier to refuse, but more difficult to deal with, including a share in a \$250,000 kickback on a fake book contract, and a share of \$50,000 from a fund for the reconstruction of earthquake destroyed schools, which had never left a Minister's personal account. In this latter case, instead of the support that I had expected from my UN employers, I was reprimanded for drawing attention to corruption when this was not in my job description. Obviously time to change employers. One of the greatest difficulties in attacking corruption is that far too many firms and organizations do not want to take the risk of disturbing the status quo.

As I gained experience in the development business I became aware of a much more insidious and damaging form of 'corruption' that was affecting both my colleagues and I, that of the ego. We became "important" by having access to a President, or Prime Minister, or Minister, opening ourselves to manipulation by the more skilful of these leaders, to support the interest of a party or clique or a clan, rather than meeting valid development goals or strategy. This access would in turn increase our status amongst our development colleagues, because we and not they had this privileged relationship. We were being bought through our egos just as others were being purchased through their flesh or their purses. Again a need to change employers. All higher officials of the development agencies need to participate in intensive programs of sensitisation to this danger of a play on their egos.

Quite obviously we development workers carry our own cultural and economic baggage with us, and often have an impact very different from the one we intend. We usually earn considerably more than we would get in our home countries. We live in big houses, and drive expensive four wheel drive vehicles, which in turn results in creating temptations amongst colleagues from the countries in which we are working, who see no reason why we and not they should have the big mansions and cars, considering that we are both doing similar work. Our very presence can tempt our colleagues to accept or even demand kickbacks and other perks. It is our behaviour more than our words that are followed, and are our lasting heritage. Far too often there is mutual back scratching. Government officials approve the projects that we propose, as long as we include vehicles, overseas travel, and even consultancy assignments for these officials. The decisions taken can be as distorted as if more open bribes were offered. Often far more projects are approved than can ever be implemented, as it is the goodies that motivate, not their likely development impact.

Development professionals from North America and the Western Europe assume of this belief. As a rule of thumb from visits to many hundreds of classrooms in more remote rural areas in Africa, and Asia, where the majority of children live, 70% of teachers are not in their classrooms at the time of such visits. Usually children are much more eager to learn than teachers to teach, and it takes many years for this eagerness to be destroyed. that civil servants should be serving the people, when in fact the main objectives of many civil services in the poorer countries is to provide employment for school leavers, and /or political patronage. We expect that teachers, if they are paid, should be found teaching

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children in classrooms. It takes many contrary experiences for us to be disabused. The fact that in many African and Asian countries teachers are conspicuous through their absence, already gives children the idea that one can have a job without working.

Visiting primary schools in Eastern Nepal one Monday, we were surprised to find that none of the schools were operating. School after school was closed. It was difficult to find out why, as most of the villagers were out working in the fields. Finally we found a group of parents, and they explained to us that their school had two teachers, in common with most of the schools in the area. One would work on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and the other on Thursdays and Fridays. Both would take a long weekend from Saturday to Monday. A parents' committee had been to the district education office to complain, but were not made to feel welcome, and came away empty handed. Later we questioned the district official, and he agreed that the teachers were expected to teach six days a week, from Sunday to Friday. He admitted sending the parents' group that came to his office away, as they were "troublemakers". If he accepted the parents' complaint he would have to sanction those teachers who were not working as officially expected, which would make him unpopular with his peers. Better children are not taught, than to upset the status quo. Again it is the children who suffer.

Some years later, travelling through a secondary forest in Eastern Ghana I arrived at a primary school at nine in the morning, half an hour later than school was supposed to start. There were plenty of children around but no teachers. After some time a couple of groggy, hung over teachers arrived and started to teach in a desultory fashion. I asked to see the headmaster, and there was an embarrassed silence, again I asked, and again the teachers looked the other way. A third time I asked, and was shown a madman, chained to a pole in the middle of the village. Evidently he had become crazy more than a month before. The Parent Teacher Association had been to the local district office to ask for the headmaster to be changed, but up to that time no action had been taken. When we passed through the district capital we asked the education officer why the madman had not been changed. He explained, in all seriousness that it would be too disturbing, academically, to change a headmaster in the middle of a school year. To see your headmaster chained to a pole in the middle the village cannot give a positive educational message to the students, and cannot encourage those children who are not in school to enrol.

It is the children who suffer most from the teacher absenteeism, as it is clear that all other things being equal, the greater the number the hours of teacher learner interaction the more the child will learn. Japan has an academic year of 246 days, and most Japanese children have at least this number of days of effective learning. US and much of Western Europe have academic years of 180 days, and achieve at least 170 days of teaching. The poorer developing countries tend to have academic years of 180 to 220 days, but largely because of teacher absenteeism and strikes, and sanctioned absences to collect salaries or attend administrative meetings, manage an average of around 120 days a year, with a low of 70 days in rural Nepal. As many developing countries also operate of a two or even three shift system, and have overcrowded classrooms (I have seen as many as 272 pupils in a class in Chad), the majority of children have insufficient access to effective teaching. Many leave school illiterate, and few have skills to equip them for self employment, let

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alone to participate in the global economy. Most parents, except for those who send their children to elite schools, are being cheated by the school system.

In order to get the teachers to be present in the classrooms, and teaching, however poorly, it is necessary to move authority, relating to the recruitment discipline and payment of teachers, away from the bureaucrat, to as close as possible to the parent, or some other group equally concerned with the education of the children. In Thailand and Nepal we created clusters of schools, with a group of five to ten primary schools not more than three hours walk from a middle or junior secondary school. The former were considered the satellites and the latter the resource centers of the clusters. Given the fact that children who competed for places in the resource centre were inevitably drawn from the satellites, it was in the interests of the resource center that the quality of education in the satellites was as high as possible. Responsibility for educational and administrative supervision and inspection of the satellites was given to the resource center, along with the power to recommend sanctions, rewards, and promotion of the satellite teachers. One afternoon a month there was a meeting/training of all the teachers in the cluster at the resource center. In the Thai case, all the teachers were civil servants, and thus any serious sanction could only be imposed by distant educational bureaucrats. In Nepal there was a mixture of civil servant, and contract hire teachers. In both cases the resource centers had some additional funds, which could be allocated to satellite schools, or to interschool activities. Teacher absenteeism in these school clusters was of the order of 15% compared to the norm in Nepal, prior to the introduction of the clusters, of 70%.

Chad has amongst the highest paid teachers in Africa in relation to its GDP per capita, the highest level of teacher absenteeism, and some of the largest classes I have ever seen. Teachers were being paid with six to nine months of arrears. At the same time there were large numbers of graduates of teacher training colleges who were unemployed. Primary school enrolment rates were low, and most children in school were learning very little because of teacher absenteeism. Schools were rarely, if ever, inspected, as the inspectors had no transport, and nowhere comfortable to stay if they ever arrived at a village school. We convinced the Government to move away from the employment of civil service teachers, and instead to send money to the Parent Committees to employ teachers, with a minimum qualification, on contract, paying about one third what the civil servant was paid. Because the teachers were contacted and employed by the parent community, and were only paid if they were present in the classroom, they tended to teach the whole academic year. It was one of the most popular measures that I have ever been involved in. Rural primary schools were revitalised, and three times as many unemployed and qualified teachers were recruited each year as was previously the case. The children were the ultimate beneficiaries.

Just because the teacher is present does not necessarily mean that any teaching actually takes place. Many is the time that I have visited schools in Ethiopia, Ghana, Cameroon, or Nepal and found the school open, but both the teacher and his students absent. The teacher has taken the children to work on his farm, not as a learning experience as might be obtained from a demonstration plot, but as unpaid child labour for the benefit of the teacher. Not only does this further reduce learning time, but discourages parents from

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sending their children to school. If children are going to work on a farm in any case, it might as well be that of their parents. In Ethiopia, and elsewhere, efforts are made to recruit teachers to work as close as possible to their homes. For such local teachers acceptable accommodation and foodstuffs will be available, he will be able to speak the local language, and more able to convince parents to send their daughters and sons to school. Less time will be lost for marriages, and funerals. If teachers from distant from the locality are employed, they will be unlikely to have access to land, and thus would not exploit the school children on their farms, but all the other advantages of having a local teacher would be lost.

Privatisation is one of the current mantras of development gurus, and no civil servants had taken this mantra so much to heart as those in Cameroon. Teachers sold places in the front rows of their overcrowded classrooms, parents had to pay if they wanted their child's exercise books to be corrected, and the only way a child could complete the curriculum in an examination year was through private tuition with the same teacher. An Inspector's main function on visiting a school was to be fed. Poor food and drink would result in a poor report. Headmaster's posts were sold, those in the larger schools by the highest officials in the Ministry of Education. In Chad the Parent Associations were imposing significant and unsanctioned levies, without which the schools could not operate. Students who could not or did not pay the levy were sent home. A similar situation existed in Ghana, and elsewhere in Africa. Again in Ghana the going price for a place in a Teacher Training College, which was a guarantee of future employment, was 5,000 Cedis (\$80 at that time) and a goat. All of these forms of petty corruption teach children that everything has its price, and that the idea of 'basic education for all' is a concept alien to many cultures.

When a child enters primary school one can see the quest for learning in his or her eyes. All the children are struggling together to try to understand what the teacher is saying. As the child climbs up the educational ladder, cooperation changes to competition, and learning to the regurgitation of often misunderstood facts in examinations. It is the tail of the dog that wags the dog. Most children, and their parents, are more concerned with their marks in an exam than whether they have learned anything from school or not. What is important to a child is his or her examination grades, and in many circumstances it is immaterial as to how these grades are obtained. Many children learn that nothing is more valuable than finding some way to cheat, by for example having examination papers in advance or the answers to the questions during or before the exam. Safes with examination questions have been blown in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka. In Cameroon the price of an examination paper was very high days before the exam, and fell to a more affordable level the day of the exam itself. In Botswana it has been reported that female students can get the examination questions from their teacher by agreeing to sleep with him. In Nepal I have stood outside an examination hall watching the examination questions wrapped round stones flying out of the window, and some minutes later answers flying back by the same route.

Even where security is strong, and no one has seen the papers before the exam there is no equality of opportunity. In all developing societies, the chance of success in an exam of a

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middle class child, coming from a literate environment, with electric light, benefiting from private tuition, going to a better endowed school, is many many times grater than that of a child from a rural area or urban slum, with poorly educated or illiterate parents, and no electric light, and attending a school with few if any text books, and unmotivated teachers. School systems create the pretence of equality of opportunity, without the reality. In several African countries 90% or more of university students come from families from the top income decile. Children learn that no matter how hard they study there is no way that they can succeed, and that there is no equality of opportunity. In Thailand, Nepal, and Kenya schools are classified according to their exam performance, and thus children and their parents know in advance their chances in the exams. In Nepal, instead of trying to build up the poor performing schools, they are threatened with a removal of their subsidies, whilst additional support is given to those schools that perform the best, and perhaps needing it least.

Many see schooling as if it were a lottery, the more you pay, the more tickets you buy, the greater your chance of winning. In the past, perhaps success in a Primary School Leaving Certificate could guarantee a job that provided more security than farming, then a secondary leaving certificate, and now university graduates cannot find any regularly paid job. The idea that schooling leads to learning is far from most people's idea of what its real function is.

Given the fact that schooling has become divorced from learning, the most pernicious and corrupting impact of the school system on the youth in the poorer countries is that they are failures. Half fail at the end of primary school, another half at the end of lower secondary, two thirds of those who are in upper secondary schools fail to go to higher education, and half of those fail to get a degree. Many of those who graduate fail to get an acceptable job. Given that the ultimate objective is to get a regularly paid job over 95% of the youth learn that they are failures. Someone who considers him or herself to be a failure cannot have a stake in the development of his society. The crowds of unemployed youth on every street corner in every sub Saharan African city, and increasingly also in the villages, ready to threaten and frighten, are a manifestation of this phenomena, as is the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. The youth, uprooted from their past, and unable to believe in their future, live only for today. Schoolgirl pregnancy is common, and more recently HIV aids. In one Ethiopian urban high school an 80% of HIV prevalence rate was reported amongst the senior students.

This sense of failure is intensified by the inappropriateness and irrelevance of much of what is taught. One time visiting a primary school in Nepal, five days walk from the nearest road, the teacher was teaching the text "Sushida took a bus to the zoo". I tried to find out from the children what a bus was. After a great deal of discussion one bright girl told me that "a bus is a kind of porter". I failed to create an understanding of what a zoo was. A high school was teaching about "Pope Pontius Septus and the crusades" The French African history books that opened with "Our ancestors the Gauls" have fortunately now been withdrawn. The Thai curriculum had the children giving apples to their teacher, even though apples are not grown in Thailand. All these examples may seem petty by themselves, but together lead the children to believe that their ultimate

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objective is to leave their country for the west. Whenever I visit a high school or higher education class, whether in Anglophone or Francophone Africa, or South Asia, I always try to find out what the young men and women want to do when they leave school. After going through a list of professions, I end with the question “and who wants to work in Europe or America?” All hands shoot up. This is hardly the foundation that is needed for the development of their societies. Part of the problem is the fact that both the curriculum and the text books are either developed by foreigners, or by those who have been trained in foreign pedagogical institutes.

The alienation created by many of the curricula and texts that African and Asian children follow does not have to be so. In Thailand a curricula was developed involving parents, development experts, and educators. Each group worked separately, only coming together at the end of the exercise. In common with many other countries they decided that during the first four years of primary education there would be no subjects taught (but there would still be language and maths drills), but instead the child would have his or her environment gradually widened ...myself, my family, my school, my community, my country, and my world. Up until the end of lower secondary school English was only taught outside the normal curricula and the school day, as it was decided most important to have a mastery of the national language.

Even the organization of the school year is corrupted by colonial values, and leads children to understand that their religion or culture is worth very little. Throughout francophone Africa there is a ten day “skiing holiday” in February. School systems in the Moslem countries of the Sahel close for Christmas and Easter holidays, and are fully operating during Ramadan. School systems by their very design, get children to look out of their countries, rather than in. Very often the school week pays no attention to market day when most children do not go to school but are helping their mothers, nor to the labour requirements of the agricultural cycle. In parts of Cameroon no sooner does the first rain fall, than virtually all children disappear from school. It is no wonder that the actual length of the academic year is so short, and so little learning takes place.

The text book publishing business is the area in the school system where there is ,the greatest financial corruption. It provides one of the biggest recurring markets in many African countries, a market that is never satiated, as year after year new textbooks are needed for the new group of students. There is intense competition from international publishers, much of it involving diverse forms of corruption. Text books in much of francophone Africa cost up to ten times that of similar texts published in Asia. As only officially sanctioned texts can be used in schools, the potential for corruption is great. Ministry of Education Officials are invited to inspect printing presses in Europe and the Far East. Officials have their names added as authors of text books they have never written, so they can share in the royalties. Ministers are bought, both to include titles on the approved list, and to discourage local writers and developers. In Guinea once a consignment of twenty five containers of textbooks was found to include several Mercedes Benz cars. Another time in Ghana all the illustrations in an expensively purchased text book series showed Chinese looking children. The extremely high cost of

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text books has led to a thriving black market in pirated versions wherever there is a large market, such as Nigeria/Cameroon, or Thailand , with such books selling for as little as a quarter of the publishers' list price. Elsewhere text books have followed the demand like any other commodity. For example World Bank funds were used to purchase text books for all Chadian primary school students. The books were bought, never reached most Chadian children , but were found being sold in markets in several other countries, some as far away as Benin.

The role of the donors can be paramount in the continued domination of publishers from France and to a lesser extent the UK in the African text book market. Whenever there is a challenge from book publishers from non traditional sources, bilateral donors will provide texts books from the home country, or subsidise the provision of these books for a short period. Often parents have to buy textbooks themselves. The maintenance of this system has a pernicious impact on the learning that takes place in schools. Research shows that after the teacher, the access a child has to appropriate text books is the most important factor determining student achievement. The high cost of text books throughout Africa means that most children do not have access to texts. It is not uncommon to find one textbook being shared by five or more children, and in many schools it is only the teacher that has the text. If it were not the thriving “bend down book boutique” market for second hand books, the situation would be disastrous. The response of several of the Francophone publishers to this second hand market in Cameroon, Chad, and Djibouti amongst others is to move, with the paid support of the Ministries of Education, from text books to work books, in which children have to write their answers, and which have to be purchased new every year. Many parents cannot afford these work books, and again it is the children who suffer.

Throughout much of sub Saharan Africa students in Universities and other higher education institutions receive scholarships, or loans (that are not paid back), and very often receive free lodging and subsidised food. Since the unit costs of higher education are about forty times those of primary education, and the largest majority of all higher education students come from the most wealthy income decile, this is an exceedingly regressive use of scarce Government resources. This by itself does not lead to the corruption of the young. However, given the relatively high level of the scholarships, and the difficulty of getting a job, many students try to remain enrolled for as long as possible, and even when this is not possible try to hold on to their free accommodation, paying on the side what might be necessary. In trying to reduce the share of education budgets going to higher education (which reached 50% in Bolivia some years ago) we discovered “students” who had managed to stay in free university accommodation for more than 25 years in Senegal, Ghana, and Madagascar. In one case we found a student who had been receiving a scholarship for thirty five years. The corruption involved in misusing the system this way, and also enabling graduating students to avoid paying back student loans creates a future governing elite trained to believe that theft from the state is OK. What is even worse is that those who succeed in cheating the most out of the system are considered the heroes. In Cameroon the level of theft became so endemic, that from one year to the next all scholarships, student accommodation and subsidized meals were

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abolished, and replaced with fees. For the first time in years Universities had some resources they could use for education, as opposed merely in providing student services.

The African continent is littered with thousands of formal vocational and technical training institutes created by one donor after another. Some of these donors might be well meaning, but others are often more concerned with selling equipment and placing technical assistant personnel, than in providing a quality education. We have known since the publication in the 1960's of the "Vocational Training Fallacy", in which Arthur Lewis showed that the chance of employment of those passing through these formal training institutes was less than if they had stayed at home, that the civil servant teacher is not equipped to teach practical subjects, that equipment provided is often inappropriate in the first instance, and is soon obsolete. In school after school that I have visited, vocational training, whether in traditional crafts such as carpentry, or modern crafts such as refrigeration or computer repair, is carried out on the blackboard, in front of fifty or more students. It is the one area of the education system where both the students and their parents are totally cheated. It is the one area where students graduate, "qualified" in a certain specialism, unable ever to get a job in that area, without informal training through apprenticeship. A great training robbery is taking place every day. It is also an area where there is intense competition to sell more equipment that will not be used. A few years back we were in the process of trying to reform the vocational training system in Ghana, by creating a partnership between the schools, which would teach the theory, and master craftsmen from the informal sector who would train in the practical skills. The British Government killed this reform by donating 50% of the cost of a contract with a British supplier to re equip all the vocational schools in the country. The provision of such poisoned chalices by donors is not uncommon.

In Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Ethiopia, and elsewhere it is often the purchase of educational equipment that is more important than its use. This is sometimes because of kickbacks, and sometimes merely because the party faithful are winning contracts. Too often in higher education institutes and schools there are unopened crates of books and equipment parked in front of empty workshops. The contents of these crates, facing tropical rain and heat is often destroyed, especially those that have remained unopened for several years.

Too often foreign suppliers provide obsolete equipment for which no spares are available, and yet others with junk, which falls apart with its first use. Too often foreign suppliers exploit the weakness of the poorer countries in preparing clear and watertight specifications. In Cameroon a central computer server costing millions of dollars was purchased by the Ministry of Education that has never worked. In a well established Nigerian university an electron microscope was supplied missing an essential component, and has never functioned. In Guinea installation instructions were provided for university equipment in a language that no one understood. In Ethiopia imported school furniture was so weak that it broke with its first use. Hundreds of millions of dollars a year must be 'stolen' from the poorest countries every year by unscrupulous first world traders and manufacturers of educational equipment and supplies, because of the incompleteness of the specifications provided. The young university students are hardly likely to believe in

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the benefits of free trade when surrounded by the junk that is sent to their country by those in the first world.

Primary schools constructed through Japanese assistance in Cote D'Ivoire, Cameroon, Guinea, and Djibouti had to be designed by Japanese architects, and constructed by Japanese contractors. Even though these prime contractors often sub contracted to local companies, the schools were costing considerably more per student place than primary schools in Japan and Western Europe, and around ten times the cost per place of locally designed and constructed schools. Even these locally constructed and designed schools were extraordinarily expensive. A hollow concrete block primary school is inexplicably many times more expensive than a hollow concrete block private house with the same floor area. The high costs of school construction mean either that huge numbers of children are studying in temporary shelters or under trees as is the case in Chad, or are kept out of school as is the case in Djibouti. Again it is the children who suffer.

The largest kickbacks are most certainly with high cost post secondary, and university buildings. Ghanaian technical schools and Nigerian university campuses are littered with unfinished and deserted carcasses of buildings. As each new school and university administration is appointed, it cancels the contracts of its predecessors so that the resources available can be used to award new contracts for new buildings. The students remain crammed in the few buildings that have been completed, surrounded by concrete examples of the corruption of those who they should be looking up to.

If youth in developing countries see that they are receiving a second rate education at least partly because of the thievery and corruption of those who manage their education systems, and if this education does not lead to the promised employment, we are creating a generation who no longer believe that they can make it through normal means, and have no stake in the orderly development of their societies. Even those with a doctoral degree consider it better to drive a taxi in London or New York, than face the insecurities and hopelessness of their own countries. When I started my career forty years ago in Ghana, everyone believed that Ghana could make it. Only a rosy future lay ahead. Thirty years later there were few who believed that things would get better. Forty years ago Ghanaians were proud of their educational institutions, and now even high school teachers have to grow their food in their gardens.

Most serious of all has been the change in the heroes of the young. No longer are their teachers, or their political leaders, or those who brought learning to the villagers, their heroes. No longer do they believe that "each one should teach one". Now the heroes are the 'Fay Men', those who develop tricks to cheat and steal money from ordinary people and the Government, and get away with it. Everyone, whether in Africa, or Asia is talking with pride of the new tricks that have been invented by these fay men. At least footballers and athletes remain as positive heroes.

We need to make a concerted effort through the school system and the media to create a new breed of heroes, heroes who have good lives themselves, but who also care for those less fortunate than themselves.