

Memo

BEP LEARNING
TO SHAPE
BIRMINGHAM
CONFERENCE

To: Participants, Learning to Shape Birmingham Conference
From: Colm Regan
Date: September 2017
Re: Education, Justice and the Future: revisiting our role

1. A PLACE TO START AND SOME QUESTIONS:

'We are entering a new era in Earth's history: the Anthropocene. An era in which humans rather than natural forces are the primary drivers of planetary change. But we can also redefine our relationship with our planet, from a wasteful, unsustainable and predatory one, to one where people and nature can coexist in harmony.'

We need to transition to an approach that decouples human and economic development from environmental degradation - perhaps the deepest cultural and behavioural shifts ever experienced by any civilization.'

Marco Lambertini, WWF International, Living Planet Report 2016

Quotes such as that above (and the evidence and realities behind them) offer profound challenges to the nature and role of education throughout the world. For example:

- *What are the implications for teaching and learning in a planet under increasing stress from a variety of angles?*
- *What is fair, and reasonable to ask of schools, teachers and students in such a scenario?*
- *How can schools 'balance' the needs and rights of students (and teachers) and those of society at large and the planet?*
- *What does Learning to Shape Birmingham mean in such a world?*

2. TO REMIND OURSELVES - EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT

When approached from a broadly defined 'justice' perspective, it is obvious that our current model of 'development' (Plan A - 'business as usual') is clearly unsustainable:

- **It denies too many, too much:** *measuring poverty at the present norm of \$1.25 per day, using our current model of 'development' it would take 100 years to eradicate extreme poverty and if defined more realistically at \$5.00 per day, 207 years*
- **It resolutely refuses to countenance planetary limits:** *to sustain our current lifestyles (including carbon emissions), we already require the resources of 1.6 planets and this will increase by 2030 to 2 planets if we pursue Plan A growth models*
- **It routinely and systematically denies equality to half of humanity:** *no country in the world has closed the gender gap and only 5 countries have closed more than 80% of it*

These realities threaten to undermine the real progress made in many key areas over the past decades across the globe especially areas such as food security, health, education etc.

*And, we should also remember **the catalytic role of education (and educationalists)** in generating and supporting much of this positive change to date. Examples include the spread of the human rights agenda worldwide, the growth of the consumer ethics and the fairtrade movement, the expanding environmental and divestment movements and the emergence of ideas and programmes such as the MDGs and SDGs.*

3. EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE?

If we remain locked into the role of educational support structure for Plan A and refuse to consider and debate the emerging Plan B, then we fundamentally fail our students, their future and that of the planet and the bulk of its people. The issues are a matter of common concern whether we live and learn in Birmingham, Beijing or Bangalore and they offer opportunities for profound learning of the most fundamental kind whether in the sciences, literacy, numeracy, citizenship etc.

They go to the essence of our profession and offer us the chance to be what we proclaim we are – teachers!

4. NOTES ON A FRAMEWORK

The Human Development Report for 2016 (international UNDP flagship report on human development) highlighted what it described as key twenty-first century life-long learning skills to engage with a world of 'rising shocks, expanding vulnerabilities' - a 'fit-for-the-future' skills framework. They will be hugely familiar to anyone involved in education:

- **Ways of Thinking:** *creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making and learning*
- **Tools for Working:** *information and communication technology*
- **Ways of Working:** *communication and collaboration*
- **Skills for Living in the World:** *citizenship, life and career, personal and social responsibility*

Such an approach builds further on the original 1996 UNESCO Report *Learning: The Treasure Within* which emphasised three key aspects of twenty-first century education - **learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together**. This framework has been necessarily updated as highlighted in the *Education for All Report* of 2016 with the addition of **learning to live sustainably**. It is clear that activists from the educational, human development and sustainability sectors broadly agree on both vision and direction.

The challenge for educationalists at the chalk-face is how to translate such lofty ideals into practical, appropriate and deliverable teaching and learning. And, the need to do this in the search for a vital Plan B.

- *What does this mean for teaching and learning 'quality education' in Birmingham and elsewhere?*
- *How do we translate our personal, professional and political responsibilities into an educational frame – strengthening a rights AND responsibilities agenda? This is key to exploring a global justice perspective in education*
- *What does this mean for the 'deeply good' education cited by BEP in its Mission Statement?*
- *What practical and feasible programmes and projects can assist us in this?*
- *How do we counter those who simply insist education should support Plan A without debate?*

Challenges such as these are at the core of Learning to Shape Birmingham.

Note: the key sources (all free online) for much of the above argument include:

- WWF (2016) Living Planet Report 2016. Risk and resilience in a new era, WWF International, Gland, Switzerland
- UNDP (2016) Human Development Report 2016 Human Development for Everyone, New York
- UNESCO 1996 *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Paris
- World Economic Forum (2016) *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016*, Geneva