

The New Learning Revisited

At the inaugural program for 2011, the core ideas and contemporary relevance expressed in a 1980 essay authored by Professor Raghavan Iyer were reviewed and discussed. Three presenters offered insights into principles and programs outlined in the essay that might guide and sustain visionary support for life-long learning. Such learning could respond in relevant and effective ways to the subtle and complex interdependence of national initiatives and global realities. Americans and their governments must participate in responses to new bonds of interdependence if the quality, richness and horizon of human life are to be elevated on a global scale.

The forum began with a recognition of the extraordinary influence that the ideas and institutions for free, open public education that developed historically in America have had upon the increasingly shared values of world culture. Early leaders of the new Republic recognized that the success of their fragile experiment with wide spread liberty, equality and democratic politics would depend on an educated, loyal and tolerant citizenry. Education could enhance the ability of citizens to participate in social progress through building political consensus. Education also could provide a more equitable access to new technology and economic advancement. Most importantly, these early leaders knew that education for both men and women was necessary to a process of self-definition whereby ordinary people became self-motivating, creative and responsible individuals. By the 20th century, the values and goals of the American Republic were used to articulate a vision of a global community and as a way of turning strangers into friends.

Current educational trends, however, seem to be moving away from these visionary ideals. Participation in a humane and equitable global life is not promoted by education that is pursued simply as a means to a career, material wealth and a higher social status. Once an adolescence competition for material wealth and status becomes the motive for education, fellow citizens are seen as strangers and threats to the acquisition of resources assumed to be scarce. A psychology of scarcity freezes thought and obscures the idea that life-long learning should lead to a mode of living supporting a commitment to public service.

The visionary possibilities and programs offered in *The New Learning* as long-term, global solutions begin with the need to renew our reasons for learning. Since the gap between rich and poor is a major trend on a global scale leaving millions destitute, national solutions to economic meltdowns require a global perspective nurtured by a felt commitment to human brotherhood and rooted in the realities of interdependence. The concept of life-long learning offers an umbrella under which we can examine the consequences of the gap between the rich and the poor, the misuse and mal-distribution of environmental resources, the inconsistencies in American foreign policies, and the persistence of bigotry. Dramatic, contemporary events show that aspirations of people around the globe are shared and similar to the values expressed in the Revolutionary

ideals of 1776. Rolling waves of these values arise in cycles to wash away the dead wood of authoritarian governments and elitism that has no moral merit to support it. Understanding our own negligent contribution to global inequities can open our eyes to the benefits of mutual learning and sharing as a therapy.

The concept of *life-long learning* also allows us to re-think the sundering of work and leisure enabling us to experience both as creative and productive activities contributing to a healthy quality of human life. It is suggested in the essay that a guaranteed income base would allow for the possibility of taking breaks from work to upgrade and learn new skills and consider new options. As better-trained workers move into positions of greater responsibilities, jobs open up for new entrants into the work force. Lack of such fluidity in employment undermines the moral hopes of millions and feeds the anger now so visible in the streets.

Twenty-five years ago, when *The New Learning* was published, the ideas it put forth seemed radical; something, perhaps, for a distant future. Now, at least a third of the ideas have taken life in some form or another. The idea of an International Service Corp, for example, is alive and well in the efforts of thousands of small NGOs offering their services to the under-represented in all parts of the globe. Educators, leaders and politicians across political lines are talking about and seeking ways and means to apply another third. One third still await implementation. We need to evolve an understanding of their relevance and application to the “central issues of equitable re-allocation of global resources on the basis on genuine global representation”. Such is the deep and broad purpose of life long learning.

America has a unique genius for energetic cooperation in constructive undertakings and its citizens must bring these qualities to bear on finding ways to foster human equality in a global world. Discussion by participants at the Forum produced a wide-ranging list of imaginative suggestions for making education more relevant and deeply rooted in a global commitment to public service.

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