



Supplement

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UNEVOC Forum

Education and philosophy

» Different traditions in philosophy, sociology and economics have dealt with education and training. In socialist philosophy, for example, work and education were viewed merely as economically relevant factors of production. Education that did not serve an economic function was considered parasitic. This was a position that Rosa Luxemburg adopted in her struggle for proletarian women when she demanded education for the women's daughters (2,162). Adam Smith also supported education that would first of all lead to improved productivity (3, 273). In contrast to this, many in the philosophical tradition criticised productivity-driven forms of education. Plato demanded that education be driven by a person's skills. In

his *Politics*, Aristotle stated that concerns related to fulfilling basic needs were not an important part of political practice. Hannah Arendt follows in suit. Her book, *Vita Activa*, is dedicated to a detailed discussion of the concept of actions. She places particular emphasis on assigning actions to the categories work, production and activity (4; original 1958). Arendt attempts to establish the concept of activity as an action of a politically mature individual, capable of demonstrating his or her civil liberty in an environment free of economic constraints. This distinction was made to demonstrate the incommensurability of production-driven knowledge and non-dedicated civil or political knowledge. She argued that



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freedom could not be achieved through work: The concept of emancipation conveyed by work could be quantified in terms of profits but not in terms of the quality of life. Arendt focused on the "human being" – independently of his or her economic status – and pleads for "transparency in the dimension of individual uniqueness that is not exhausted by the completion of a task" (4, 206).

The discussion as to whether target-driven knowledge for the sake of target-driven activity and knowledge for the sake of personal integrity can actually be disambiguated in this way is not a new one in the field of social philosophy. David Hume viewed non target-driven education as a condition for the well-being of a nation, as the virtuosity of the inventive mind builds on it. As a second and no less important argument, Hume states that it is the power of imagination that allows us to comprehend the significance of material goods in all their facets. According to

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Hume, imagination precedes the economic and productive force (6). Gaetano Filangieri, one of the most influential thinkers and reformers in social philosophy in the 18th century, argued that the natural resources of a country are not genuine reasons for its poverty or wealth. He said that a country's wealth is not restricted to the material goods available there. Instead, its wealth is a product of material goods complemented by "refinement", and thus the education and skills of a people as they relate to economic activity are a major factor of wealth (7, 242).

Theodore Schultz, Nobel Prize laureate for economics, radicalized these ideas. He claimed that neither land nor power were the decisive factors that led to prosperity. "Land itself is not a critical factor with respect to poverty. Human capital is" (8,

669). According to Schultz, the wealth of a nation depends on the "quality of its people". In his *Economics of Poverty*, Schultz discusses why, in his opinion, the major criteria for the prosperity of a nation are not material. "Differences in the productivity of the soil are not a useful variable to explain why people are poor in long-settled parts of the world. People in India have been poor for ages both on the Deccan Plateau where the productivity of the rain-fed soils is low, and on the highly productive soils of South India..." (8, 661).

James Buchanan is a renowned analyst of the relationship between the state and the economy. He specializes in the field of constitutional economic ethics (14, p. 21). Buchanan has repeatedly stated in his work that morals and economic conditions influence each other to a great

extent. He assumes a basic distinction between economic action and normative social policies. Economics is concerned with analyzing the origins and consequences of economic activity with respect to the process of allocation and distribution of goods. In contrast to theories commonly propagated today, which state that economic activity is a social activity, Buchanan argues that economic activity is centred on the individual and individual preferences. Buchanan demonstrates this through his Robinson Crusoe example. He describes Robinson Crusoe as a person whose behaviour is driven by economics. Crusoe solves his economic problems "by modifying his behavior as determined by his preferences, or perhaps, to put it more appropriately, he is forced to adapt in order to achieve the state he most desires" (14, p. 26). According to Buchanan, the contradictions of economic theories, as demonstrated by repeated contravention

of economic principles, can only be explained by the fact that humans base their behaviour on ethical reflection and do not live up to economic targets or insights. "Ethics only emerge in a social environment; as a social animal, the human is an ethical animal" (14, p. 27).

If the points that Buchanan raises in the context of his institutional theory are true, this has a major impact on the discussion about vocational education. Vocational, career-targeted education may accommodate those "rational" beings who seek maximum exploitation of potential. However, it may conflict with the goal to moralise individuals. Or, vocational education may be a niche in which one's responsibility as a "good citizen" concurs with responsibilities related to work and vocational competencies (16).

Ethical and economic issues play an increasingly important role in both education and work. The power of economics and the necessity of civic education based on ethical principles continue to be a desideratum which becomes all the more apparent and global in the framework of vocational education (15,16,17). In the 20th century, Max Weber discussed the extent to which intellectual principles and economic activity can be harmonized. In academia, there has not yet been an agreement on the humanistic foundations of vocational education, and thus of individual economic activity. The involvement of UNESCO in the area of vocational education and the establishment of the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre were important steps towards devoting intensive research into this complex field of humanistic and economic tradition. The institutionalisation of vocational education in UNESCO clearly demonstrates that vocational education cannot simply be subsumed to a technical resource that merely serves to promote employment.

Following, or even prior to, the publication of the Club of Rome report entitled *The Limits to Growth* in 1972, there was a worldwide discussion on the issue of fair distribution of resources. The rate of raw material consumption was the topic of philosophical debates with respect to egalitarianism and equitable distribution.

At the time of the publication of the *Limits to Growth* report, UNESCO had

investigated issues related to vocational education and had identified it as a decisive factor for the successful future of developing and emerging countries. In 1974, it was stated at UNESCO's 17th General Conference that "the rapid changes in technology and education" required new, creative and effective efforts "to improve education as a whole to further social, economic and cultural advances" (1,16). In 1989, the organisation decided to set up a TVET programme and founded the UNEVOC Project, which had an international focus and was based in Berlin, Germany. In 2000, the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training was set up. The Centre was inau-

gurated in Bonn in 2002. With respect to the aims of vocational education, the Revised UNESCO Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education (2001) stated that "given the immense scientific, technological and socio-economic development ... particularly globalization and the revolution in information and communication technology, technical and vocational education should be a vital aspect of the educational process in all countries, and in particular should: contribute to the achievement of the societal goals of greater democratization and social, cultural and economic development, while at the same time developing the potential of all individuals, both men and women, for active participation in the establish-

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ment ..." (9,9). The new assumption was that vocational education would help societies cope with future change. Full employment and sustainability became buzzwords that had a major impact on our understanding of vocational education and training.

Today, education increasingly focuses on the independence and proactiveness of students. Ethical components also play an increasingly important role in education. There appears to be a drive towards a holistic view of economic development that is supported by individual citizens. This is also a departure from the material resource scenario. Education no longer takes place with a view to a specific career, but with a view to gaining an overall perspective of the variety of viable opportunities (13).

In developing and emerging countries, the major concern is still promoting efficiency and the growth of national economies through vocational education, improving productivity and competitiveness, and attracting foreign investors. Effective and sustainable reforms are necessary to improve vocational education and modify it to reflect the changing requirements of the labour market. Infrastructures and school programmes need to be adjusted to reflect new economic priorities, and qualifications need continuous reforms to meet the changing labour market demands. Vocational education is driven by the available work. And the nature of work is changing so fast that education quickly becomes obsolete.



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