



AN EVALUATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE UNICEF GLOBAL EDUCATION PROJECT IN IRAN

Mehdi Mahdavinia

Assistant Professor

The University of Azad, Tehran south Branch

Mahdavinia@mahdavischool.org

Received 88/10/07 Accepted 89/02/01

ABSTRACT

In 2000, an evaluation of Iranian elementary education revealed that it did not successfully prepare students for the future. The failure was attributed to the teacher centered, content-oriented education system. In 2001, the Iranian Ministry of Education began a pilot project that introduced an alternative curriculum, known as “Global Education,” with UNICEF’s participation. Global education, a participatory and collaborative approach to learning, proposes a holistic curriculum that encompasses all dimensions of learning.

In a qualitative case study, this author evaluated the implementation of global education on Iranian learners in two provinces: Sistan-Baluchistan and Tehran. The data showed that the pupils not only learned life skills and the importance of sustain ability, but enjoyed the process as well. They also established relationships with their peers, parents and teachers. However, pupils, teachers and principals also found global education ambiguous. Teachers and principals found it time-consuming, hard to implement, and hard to explain it to government officials. In addition, global education's philosophy and content hardly complied with Islamic teachings, the main focus of government policy-makers.

The results of this study suggested that the Iranian future curriculum should emphasize present and future needs, both locally and globally. Emphasis on learners as self affricate Iranians and their ability to establish global relationships is more important than any other immediate or long-term program for education in Iran.

Key Words: Global education, UNICEF, Holistic education, Teacher-centered education, Content oriented education, participatory and collaborative approach to learning.

Introduction

In our ever-changing world, what is indeed inseparable from life, is change. It affects not only humans but also all organisms on the planet (animals

and vegetables), as well as other aspects of the ecology. No matter how we look at the issue, whether through the eyes of biblical and Koranic believers—who emphasize creation and the Adam

and Eve story as we do; Or, through Darwin's Theory of Evolution—that sees humans as a newly evolved animal species, called *Homo sapiens*—we cannot deny change. We have also witnessed tremendous social changes, from living in small family groups that could not rival the immense herds of wildebeest and antelope to our present life of millions in cities and travel to other planets. (Suzuki, 2002)

Failure of Education in Relation to Social Change

Scores of educators (Swimme & Berry, 1992; Capra, 1996; Suzuki, 2002; Miller, 1996; Miller & Nakagava, 2002; Freire, 2000; Pike & Selby, 1999, to name a few) are not satisfied with the many social changes that have happened in our lives and those around us; nor are they happy with most of the products of today's education.

Looking at it critically, these educators believe that education has focused on the learners' physical and mental dimensions, while ignoring the emotional and social aspects. They are then producing improved technology by which only some humans—not all—can exploit nature at an increasing pace. They argue that these problems derive from the prescriptive theory of education, whose followers attempt to create models of curriculum development that will improve school practices. On the other hand, prescriptive theoreticians, like Tyler (1949), believe that "finding the best way of designing curricula will lead to the best possible curricula for schools." (Marsh & Willis, 2003, p. 103) In other words, schools were given prescribed curricula to achieve goals isolated from the learners' inner dimensions such as feelings and personal attitudes (Selby, 1999). In this approach, education is teacher-centered and students are considered mere receivers of knowledge through books or by the teacher, who acts as a mediator between the books and the students. Freire (2000) criticizes traditional practice-based (prescriptive) education, calling it "banking education." In his banking model, knowledge is deposited into the learner's mind by the teacher; "the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead

of communicating, the teacher basically issues communiques and thereby makes deposits, which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (p. 72). Freire believes that "banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more sensibly human." (pp. 84-85). In contrast to the banking model, Freire proposed "problem posing" education and argued that "problem posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality," (p. 85). Freire believes in an ongoing education that helps the learners to become something new after each step. He holds that humans are, like reality itself, unfinished entities; and education helps both the learners and reality to move toward transformation. "The unfinished character of human beings, the transformational character of reality necessitate for education to be an ongoing activity," (p. 84). With such an education, "men and women develop their power to critically perceive the way they exist in the world with which and into which they find themselves; they come to see the world, not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation.." (p. 12)

Global Education Solution

Global education, as another paradigm in the field of transformative learning, seeks to address what is "missing" in today's education in so much of current educational practice. Supporters of global education maintain that there is an unbreakable relationship between the components of life on earth and their interrelatedness to all components of time: past, present, and future Pike & Selby, (1999). Global education, as conceptualized by Pike and Selby (1999), addresses both the content of education—emphasizing key issues—as well as the pedagogy—emphasizing collaborative and participatory activities.

Statement of the Problem

Educational change or reform in any context is not easy; it is always subject to shaping by many competing voices and its success usually depends on a combination of support, resource, pedagogic flexibility and determination from school personnel, as well as the cooperation and receptivity of students and parents. Whereas so much is at stake for so many people, and because educational initiatives frequently have strong political cause and effect, the evaluation of educational initiatives is of great importance. Besides, various perspectives are desirable in the construction of an evaluation. Hence, the greater its objectivity, the higher potential value evaluation will have. The researcher's contribution to this process will be whatever objectivity he can bring to evaluation of the Iranian global education project. The researcher has not been involved with the project in any way, but he does understand it as an insider of Iran's educational system and its political context.

Research Question

The principal research question is:

How has the implementation of global education as a form of participatory and collaborative knowledge development in pilot elementary schools in Iran affected the learners?

Significance of the Study

Global education was implemented by the government starting in 2000. The present evaluative study is independent of the Global Education Initiative, a collaborative venture of the former IIGE, University of Toronto, the UNICEF regional office for the Middle East, and the Iranian government.

The Context of Educational Change in Iran

Iran is located at a distinct point on the globe, connecting various cultural and civilized domains of Asia and Europe. As a main focus of the Silk Road between China and Europe in 13th century, its unique location has placed Iran on a route of political hurricanes as well as pleasant breezes of cultural,

educational and international trade exchanges. For more than 2,500 years, Iran also had the distinction of being known as one of the ancient arenas of learning (Khatami, 2000).

Methodology of the Study

I have used an evaluative case study as the methodology of this research. Its goal is to explore the degree of the effectiveness of the implementation of the project of a model of global education on Iranian elementary students and looking at the available documents in two provinces (Sistan-Baluchistan, the most deprived; and Tehran, the most facilitated one) as two different cases of this study. The data gleaned from these two cases can directly influence the policy, practice, and future research approaches to education in Iran.

Participants

My major target populations are learners, teachers, parents, and administrators of pilot schools in the Global education Project in two provinces in Iran. I selected and interviewed five students from each class, five parents, the teachers involved with implementation, and the administrators of the schools. I invited participants through snowball sampling, which naturally gathered those most interested in sharing their thoughts about global education with me. "In snowball sampling researchers identify a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which they are interested. These people are then used as informants to identify, or put the researchers in touch with, others who qualify for inclusion and these in turn, identify yet others – hence the term snowball sampling" (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K 2001, p. 104).

Description of the Study

More than eight years ago, a global education project was implemented in a number of schools across Iran with the financial support of UNICEF, and in collaboration with the International Institute of Global Education, previously adjoined to the

University of Toronto (IIGE/UT), and at the request of the government of Iran. The project, officially commenced in 2001, still is in its experimental stage. The project began mainly with the help and participation of teachers who were trained for that purpose. Experimenters planned curricula that gave students opportunities to achieve knowledge and develop skills through a participatory approach to learning and teaching. (Pike & Selby, 1988)

Research Plan

Introduction

The researcher used three strategies of evaluative case study research (qualitative design) by interviewing learners, teachers, parents and administrators, observing classes at each school, and analyzing available documents. The author is confident that the triangulation of the research strategies, multiple methods of data collection and analysis has strengthened the reliability and internal validity of this study. (Merriam, 1998) Since no issue can be tackled without a program, the researcher sketched a plan for the process of his evaluative case study. Here, the researcher explained who the participants would be; how to engage their cooperation; how many participants would be needed, and finally, how to observe the ethical issues in order not to harm the volunteers.

Interviews

Since the researcher used a qualitative study method, he continually made decisions about the kind of information that will be needed to address the problems, and how best to obtain such information. Interviewing was his primary method of data gathering. In designing questions to be asked in the interviews, the researcher tried to be as concrete as possible. He also interpreted the answers given as the interviewee's response to the question, and not necessarily the "correct" answer.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher sought participants' views in order to collect data that demonstrated the results of global education implementation in their schools.

To enhance the validity of the research, the researcher chose four schools each from the country's two different provinces. As Iran enjoys diverse communities of people, and different regional social situation, so did these two provinces differ in economic, cultural, and ecological characteristics. And as the researcher had anticipated, the reaction of the participants toward the changes also differed.

Observation of Teachers and Classes

"Teachers' perceptions of how well the implementation is proceeding are valuable, but active participants have a particular view of reality that must be validated through perceptions of another informed observer" (Bartel, 2003, p. 17). Following Bartel's method, I observed the teachers who were interviewed while they were implementing the activities, with their full knowledge and consent. I appeared in the classrooms as a university teacher who wished to learn about global education, and recorded observations.

Importance of Observation

Although interviews made up the main source of my data, I found observation in natural settings, at par with interviews. Nonetheless, I found each fruitful in its own place, and believe that one without the other would weaken the validity of the study and lessens its reliability. To borrow an expert opinion:

Observation is a major means of collecting data in qualitative research. It offers a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when combined with interviewing and document analysis, allows for a holistic interpreting of the phenomenon being investigated. It is the technique of choice when behavior can be observed firsthand or when people can not or will not discuss the research topic. (Merriam, 1998, p. 111)

Data Collection

The researcher intended to study the impact of Global Education Project on learners in pilot schools in my home country, Iran, emphasizing the interaction between learners and their peers, teachers, and parents. This was to discover whether they had acquired life skills, and finally their concern

for the sustain ability of nature in order to secure it for the future generations, the main goal of Global Education Project. In previous sections, I as the researcher discussed my data collecting techniques: conducting effective interviews, observing classes, and reviewing documents. I used all three techniques because in qualitative case studies like this research project, all three techniques are frequently used. I strongly agree with Merriam (1998) who suggests that "understanding the case in its totality, as well as the intensive, holistic description and analysis characteristics of a case study mandates both breadth and depth of data collection. Data collection in a case study is a recursive, intensive and interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may lead to subsequent sources of data." (p. 134)

Data Analysis

In order to bring order, structure, and meaning to my collected data, I used the strategy of Case Study, which offers an intensive, holistic description and analysis of the project of global education in designated areas of implementation. "Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research." (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). I began my analysis with the first interview, the first observation, and the first document read. As Merriam holds, "rigor in qualitative research derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description." (p. 151)

Validity - Focused

From the very outset, the researcher knew that he wanted to understand the impact of the new approach (global education) on the students. The researcher also knew that he had to obtain this through observing what students do in the learning setting, hearing the arguments my participants proposed and reviewing the artifacts they had produced. To conduct this evaluation, the researcher had already set some criteria such as interaction between students and their interaction with teachers, whether

or not they grasped anything about life skills, and how much they cared about the sustain ability of nature. Knowing this helped the researcher develop analytic questions, which gave focus and organization to the issue of data collection as he proceeded. From the very first step, the researcher reviewed the questions and aligned them with the context in order to give direction to his work. This strategy helped him plan each data collection session according to what he found in the previous session. In order to become more than a recording machine the researcher added more analytical flavor to the study from at least three sources including the researcher, the participants, and sources outside the study such as the literature.

Research Limitations

The main obstacle in front of the researcher was the system of theocratic thinking in Iran. For instance, females (teachers-students) are bound by a religious limitation in their association-contacts with their male colleagues-teachers. My observations revealed that female teachers preferred to talk in group settings and not individually. Another dimension of theocratic prejudice, which causes restrictions in both education and research, is the prohibition of male teachers in female schools¹. Another eye-catching phenomenon is face-to-face contact of the opposite sex. Furthermore, some Moslem religious leaders in some areas like Sistan-Baluchistan have strict control over what female students read and the music they listen to.

The results

- Local Needs

To a question regarding what the actual needs of the region in Sistan-Baluchistan were, an authority referred to the plague of smuggling in the region, and related it to the future probable impact of global education. The authority concluded that global education could be more effective, should it understand the actual need of the region and is planned accordingly: "A huge amount of contaminated meat from Pakistan is smuggled into

the country and makes people sick. ... Although global education teaches the students about life skills, such as cooperation and discussion and making good decisions, our problem are not our kids, but rather adults who need an earnest education. Maybe this education is good for our kids to be good adults in future, especially when it talks about issues like international development, environmental and humane education, human rights but it should be re-planned in order to cover the actual regional needs in the framework of international needs to stop hunger and violation.” (A government official, February 2004)

- Teacher-Student Interaction

Through observation and interviews I found reasonable relationships between teachers and students for in Tehran classes I could see the teachers intermingled with the students—rather than remain fixed at the front or at the back of the class. Yet, some teachers showed weakness in treating the children as real participants in the learning process in global education classes. In short, global education classes in rural and more deprived classes were not very successful in establishing a good rapport with the students, their peers, and teachers.

- Perception of Activities

What I observed in the classes, heard from my participants and mined from the documents showed that the majority of the teachers and students liked the activities. However, neither the teachers nor the students approved of all topics of discussion, in the way they were planned or the type of resources recommended for their implementation. Teachers and students believed that there was no logical relationship between the goal of the activity and the time allocated for its completion. Perhaps that was one of the reasons that the teachers, rather than the whole class, directed most of the activities. Whereas some teachers showed interest in facilitating activities in small groups, some did this in a kind of teacher-centered tone. Although more than half of the students enjoyed working in groups, some

students did not noticeably take part. They looked almost isolated during the implementation of activities, except those whom, according to the teachers and the students, were designed by the whole class. In summary, what I observed tells me that not all goals of the activities were achieved in the global education classes. Despite that, some teachers believed that activities worked well, because they brought the students together, invited them to work cooperatively, and provided situations in which all might participate. These teachers maintained that the activities could be more useful if prepared according to a whole class approach, with interaction between students and teacher; otherwise activities would cause education to revert back to teacher-centered education. My findings show that this drawback was indeed happening in global education classes in Iran.

- Signs of Theocracy in the Activities

Iran is a theocratic country, and its education is heavily controlled and dominated by theoretic views on both philosophy and content of the country's education. Although global education is a learner-centered education, in actuality all educational policymakers including core team members are undoubtedly under the influence of this theocratic view of education. Furthermore, as long as global education is activity based, most activities and materials—including books, circular pamphlets, and letters of amendments that are prepared by the core team members for the whole country, are influenced by Iran's religious tone. This means that, either directly or indirectly, Iran's theocracy influences all kinds of educational movements, including global education activities, which will eventually result in a kind of teacher-centered and government dominated education.

This strategy will also cause challenges for teachers and students in non-religious atmospheres, and in arenas where the dominant religion or faith is not the same as that of the activity planners.

- Perception of Holism: Spirituality in Education

Spirituality, as one of the two wings of creating a

sound life in a healthy world, had very superficially affected the schools. The results of the study showed that global education in Iran relied basically on books and instructions recommended or written by the core team whereas, according to spiritual educators, spirituality cannot be taught through interpreting books and scriptures (Yogananda, 1946). Yogananda argues that it is a matter of natural and effortless activity that the bearer would immerse deep into the divine library and takes the foam of the words and the spray of thoughts from the fountains of ones blessed omniscience. According to famous Iranian poet Sa'di (13 century) “The green leaves of a tree, in the eye of a watchful seer; each is a book on the wisdom of the Creator,” Who nourishes everything, everywhere, including you and your thoughts, [Barg-e Derakhtan-e sabz dar nazar-e hooshyar, har varaqash daftarisht ma' refat-e Kerdegar).

- Perception of Life Skills

Skills and concepts of cooperation and sharing and participation were not perfectly understood by the learners in less advantaged regions, but were understood in places with adequate facilities, including some schools in Tehran. In other words, students and even teachers often used the term cooperation without having internalized its meaning. I base this statement on the tacit information I could ascertain from the direct and indirect expressions of the participants.

- Perception of Islam

Global education's focus on activities pushes educators to teach all information, skills, and concepts through activities including Islamic issues, in order to cover the topics mandated by the government. Knowing this, I browsed through books dealing with preplanned activities for the social sciences and realized that some topics and key words carried the name of Islam or Iran, but very few words connoted the concept of globalism or global issues. Furthermore, global education is systemic-based and does not comply with Iran's divine-focused Islamic-

based teachings. In other words, Iranian policymakers wish to Islamicize education and this cannot comply with global education's process-based, systemic-focused approach.

- Perception of Culture

Some documents and their words by regional authorities indicate that global education has been successful in Kurdistan. Teacher centeredness has given way to learner-focused education in most schools in Kurdistan, and the semantic meaning of participatory education has been grasped by both teachers and students. Authorities judge this to be due to the regional unbiased culture. Authorities believe that Kurdistan enjoys a rich culture, although it is poor economically compared to the country's other provinces. Traditionally, Kurdistan upholds high ethical values and spiritual standards, which is one of the reasons that this province has produced many artists, poets and musicians. (My field notes, July 2004)

- Perception of Child-Centeredness

Global education has been successful in Bandar Abbas²[2] because of its strong emphasis on child-centeredness. This could better be understood through the words of an authority in-charge of implementing global education in this region:

You know! It is true that global education is based on two strands of educational thinking: world-mindedness and child-centeredness. But we all understand that this cannot happen unless every individual understands what it means.... So we conclude that education must begin from the early childhood and it should be only child centered.

... Children are actually good teachers. They love to explore and discover for themselves.

We in Bandar Abbas, centered our education on our lower levels, that is, grade one kids. We held most of our classes in open air such as beaches, parks and even in schoolyards rather than in enclosed areas. We invited the parents to accompany their children in their education. ... At the moment our global classes are covered with the works of children

and we already have held some exhibitions of these works in an arena called Khaneh-ye Moallem (The House of Teachers). (My field notes, July, 2004)

- Education and Democracy

Based on the information I received through interviews and documents, education in Iran is politically loaded and each individual authority wishes to impose his understanding of education into the country's curriculum. This is one of the main reasons that global education is kept under the control of a core team that reflects the wishes of the government authorities. Let's reflect on some responses presented by educational experts in this particular issue.

Administrators, each maintain his or her understanding of the educational issues, and the method (s) of implementing it to match it with the objectives of the political power of the country's system. Thus, this is how they define what education is and what kind of strategy should be applied to achieve it. (My field notes, March 2005)

- Education as an End, Not a Means

Evidence shows that the end and the means have been mixed up in Iran's educational system. Many problems arise when education is treated as the end—rather than the means—to implement change in the behavior of the learner.

We sometimes forget that education is for people not people for education.

You know! Global Education must be treated as a means not as an end. Believing in the latter and doing the activities slavishly trap us in the same system that we were in and still are. (A Core Team member)

- Perception of Teacher-Centered Education

In most places, where global education has been implemented, teacher centered-education was, in actuality, more prevalent in global education classes than in learner-focused classes due to its government mandated activities. A rote learning approach to education was conspicuously present in most global education classes. Core team members tried to put

everything in books and distribute them to schools. Teachers did not grasp the concept of a teacher as curriculum developer, and school authorities had almost no sound idea as to what role the school should play in developing a curriculum. Teachers were rote interpreters of the Qoran, circular religious magazines, and narrations of Imams and sages. Moreover, almost 95% of the lessons were teacher-directed when dealing with in-class activities. Documents also showed that general activities were planned for all provinces, despite the fact that provinces differ ecologically, culturally, and socially. (My field notes, July 2004).

Challenges

• Teachers

Teachers' primary need was for more knowledge of the philosophy, goals, content, and methodology of learning and teaching global education. They also needed more financial support, and substitute teachers available for when they were on leave.

Teachers wanted to have a role in preparing activities that met the needs of the learners, and wanted a decrease in the number of activities and an increase in the time allotted for implementation of the activities.

• Students

Students expected separate schools, as opposed to mixing with students from traditional classes in one school. They complained that not all activities were suitable for them. They found some activities to be a waste of time, and more time was needed to deal with those activities. There were too many students for the small-sized classrooms, particularly in rural regions. Some students still had difficulties performing in classes using the participatory approach, while some others were unclear about the content and the purpose of activities (though this might be a matter of cultural differences); furthermore, the volume of material seemed to be too much for the students. Also, both teachers and students suffered when educational materials did not arrive on time.

• The Characteristics of Patriarchy

Another participant referred to the issue of patriarchy and believed that some Iranian communities are not yet prepared to run their schools by a democratic system like that of global education. This participant argued, "You know! Our society, particularly in most distant areas such as Kurdistan, Baluchistan, and Azerbaijan, where global education is in its experimental stage, is strictly patriarchal bound. Thus, it's not, I think, such an easy job for global education teachers to convey the idea of democracy to the minds of their students. Parents sometimes show concern on this issue and even interfere. I think we need more time. (A member of Core Team, July 31, 2004)

Regarding global education's impact on the interaction between students and their parents, a teacher responded that parents in that region of the country are not used to being questioned by their children and this is what will happen when global education is implemented in their classes. Some parents are getting used to it, but some are still skeptical.

Some parents in that part of the country are happy with the way their children react after attending global education classes, but there are still others who do not show much interest in the project. This may be due to the fact that today they are being interrogated by their children, though on a lesser degree than in the past. We see more parents in the school nowadays than before. (A principal, February 2005)

My own understanding as an insider reminds me of parental expectations for their children and their reason for sending children to school. In rural parts of Iran, especially in the more traditional region of Sistan-Baluchistan, parents, fathers in particular, send their children to school to become literate followers of their elders. Parents in those areas believe that this is the responsibility of teachers, and ultimately, of the schools.

Perception of Ambiguity

Some information from the study introduces

global education as an ambiguous approach to education. This alleged ambiguity rises from global education holism, which wishes to cover all disciplines interactively, and some cannot understand this wholly. A teacher argued that many issues such as sustainable development, peace, human rights, gender and race discriminations are not small issues to be dealt with easily and clearly. The teacher also criticized global education as being too pluralistic.

Theorizers expect global education to deal with immense issues like change and different views on the future, and claim that it wants to answer all global questions. That is why global education's goals elude some people.

Global education, to my understanding, is a challenge in education, which is not strong enough to be able to deal with global issues in this shocking world with its diverse focuses on life such as money, looking for independency, freedom, entertainment, fighting with hunger, consumption, or religion. However, I believe that global education is not just a lifeless idea but a live phenomenon (I don't know what the correct word is, maybe a live movement), but it needs more explanation, more elaboration and much more support from the educational experts who understand all angles of creating a society, or a community, even a community of non-humans and so on through education. (A member of Core Team, July 31, 2004)

. The Project

The project by itself showed some problems: It was time-consuming; and was too expensive for poor provinces like Sistan-Baluchistan. Global education is a process focused education and does not match the traditional curriculum, which should be based on state standards and will be measured through standardized tests.

Why these Results and why these Challenges?

Perhaps the first and the strongest reason behind the failure of any academic based curriculum, global education in particular, is an issue of misunderstanding of the focus of the Four-

Dimensional Model of Global Education that is based on “globalism” not “globalization.” Hence, it is globalism that believes in diversity, equity, justice and altruism, and Pike & Selby’s model can be defined and understood within this matrix, not globalization that is based on global economy. I believe that Iran, under status quo, is not ready for such a change because the Iranian government believes in a sort of centralism (presumably Islamic centralism), that looks at the globe within that understanding (religious globalization). (Spring, 2001) We can add to the above causes the following elements that apply to the approach of global education with relation to the Iran's context.

The Final Word

Has global education help Iranian learners find the “missing point” in education? Global education is another paradigm in the field of transformative learning that seeks to address what is “missing” in so much of current educational practice. No one could give a clear answer to this question because all movements of this education, particularly the themed activities, deal only with half of the learners, that is, the physical and mental dimensions. Global education has usually focused on teaching and the teachers, and thus, has almost forgotten about the learners’ spiritual dimension. Many holistic educators believe that spirituality cannot happen through teaching, but has to be acquired through a natural process of inner meditation and non-intentional imaginations. Holistic education in Iran is still in its planning stage.

Claimed to be part of global education, holistic education has its own implementation tools such as imagination, intuition, meditation, and dreaming (Miller, 2000).

However, almost none of these have had a place in the activities designed by the members of the core team, nor with the teachers trained by the core team. (For detail, see "Why these Findings?" above).

Conclusion

As Bartel (2003) holds, I, too, believe that

evaluation of learning is a complex affair. There is no single form of evaluation that one can rely upon to produce an accurate picture of what learnings have taken place in a classroom. However, my observations, interviews, and document studies in Sistan-Baluchistan, Iran’s most deprived province, and Tehran, the country’s most advantaged province based on my participants’ perspectives— students, teachers, principals and parents as well as some authorities, core team members and non-global education teachers and educators showed that:

Parents, particularly in Sistan-Baluchistan, needed an earnest education. To my question about the impact of global education on children, an authority responded by saying that it was rather the parents who needed an education than the children. He said “people in Sistan-Baluchistan are very poor, and they are most of the time thinking of how they can keep their body and soul together. People’s need here is completely different from that of people in the other parts of the country. We have our own problems and we need our particular education. Pre-planned curricula or educational packages will not do us any good.” (A government official, February 2004)

Suggestions

Before proposing any suggestions, I would like to point out the immediate goals of implementing global education in Iran. After analyzing the degree of the program’s inefficiencies, I, as both an insider and an outsider educator, suggest that instead of increasing the power of curriculum prescribers in the capital, or demanding more accountability from the already overloaded school administrators, authorities should give educators--teachers in particular--the necessary tools and invite them into full partnership in deciding as to who will be responsible for Iran’s educational improvement process. Regarding the global education project I suggest that the core team has to facilitate the soul of participatory education to the global education teachers.

Furthermore, the government subject-based curriculum has to change to a somewhat holistic

curriculum in which self-realization might happen in the classes. I propose an inquiry based approach (Alquist, 1996) to inquire about all elements of education (students, teachers, parents, society and etc.) within Iranian context, and goals to be achieved by education. And as a final word I would like to warn the government officials that failing to understand these concepts will push Iran off of its educational track and trap it in the same old teaching strategy again. In short, I would like to argue that although the participatory learning method and the cooperative education approach could be considered the most efficient endeavors in education, it could be strengthened with the addition of other approaches such as story telling, learning through art-based activities, individual or group experimentation, class outings, especially through reflection, meditation and imagination.

¹ Iran does not have mixed classes except a few in far reached villages or tribal areas, where there are too few students, only one teacher for all classes, and a lack of required educational facilities like buildings, resources, and even basic furniture.

² A city in south of Iran, on the Strait of Hormuz with a population of 201,642, Bandar Abbas is Iran’s natural maritime outlet. It is close to the Arab world and, through the Sea of Oman, open to the Indian Ocean (Wood, 1996).

References

- Alquist, E. (1996). *Making it happen in the classroom*. Amsterdam: International Schools Curriculum Project.
- Bartel, L. (2003). *Evaluating global education implementation in the Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan: Technical manual of instruction and instrumentation*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Capra, F. (1996). *The web of life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2001). *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Khatami, M. (2001). *Dialogue among*

civilizations. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

Marsh, J. C., & Willis, G. (2003). *Curriculum alternative approaches: Ongoing issues*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, J. P. (1996). *The holistic curriculum*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: OISE Press.

Miller, J. P. (2000). *Education and the soul*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Miller, J. P., & Nakagava, Y. (2002). *Nurturing our wholeness*. Brandon, VT: Rutland.

Pike, G., & Selby, D. (1988). *Global teacher global learner*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Pike, G., & Selby, D. (1999). *Global education: Making basic learning a child-friendly experience*. Toronto: UNICEF MENARO [In conjunction with the International Institute for Global Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto].

Spring, J. H. (2001). *Globalization and educational rights: An intercivilizational analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Suzuki, D. (2002). *The sacred balance: Rediscovering our place in nature*. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: The Mountaineers.

Swimme, B., & Berry, T. (1992). *The universe story*. San Francisco: Harper.

Yogananda, P. (1946). *Autobiography of a yogi*. Los Angeles: Self Realization

Fellowship



*MEHDI MAHDAVINIA is a scholar activist with a Ph.D. in education from the University of Toronto in Ontario (Canada), where he carried research and did his doctoral dissertation in the field of curriculum studies focusing on holistic education and its operation in Iran. He is a Professor of English at Azad University Tehran South Branch. In addition to some academic articles, he wrote *A Shortcut to English Subtleties* (1999), *A Step toward Translating Simple Texts* (1999), and *Everyday with Diabetes (Translation)* (2000). Dr. Mahdavinia research interest centers on educational research, global citizenship, and holistic curriculum at elementary, secondary and post secondary levels. His current research is on holistic education and curriculum development at junior high level.*