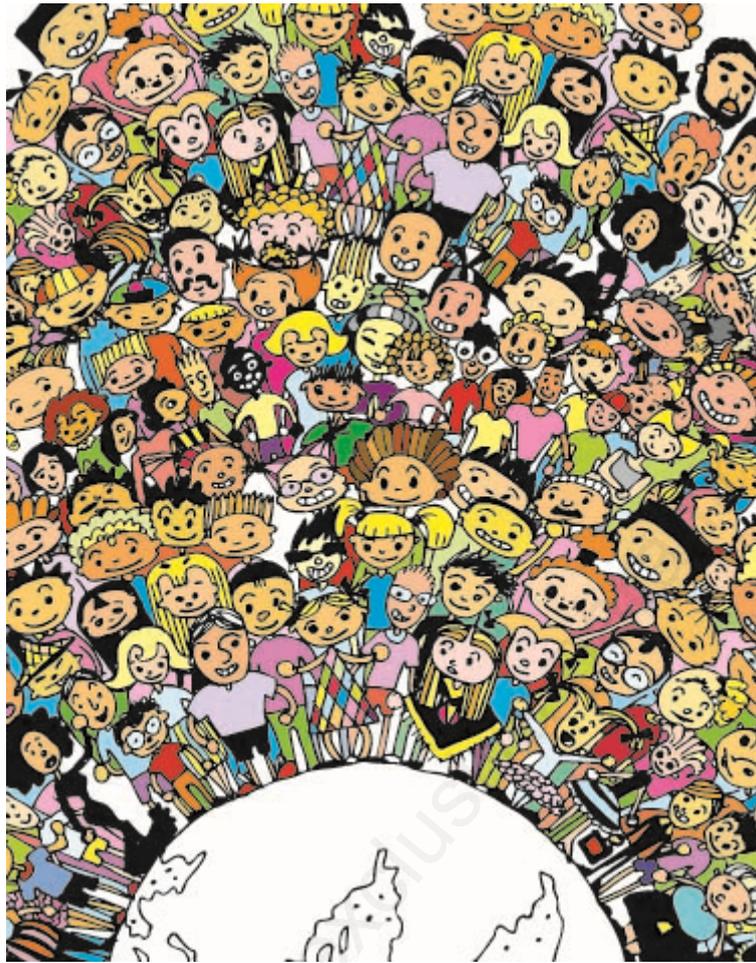


A Curriculum for the Next Billion

Charles Leadbeater



Today, global companies are fascinated by the prospect of what the World Economic Forum calls 'the next billion' – the future consumers of the developing world whose income is rising from around \$2 a day to between \$5 and \$7 a day. Most of these people are recently arrived in rapidly expanding cities, often living in the poorest areas: every month about 5 million people in the developing world move to cities.

If we were to look at these families as parents and learners, what kind of education will they be looking for? Or to put it another way, if we were to design a curriculum with 'the next billion' what would they want?

Having spent much of the last three years visiting a wide variety of education projects in cities across the developing world, it strikes me that the first thing that people want is facility with a global language, usually English, but also in some places Spanish and, in others, Mandarin.

They want a language that will give them access to people and jobs linked to global networks and trade – a business hotel, a job in retail, manning a phone in a call centre – rather than confining them to ply their trade in purely local markets.

Next they want a mastery of basic mathematics, the ability to understand numbers and do fairly basic sums, like working out discounts or more complex applications like planning a production schedule. Maths is foundational to much else that people need, and want, to learn.

The third ingredient is digital literacy. People need to be able to work competently and capably with computers, and not just the basics of the Microsoft world of Word and Excel, but increasingly the world of the web and social media, apps and programming. They need to be comfortable with having to learn, and learn again, as technology changes.

None of that, however, is worth very much unless they are skilled at working together with other people. So the fourth thing their education needs to give them is a well-grounded experience in social skills so they know how to respond to customers and work well with their colleagues, to find collaborative solutions to problems. Some of those skills are social and relational, based on empathy and sympathy. But others are more about collaborative self-government, which is why it is so important that education provides children with ample, structured, challenging opportunities to work together, in groups, on projects which they can make their own. As social media spreads so it will open up ever more opportunities for people to find one another and come together to achieve common goals. Citizens will need to learn how to make the most of these technologies, for better government, richer culture and more successful businesses.

All of this needs to be married to entrepreneurial and creative capacity, by which I mean the ability to spot an opportunity, mobilise support to take it, learn how to take risks and recover from setbacks. Most of the 'next billion' will find themselves working in small entrepreneurial companies. Studies of the urban poor show that many have to hold down two or three jobs to survive. Their education needs to help them become micro-entrepreneurs, adaptive and resilient, fleet of foot. Learning to juggle work if, not balls, is a key skill.

The slim core skills set out above might provide the starting point for thinking about the kinds of skills all young people might need in the years ahead, in the developed and the developing world.

Yet that is only at best half the story. Setting out what people should learn is just the starting point. How they learn is almost as important. Effective learning needs to be a structured, well-designed, highly engaging activity which challenges and stretches young people as well as supporting them and building their confidence. It needs to pull people to it, by the laws of attraction. Too much of the time at school it is the other way around: people are pushed into learning they do not really understand and cannot make meaningful.

To be motivating learning needs to be intrinsically satisfying and to offer at least the distant prospect of a pay-off: a better job; a practical skill; a useful way of thinking.

Achieving that will mean that learning will have to become more connected to, if not located in, the real world of work and production. The most impressive and attractive places to learn in future, in the developed and developing world, will give young people ample opportunities to design and make, produce and sell things, with their hands and their heads. They should go to school to learn by working and having fun. They should study by making and building rather than sitting and listening.

Too often education is seen as a pristine preparation for a later career. Work is held at bay for as long as possible. I doubt we can afford that distinction in the future in which education increasingly seems to be losing touch with the real world that young people live in – and the real world seems increasingly unwilling to give them the jobs they crave. We need learning to give young people a real sense of what creative, satisfying, productive work can be, so they can take those standards and expectations into their later working life.

All innovators succeed by challenging ingrained conventional wisdom. Breaking down the barriers between work and learning will be one of the chief opportunities for educational innovators in the decades to come, especially if they want to meet the needs of the next billion parents and children entering formal education.

Fonte: OECD, 11 June 2012. [Portal]. Disponível em: <<http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.fr/2012/06/curriculum-for-next-billion.html>>. Acesso em: 11 June 2012.