



May 2021

Why Integrated Learning Matters

Contribution to GTI Forum [The Pedagogy of Transition](#)

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Stephen Sterling's [note](#) and the subsequent comments raise key concerns about the challenges of education for a new future. Mainstream approaches that call for enabling education so that the “global village” and the “connected society” can be realized or promoting “education as a public good”—without attendant and relevant structural support to realize this—make a mockery of conditions where there is extant destruction of local dwelling places, villages, and societies. In a context where the expansion and legitimization of capital in all spheres and the subsequent disembedding of societies have become all too common, there is now a global population that consists of an over-privileged transnational class versus a large mass of disempowered populations. Within this, youth are now subjected to processes of alienation, humiliation, and violence that render them either invisibilized and disenfranchised citizens or violent anti-state and anti-social actors.¹

Reports from Africa and South Asia highlight how vast masses of youth now crowd into ever-expanding cities and form a large restive population as their formal education assures them no appropriate employment.² India's youth who subscribe to right-wing and religious fundamentalisms, Nigeria's extremist and violent outfit that has come to be labelled as “Boko-Haram, and the large number of armed youth militia groups in various parts of the world bear testimony to the compounded failure of the political economies of several countries and their mass higher education systems. The rise of criminality, corruption, and violence among even those burdened with the tag of being the “educated unemployed” can be seen as both fallouts and survival strategies to which the disadvantaged resort—in order to tide over poverty and the multiple disadvantages. Worse yet, the cultural vacuum and the social dissimulation that poorly

conceived education triggers among youth are issues that have become serious social challenges in many societies.

As precariats in the global economies that have been unraveling over the past decade, youth now bear the biggest burden of failed economic, social, and political agendas. All of this is capped by the spread of “epistemicide” or the death of epistemologies of the South, which remains the hidden and unregistered reason for the widespread disorientation and disarray that one sees among the “educated youth” of marginalized and disenfranchised communities.³ The onset of a collective amnesia of languages and cultures and the subsequent dysglossia of several long-evolved cultures and life-worlds must also be laid at the door of mass, formal education.⁴

The summative results of intense and prolonged disembedding of youth from their original provenances, life-worlds, and organic inter-subjectivities are to be seen in the extent to which members of disadvantaged societies are now marked by deep “erosions.”⁵ Such erosions include the loss of local knowledge and skills, the sense of belonging to specific communities and locales, the resilience and rejuvenation abilities to tide over catastrophes, and the social capabilities to discern and choose between long-term and short-term goals and values. As targets of the expanding capitalist market, youth have been rendered more consumers than citizens, more a submissive and pliant audience to mass media than active agents of their own destinies.

Alternative Learning

If all these issues must be addressed and if the worth of education as learning and enabling must be revived, it is imperative that we deploy imaginaries that challenge many of our accepted and institutionalized criteria and yardsticks. Located as we are in a global predicament of intense and multiple emergencies, now manifested most by the COVID-19 crisis, and with the imminent collapse of ecological and economic systems that global warming/climate change forebode, we must accept that new economic-ecologic-social-political systems are now inevitable. Instead of neoliberal education’s guiding norms of fitting society into the dominant employment apparatus, new terms and yardsticks will be required to initiate integrated learning centers at regional and community levels. Then the key ideas of democracy, decentralization, diversity, and dignity must

be the foundations on which education in general and community integrated learning centers in particular can be established.

Decentralization that emphasizes localism is key as the recent trends of deglobalization and degrowth economies indicate the need for a revival and renaissance of local knowledge, skills, abilities, and viable economies and societies. Facilitating the learning centers to have schedules and calendars that suit the specificity of their regions will enable them to engage in the rhythm and life of the region. Projects and learning assignments should also be linked to the seasonal-work-social calendars of different regions so that there is an alignment between the immediate ecological, economic, and social environment and the learning programs.

Diversity

The principles of diversity should be extended to the world of knowledge, and the curricula of the learning centers must thus draw on a diversity of knowledges. Universal knowledge forms of academic content must be fused with the knowledge systems and skills of different sources and epistemologies. These learning centers can be the sites for recognizing and validating a diversity of locally evolved knowledge systems and skills. It must also be possible to recognize and integrate knowledgeable persons (without “certified” status) as professional resource persons.

Linked to recognizing multi-diversities of peoples, ideas, and practices, there is need for learning “tolerance of differences” and “tolerance of tolerance” so that public discourse and personal acceptance and co-living are facilitated.⁶ This is particularly pertinent in regions or contexts where youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and histories of war and violence are recruited. It is not out of place for such centers to also act as “peace and reconciliation” sites so that the graduates from these centers become carriers of peace and the philosophy and practice of seeking justice through non-violent strategies.

In emphasizing a “web of knowledge” approach, an integrated learning curriculum can also enhance the learning levels of youth. In some cases, “traditional” and local knowledge and skills can be reviewed and incorporated into teaching modules. In addition, new knowledge and skills can be integrated into the courses. Issues such as the loss of biodiversity, local, ecologically viable agricultural practices, and erosion of sophisticated long-evolved and viable knowledge systems, languages, and socially cohesive practices (e.g., community grain banks, seed sharing, collective

environmental care, group socialization, etc.) can be addressed. As integrated learning centers at the community level, these centers can endow youth with skills for ecological and agricultural-horticultural conservation, land restoration, rejuvenation, artisanal skills for local crafts, new skills for appropriate technologies, and citizenship responsibilities which include community-building of common resources and institutions. Combining such skills and knowledge with the integration of new technologies and methods will provide youth complementary skills for new livelihoods and social capital building. Such learning and knowledge capacity building will buttress regional economies and make them viable entities and livable arenas. In seeking a great transformation, we must imagine and work on learning spaces and transactions that make possible the lost diversities and humaneness of the world.

Endnotes

1. This has been adapted from A. R. Vasavi, "Rethinking Mass Higher Education: Towards Community Integrated Learning Centres," background paper, UNESCO, 2020, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374442>.
2. UNICEF, *Analysis of Multiple Deprivations in Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London: Cardno, 2020).
3. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
4. Ganesh Devy, *The Crisis Within: On Knowledge and Education in India* (New Delhi: Aleph Books: New Delhi, 2017).
5. A. R. Vasavi, "Eroded Life-Worlds and Emergent Assemblages: Rethinking the Sociological/Social Anthropologies of the Contemporary," *Sociological Bulletin* 66 (2018): 1-15.
6. Walter Feinberg, *What Is a Public Education and Why We Need It: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Self-Development, Cultural Commitment, and Public Engagement* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

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Cite as A. R. Vasavi, “Why Integrated Learning Matters,” contribution to GTI Forum “The Pedagogy of Transition,” *Great Transition Initiative* (May 2021), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/pedagogy-transition-vasavi>.

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