WHY SHOULD CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL?

Abstract. In the first part of this chapter I defend the claim that most thinking on ICT and education is presently taking place within technocratic discourses. These discourses are means-oriented, ignoring the basic-values or aims questions, and focus on small-scale issues disconnected from the whole picture. I further claim that it is vital (for the health and survival of postmodern Western societies) to complement this kind of discourses with macro-strategic discourses. Such discourses should “go deeper and wider” (to paraphrase on a sentence by A. Hargreaves). They should start with the search for the most basic grand visions, (also) supplying answers to the question in the title, and systematically refer, in their light, to all aspects of the educational process: ICT and education being one of the most important among them. In the second part I supply the reader with an example of such strategic thinking – the conception of the computerization of the Israeli system recommended to the Israel Ministry of Education in 2002 by a committee chaired by myself.

INTRODUCTION

My aim in writing this article was to stress the urgent need to complement the piecemeal technocratic and reformist thinking now dominant in the field of ICT-based education, with a strategic thinking. Such strategic thinking should be aimed at guaranteeing the “humanization of technology”, or in other words the harnessing of technology to the implementation of the most fundamental humanistic values.

I defend these claims in this chapter by two major steps each made in a separate part of the chapter. The first part involves a defence of the claims:

• That for the first time in Western history we have no answer to the question in the above title (Why Should Children Go To School?), or in other words, that the grand visions that have supported Western education throughout history have collapsed in the last generation - with no alternative seen in the horizon (first section);
• That the crisis-situation caused by this collapse creates an anxiety which has led most educationalists and thinkers on education to retreat to a purely technocratic or means-oriented small-scale discourse (since, given the lack of supporting grand-visions they cannot handle “aims oriented” large-scale rational discourse on the subject);
• That ICT is introducing us to a wholly new environment which we are all going to live in and which redefines all the aspects of our life-styles and hence the meaning of “being a human-being”;

• That, ethically (or Humanistically) speaking, this redefinition of the human condition, now intensively and rapidly taking place, is double-edged: it contains both the potential of leading us to Paradise as well as to Hell;

• That this extraordinary state of affairs requires (also) educational thinkers, decision makers and educators to face a huge challenge consisting of the search of ways of optimising the impact of ICT (i.e. reducing potential harms and enhancing potential benefits) from a Humanistic point of view;

• That the prevailing technocratic approach cannot “contain” this huge challenge, and

• That therefore there is an urgent need to replace the technocratic and reformist modes of thinking now dominant in education in general, and especially in the area of ICT-based education, with an entirely different mode of thinking (and hence decision-making and acting): strategic thinking (second section);

• That such strategic thinking is not to be found in the foundations of actual policy-making in Western postmodern societies (third section).

I end the first part with three sections explaining the nature and necessity of the three basic ingredients of missing strategic thinking: the cultural perspective, the ethical perspective and the action-plan stemming from their combination (fourth, fifth and sixth sections).

The second part of this chapter presents a specific example of such strategic thinking, based on the fundamental humanistic values, as recently developed by a committee set up by the Israel Ministry of Education. In this part, the cultural (first section) and ethical (second section) ingredients of the recommended Israeli policy are presented together with the educational consequences stemming from the ethical perspective (third and fourth sections). These are followed by a description of the various aspects of the action-plan stemming from the combination of the cultural and ethical ingredients (fifth section) as well as the overall vision underlying this plan (sixth section).

**STRATEGIC THINKING: THE ONLY APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO THE CRUMBLING OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF POSTMODERN WESTERN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS**

*The turtle stands on an abyss (or: On the sudden collapse of the justifications for the prevailing educational practices)*

When asked why children should go to school, the only candid and rationally sound answer in respect of school as it is today in the prevailing postmodern context is