LITERACY, EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING - FOR WHAT? *

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1. Introduction

What would happen if the whole world became literate? Answer: not so very much, for the world is by and large structured in such a way that it is capable of absorbing the impact. But if the whole world consisted of literate, autonomous, critical, constructive people, capable of translating ideas into action, individually or collectively - the world would change. And this is, by and large, the topic to be explored in the present paper.

To do so it may be useful to start out with the distinction between schooling and education that is now rapidly becoming commonplace.[1] This is no sharp dichotomy, schooling obviously serves some educational purpose, but there is, and should be, a concept of education much broader than that which is served by schooling, at present. More particularly, there are important dimensions along which schooling may be said to dilute, even pervert the richer concept of education. And literacy, the major focus of this paper, stands in an interesting in-between position: it can serve as a launching pad for schooling, but it can also be one among several points of departure for education more broadly conceived of.

Let us then proceed with these dimensions along which the schooling-education dilemna can be said to be located. They can conveniently be divided into two parts: form and content, the structure of schooling, vs. the content of that which is transmitted.

2. The schooling paradigm

Structurally speaking, there is little doubt that the entire institution of schooling, as we know it, is vertical and individualistic. The unit to be schooled is the individual: he or she is the receptacle of knowledge, the unit that moves from one class or school to the other, that performs and ultimately achieves and receives diploma and graduates. And the system is permeated from micro to macro levels with all kinds of verticality: pupils are ranked within classes; classes are ranked by numbers (grades) and often also by letters (the A class and B class of the same grade may be as different in level as the A classes of second and third grades, for instance); schools are ranked very clearly as conveying primary, secondary and tertiary (also called "higher") education; but schools are also ranked qualitatively within countries with the best in the center and the poorest in the periphery; and between countries with the best in the Center countries and the poorest in the Periphery countries. There is a corresponding verticality among teachers: the social distance between the professor at a university in the center of a Center country and the village teacher at the lowest grades of a primary school in the periphery of a Periphery country is about the same - we should imagine - as the corresponding difference between their pupils.

Hence, if somebody wanted the schooling system to serve as a tool for placing people in niches in a society that is predominantly vertical and individualistic - the liberal society fostered by the European post-Renaissance tradition, and particularly by the post-Enlightenment tempered with industrial capitalism - then the system is well constructed. In fact, it is probably too good, for it is much more rational than the society at large. It can be seen as one enormous sorting device absorbing each year new millions of small children, processing hundreds of millions one more step till they either graduate at some level, with

some note hung around their necks, or drop out. The system proceeds on the basis of the theory of innate ability combined with the built-in social injustice: the higher one comes up this ladder the better one's life chances, and society is not going to ask too many questions about whether this was because one was favored from the very beginning - e.g. by being born in the center of the Center - or because of innate superior qualities; if such exist at all.

However, that may be, the system grinds out a humanity sorted into categories consistent with the way the world economic system divides the same humanity, through all the mechanisms known as "division of labor", into those who extract something relatively directly from nature, those who process it and those who distribute it and administer this whole process.[2] And by and large these three sectors of economic activity, the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, receive their "human resources" from the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of schooling, respectively; when by "secondary schooling" we also mean vocational, post-elementary schools; and by "tertiary schooling" we mean any type of schooling beyond the secondary level. Hence, schooling is power because high position in division of labor is power, not only in the trivial sense of by and large being better paid, but also in the sense of having terribly important spin-off effects: often more challenging work, the right to define and prescribe the work of others, easier on-the-job access to other people and other types of activity, easier access to other spheres of society, among them politics. Just think of how a village peasant is tied to a very limited range of activity, compared to a free-floating expert - without glorifying the latter, the difference in impact on their surroundings is considerable, and schooling is the legitimizer of the power of the latter as much as lack of schooling justifies the misery and powerlessness of the former.

In all this there is, of course, the pervasive myth of schooling as the road to mobility, to be trodden by the ambitious, talented and industrious individual. What is not so clearly seen is how this mobility is limited by the constraints set by national and international division of labor. It does not help much to have a certificate from secondary and tertiary schooling if the country only offers job opportunities in the primary and secondary sectors of the economy; unless, that is, the country is in a position of power to adjust its economy so as to fit the schooling delivery system. The countries on top of the international division of labor (by and large those with a high GNP per capita since GNP measures essentially degree of processing and marketing) are gradually abolishing the primary sector of the economy, mechanizing and industrializing it and having it carried out in other countries (which deliver raw materials and foodstuffs for processing), thus making secondary and tertiary school graduates more functional, even indispensable. And the countries at the bottom will, precisely for this reason, have difficulties finding jobs for these graduates who, consequently, will engage in brain drain to the countries where their skills can be used because of the division of labor structure. But only few can engage in geographical mobility in order to convert schooling into social mobility - for the majority this is not possible.

Consequently, major contradictions will develop: sooner or later the hungry and angry masses of the Periphery countries will join hands with the educated elite without meaningful jobs and get out of the division of labor and into some pattern of local, national and regional self-reliance.[3] In that case, the Periphery countries will have much to gain, and so will the Center countries which will have to rediscover the primary sectors inside their own countries and overcome the

contradiction between that type of work and a pattern of schooling that has emerged whereby several of these countries have between one third and one half of the age cohort in tertiary education. In all probability this formula, self-reliance, will also contain some of the basis for a cure to the over-development of the Center countries, just as self-reliance seems to be the new word for the development of the underdeveloped countries.

We mention all this because it belongs to the context in which problems of literacy will have to be understood: it is a clearly economic and political context, domestically as well as globally. And this context also explains some of the content of schooling: it is basically knowledge-oriented and basically theoretical - except for the vocational schools. In other words, there is a schooling concept dominating the educational horizon which is predominantly verbal, and predominantly geared towards a type of knowledge held to be uncontroversial. That type of knowledge, by definition, has to be on the conservative side. To the extent that it is empirical knowledge (e.g. history, geography, natural science of various kinds), it deals with that which is rather than that which might be. To the extent that it contains normative knowledge (religious studies, national myths) it is not likely to instill doubts and to the extent that it deals with instrumental subjects (languages, mathematics, and literacy for that matter) they are also seen as unalterable - as it may be argued that to some extent they are (at the very least, one should not change somebody else's language!). The task of schooling seems to be to fill as much as possible of these things into the heads of the pupils, thereby creating people who are as similar as possible. The school is used to reinforce the nation where there is one, to create one where there was none in advance, like in the United States or the Soviet Union.

This immediately spills over into the structure. The type of content mentioned here is entirely compatible with the verticality and the individualism mentioned. As long as the content is so verbal and so knowledge-oriented the superiority of the teacher is almost guaranteed and protected; for it takes some years to accumulate factual knowledge and verbal skills to communicate them. Some children may be almost born with practical skills that emerge and develop very quickly when given the opportunity - and the same may be the case with mathematics and the languages - but hardly with the most fact-oriented subjects. Of course, experience always makes for some verticality, but more in some fields than in others.

Moreover, to memorize things is or can be a totally lonely thing: there is no need for any communication among the pupils at all, nor for any discussion: the receptacles are just being filled, occasionally tapped to check the quality of the knowledge liquid. More particularly, one would not expect any chain effect to arise from schooling, with children running home from the school house, eager to communicate the important findings of that day, to others in the family, to friends, to neighbors - so filled with it that it <u>has to</u> be discussed and tested in some kind of practice. Just to the contrary, one would expect children to separate schooling and the rest of their life into rather watertight compartments, schooling being a very special form of life, relatively unrelated to the rest. This, in turn, has one rather disastrous consequence: since people tend to identify education with schooling, and society tends to support this, they also feel that <u>education ends when schooling is over</u>. They study no more because they have no teachers to check them, and real dialogue they never learnt anyhow.[4]

3. The education paradigm

Let us now contrast this with an image of what education could be. Of course, it is easy to negate everything said above and paint a rosy image of something abstract called "education" - the problem is to make this image clear, vivid and compelling, partly by means of examples, partly by concrete ideas, and strategies. And that is not easy because it is by no means clear what "education" stands for. Who is educated, for instance? You? I? Try to think of a person you would call educated - what are the characteristics of that person?

In asking such a question a difficulty of linguistic nature shows up: "educated" in English is relatively close in meaning to "schooled", as is "ausgebildet" in German - English does not have the equivalent of the German "gebildet" (Norwegian "dannet", as opposed to "utdannet"). This concept, on the other hand, has a very bourgeois connotation of somehow belonging to the good class, with nice manners. But it has also some other content which is what we shall draw upon here.

First of all, there is something autonomous in the concept of education, something creative and very different from passive receptivity. On the other hand, how does one reconcile the need to receive, at some stage, with the need for autonomy? The answer is obvious: through dialogue, and through self-study, the two obvious methods of education.[5] The dialogue can be with teachers, with equals, with pupils - as long as it is dialogue and discussion it does not matter so much for that form will in and by itself wash out much of the verticality. Third, and closely related to this: the educated person goes in for sharing - an insight is not a private property, but something to be communicated to enrich others, and - through dialogue - to be enriched by them in turn.[6] Fourth, and this is where it would differ from the bourgeois concept: the

educated person might go in for the most esoteric subjects but would also be relevant, which means that there would be an element of praxis built into the concept of education. Through schooling the individual is on trial; in education society is on trial - that may be one way of formulating the difference, and also the simple reason why the societal establishment - right, left or middle - will prefer the former and the anti-establishment the latter, and also why schooling and education will always be dialectically related, in the same way, and paralleling the dialectics between establishment and anti-establishment.[7]

What does this mean concretely in terms of structure and content of education, as opposed to schooling? Less verticality, less individualism, less emphasis on knowledge, less emphasis on verbalism; more dialogue of all kinds, more shared growth, more discussion of values and strategies, more praxis. It is hard not to think of the image we have of education in classical Greece, of citizens combining education and politics using dialogue as the major instrument of either.[8] Another example would be schooling in a People's Commune in China, much closer, it seems, to the Greek ideal than schooling in, for instance, Greece today.

Out of all this let us now pick one element: the notion of "knowledge". This is absolutely fundamental, and it is probably relatively safe to say that knowledge presented in at least lower schools is presented as something relatively final. The students may be given the idea that further on there is knowledge is of a less certain kind, but there are certain fundaments on which to build - and here are some of them for you to learn, not to learn how to question. Thus, schools are not known for telling their students how even the most innocent looking arithmetic already has built into it much of Western time concepts: students learn

that 5 + 9 = 14, but for a farmer concerned with his work 5 + 9 = 2, if 5 stands for the fifth month, 9 for nine months, and 2 for February - and so it does for a girl who gets pregnant in the month of May; often the annual cycle/reflects social life better than Western unilinear time.[9] And capitalist money concepts: students learn that a+b = b+a, and are not told that when translated into financial deals this means that the order is unimportant, only the amount - which is another way of cutting down on all kinds of social decorum in favor of a purely quantitative approach to life.[10] Nor do they usually lead up to any discussion of how the language they are taught will structure their thinking - it is taken as an undisputable fact, like the rise of the sun and the position of the stars.

Instead of the schooling paradigm of knowledge as something about which there is consensus, more or less artificial, education would have another conception of knowledge. The facts would be there, but so would the values, and there would be no effort to stay away from them because of lack of consensus. Values tend to equalize people much more than facts do: of facts one can know more or less, in values one can believe, and my belief is as good as yours, hence in a dialogue you are no more teacher than I am. De gustibus non disputandem - values are not to be discussed - is a deeply reactionary norm, partly because by implication facts are to be discussed, presumably because the last word will be spoken by the older, the more experienced, the more schooled, and partly because values have to be discussed, since they are our guiding lights into the future, whether consensus is obtained or not.[11]

But this means that education should and could be centered around values, after knowing what is mapping out what might be, then leading on to discussions of strategies, and finally going into praxis.[12] Modern countries usually protect themselves against the latter not only by

defining such approaches as unscientific and inappropriate for school curricula, but also by constructing nation-states in such a solidified, centralized way that any change has to be from the top, making people into clients of politicians and experts with top schooling, at most capable of exercising some praxis in their own private sphere, their apartment, and their own family life.[13] This idea is also protected by such macro-level oriented ideologies as liberalism and marxism, that both assume that basic changes have to be in the society as a whole, not at the, say, school, farm, factory, firm, village level.[14]

Nonetheless, the moments when this type of education breaks out like a fire, in a school, are probably the moments best remembered by students - and by teachers because "it got out of hand". These are the moments when a real passionate discussion starts and the teacher does not try to quell it through his authority, nor to act the wise third party but becomes so involved himself that all masks fall and he simply becomes a party, on an equal footing, to the discussion. These are the moments that create chain effects, the moments that will be reported - although often not for its true value as much as for the triumph in having broken the structure - and even small children have a very keen sense of this. And not only does this pattern lead to chain effects - it also leads to a pattern of education by far outlasting schooling as a phase in life: education becomes an existential necessity. Socrates was <u>old</u>, meaning not only wise but also one who continued his education beyond schooling...[15]

Thus, there is an intimate relation between form and content; schooling and education are two ways of combining different forms and different contents. Is, then the answer to all this to abolish schooling and switch to education, creating societies with all kinds of academies where everybody walks peripathetically and dialogues his and her way

through life, alternating with People's Communes as a way of coming closer to the ground? No, there is probably also some pedagogical value in the tension between schooling and education,[16] and schools can only be basically transformed if society is transformed anyhow; meaning not necessarily at the macro-level of total society, but at least at the local level. But schools can be, and should be, brought much closer to education - and one way of doing that would be through a critical redefinition of the concept of literacy. To that we now turn.

4. The role of literacy

It is easily seen what role literacy plays in the context of schooling presented above, a context which in turn has to be extended to the economic and political spheres to be fully understood.

First of all, literacy serves as the first rung on the ladder (or succession of ladders) of schooling. If the content of schooling is primarily verbal, as we have argued, then knowing how to read and write is a conditio sine qua non for participation. It becomes like an entrance card, and possession of that card becomes like the diploma handed out when the final rungs of the ladders are reached: something ascriptive, "I can read and write" becomes like "I am a boy", non-dynamic, undisputable, no longer a question of what for? why?

Second, literacy, when universally obtained, serves to give a sense of equality. Where everybody is above a certain minimum the discrepancies above that minimum may recede intothe background. A national community of "all us literates" emerges for some time, rapidly yielding to a keen awareness of the tremendous discrepancies between maximum and minimum schooling above that threshold as time passes on, and literacy is taken for granted.[17]

Third, literacy is entirely compatible with the typical Western combination of verticality and individualism. In a push-button society a minimum of literacy is needed to know which buttons to push although it is, strictly speaking, not indispensable: like traffic signs they may be ideographic rather than based on letters. However, as the population grows more literate, society will have to make more use of letters and words to make it look functional, to justify the expenses involved, although it only serves as a mask to cover up the alienating nature of work in modern society. By "alienation", then, we refer essentially to a work structure whereby the work operations become so standardized and routinized - but not necessarily easy to perform - that once they have been acquired these work routines require no more input unless they are changed by somebody higher up.[18]

But does one not have to be able to read to learn how to do it? Yes, that is one way of doing it, both producers and consumers are in need of recipes (there is the magnificent German word "Gebrauchsanweisungen" for this) - but it can probably just as well be acquired through imitation. It is only for more abstract creative work, into the unknown, anticipating through verbal symbols that which is not yet there, in thoughts, on the drawing board, in texts, in discussions that mastery of verbal symbols is strictly speaking necessary. For that is the fabulous thing about words: they allow us to create images of the potential. Words do not protest against being put to non-empirical uses, to reflect the non-existing, values rather than facts for instance. The only constraint is that the sentence is correctly formed, and these constraints are internal to the verbal system; they do not reflect the borderline between empirical and potential reality. Like mathematics we would go far to argue that language is empirically neutral, although there probably

is some bias in an empiricist direction: after all, languages (and mathematics) are so often used to reflect that which is that there must be some carry-over effect somewhere.[19]

So, the argument is that literacy is not really needed for work in a modern society, for most of the population. It may be needed for consumption though[20] - although producers seem to rely more on commercials and advertising based on the spoken word and symbols than on people's ability to read. And it is, obviously, needed for kinds of creative work, for the reason mentioned, but that is for the few.

Conclusion: literacy serves to a large extent to create an illusion of equality. It is not really being used, so like a leg never used it will tend to wither away. First goes writing since this is a way of sending a message, and that is incompatible with being located in the lower strata of vertical society - most people, hence, probably have their writing peak at school, particularly during the final exams.[21] After that it may reduce to the legal minimum, the ability to sign a document. But reading, the receiver aspect of literacy, is also threatened if it is not strictly speaking necessary: people soon find out that they can get at more valid knowledge in other ways. People complain of fatigue when they read, and this is protected by the incredible growth in radio and TV, also vertical but no longer with the faintest hope of entering into any dialogue. A teacher can at least be teased into it - it is hard to tease a gadget into a mutually rewarding exchange. In short, the literacy is not functional, it is only a statistical artifact for large groups of the populations - in underdeveloped and overdeveloped countries alike, and probably even more in the latter because they are more routinized in their work structure.[22]

What about individualism? Something of the same applies here.

One learns how to read alone and write alone, not how to read for others or tell stories for others, nor how to compose things together. Literacy is privatized, which is natural since capability is used as an arm in the competition with others, rather than for cooperative purposes. This is very well reflected in the structure of examinations in ways too obvious to describe in any detail, and the net result is a deepening of the individualization of learning.

Nevertheless, in spite of such critical remarks the conclusion is certainly not to detract from the importance of literacy campaigns, but to enrich them by enriching the concept of literacy in ways to be discussed below. It is very easy for the well educated, not to mention the over-educated to be scornful about literacy - it smacks of the rich who says "believe me, money is not everything" to the pauper. To be literate is like being a citizen or a voter, it means being <u>in</u>, being a member. One may certainly criticize what one has become member of, but it is easier for the citizen not to participate, for the voter not to vote and for the literate to let his literacy wither away than for the reverse process to take place.[23]

The problem is certainly not how to reduce literacy campaigns but it is not merely how to reduce literacy either - it is to make them more meaningful. For illiteracy campaigns are conducted very much in the same manner as anti-smallpox or anti-malaria campaigns: illiteracy has to be eradicated so that the country can claim that the territory is free from that plague.[24] However, whereas the alternative to smallpox is no smallpox at all it is not so clear what is the alternative to illiteracy. Is it merely to read or write, or is it read and write + - and what, in case, does that plus stand for?

5. The broader meaning of literacy

Imagine now that we simply see literacy as the beginning of education rather than as the first rung on a schooling ladder, what would then be the meaning of literacy? Most of it has been spelt out implicitly above, here we shall try to go more into detail.

Evidently, it means training in another type of structure both for the production and consumption of knowledge, in a broad sense, a structure that is at the same time less vertical and less individualist. More concretely, this would mean that the ability to enter into a dialogue would be seen as equal in importance to the ability to read and write. However, there is an important distinction here that could be made between dialogue and discussion or debate: the former is a method, dialectical, for mutual enrichment and mutual growth; the latter is some kind of regulated verbal warfare where the basic point is to win over somebody else. To dialogue (it should also be used as a verb) may involve pro et contra dicere, also in the sense that one takes this view and another the opposite view - but this is understood as a method to arrive at some kind of synthesis rather than as a competitive game. It is like the two rowers in a double-sculler: it could turn into a competition in turning the boat around; but it is a cooperative endeavour making use of some of the dynamism of the competitive enterprise.

A more relaxed form of dialogue is the conversation which often may be a dialogue, or a debate for that matter, in disguise. It is a profoundly collective undertaking; it respects the other party fully, there is an assumption that time should be about equally shared (it is not a lecture or a teaching session)[25], it is conducted in an atmosphere of respect with a view to mutual enrichment. Of course, it has an air of the bourgeois salon and is too polite to be a tool for social

transformation - and yet, should it not somehow enter our concept of literacy? Should not literacy be defined more broadly as <u>how to deal with words in a social setting</u>, not merely how to read and write them?

We would also argue in favor of knowing how to read and write <u>together</u>. The storyteller was an ancient role of tremendous importance - inconceivable without a public, partly destroyed through literacy because the stories are now stored and available to all who care to read them. But in this process the story as a social transaction between human beings disappeared - the book is and remains a rather indirect link between author and reader, between sender and receiver.[26] At least some of this can be recreated through a pattern of joint enjoyment, but today very few people even know anything about how to read so as not to bore others - and few know how, together, to build on a story and create out of it something new.

So much about the form, what about the content?

If education is of any use in social transformation it obviously has to include both facts and values, both knowledge of the empirical and the potential, with ample use of the values to criticize the empirical, and of all kinds of knowledge to construct, using the precious tools of words that we humans have at our disposal, a better reality. Education should foster not only the empirical, but also the critical and the constructive mind[27] - and there is no contradiction between the three. On the contrary, to build on only one of them, usually choosing the empirical since it is least threatening and most consensus-oriented, should be seen as promoting some kind of truncated, even castrated type of knowledge.

Concretely this means that education should lead to consciousness, to Paulo Freire's and others' famous conscientization - for what is that if not exactly the keen awareness of the contradiction

between the factual and the potential, with ideas both about why the factual falls short of the potential and what could make the potential one day become empirical reality? Consciousness is more than mere awareness of the forces working upon one - it is also awareness of how to transcend. To this we would only add one point already alluded to above: a theory that only sees transcendence in terms of macro changes is of little use. Revolutions are rare occurrences in human life; one cannot base education on such macro phenomena that happen once in a generation - at most - that would be like basing astronomy on the appearance of Haley's comet. Hence, the praxis concept to be encouraged should be relevant at the micro levels too - which means that for literacy to contribute to education society will have to be more decentralized, more capable of diversity at the local level, of permitting people to handle their own affairs locally. There is a clear connection between education and diversity brought about through more decentralization, and increasing self-reliance, locally and individually, just as there is a connection between schooling and centralization, in fact with nation-state building. Since both may be needed, and at the same time, there should be a scope for both.[28]

6. Literacy relative to other fundamental needs

Literacy, whether defined narrowly or more broadly, is a fundamental need in a literate society. But what are the other needs, and how does literacy relate to them? The answer to the latter obviously depends on the answer to the former.

Thus, take the usual list of fundamental needs, or bienes fundamentales as they would be referred to in Cuba: food, habitat, clothes, health - and then education, at its minimum conceived of as literacy. It is

easily seen how literacy narrowly conceived of is instrumental to the satisfaction of these needs when the list is that short and these needs also are narrowly conceived of. Thus, if food becomes a question of reading recipes for increasingly industrialized food-making, habitat a question of signing a contract and being sufficiently knowledgeable of numbers and letters to locate one's own dwelling among similar looking ones, clothes a question of shopping and understanding advertising, and health a question of reading instructions of hygiene - well, then it all combines relatively well. But underneath this smooth surface, there are very substantial problems, and all of them relate more or less directly precisely to the problem of what is meant by literacy and education.

First, there is the idea of giving a deeper meaning to the fundamental needs already mentioned. There is a basic structural similarity ("isomorphism" to use the technical term) between being made literate on the one hand, and being fed, sheltered, clad, and protected on the other. In all cases one is receiver, a client, being taken care of by nutritionists and food-makers, by town planners and architects, by manufacturers of clothing, by sanitation engineers and physicians. There is a whole army with tertiary education to take care of you --- once you are willing and able to read their instructions! But the significant thing about this is that for all these fields there is something corresponding to the schooling vs. education dilemma, with the former standing for a more quantitative and the latter for a more qualitative approach with autonomy and sharing as basic ingredients.[29]

Take food as an example: food in a qualitative sense is more than calories and proteins, just as education is more than the number of years passed in schools and the number of diplomas received. Food is an act of social communication, of sharing, of doing something together - and

just as for habitat, clothing and health: the moment one can master some of it alone or together with the nearest ones (family, friends, neighbors) the whole meaning of these basic aspects of life changes. But that brings them closer to the education end of the spectrum - which means that the type of literacy we have argued above, the broad concept, would be more compatible and probably also lead to deeper quality in the need-satisfaction. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the case of health: to be a patient is not only to admit that you are ill but also tosubmit to the professional skills of health personnel, denying other roads to cure.[30] In some cases it would be foolhardy not to submit but by no means always - again we are arguing what the Chinese refer to as "walking on two legs". A person who has converted his literacy in the education direction, who has become autonomous, capable of dialogue, critical and constructive, will also be far more capable of self-cure and of curing others. The point, one might emphasize, is not so much the precise content of the texts one reads after one has become literate as the structure literacy leads one into, whether it is of the schooling or education varieties -- <u>for the structure is the major message</u>.[31] Since schooling/education fills increasingly large parts of people's lives that structural message will dominate people in their social behavior - and among other things have spill-over effect that could lead to a much higher quality of life if the education paradigm is made more dominant.

Second, there are all the other needs - life is not limited to those five alone. How do the two types of literacy relate to these less material needs? Depends on which they are, and here there is much less consensus. But why is there less consensus? Partly precisely

because the needs already mentioned can be handled in a way totally consonant with a centralized, standardized, vertical nation-state of fragmented individuals whereas this is clearly not the case for other needs. Take work, for instance, not merely interpreted as a employment, as a job with a guaranteed minimum income so as to insure the satisfaction of basic needs, but as an opportunity to express, to create, to engage in praxis. Today this privilege is probably reserved for a small elite of intellectuals, artists and some others - in a society less bent on standardized production and consumption it could be the birth right of everybody and in that case literacy could become functional for everybody. [32] Or take freedom, that holy word which is being usurped precisely by those societies that talk most about it: it should mean more than freedom to choose between different TV channels or newspapers, all the time remaining a passive consumer. It must also imply the freedom to create, but that means that from the very beginning creativity rather than receptivity has to be emphasized, which immediately would favor education rather than schooling.

At this point a very important aspect of literacy should be mentioned: freedom of expression, even in a relatively non-creative way, is meaningless unless the media are available. In modern society one is only permitted to communicate to selected, specific receivers - letters and stamps, telephone calls can be afforded by many, if not by all or even by most - for the letters have to carry an address and the telephone call has to be preceded by dialling a number. Only the establishment, or selected individuals, are permitted to communicate with unspecified audiences, even the nation as a whole, and even beyond that. The ordinary person may not even put up a poster on the town square without permission,

even not in countries that boast a very high level of freedom of expression. Our point here is not that everybody should be given prime time on television but that literacy should find more non-privatized outlets that can be afforded by people in general. One possibility is exactly the wall poster - a major Chinese contribution to freedom of expression - another would be to make mimeographing and photocopying services available free of charge to everybody, in addition to cable TV and FM radio-senders. Do this, and literacy would become much more meaningful, immediately.[33]

This also has some implications for the next need in line: the need for politics. We are then not merely thinking of politics as a social institution, as an instrument to shape society and hence as a "social need." We are thinking of it precisely as a human need, as the need for participation in shaping the conditions of one's own living. One can see it in the facial expressions of people who live in societies where this need is somehow satisfied, at least in some periods: there is an acute sense of being alive - whereas people denied this possibility tend to become dull and to resort to consumerism, passive religiousness or nationalism instead.[34] But to engage actively in politics is to do exactly all those things that we have mentioned under education, and particularly under the broad concept of literacy - whereas schooling would make for citizens who know how to read party programs, and literacy would create people below that,[35] but at least able to behave adequately on election day.[36] Hence, parliamentarism is to real politics what schooling is to real education, which is what the narrow concept of literacy is to the broad concept --- which, in turn, is what stones are to bread.

We could continue this list of needs, but it all leads to the same type of conclusion. Thus, is there not a need for togetherness,

also having such expressions as friendship and love? It is a telling indictment of our schools that many people do not know how to reconcile friendship, love marriage with real dialogue but tend to see dialogue as something one engages in only with half-friends and half-enemies - real enemies are even beyond that. Further, is there not a need for joy and for giving joy to others - and is talking together not one, by no means the only one, such source of joy? And what about the need for having a meaning with one's life - can that really be reconcilied with the kind of structure and content associated with schooling - if the picture drawn above is not too overdrawn, for it is obvious that it applies to some countries and to some periods in history more than to others? [37]

In fact, among all of these dimensions the broad concept of literacy is not only a necessary component; it is so central in the whole social nexus that it comes close to being a major causal factor. But to the extent this is true it becomes rather important, and the question is how that concept is better promoted, in theory and practice. To that we now turn.

7. Conclusion: some strategies

It is not for anybody to translate this into any kind of blue-print - that would be against the whole spirit of the exercise. But a couple of very broad guidelines might be suggested.

First, literacy training must no longer be seen as a question of how to train the largest number as quickly as possible and as inexpensively per head as possible. Rather, much attention must be given to the social structure in which it takes place, and the content of the first verbal messages to be mastered. The structure should be decentralized, close

to real life situations - carried out at work if possible, and by equals as much as possible. The content should have maximum relevance, verbal examples should not be contrived, literacy should be experienced as a magnificent instrument to express and understand important things, not as a goal in itself - in that case it becomes a fetish. There is much to learn from the Cuban campaign where this particular point is concerned.[38]

Second, literacy training must include a large variety of training programs in what to do with words, such as composing posters, having dialogues, composing letters-to-the-editor, commenting and criticizing radio programs, behaving in meetings[39] - even when reading and writing are not directly involved. It may well be that a new term should be invented to make a distinction between the narrow and the broad concept, retaining "literacy" only for the former.

Third, this type of exercise should have carry-over effects into schools, and one vehicle of transformation here might be to give recently alphabetized adults more access to ordinary schools so that their higher level of experience can mix with the more formal training possessed by the children.

Fourth, even given all this a basic condition for literacy to become functional, not only a question of learning and forgetting equally or even more quickly, would be for society to undergo some transformation, particularly in the direction of more administrative decentralization and more economic self-reliance at the local level. For this to happen considerably more than literacy campaigns is needed, but they may be important instruments in that direction. For just as the structure is the basic message, the content is defined through the use, and the use will have to be meaningful, which means, ultimately, bordering on or

getting into some kind of politics. But this presupposes a sense of local self-respect, which in turn presupposes some kind of knowledge reform, not too different from a land reform, whereby the monopolizers of knowledge-production, such as universities, experts etc., are willing to distribute the tools of knowledge better, and people in general dare respect their own insights more.

So, what would happen if the whole world became literate? Quite a lot, in fact - if we dare define it broadly enough and take the consequence of trusting the people who are given, and themselves develop further, the tools of reading and writing.

N O T E S

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1. For one presentation of this distinction, see Johan Galtung and Veslemøy Wiese, "Measuring Non-formal Education", Papers, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo, No.14.

2. This parallel between the economic system and the schooling system, nationally and internationally, is the basic theme in Johan Galtung, Christian Beck, Johannes Jaastad, "Educational Growth and Educational Disparity", Papers, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo, No. 1, also published by UNESCO, Division of Statistics on Education, 1973.

3. This theme is explored in some detail in Johan Galtung, Peter O'Brien and Roy Preiswerk. eds., Self-Reliance, George, Lausanne, 1977.

4. The consequence of this, in turn, are obvious: re-analphabetization will set in; little tendency to study anything by oneself or together with others; exaggerated faith in what can be learnt in courses as opposed to what can be learnt by oneself or together with others; a tendency to confuse diplomas and certificates with knowledge; a tendency to accept as natural the low level of retention of what was learnt in order to pass an exam and for that reason to regard school knowledge as irrelevant, "for exams only". With a low level of respect for school knowledge and at the same time low level of capacity/motivation for true education the industries of mass cultural consumption (TV, radio, movies, magazines, many of the books published) will have a relatively easy play.

5. As expressed by Francisco Gutierrez in his excellent El Lenguaje Total, Editorial Humanitas, Buenos Aires, 1974:

> "-- imposible obtener la participación de las bases (los alumnos) en el proceso de aprendizaje si no se llega a establecer una comunicación horizontal, prerequisito de la comunicación dialogica. Este tipo de comunicación implica admitir que el profesor ya no es el sabelotodo sino un co-investigador, co-aprendiz y co-responsable en la accion educativa" (p.80).

6. One of my own most vivid experiences in how perverted academic life can be came out of a guest lecture in 1962 in a Southern European country. After the lecture I asked, as usual, for comments and criticism, and one person came up to me and whispered - to my surprise - a question. Naïvely I started repeating the question so the others could hear it - but he clutched my arm and insisted "no,no, if you tell the question to all the rest, they will guess what I am working at right now". The full meaning

of that statement became more clear the same evening at a party where I discovered - again to my surprise - that the host had placed his books with the back in "so that nobody can steal ideas about book-titles I have had great trouble acquiring". Intense patterns of competitiveness (verticality cum individualism!) would foster exactly this type of lack of sharing, although the illustrations, admittedly, are extreme.

7. The key person to set education in this perspective for our entire generation is, of course, Paulo Freire. Freire was actually awarded a major prize for his work in the field during the Symposium - much to the chagrin of the official Brasilian delegation present.

8. However, "dialogue" should not necessarily be equated with "the Socratic method". It is true that Socrates, according to Platon, is good at asking questions and making the other person think and reflect and formulate. However, there is little trace in the dialogues of Socrates ever learning anything - they usually end with statements of the "yes, Socrates, now I see it Socrates, you are so right Socrates" variety. This is not dialogue in any horizontal, symmetrical sense, but a way of making others see the problems the way one sees them oneself. It is probably a more effective way since the pupil is led along the path through his own formulations, believing himself to make the steps - but in that movement there are still the asymmetry between mover and moved, between cause and effect, with most of the former in the teacher and most of the latter in the pupil. Was Socrates essentially a tricky old man - at least there is a myth about "the Socratic method" that seems to last forever - -

9. Mathematically this is resolved by saying that 5+9 = 2 modulo 12, but more interesting than such mathematical formulas would be efforts to relate them to empirical reality or ways of thinking about, conceiving of, empirical reality.

10. Mathematically this can be handled through non-communative algebras, but again the important point is to see mathematics as a tool and be very sensitive to how mathematics may structure reality for us rather than vice versa. Thus, the example mentioned would reflect the idea that "a dollar is a dollar, does not matter who pays first", very basic in the rationale of capitalism as a system where production factors should flow in an unimpeded manner, and be easily substitutable for each other.

11. Thus, the idea is not that the focus on knowledge makes schooling so vertical because of the experience/accumulation factor, but that schooling is vertical because it has a certain task to do in a vertical society and will tend to be built around topics that can preserve, even reinforce that verticality.

12. For an effort to build a methodology of social sciences on such concepts, see Johan Galtung, Methodology and Ideology, Ejlers, Copenhagen, 1977.

13. However, it should be noted that recent years have witnessed quite a lot of interest in creating a sphere between the state/public and the individual-family/private spheres: that of the community, perhaps best understood as a "commune". The West German Bürgerinitiative are excellent examples of efforts to regain some popular power, (perhaps) in a more egalitarian manner than this was done in earlier ages. Such initiatives are bound to involve schools and almost force the teachers to take sides. Ultimately this contradiction will lead to a fight over schools - do they belong to the nation-state or to the local community?

14. For one analysis of this, see Johan Galtung, "Two Ways of Being Western: Some Similarities Between Marxism and Liberalism", Papers, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo.

15. For a sceptical remark about Socrates, however, see footnote 8 above.

16. And it can also be argued that the two are dialectically related: if schooling for some reason disappear (as during an occupation with soldiers billeted into all schools), then education would change character and gradually become more like schooling.

17. This theme is analyzed in some detail in the paper referred to in footnote 2 above.

18. Consequently, anyone else who learns these work routines can just as well carry out the job, thus laying the basis for the substitutability that seems to be at the basis of alienation.

19. For one effort to dig into some of this, see Johan Galtung and Fumiko Nishimura, "Social Structure, Thought Structure and Languages: Some Reflections on Japanese and Chinese", Papers, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo.

20. This has to do with brand differentiation, an essential mechanism in capitalist expansion. However, it may be argued that literacy is not strictly speaking needed to differentiate between, say, Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola - bottle-shapes, colors, figures, "ideograms" of various kinds may do the job. But literacy is useful because of the high level of densely packed information that can be carried by sets of around 25-30 letters.

21. I have met people who have said that the last time they wrote anything like an essay was for the final school exam. Why write a letter when all that is needed to communicate is to dial a telephone number, soon to any country in the world?

22. That does not mean that literacy campaign are successful, however. The first sentence in the "Declaration of Persepolis" that came out of the Symposium (where the present paper was presented) reads: "The number of illiterates is constantly growing". The conclusion is based on one of the documents prepared for the Symposium, "Literacy in the World Since the 1965 Teheran Conference: Shortcomings, Achievements, Tendencies", where it

is also pointed out that "Illiteracy has affected particularly women and rural people in the developing countries. These patterns are not different from those experienced by the world prior to the 1965 Teheran conference" (p.48). It might be pointed out that the Symposium was held at the tenth anniversary of that conference, as a joint UNESCO-Government of Iran venture, adopted at the 18th session of the General Conference of UNESCO October-November 1974.

23. In the Report from the Symposium it is mentioned that one participant asked "what would happen to humanity if it reverted to the state of universal illiteracy: nothing less than the end of civilization, without a doubt" (p.13 - in response, actually, to the question put at the beginning of the present paper). This may be going a little bit too far, unless one assumes, by definition, "civilization" always to be based on the written word, and hence on the literacy at least of some. What about a culture with tremendous expressiveness in dances, mimique and gesture, the non-verbal arts and the non-written verbal arts (eg., story-telling); would it be"uncivilized" ?

24. In accepting this view of literacy campaigns a negative concept of education is, in fact, promoted. It is not to do something that literacy is needed; literacy is seen implicitly as "absence of illiteracy", just as negative health has one element in its definition, viz., "absence of malaria". This would be acceptable if one assumes that negative education (health) is a necessary condition for positive education - but, to quote from the same Report: "- - dialogue in itself constitutes a path to literacy, and - - it is not essential to be able to master written language in order to be able to carry on a dialogue" (loc.cit.)

25. This requires discipline. In a social setting where everybody insists on very long presentations there will either be submission to the stronger (older,more experienced, the best story-teller, etc.) or a set of monologues. The latter need not be parallel, with everybody shouting his or her speech at the same time. The speeches could also be constructive, but with no dialogical content because everybody plays according to the rule "I shall abstain from interrupting you and look as if I am listening, if you do the same when my turn comes".

26. There are, of course, important ways of trying to overcome this distance, eg., by having empty pages at the end where readers can put down their reactions and queries and mail them to the author. This could constitute a way of establishing a link with authors across distances in space, but the written word also constitutes a one-way bridge in time, from authors in the past to readers in the present - hard to bridge by such methods. The interest in interviews, final dialogues with great philosophers before they pass away is important here: it deepens the link. But imagine a country where for some reason only the books written by authors long since deceased are available: the verticality of the written word would be even more pronounced. And this is, of course, precisely the situation in countries/cultures that base themselves so much on the written word of the past, eg., the Bible, the Koran, the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and (possibly) Mao Tse-tung.

27. See the book referred to in note 12 above, ch. 2.

28. It should be remembered that the arts of reading and writing are considerably older than the institution of mass literacy and mass schooling; the latter are recent phenomena, concomitant of the rise of the nation-state as a basic unit of the organization of humankind. In a humanity organized in smaller units schooling, even literacy was/is strictly speaking not needed: communication could be direct, in space; and whatever should be communicated in time can be handed down from one generation to the next by the spoken word, by drawings, and above all by the built-in code in social institutions, technology etc. After all, this was/is the way most of humanity has carried on. It may be objected that there is a linkage between ability to read and write and the ability to change the code, and this may be in part correct - working with the written word probably facilitates abstract reasoning. But the objections would be (1) for this to happen the literacy of a small elite may be not only necessary but also sufficient, and (2) why should societies change their code?

29. At this point one should not be blind to the vested interest of the intellectuals in spreading literacy. In a sense literacy is to intellectuals what salary, meaning entry into a monetized economy, is for the capitalist: it creates customers. The more literacy, the more potential readers. But it is obviously also in the vested interest of the intellectuals that they remain readers and do not start competing as writers - except in the private sphere as letter-writers. Moreover, to create literate people means to give them an entry card to the general field of words where the intellectuals are masters; consequently increasing the relevance of the latter as models. Put more precisely: literacy is the condition for somebody else to be a teacher. As intellectuals increasingly take over power positions in society, verbal fluency may start competing with other currencies, particularly with money, as a way of articulating power. However, for this currency to work there have to be receivers (readers, listeners), not only senders (writers, speakers), and this is exactly where literacy may enter. Thus, imagine a society based much more on the ability to express oneself in the ways indicated in footnote 23 above, what would then remain of the power of verbally highly articulate intellectuals, especially those among them who in addition have become bureaucrats? As Francisco Gutierres points out (see footnote 5) verbal language is but a part of the total language of human beings. Intellectuals have made this the dominant part.

30. Illich utilizes these points, drawing on Talcott Parsons in The Social System, Free Press, Glencoe 1951 in his Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health, London, Penguin, 1976.