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Book Review

Mega-Schools, Technology and Teachers: Achieving Education for All

Author: John S. Daniel (2010). **Mega-Schools, Technology and Teachers: Achieving Education for All.** London & New York: Routledge. 186 pages. ISBN: 978-0-415-87205-8.

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There is hardly a bugle call that stirs educators more actively than "education for all." It works well as a catchphrase, fits nicely in politicians' speeches as a lofty goal, and, for those closer to actual planning and execution of educational programs, signals the failure, difficulties, and challenges of achieving full coverage of the entire population with adequate or better educational services.

Sir John Daniel has made a new contribution to educators with a book on the plans, actions, technology, and methods by which humankind has a hope of achieving the goal of providing education for all.

Education for all in Daniel's book is the name of a broad set of international programs. It has emerged from high-level meetings of government officials, particularly representatives of education authorities.

The goal of education for all is described in a summary of a meeting in Dakar in 2005. Simply stated, by 2015 the following will be achieved: expansion of early childhood care and education; all children in schools, emphatically including girls, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable groups; 50% increase in adult literacy, especially in women; equitable access to satisfy learning needs; elimination of gender disparity in education; and improved quality through measurable outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills.

That is John Daniel's starting point. He gives us a book that is compassionate as well as passionate. He makes a rational assessment of progress towards those goals and forces us to think about how to achieve them. I am a witness to his collection of evidence and its validity, which is based on intensive questioning and extensive research and cross-checking.

Sir John believes that education for all can be achieved by combining technology, private education for the poor, and a rethinking of educational goals, programs, contents, and methods, particularly in the area of teacher in-service training.

He is acutely aware of the challenges of increasing the scale of applying even simple ideas to large numbers of students and teachers, particularly those in poverty, in isolated regions, and in vulnerable minorities. This perspective is one of the highlights of the book; much literature and debate emphasize pedagogical approaches, the workings of the classroom, and many other valuable angles but overlook the challenges associated with transforming those approaches into viable, massive, fast-acting programs.

Chapter 1 of the book reviews the education for all programs and experiences. Sir John traces the history of the World Bank's views on education and, in particular, the Bank's *volte face* on the need for decisive state interventions. The Bank extracted eight lessons from the experiences of approximately 2,000 Bank-related institutions during the previous decade. They are listed as conditions for achieving country-wide education for all:

- Political commitment,
- A focus on quality in education,
- Partnerships with families and civil society,
- Comprehensive sector policy frameworks,
- Efficient resource allocation, including learning materials and in-service teacher training,
- Adaptability,
- Cushioning education during economic and political crises,
- Growing economy.

The goal of education for all must now include additional goals of expansion of secondary schooling, encouragement of lifelong learning, and reduction of inequality.

Chapter 2 contains an updated summary of problems and approaches to solutions. It highlights some troubles of public schooling, again especially in developing regions (many of which are also experienced in developed countries), particularly teacher absenteeism and the social distance between schools and teachers on one side and students, families, and civil society on the other.

Sir John stresses the growth of private education for the poor in many countries. This growth is fueled by many factors. Readers are challenged to reconsider widespread views about the low quality and the lack of control over these schools in exchange for appreciating what good they can provide (from an accessible payment schedule to an immediately useful education).

Daniel then reviews recent approaches to applying technology in schools, including the "One Laptop per Child" initiative, its many changes over the years, and the beginnings of successful applications, such as the one taking place in Uruguay. Further, he contrasts large-scale, system-wide, top-down government driven programs with others such as the "Hole in the Wall" approach

undertaken in India, in which spontaneous, highly decentralized actions leave, to astounding effect, many decisions to the children themselves.

Chapter 3 focuses attention on technology. Daniel presents a simplistic approach, taken almost naïvely from Adam Smith; this simplicity serves the purpose of a direct explanation. The author takes us to the heart of the problems of scale and the conditions for solving them. Citing the economics of educational systems, Daniel provides a clear explanation of the division of labor between those who develop systems for learning and the teachers who apply them.

We thus enter chapter 4 armed with a set of tools to analyze and criticize existing systems and, hopefully, to build new and more effective systems. Drawing on Daniel's thinking, this chapter offers a definition of mega-schools and open schools. Mega-schools share with open and distance learning (ODL) such parallels as enhanced presence of private institutions, autonomy, and intensive, differentiated use of online technology.

After a walk through the complementary, alternative, and integrative modes of education in mega- and open schools, Daniel describes collaborative creation of learning materials. He then advocates the use of open, distance, and technology-based education to strengthen conventional education, catalyze reform, and expand the use of ICTs in society in general. Governance of open schools is left for further consideration by the reader.

Chapter 5 considers the challenges of increasing the scale of teacher education. A particularly nagging problem, this is the Achilles' heel of many a failed education program. The history of education worldwide is littered by programs that have failed, particularly those programs intended to equip teachers with the skills needed to enable students to increase their technical competence, which they typically possess at a higher level than the teachers themselves.

Chapter 6 brings together the strands developed in order to consider synergies, systems, and strategies. Local learning, resource centers, technology, legislation, policy, governance, leadership, management and administration are all considered, as is international assistance.

The appendices are no less substantial than the book; they provide valuable, concrete information about specific mega- and open schools, programs, and mechanisms for expanding teacher supply, and many other valuable insights.

The book's excellent organization makes it easy to use for different purposes. Each information-rich chapter concludes with a clear, practical summary. The cases presented provide numerous examples of how the ideas discussed have been applied in practice. It is disciplined and methodical. The urgency of the call should not be missed. We are too close to 2015 and too far from achieving the goal; there is no room for complacency.

Thus, Sir John Daniel has provided us with a masterpiece. It will fuel our emotions and commitment, allow us to make sober assessments of the challenges faced by educational systems, and provide us with tools and stepping stones for building new and more effective educational

systems. Rarely has stepping on the shoulder of giants been facilitated by such a high-speed elevator as this book.