Education: key to the SDGs … *and Sustainable Change*

Way back in 2015 – before Trump, Brexit, Covid or Ukraine - the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the somewhat underwhelming Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The revised set of targets focuses on a similar overall plan to improve the quality of life for all, but with a much more focused agenda.

The 17 SDGs can be sub-divided into goals relating to social, environmental, and economic areas. Education is an important goal in its own right, but because it acts as an enabler for many other goals, can be apportioned a unique place on the list. In my view Education is by far the most important SDG.

Education however comes in a variety of shapes and sizes: good, bad and often quite indifferent (as many of us can attest to).

In the 1980s and 90s I coordinated projects that linked schools in *The North* to schools in *The South*. In this case, North meant Britain and Australia; South was India and Kenya. Back then, there was a wide *Education Gap* between North and South. Today this appears to be narrowing.

For those whose memory can track back to the 80s, you will recall little in the way of mobile phones or laptops; *digital* then was something to do with fingers and toes. Thus, because many schools I visited in The South were also off the electricity grid, I developed a treasure trove of photos and other paraphernalia to represent the faraway culture which I (literally) carried into schools. By today's standards it was crude, but it seemed to work, motivating children to learn more about distant cousins and their often rather strange customs.

By the start of the new millennium, Hi-Tech was beginning to happen, and education facilities, such as the internet, email, LCD projection and PowerPoint evolved accordingly. But despite all that it was still important to go back to basics; connect young people to their physical surrounds.

For this I used a method whereby students mapped the locality and plotted their route to school, showing all the different spots they passed on the way. This map formed the basis of discussion around what could be done to improve the challenges that existed, related to social, environmental and economic concerns.

Later this method became more refined. Student groups discussed and apportioned red, green and amber stickers to various aspects of their surrounds. A health clinic, good (thus green), factory pollution, bad (red), with a host of amber spots in-between warranting attention. They then discussed and decided on a practical project to develop and run, that would tackle one of the

challenges identified. We termed this method *The Traffic Light*. The point I want to make is that our Traffic Light technique exemplified education at its best, because it embodied a number of key principles. It was:

1. Participatory
2. Experiential
3. Learner-centred
4. Enquiry-based
5. Problem solving, and
6. Embodied learning by doing
   (rather than by seeing or hearing)

These principles underpin **Quality Education**, which by coincidence is the exact title of SDG Goal No. 4. Making these principles work on a global scale is an enormous challenge, but if successful will definitely result in an improved impact for other SDGs, … and of course, more **Sustainable Change!**

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