

The human face of globalization: implications in education

LA GLOBALIZACIÓN ES UN HECHO. Y EN UN AMBIENTE QUE ESTÁ CAMBIANDO VERTIGINOSA Y CONSTANTEMENTE, LAS ESCUELAS ESTÁN LLAMADAS A RESALTAR LA NECESIDAD DE FOMENTAR LA FORMACIÓN EN VIRTUDES. LA RAZÓN ES SENCILLA: LA PERSONA VIRTUOSA ESTÁ EN LA MEJOR DISPOSICIÓN PARA AFRONTAR LOS INELUDIBLES DESAFÍOS.

KEYWORDS: GLOBALIZACIÓN, COMPETENCIAS BÁSICAS, VIRTUDES, FORMACIÓN.

THE COVER OF *EL SEMANAL* IN THE MAY 21-27, 2000 issue (no. 656), a supplement of *Diario de Navarra*, featured a bent man squatting on the floor with the whole weight of the globe on his back. The cover title was “*La nueva economía revoluciona el trabajo ¿Esta usted ya globalizado?*” [The new economy revolutionizes work: Are you global already?]. An article by Enrique Barrueco entitled “*Globalización: ¿y qué me está pasando?*” [Globalization: And what is happening to me?] features how globalization is affecting the lives of people differently: some are winners, but others have ended up as losers. An example of a loser is a Customer Service Agent, who worked for an American airline that decided after fifty-three years to close its operations in Spain. She is one of the eighty-seven employees, with an average age of fifty years, who would have to face an uncertain future without any job. The irreversible decision was made at the head office in another country and has adversely affected the lives of these people. This is a common phenomena in the business world, where restructuring and mergers are driven by the credo “adaptation at whatever cost” (Barrueco, 2000: 20). Thus, Barrueco says that “this model of globalization undermines social cohesion and promotes inequality and poverty. It speaks only of accumulation, but not of redistribution” (Barrueco, 2000: 20).

Definitely, not everyone sees globalization as an “evil”; but it is also a fact that criticisms are not wanting. Proof of this are the demonstrations of public protest participated in by people from different countries and organized in places where world economic summits have been held. The same may be said of the academic reflections that globalization has generated.

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An example is Sennett's book *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (Sennett, 1998) which is being considered as a "refreshing tonic of counter-cultural pessimism"¹. All these criticisms against globalization have one point to make: in spite of the euphoria over the wider opportunities that globalization seems to offer, not all the consequences of globalization are necessarily favorable.

Sennett, in particular, analyzes the consequences of the new forms of work on the values and character of the persons immersed in an economic system that is characterized as 'flexible capitalism'. According to his assessment, in general, the effects are negative. He recognizes that the flexibility in time and space and the hallmarks of the new economic order—the global marketplace and the use of new technologies—have freed people from bureaucracy and have given them more control over the destiny of their own lives. This seems to be validated in the example of a 28 year-old Spanish president of the Retemsa company, a global winner featured in the aforementioned issue of *El Semanal*. He was able to tap the internet to penetrate the global economy—Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Moldavia, Lithuania, Russia—selling ingenious ideas for the mobile telephone market. Ironically, his company is prevented from selling its products in Spain because of legal impediments put up by Telefonica. Nonetheless, with only fifteen mostly young people among his personnel, working in a "disorderly room... that looks more like an appliance repair shop", his company was projected to earn six hundred million pesetas in the year 2000 (Barrueco, 2000: 20-21).

But this celebrated flexibility has its downside to it. Sennett points out that this new order is generating new demands and new problems for the ordinary worker: "the need to be open to change on short notice and to be prepared to take risks continually... are sources of greater anxiety" (Sennett, 1998: 9). Perhaps these demands partly explain the higher incidence of depressions and mental breakdown in our society. These may be manifestations of the failure of persons to adapt to the rapid pace of life and to cope with the stress that comes with a corporate structure that is quite unforgiving of failures or of non-performance. Thus, job tenure is precarious: he who is unable to meet targets is easily replaceable.

Besides, Sennett thinks that human character is being weakened by the work values that the new economic order seems to favor.

"Character focuses on the long-term aspect of our emotional experience. Character is expressed in loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed

¹ A comment made by Sonderman, M. in *El Modelo Laboral de Capitalismo Flexible* published in *Perspective* (February-March 2000). Reprinted in *Análisis*. (May 2000). *Aceprensa*, 59.

gratification for the sake of a future end... How do we decide what is of lasting value in ourselves in a society that is impatient, which focuses on the immediate moment? How can mutual loyalties and commitments be sustained in institutions which are constantly breaking apart or continually being redesigned? These are the questions about character posed by the new flexible capitalism” (Sennett, 1998: 10).

He also points out that the fleeting associations in teams constituted on a project basis—the team is dissolved when the project is completed—do not foster strong social ties because ordinarily social bonds take time to mature into real friendships. Thus, in general, the working relationships are governed by the “no long-term” principle that corrodes trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment” (Sennett, 1998: 24). This “transposed to the family realm... means keep moving, don’t commit yourself, and don’t sacrifice” (Sennett, 1998: 25). Another case in point is the negative consequence of bringing the teamwork culture into the families: in a team, every member is considered an equal. But, “practiced at home, teamwork is destructive, marking an absence of authority and of firm guidance in raising children” (Sennett, 1998: 25).

The preceding discussions are thought-provoking. They constitute an invitation for educators to reflect on the kind of education that is needed to prepare people to “survive” within the evolving new economic order. Concretely, more than ever, it seems that the problems and opportunities that people must face in a flexible capitalism make education in virtues imperative.

I. FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS ABOUT EDUCATION

The most ideal is to consider “educators” in the broad sense. They include parents, teachers, business organizations, mass media, government and the society-at-large. It is the most ideal because without some coherence among these direct and indirect agents of formation, integral formation would be difficult to realize. Nevertheless, this article has the schools in mind, without implying in any way that they have the panacea for all the problems; nor should schools be considered as the principal agent in all spheres of human formation. In fact, the family has a more decisive role, particularly in the area of moral formation; while schools have only a secondary role. In any case, the unity of the person prevents us from having a clear-cut division in the competencies of the different agents of formation nor a practical distinction between the different dimensions of education: intellectual, moral, social, physical, etc. The contrary posture “is a consequence of pedagogical scientism” (Naval y Altarejos, 2000: 199).

Moreover, it should be taken for granted that the principal protagonist of education is the learner himself and that given the natural individual differences, each learner will vary in their personal development. Thus, the role of educators has the nature of a help and is never a substitute for the action of the learner. This principle is a key criterion in designing the

curriculum: syllabus content, teaching strategies, and methods of evaluation. When students are accustomed in the schools to being the protagonists of their own development, then they are being prepared to play the same role in the other spheres of their life, whether in the present or in the future.

2. IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBALIZATION IN EDUCATION

First, it is important to accept that globalization is an irreversible fact of life; thus, it simply cannot be ignored. Second, it would be a great service to our clientele—the students—if the educational system is able to identify and to favor the acquisition of the necessary competencies that are needed to cope in the so-called flexible capitalism. In this regard, the following data is worth considering. According to a Spanish executive director of a headhunting company, those who are most prepared to face the demands of the labor market are persons who have these four qualities: “mobility, ductility, accepts what is given and takes advantage of opportunities” (Barrueco, 2000: 22). Note that none of the four refers to content learned in universities; rather, they refer more to attitudes or dispositions that are not job-specific.

The next question then is “what can the schools do to help the students acquire the qualities that are needed in the ‘real’ world?”. It may seem ironic but the 28-year old President of Retemsa was quoted in *El Semanal* as saying that his success has nothing to do with having gone to a university: “Nothing is to be learned there” (Barrueco, 2000: 21). It is difficult to believe that. Still, it raises the question of whether what are learned in universities are attuned to the needs of the “outside world”. This does not in any way imply that education must respond only to utilitarian ends. In other words, its end cannot be limited to the acquisition of knowledge that enables the learners to produce something for society. Rather, our concern should be directed at providing the persons with the interior resources to face the vicissitudes of life.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to concretize in detail how the schools must be transformed, but the recommendations of the Delors’ Study can provide a general orientation as to the kind of education that schools must aim for. Concretely, the study identified four pillars of education: to learn how to know, to learn how to do things, to learn how to live with others, and to know how to be what one truly is (Delors, 1996). In *Filosofía de la educación*, Naval and Altarejos elucidate on these four dimensions from the perspective of the authentic meaning of human formation (Naval y Altarejos, 2000: 195-197). According to them, “[these] ‘four pillars of education’ when examined with detail can be a valid synthesis of an authentic meaning of human formation from a personalist perspective” (Naval y Altarejos, 2000: 195).

The first pillar advocates the students’ mastery over the means to gain knowledge, in contrast to mastery over the content of the different sub-

jects. This implies that while memorization should not be completely done away with, it should not be given primary emphasis. This has relevance within the context of flexible capitalism: there is somehow a need to make oneself “indispensable” in the job market by ensuring that one’s knowledge and skills do not become obsolete or in the management lingo, one should constantly “re-engineer” oneself. In this regard, perhaps one problem that characterizes our time is “information explosion”: there is simply an abundance of information. Consequently, this pillar includes knowing where to find relevant and quality information and how to access to that information. For this, knowledge of computers and of the information available in the cyberspace are indispensable. For example, the possibility of having access to references in major libraries all over the world from the confines of one’s own home is revolutionizing the way research can be carried out.

“To learn how to do things” is no longer limited to a concrete material task. Above all, it refers to the individual’s capacity, through initiative and creativity, to personally contribute something to a common enterprise. The third pillar, on the other hand, highlights the inescapable high levels of interdependence that exist among the different members of an organization. This interdependence that can even go beyond the boundaries of one’s own country. For this reason, the designated symbol of globalization is the “Net” that links everyone. Besides, it is a tested management principle that the strength of a team in an organization is anchored on the complementary knowledge and skills of its members. This setup allows the achievement of synergy, that is, the end product is more than just a sum of the parts. This is symbolically expressed as $1+1=3$. The schools can prepare students for this kind of environment by promoting cooperative learning, in contrast to individual work.

The fourth pillar implicitly recognizes that man is a unity, whose development can only be promoted by an integral education. This is an ultimate reference of all educational activity and demands a rejection of any kind of education that subordinates the development of the person to any utilitarian ends. Thus, Langford would say, “to be educated is to learn to be a person” (Langford, 1975: 30).

3. THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUES AS A CORE COMPETENCY

The term “virtues” may not appear as a descriptor or a key word in the literature on competencies. In fact, today, the term “virtue” can “give rise to two opposed meanings that are far from its correct comprehension: on the one hand, it is used to refer to some kind of an obstacle for the human being to act freely; and, on the other hand, it is considered as merely an illusory abstraction, that is interesting, but divorced from moral conduct” (Naval y Altarejos, 2000: 206). Contrary to these ideas, good habits or virtues increase the person’s capacity to act with more freedom and at the same time promote authentic self-realization or self-development through

his free acts. Thus, when virtues are understood correctly and when we analyze the document prepared by Vázquez (1993), which specifies the more relevant competencies that are needed today, we realize that these competencies actually refer to virtues; although, the term “virtues” is not explicitly mentioned.

For example, Vázquez identifies the following basic competencies as indispensable in the present-day society: deliberative and practical judgment, capacity to think and to plan given conditions of uncertainty and the capacity to assume risks. These actually refer to the virtue of prudence. This virtue enables the person to make an objective assessment of a given situation in order to be able to decide and to act on the best course of action. Pieper says that prudence has both cognitive and imperative dimensions: prudence is “knowledge of the concrete situation in which the concrete action is to be realized” (Pieper, 1997: 46). More specifically, the competencies mentioned by Vázquez refer to *solertia*, which is an aspect of prudence.

“It is a perfecting capacity by means of which man, in having to face the unexpected, does not limit himself to closing his eyes instinctively and to take action blindly, though he may have the power to do so; rather, he is disposed to objectively confront reality with an open mind and to decide in favor of what is good, overcoming all temptations of injustice, cowardliness and intemperance. [Solertia, then, refers to] objectivity before the unexpected” (Pieper, 1997: 46).

The same may be said of the other basic competencies mentioned by Vázquez: the capacity for self-learning refers to the virtue *studiositas*; the ability to work cooperatively with others correspond to the virtue of justice; self-control is not possible without the virtue of temperance; personal responsibility which refers to rights and duties is also associated with justice; the capacity to communicate is part of the practical intellectual habit called art or *techné*; the capacity to take initiative is related to the virtue of fortitude.

Likewise, the four pillars mentioned in the Delors’ study presupposes the practice of intellectual, as well as, moral virtues. Nonetheless, his recommendations are comprehensible only when education is defined as “a reciprocal action which is a help that is oriented towards *human perfection*, intentionally ordered to and directed from reason, in so far as it *promotes the formation of ethically good habits*” (Naval y Altarejos, 2000: 33-34) (italics mine). But anyone could object that the acquisition of virtues as the end of education is too general. And it seems more appealing to identify educational goals in terms of specific knowledge and skills that are in demand in the labor market. But, precisely, Vázquez defends the idea that basic competencies need to be general in nature in order to have universal applicability (Vázquez, 1999). In this regard, there is nothing more universally relevant as virtues because they enhance a person’s capacity to deal with the demands –including the unexpected– of any job, in any place and at any time.

Besides, Vázquez also insists that these competencies must be anchored on the person. Moreover, he does not favor the consideration of competencies in terms of tasks. These ideas further strengthen our posture concerning the relevance of virtues. On the one hand, the acquisition of virtues necessarily involves the protagonism and the intrinsic development of the person. On the other hand, Naval and Altarejos considers education principally as the promotion action or immanent acts, rather than as activities or tasks. In particular, they cite the idea of RS Peters who conceives education as *initiation: not a training for something concrete*, but a preparation for a worthwhile form of life (Peters, 1962). (italics mine)

4. REFLECTIONS ON THE PHILIPPINE CASE

In the Philippines, the education law provides for the teaching of civic education in the primary grades and values education in the secondary level. However, the goals fall short of an explicit enunciation of aims in terms of the acquisition and the practice of virtues. Thus, evaluation is focused on determining the students' knowledge of values. And, year after year, when the national examinations are conducted – the National Elementary Achievement Test in Grade 6 and the National Secondary Achievement Test in 4th year high school – students usually get very high scores on civic education and values education, respectively. Ironically, these high scores are compatible with the prevalence of cheating in examinations, pre-marital sex, drug use, truancy, etc.

There are, therefore, two issues concerning the formation in virtues: (1) how to teach values and virtues in such a way that it not only promotes knowledge, but that it also stimulates the appetitive dimensions in the human being – emotions and the will – so that the person ends up doing what promotes self-development; and (2) how to evaluate the acquisition and the practice of virtues. It must be recognized that the latter is difficult because the behavior of the learner cannot be monitored all the time and the evaluation can be quite subjective.

In this regard, Naval and Altarejos (2000, 49-64) provide some orientations to address these issues. As regards the first concern, they recommend the use of rhetoric or the persuasive use of language. On the second issue, they caution against the tendency in education to limit educational achievements to observable attributes, which is a consequence of pedagogical scientism. The latter is a tendency to conform education to a paradigm that is more apt for the natural sciences, but is not adequate for education whose end is to promote action or formation in virtues in the learner. This is because the act of learning or formation is essentially an immanent act. And the latter, strictly speaking, is not subject to observation and measurement. It is only observable when externalized in human activities. Nonetheless, formation cannot be reduced to activities because it is most probable that an educand is learning more than what he is able to manifest

externally. The preceding discussions imply that what is essential in education is to promote intrinsic personal development (*crecimiento personal*), which can only be initiated in schools but which, by its very nature, is never fully achieved in schools.

5. CONCLUSION

Education that leads to the formation in virtues seems to be the most appropriate way to prepare persons to brave a rapidly changing work environment. It will, certainly, not eliminate the human problems that accompany globalization, but then a virtuous person has the necessary internal resources to face uncertainty and is less likely to break down from the inevitable pressures. Besides, virtues will never be out-of-date because a virtuous person, in all senses of the word, will always be in demand! ■

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