

Foreword for Indian edition

Urmila Samson

This title is not one that I would have normally agreed with, as for me, it is the rainbow of emotions that add the splash of colour to childhood and all of life. Having said that, however, it is the biggest tragedy of our age that we are so little concerned with the happiness of our children, that it is in fact the most appropriate title when writing about children and learning today. Steven Harrison asks parents to move from fear and worry about future security when considering children's education and give a thought to their happiness in the present. After all, it is who they are in the present, what they are busy with, how they are feeling and dealing with their feelings, the thoughts they are thinking, with whom they are relating and all that makes up their present that shapes not only their own future, but creates a world that is a reflection of all that is within.

In a world where machines are taking over all the work that machines can do, we are left with the question of what it is to be human. Our *Industrial Age* education was created to make and run the machines and to fit people in to the jobs required to run that kind of system. The system itself began to run more machine-like, and because of the apparent efficiency of this way of treating things, and running systems, we have taken it forward to the way we organize people, including chil-

dren. Even for the treatment of illness, the human body is perceived as a machine. It is clear from the problems that face us on all levels, systemic, cultural and personal, that this model is not working, and that we need to change our relationship with human life and all of life on our beloved planet.

Steven Harrison also brings up the question of fragmentation that leads to dysfunction again on many levels. Separation of child from family and community, segregation by age and sometimes sex separation of subjects within a curriculum and curriculum detached from the rest of life, teachers far removed from the child's reality and the requirement of separation within the child's being, of their own thoughts, emotions and the physical self. This repeated and mostly intangible fragmentation from a very tender age is forced and I could go so far as to say brutal. It is no wonder that as adults we can be so desensitized to others, after having experienced this systematic breaking down and breaking up of our beings, throughout our own childhood.

Our children today are burdened with a system that was created for the Industrial Age, it is already not serving the Information Age, and we are moving faster than ever before, into the unknown. Those who know a lot, also know that there is much much more that is unknown, and in fact unknowable. Again, all the information that most of us need, is available at the click of a button on a hand held device, we carry around in our pockets. This makes memorization of prescribed information redundant—yesterday! So what now?

There is a saying that it takes a whole village to bring up a child. The Happy Child gives us very workable solutions whose time has come, such as the *Living School* at the centre of the community for the time being, with porous walls,

which can transition to Learning Communities, Intentional Families and Living Communities, where learning happens all the time, everywhere, in exchanges, through all parts of the being in relationship with everyone and everything. Relationship and love are central. This kind of learning is happening in any case in some measure, mostly outside of schools. It is time to now recognize and understand its power.

What is the relevance to Indian readers? India is a country of tremendous diversity; possibly the most diverse country on all of earth. This diversity is being severely compromised by standardized education imported from the West. This education makes us all compete for the same kinds of careers, livelihoods and lifestyles. Worse still, it makes us yearn for the same kinds of housing, clothing, food and products. We are fast losing languages; less is being read and written in our mother tongues. We are losing our traditional arts, crafts, dances, theatre and stories. There are valuable herbal remedies and attitudes to health and healing of various kinds, all over the country. There are deep spiritual traditions that are little known, which balance inner and outer learning. Exploration of this deeper understanding of learning can bring about change that we cannot right now imagine, emanating from the mysterious inner depths of our very beings.

A friend of mine visits villages deep in the interiors. She is fascinated by such Indian villages. Here, she tells me, there are only happy children! They spend their days climbing trees, eating berries, swimming in clean, clear streams and rivers far from the pollutants of cities, factories and sewage. They learn all the skills they need for adulthood and survival while living and playing. How to gather materials and food, build a house or a fire, cook, weave, collect honey, herbal remedies and how

to birth a child. They take what they need without waste, and give back to the earth as part of their way of life.

Enter RTE, in which every child between the ages of 6–14 will be provided free and compulsory education in school. Here they will learn to read. What will the content of that reading be? Here they will learn to memorize facts. Which facts? They will have to sometimes spend an hour or more to go to one place every day. They will have to sit in one place for several hours. They will be taught the dominant language and their own language and culture will be derided. They will have to recite by rote things that they will not have much use for now or ever. They will be taught to use toilets which will then become smelly and have to be cleaned, using up precious water resources and no longer 'giving back to the earth'. They will be graded and assessed on abilities that have no meaning to them now or ever. They will start feeling shame about themselves, their beautiful, healthy and happy lives, their parents and their ancestors. Within a generation they will be unable to live their integrated lives in harmony and interdependence with nature and will move to the city for a 'better' life, usually on the fringes, in slums, as they can never compete with those of us who have been 'well educated' in the money system for generations. The moment I say this, someone is sure to tell me, "Don't glamorize village life". Fair enough. Then let us not glamorize the life of the educated either. Let us give equal dignity to the illiterate and spare some time to learn from them too.

Since urban India is irretrievably in the grip of the Westernized monoculture or single reality, we can turn to rural India for a more 'real' education and an experience of multiple realities and possibilities. In India, there exist com-

munities that know no crime, that need no old age homes, nor do they fear sickness, old age, loneliness or death. Nature, animals, resources, the elderly, little children are honoured and cared for. There is no dysfunction or fragmentation in thought, function, relationship or within the self. Whereas no one is saying we have to 'go back' to those ways, it is of great importance that we un-brainwash ourselves long enough to go in search of questions instead of accepting the readymade answers.

Twenty years ago there were a few homeschooling and unschooling families in the country. Today, in 2013, I am guessing that there are several thousands, and counting the families with no access to school who are nevertheless learning everything they need to survive and thrive, there are countless more. Many families are struggling with questions about 'the future', the content of curriculum, its relevance to children today and their lives tomorrow, the way in which children spend their childhood, the way in which relationships are structured because of school: with parents, with teachers, with classmates, with others; money: how it is earned, what it means, is there life beyond it, what would life be like without it. For me, these are the families that are the hope, not only for the country, but also for the world. All our systems are in need of rethinking and re-imagining. Our human brains were meant for intricate multi dimensionality. These abilities are being schooled out of us. Instead of evolving into higher beings, we are being standardized to feed and service a one dimensional global giant. The same human brain that created today is well capable of recreating a very different tomorrow.

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