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**THE REPORT OF THE FAURE COMMISSION: ONE STEP
FORWARD AND TWO STEPS BACK**

JOHN SIMMONS¹

*International Bank for Reconstruction and
Development, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.*

ABSTRACT

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THE REPORT OF THE FAURE COMMISSION: ONE STEP
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ABSTRACT

The Report of the Faure Commission, *Learning to Be*, is critically examined and found wanting. It is argued that the Commission fails to reveal the essential problems of formal education, is vague in its recommendations for reform, and ignores the political implications of its proposals.

During the last ten years students, parents, educators, planners and researchers have articulated the existence of a crisis in formal education around the world. The Report of the Faure Commission,² *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, asks for both poor and rich nations, "Does the educational apparatus as now conceived really satisfy the needs and aspirations of man and societies in our time?" (p. 23). The commissioners conclude that it does not and propose that educational reform and innovation will renew the educational systems (p. 263).

This review will summarize some of the main points of the Report. It

¹ The views in this report are those of the author and are not necessarily those of any institution to which he has been or is presently attached. The author would like to acknowledge the comments of F. Champion Ward and other friendly critics on an earlier draft. They are not responsible for any omissions or contradictions.

² The seven members were: Edgar Faure (France), Chairman, former Prime Minister and Minister of Education and currently Minister of Social Affairs; Felipe Herrera (Chile), former President respectively of the Inter-American Development Bank and Society for International Development; Abdul-Razzak Kaddoura (Syria), Professor of Nuclear Physics, University of Damascus; Henri Lopes (People's Republic of the Congo), Minister of Foreign Affairs, former Minister of Education; Arthur V. Petrovsky (U.S.S.R.), Member of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the U.S.S.R.; Majid Rahnema (Iran), former Minister of Higher Education and Sciences; Frederick Champion Ward (United States), Adviser on International Education, Ford Foundation. Aser Deleon, UNESCO, was the Executive Secretary of the Commission.

will then be argued that while the Report considers a number of important points about formal education, it contains significant omissions and contradictions. These concern the analysis of the causes and consequences of schooling and learning as they relate to the educational crisis. Furthermore, the solutions proposed to deal with the crisis ignore both the historical perspective and contemporary reality. It is concluded that while the commissioners discuss a number of important educational issues, they may have confused rather than served the producer and consumer of formal education.

Since the Report does not adequately define education,³ several distinctions should be made for this review. Formal education refers to organized learning and is synonymous with the term *schooling*. This would range from infant training to adult recycling. *Education*, without an adjective, refers to an almost infinite variety of learning processes and mechanisms, organized and unorganized. *Nonformal education* is used in the literature to describe organized education which takes place outside traditional places of schooling like school buildings or vocational centers. It refers to mechanisms such as adult literacy programs, agricultural extension services and in-plant training in vocational skills. The term *nonformal* can be misleading because it implies an inclusiveness of all that education which is not formal. It excludes what is perhaps the most important type of education, *informal education* which is learning by looking and doing.⁴ Experience is synonymous with informal education. (Strictly speaking, schools also provide experience.) This dimension of education is virtually omitted in a discussion of "learning to be."

The goals of the Commission, which will be located by persistent readers in the Report's second appendix, include the statement that the Report should "propose criteria and outline a methodology by which governments could evolve a national strategy" . . . and assist in the formulation of these strategies (p. 269). The Report is divided into three parts: Findings, Future, and Towards a Learning Society. This review will discuss the Report in three sections: the reasons for the educational crisis, the recommendations, and some omissions and contradictions.

The Reasons for the Crisis in Education

For readers of the Report who are not familiar with the various dimensions of the educational crisis, the "Findings" section is informative.

³ The only definition is found in the terms of reference, Appendix 2, p. 269.

⁴ For quantitative support of this assertion see, for example, Simmons (1972) and Zhit'tsov (1969).

To suggest the nature of the Report, representative passages are cited under the following categories: (1) historical perspective; (2) the technology of education, referring to how labor and capital are combined to achieve educational objectives, and including questions of internal efficiency; (3) supply, demand and employment; (4) equity; and (5) political factors, probably the most important topic to understand if reforms are to succeed. Because most readers are aware of this background only a limited number of quotations are given and the comments are minimized.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The historical background section of the Report explores primitive, Asian, Greco-Roman, Christian, Islamic and Medieval modes of education. In one form or another these societies had an aristocratic conception of education which was dedicated to "cultivating a selective education, frequently of high quality, for the benefit of the minority, conferring the stamp of nobility on an elitist doctrine which remains very much alive in certain education systems in our time" (p. 7).

TECHNOLOGY OF EDUCATION INCLUDING INTERNAL EFFICIENCY

- (1) "School programs are ill-adapted to provide knowledge of the real universe . . ." Educators fear, and often refuse, to tackle thorny questions (p. 64).
- (2) The teacher-student relationship has become the relationship between a dominator and the dominated. "This relationship is entrenched on one side by the advantage of age, knowledge and unchallenged authority, on the other by a position of inferiority and submissiveness" (p. 77). "A wave of rejections of this obsolete state of affairs in human relationships has swept the world of education in our time, expressed by passivity and rebellion, dropouts and protest, as well as by independent community teaching schemes and attempts at self-management at school and university" (p. 77).
- (3) Formal education systems teach that manual work is "a calamity which must be avoided at all costs" (p. 68).
- (4) "The most unquestioned dogma in education is that education equals schooling. In fact, education does not equal schooling. The schools' importance in relation to the other means of education and of communication between generations is not increasing but diminishing" (p. 82).
- (5) "Education thus neglects its basic duty of teaching men the art of living, loving, working in a society which they must create as an embodiment of their ideal" (p. 66).

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SUPPLY, DEMAND AND EMPLOYMENT

(1) "... the past societies evolved slowly... and absorbed the products of education easily and willingly, or at least managed to adapt to them, the same is not always true today. For the first time in history some societies are beginning to reject many of the products of institutionalized education" (pp. 13-14).

(2) The fact that there is often little relation between what schools do and what is needed in particular occupations means that the competence of schools to make such important decisions for individuals in societies is "even more questionable" (p. 77).

(3) "The demand for education, characteristic of our time, is of unprecedented dimensions and strength... All indications are that this trend will gather momentum. It seems to us to be *irreversible*. Future educational policies must be formulated on this basic fact" (p. 34).

EQUITY

(1) "Despite the hopes conceived some twenty years ago, education has so far been no exception to the harsh rule of our times which tends to increase the unequal distribution of goods and resources in the world" (p. 54).

(2) The system of selection, examinations, and diplomas "rewards the strong, the lucky, and the conformists; it blames and penalizes the unfortunate, the slow, the ill-adapted, the people who are and who feel different" (p. 75).

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

(1) "... And if social mechanisms inevitably favor the academic success of children from privileged social and cultural backgrounds, this must be seen as a consequence and not as an aim of the system." The elite determine the selection criteria which become continually more stringent, so that to become a member of the elite "is always just beyond the masses' grasp" (p. 59).

(2) "Only in those societies in the process of achieving integration through a widespread dismantling of their social barriers can the tasks of education to select and distribute lose their negative, filtering aspects and take on the positive features of promoting human achievement" (p. 60). In short, the authors suggest that the social relations of production have to change before the educational structures and processes will change (Bowles, 1971).

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While the Commission reviews a significant amount of information in the "Findings" section, it does not mention two important areas of the education literature. The first is the quantitative literature on internal efficiency, i.e., why some students learn more than others.

Studies by Averch *et al.*, (1972), Bowles (1970), Coleman *et al.* (1966), Guthrie *et al.* (1971), Husen (1967), Plowden (1965), Jencks *et al.* (1972), and Simmons and Erkut (1972) are only a few of those who have looked at this question in the past decade, yet we do not learn the commissioners' opinions on these results.⁵ Perhaps the sheer amount of the evidence and its quantitative nature, which exemplifies the better sociometric and econometric tools of analysis, discouraged the Commission. These studies tended to show that family background and personality factors were equally important, if not more important than schooling, in explaining why some students had higher scores than others in cognitive achievement. The results also suggested that the marginal returns to investment in better school inputs (e.g., increased teacher training, quality of physical facilities or smaller class size) were not reflected in marginal improvements in cognitive achievement scores, except, in some cases, for science (Husen, 1967). Whatever the reasons for the omission of the evidence about the effect of formal education, its absence, and the absence of a discussion of its implications raise serious questions about the success of future innovations in improving achievement scores.

The second omission concerns the literature on the external efficiency of the schooling process. To what extent, and how, does schooling benefit the lives of individuals and society? What are the relationships between schooling and employment? Benefit can be measured, albeit poorly, by lifetime earnings, occupational status, or satisfaction (job or life). The results of the quantitative studies on these outcomes are similar to those reported in relation to achievement scores. After controlling for background and personality factors, schooling has a much less significant impact than popular notions would suggest (Berg, 1970; Selowsky, 1968; Jencks *et al.*, 1972; and Simmons, 1972). And the non-cognitive outcomes of schooling may be more important in explaining the variance in the benefit measures than the cognitive outcomes (Gintis, 1971).

The authors give no explanation why both of these fields of research

⁵ While Jencks dealt with these subjects by summarizing previous research, his study was not generally available until after the Faure Commission terminated. Research by Simmons and Erkut (1972) which treats this question for a developing country and reviews earlier research was also completed after the Commission's work was done. The remaining studies and their extensive references were completed before the Commission's work was concluded.

were ignored in their review, nor do they discuss the literature on education and income distribution. Because the "Findings" section omits a discussion of these subjects,⁶ which are essential to an understanding of the impact of formal education on students and workers, the final two sections on the future of formal education offer inadequate solutions.

These omissions should not obscure the importance of a high level Commission's endorsement of what has become a virtually universal critique of the structure and process of formal education. Furthermore, the Report has noted the political nature of educational decisions and the manner in which these decisions reflect the priorities of national elites. The commissioners sought to unsettle conventional thinking. But the Report is weakened by the omission of a discussion of the nature of the learning process, especially the crucial role of experience (informal education), the omission of a review of the causes and consequences of cognitive achievement and the omission of the reasons for the rise of mass education in the nineteenth century. Given the Commission's findings, what does it propose for the future?

Recommendations for the Future

The Commission presents a *smorgasbord* of reforms which they summarize in twenty-one principles and recommendations. Two main themes categorize the recommendations. First, organized learning should take place over the lifetime of the individual. Second, to promote this concept of continuing education, fundamental changes in present educational processes and structures are required.

The reforms which the Commission endorses are a summary of what a number of observers have been advocating for some time. While many of the recommendations are vague, they include:

(1) "School education must be regarded not as the end but as the fundamental component of total educational activity . . ." (p. 233).

(2) "We must gradually eliminate rigid distinctions between primary, secondary and post secondary education" (p. 233).

(3) "Special attention should be paid to fostering education for

⁶ One of the few references to the quantitative literature on the impact of socio-economic status and peer groups is in a footnote. "One of the most important recent achievements in the field of educational sociology consisted in showing that success or failure in acquiring learned culture could not be evaluated without reference to the sub-culture of the groups from which the pupils or students come" (Faure, 1972, citing Robert Castel). This quotation does not reflect either the breadth or depth of the research findings.

pre-school children by selecting and cultivating the most positive forms of family and community association in this work" (p. 233).

(4) "Technical education, which is unnecessarily expensive, should be supplemented and in many cases replaced by out-of-school professional training" (p. 233).

(5) "Universities should be turned into multi-purpose establishments open to adults and young people . . ." (p. 233).

(6) "Educational management should be democratized, and the general public should play a large part in all decisions affecting education" (p. 234).

All these reforms may be appealing in that they reflect a desire to keep present educational systems from either atrophy or explosion. Yet, for many of these reforms, there is little evidence that they are either workable or would achieve the desired goals in most countries.

One basic theme that emerges from the Report may give a reason for this failure. It is that formal education can be modified to help people become agents instead of patients. If the commissioners had reviewed the historical and quantitative literature, they might have concluded that this is a liberal or progressive myth when dealing with large groups of poor people. Preparing the poor to become active, independent agents is the reverse of what most ruling elites want. When the poor have become agents and threatened economic institutions, they have often paid with their lives. The history of peasant rebellion and elite repression is brutal evidence (Wolf, 1968).

The most serious single deficiency of this reform package is the lack of consideration of social costs and benefits. The subject of global costs is discussed, but the implications suggested below are not drawn.

First, the aggregate education budget for the world is second in size to defense (US \$ 312 vs. 182 billion per annum in 1968), but the economic cost of education when private costs are included would put it about equal to the financial costs of defense. While education budgets in eighteen countries exceed 20 percent of the total budget, adding education expenditures which are included in budgets for other sectors would put many more countries over the 20 percent line. And yet the Commission calls for ever greater levels of expenditure (p. 54), without quantifying the net social benefits. Some countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, are seeking ways to stabilize or *reduce* the percentage spent on education.

Second, the effect of the reforms on unit-costs is ignored. No evidence is given to show that the reforms will either increase efficiency, (e.g., the cognitive score per unit input), or that rapidly rising unit-costs will rise less rapidly. In fact, some of the recommendations imply substantial increases in unit-costs. A basic contribution of reform should be to

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reduce costs, particularly when there is strong evidence that the reduction will *not* adversely affect the quality of education as defined by test scores. The omission of the discussion of costs verges on social irresponsibility, given the nature of the benefits from investment alternatives like food, clothing and shelter. As René Dumont put it: "If your sister goes to school, you won't have anything to eat but your fountain pen."

Given the menu of reforms, what suggestions does the Commission give the planner on how to set priorities? The Report states that "the concern to correct existing disequilibrium [sic] will dictate the choice of priorities." The Report gives several examples of disequilibria. In one country "we may find primary education underdeveloped, and secondary overdeveloped . . . In another, primary may be as wished . . . and higher education overdeveloped" (p. 232). A definition of "overdeveloped" is left to the reader's imagination. What are the dimensions of the equilibrium? Is it the supply and demand of the labor market for the graduates of the various levels? Is it the public demand for school places? Is it determined by some sense of what is morally correct?

The Commission mentions no other criterion for setting priorities. Thus the reader is not confused by concepts suggested by social rates of return or cost-benefit ratios. The Commission concludes that "educational strategies in the immediate future should be very largely concerned with correcting lack of balance of this kind" (p. 232) (i.e., the existing disequilibria). Decision-makers will find little solace for their problems in that assertion.

Omissions and Contradictions

The omissions and contradictions in the analysis limit the usefulness of the document for policy planning. This section of the review will examine only some of the more important ones.

(1) *Educational theory.* The Report omits a clear discussion of the extensive theoretical literature on the relationship of educational outcomes to the needs of society. Instead, the reader is offered a muddled discussion of the models (p. 56).

(2) *Country goals.* The Report does not analyze what nations want from their investment in education. Learning has two types of utility: economic and noneconomic, and they are not mutually exclusive. Governments in poor countries are mainly concerned with the economic and political effects of the investment in education, and only secondarily in social modernization, psychic reward, and cultural enrichment. (The last is a complex issue since the Western orientation of curricula may be a culturally divisive force.)

(3) *Equity and employment.* These crucial issues were mentioned in the "Findings" of the Report, but are not emphasized in the section on reforms. Alternatives are neither defined nor weighed.

(4) *Schooling benefits.* While the Report vaguely asserts the importance of relating education to agriculture and other sectors,⁷ exactly what these sectors require from schooling is not analyzed. This is a serious omission. A growing body of literature exists for the developed countries which shows that schooling is much less important for many occupations than is now imagined.

(5) *Economic utility.* What do schools do to students that is economically useful? The Report omits a thorough discussion of this question. Two major results dominate the empirical evidence that the Commission did not review. First, students learn how to read, write and calculate, and these cognitive skills are rewarded in the labor market. Second, students learn behavioral traits such as respect for nonfamily authority, punctuality, and conformity that are also rewarded in the labor market. There is some evidence that the behavioral skills are better rewarded in money terms than the cognitive skills. (Gintis, 1971).

(6) *Schooling effectiveness.* The Report omits a discussion of the effectiveness of schooling in achieving the usual goals of the educational process: reading, writing and arithmetic. The quantitative literature reveals that a significant number of children do not learn to read in school and that many among those who do learn to read soon forget (Harmon, 1970; Simmons, 1970-72, 1973). Eleven percent of the ninth graders in the United States cannot read and understand the newspapers, and the percentage in each grade increases as the grade level decreases.

(7) *Interaction.* The Report confuses the reader as to what impact formal education either has had or should have. For example, the Report asserts that formal education "is an essential factor in shaping the future, particularly at the present moment, since in the last resort, education has to prepare mankind to adapt to change - the predominant characteristic of our time" (p. 104). The reader is also told that education "may greatly contribute to changing and humanizing society" (p. 56).⁸

Then, a few pages later, the reader learns that the reverse is also true. School has been shaped by society "through successive mandates . . . over

⁷ For example, "the future of education will necessarily be determined by the general direction of development" (p. 232).

⁸ There are other similar statements. Education should help societies to "adapt to change and even assist it" (p. 30).

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the centuries" (p. 70). "Education by itself is incapable of remedying the evils of society"⁹ (p. 81). The contradiction of these statements is not analyzed, and the reader is left confused on a central issue. While some critics assert that educators are often far too powerful, they will also agree that "education" is important. They ask: what kind of education — formal or informal, how much of it, and when? Can informal education substitute for formal education in teaching other skills than reading and arithmetic? The Report does not raise these questions.

(8) *Vocational education.* The reader learns that vocational education is important, but the Report does not discriminate between different kinds of education; nor does it discuss how particular skills might be most efficiently learned (p. 66). While it suggests that in the past vocational education has not been very effective in most countries, it does not explain why it has not been. The history of vocational education is particularly crucial when a major question for future educators is how to make formal education more relevant — precisely what vocational education has been trying to do for more than seventy years.

(9) *Continuing education.* The Commission appears to suggest that the basic reform is to institute continuing education. While continuing education has been around for a long time, virtually nothing is said about that history. Is this information omitted because of the unresolved issues in that field?

(10) *Student and worker selection.* The educational selection process, including admission, promotion, testing and certification, is not analyzed for its implications for effective resource use. Nor are methods discussed which might be used to select in the future (p. 71). There is a total silence on the distorting effect of wage structures, certification biases of employers, and other dimensions of the labor market which the education system is supposed to be serving.

(11) *Schooling alternatives.* Lip service is paid to the importance of other forms of education like mass media (p. 83), but their effectiveness is not compared to that of either traditional or reformed educational methods. The relative importance of informal education (experience) versus traditional or reformed processes is omitted.

(12) *Informal education.* While the Report states that education does not equal schooling, it then fails to ask how effective informal education is. The number of successful individuals who had little or no schooling is large enough to be significant; they are not exceptions. The number would be larger if the distinction caused by requiring certain school qualifica-

⁹ "Educational systems are not able to eliminate . . . the deplorable conditions of society" (p. 73).

tions were eliminated from hiring and promotion practices.

(13) *Behavior.* Future education might increasingly focus on shaping students behavior (p. 68). But the reader does not learn about the research which says why this is so important. Could the Report have made suggestions as to how this idea might be implemented?

(14) *History of reform.* The Commission calls for new reforms, but does not discuss the fate of educational reforms of the past century. The reader is given the guideline: "Reform will come from outside education, not from inside" (p. 81). Surely the lessons from past reform attempts are important: A review would show either their low educational value, or a frequent inability to implement them.

(15) *Self-reform.* The Report accurately describes the educational establishment as being conservative and hierarchical. But it then suggests that this same establishment can reform itself by democratization, by considering the bottom of the educational hierarchy, students and parents as peers. This possible contradiction is not explained. Some readers might ask where the authors and their staff were, for example, during the democratization attempts within UNESCO in 1968–70.

(16) *Preconditions for reform.* The Report omits a discussion of the pre-conditions for educational reform. Only one sentence is devoted to the importance of support from other sectors of the economy for the types of reforms the Commission suggests (p. 19). The Report also refers to the importance of adult education as a precondition, but its role is neither defined nor clarified (p. 68).

(17) *Reform feasibility.* The Report omits a discussion of the feasibility of the proposed reforms. Nor is there a discussion of their costs, or of whether they can be adopted piecemeal or only as a package, or of the trade-offs with other social needs.

(18) *Reform costs.* The reforms of the educational structure and processes to improve quality, as they are sketched in the Report, will be costly. Furthermore, the Report sees that the expansion of enrollments at every level is "irreversible."

The desires of virtually every country are frustrated by the rise of unit and total costs; some countries are doing something about it. They wish to reduce educational expenditures both as a percentage of the GNP and in absolute terms. The Report omits a discussion of the studies which show little or no improvement in student test scores, when upgrading schooling inputs has occurred as in providing new class-rooms or longer teacher training. Given the declining trends in the social rate of return to investment in many forms of secondary and higher education and higher returns to alternative investments, stabilization or reduction of educational expenditures may be the correct economic strategy for many countries.

(19) *Democratization*. The elitist approach of the commissioners contradicts their proposed democratization. Why were there no students or parents on the Commission? If education is supposed to be linked to the needs of society, why were only educators, former educators, or high officials called upon to write the Report? Don't representatives of the other professions, services, trades and the unemployed have something to say about education?

(20) *Educational establishment*. The Report omits a direct discussion of the power of the educational establishment. This would have helped to explain why many past reforms have been ineffective and why the prospects are poor for most countries.

(21) *Facts and research*. The Commission offers no evidence that the reforms it proposes are going to increase social or private utility, yet it does not call for research on these questions. Instead, it asks for the creation of an institution to develop innovations in continuing education. The lack of interest in research and the lack of an awareness of the importance of research as a preliminary to reform is a serious deficiency.

(22) *Guidelines for aid*. "We ask whether the International Community should not at the same time exert itself more energetically to eliminate the persistent and worsening educational disparities among the nations of the world" (p. 54). What are the implications of this question? Educational disparities at all levels of education? Within what length of time? Should 80 percent of the high school age students in less developed countries be in high school as they are in the United States? Do the commissioners feel that one out of every three high school age students in Chad or Brazil should enter university as they do in the United States? While "eliminating" disparities is a commendable goal, the poor countries are also faced with feeding, clothing and housing their people. These countries have already had their hopes and aspirations raised too high by the riches that education investment was supposed to bring.

Conclusions

Schools have a crucial role to play in individual and social development, given the social structure and political processes in most countries. Nevertheless, large quantities of schooling are not essential to individual or national success because learning takes place outside the school. Furthermore, as the preamble of the Report acknowledges, some aspects of schooling are harmful.

In the future, formal education will also have an important function. The debate is over what shape the educational processes and structures

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will take, and who will decide this. These are serious questions, the answers to which will affect more lives around the world than decisions in any other sector of the economy. The Faure Report, regrettably, is not equal to this responsibility. Not only has it failed to reveal the true nature of much of what is wrong with formal education today, it proposes a list of vague reforms. The decision-maker will find neither guidelines nor well defined options.

Finally, the Report does not attempt to draw the political implications of the reforms that it proposes. The reforms call for a new order in educational structure and responsibility, not fine tuning. Buried in a remote paragraph is the caution that educational reforms will not be accepted in a society unless there is already widespread support from other institutions. Without this support the status quo would be maintained by the educational establishment and reinforced by upper and middle income students, parents and teachers. Since the groups who would lose in the short run are those who hold the power, the suggested reforms are often a political contradiction.

In promoting, through an analysis of the difficulties in formal education, an understanding of the present educational crisis, the Faure Report is a great step forward: it is a pity then that the Report's omissions and contradictions should represent at the same time two steps back.

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