



INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION NEWS ROUNDUP

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Global: Rise in 'school terror attacks'

Sean Coughlan, BBC News, 10 February 2010

"Brutal attacks" on teachers and pupils are being used as a tactic of terror and political violence, says an international report. A report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation warns of a "significant increase" in attacks on education. These include assassinations and bomb attacks on staff and pupils in 31 countries around the world.

The report warns of the "degradation" of communities facing such atrocities.

"Education under Attack 2010", a report from the United Nations agency published on Wednesday, reveals a pattern of systematic attacks on teachers, pupils, schools and universities.

Warning of a rise in attacks in the past three years, the report highlights teachers being murdered in Thailand, the destruction of schools in Afghanistan, sexual attacks on schoolgirls in the Democratic Republic of Congo and "narco-guerrillas" trying to control schools in Brazil.

It identifies new trends, including "the direct killing and mass poisoning of schools students in Afghanistan and the mass abduction of pupils for recruitment as suicide bombers in Pakistan".

Read entire article: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/8500404.stm

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Canada: Toronto board simplifies report cards to parents

Kristin Rushowy, ParentCentral Canada, 27 February 2010

Come next week, hundreds of parents will open their children's report cards, read them and be shocked. Because this time, they'll actually make sense.

So, while last year a Grade 3 pupil would have "applied critical analysis to the communication of feelings, ideas and understanding in response to a variety of dance pieces and experiences," she now "shares ideas and feelings about dances that were viewed or created."

For more than a decade, Ontario parents have struggled to make sense of their children's report cards, which are full of highly technical phrases taken directly from curriculum documents and give little indication of what exactly a child has learned. Last fall, Toronto public board trustee Howard Goodman decided to investigate if, indeed, the Ministry of Education mandated that teachers use such language. As it turned out, that wasn't the case.

Read entire article: <http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/education/schoolsandresources/article/772396--toronto-board-simplifies-report-cards>

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China: China pledges to ensure fair, high quality education in decade ahead

Xinhua, Feb 28 2010

The Chinese government pledges to improve the quality of education and enable people to enjoy fairer education through more investment and reforms in the coming decade.

The draft of the National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) was published Sunday for public opinions.

The amount of government investment on education annually will increase to 4 percent of the country's total GDP by 2012, according to the outline. The proportion was 3.48 percent of its GDP in 2008.

Ding Xuedong, vice minister of finance, indicated on Sunday that the four-percent target was ambitious but also challenging because other sectors such as agriculture, science and technology, health care and social security need investment, too.

"Governments at all levels will have to make greater efforts to ensure the fulfillment of the target," Ding said.

He said the government would increase its education budget through more effective taxation and better management on education funds.

Read more at

<http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/en/level3.jsp?tablename=1245221060103297&infoid=1267513260901287>

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Haiti: With Schools in Ruins, Children in Limbo

Simon Romero, New York Times, 6 March 2010

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Thousands of schools in and around this devastated capital could remain closed for months or never reopen, according to Haitian and United Nations education officials. That leaves vast numbers of children languishing in camps or working in menial jobs as they struggle to survive.

Even before the Jan. 12 earthquake, only about half of Haiti's school-age children were enrolled in classes, a glaring symbol of the nation's poverty.

UNICEF, basing its estimates on talks with government officials, said that more than 3,000 school buildings in the earthquake zone had been destroyed or damaged. Hundreds of teachers and thousands of students were killed, and officials are questioning the safety of the remaining buildings after violent aftershocks in recent weeks.

Some educators and relief officials are not waiting for the government to act, deciding to open their own schools on a piecemeal basis in some camps.

Read entire article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/world/americas/07schools.html?pagewanted=print>

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Hong Kong: Catholic diocese fails in schools appeal to protect religious freedom

Min Lee, Associated Press, February 4

Hong Kong's Catholic diocese on Wednesday lost a second legal challenge against new school laws that it views as a violation of religious freedom in this semiautonomous Chinese territory.

This former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997 under a special political status that promises it Western-style civil liberties, including freedom of worship.

While the mainland Chinese government does not recognize the Vatican and frequently persecutes Roman Catholics, the church was allowed to continue to operate in Hong Kong and run government-subsidized schools. The Hong Kong church currently runs 185 government-subsidized primary and secondary schools.

Under previous practice, Hong Kong's Catholic diocese could choose the board members that managed these primary and secondary schools and often appointed priests and nuns to those posts. But under new laws that came into effect in 2005, the Hong Kong diocese is required to name some outsiders, such as parents and alumni, to the school boards - although it still controls 60 percent of the board seats.

The Hong Kong government says the new laws are designed to improve school management by making it more democratic. But the Catholic Church believes the provisions violate its autonomy and challenged them in court, arguing that they violate Hong Kong's constitution, which promises religious freedom despite Chinese rule. Hong Kong also maintains a legal system separate from the mainland's.

Read entire article: <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/ap/20100203/tap-as-hong-kong-catholic-schools-d3b07b8.html>

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Indonesia: Chinese still face discrimination in Indonesia

Harjo Winoto, UPI Asia, 10 March 2010

It is conventional wisdom that Indonesia's education policy has traditionally discriminated against the Chinese minority living in the country. For a long time – especially before the 1998 downfall of President Suharto – the Chinese have not enjoyed equal educational opportunities.

For example, there would be a limited number of seats – or no seat at all – for Chinese on certain faculties; Chinese have had extreme difficulty in applying for scholarships; and they have faced impediments in seeking careers in state institutions such as the police, judiciary, legislature or government.

This phenomenon dates back to a post-1945 compromise in which Chinese were encouraged in economic activities while non-Chinese – especially the Javanese – had priority in running the country. A similar political compromise was made in Malaysia.

Although in terms of its written laws discrimination has abated in Indonesia, in practice – with only trifling changes – discrimination is still rampant, particularly in Medan and cities far from Jakarta.

Read more at

http://www.upiasia.com/Society_Culture/2010/03/10/chinese_still_face_discrimination_in_indonesia/7057/

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Jamaica: Wanted - more men in the classroom

Cynthia P Cooke, Jamaica Gleaner, February 9, 2010

That the male students in high school are not performing as well as their female counterparts is a fact. That is not debatable. This we must discuss and carry on the discussion until we find a solution.

I do not believe the slower development of male students affect their performance significantly. If this were so, the curriculum used in boys' schools, would have to be modified to accommodate this. I have not heard any request of that nature.

I believe it is what happens to them during the high-school period that is responsible for their performance.

Away from the fact that they are now changing from boys to men, and have to deal with the accompanying challenges, they are raised mostly by women. The challenge for the school is to recognise this and make a deliberate effort to address the problem.

First, you have to start with the recruitment of teachers. When we had a female music teacher, mostly girls attended after-school music activities. As soon as we got a male teacher, the number of boys increased tremendously. This was a sign to me in my learning stage. Boys must see men in roles that they would like to be in when they become adults.

Read entire article: <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100209/cleisure/cleisure2.html>

Cynthia P Cooke is the Principal of Camperdown High School

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Kenya: New Policy to Boost Special Education

Daily Nation, 10 March 2010

Learners with disabilities have a reason to smile after the government launched a policy seeking to enhance their education.

Under the new guidelines launched by the Ministry of Education, sign language will be promoted and developed to become an official language at par with Kiswahili and English.

This means that the government and other agencies could soon be compelled to provide information to the disabled in sign language and Braille.

Announcing the measures meant to make learning easier for students with disabilities, Education minister Sam Ongeri also said students with poor vision would be exempted from writing Chemistry examinations.

Read more at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201003101067.html>

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Namibia: Much to learn from the Finnish

Frederick Philander, New Era Namibia, 4 February 2010

Finland is evolving from an advanced industrialised country into a knowledge-based society, where rural and manufacturing industries are giving way to innovation and employment based on advanced knowledge. This was said by the visiting Minister of Education of Finland, Henna Virkkunen, at a workshop in Windhoek where she met her Namibian counterpart, Nangolo Mbumba.

“It is appropriate to take a look at how we are doing up there in the north, what we consider important and what we invest in. Our national competitiveness relies heavily on competence and a high educational level.

“We consider education, research, competence and creativity to be crucial to the success and well-being of Finland. “Therefore, our government programme includes significant policies aiming to reform and consolidate the educational system from the comprehensive school all the way through to higher education and research,” said the Finnish minister.

In her opinion, the development and profound reform of research and the higher education system are essential.

"For several years young Finns have excelled in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) surveys. The Finnish literacy rate is the best in the OECD countries. Young Finns are also among the world's best in science and mathematics."

Read more: <http://www.newera.com.na/article.php?articleid=9411>

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New Zealand: More schools rethink homework

Nathan Beaumont, Dominion Post, 16/02/2010

Hundreds of primary schools could soon follow the lead of their Wellington counterparts and make radical changes to traditional homework methods.

Karori Normal School has told parents that pupils should read comics and the backs of cereal packets to improve reading skills. They also suggest pupils improve their spelling by doing crosswords and playing board games. The school argues that homework has no positive impact.

The move has been backed by education expert John Hattie, who says he has found "zero evidence" that homework helps to improve time management or study skills.

Principals Federation president Ernie Buttveld said he knew of schools that were considering similar moves.

"In fact a lot of schools already have. It's about making learning more fun. A lot of kids hear the word 'homework' and turn off straight away. Homework often has negative connotations."

Read entire article: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/3332254/More-schools-rethink-homework>

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New Zealand: Minister Will Pay for Roads But Not Education

Tertiary Education Union, 10 March 2010

Yesterday Steven Joyce, the minister of tertiary education said that he was "acutely aware of how important better educational outcomes for our young people are to strengthening our economy for the future" but then went on to say "it is highly unlikely that there will be any significant cash injections in the foreseeable future."

Today Mr Joyce the minister of transport lauded his government's investment of \$10 billion dollars of new spending over ten years into roads.

TEU national President Dr Tom Ryan says this disparity of investment is perplexing.

"Last year the government cut over \$100 million of direct funding to tertiary institutions and there is no indication that this money will be returned," said Dr Ryan.

"It's for someone else to say whether a bit of tarmac is going to promote productivity and deal with the pay differential between NZ and Australia as successfully as investing in our world class tertiary education system."

Read more: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1003/S00046.htm>

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New Zealand: Ministry of Education reviewing support to sector

Ministry of Education, 10 March 2010

The Ministry of Education has launched an organisational change programme focussed on lifting student achievement and improving the quality of its services, within existing departmental baselines.

“Last year the Ministry looked at how we could make savings at a time of economic constraint. In order to create the education system we need for the future, we must be effective now to ensure our activities have the greatest impact on student achievement. This may mean scaling down some activities, and working in new ways on others,” said Karen Sewell, Secretary for Education.

The new programme will focus on three critical work areas –lifting Student Achievement, Infrastructure and Services to the Sector, and Improving Efficiency.

Read more at: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1003/S00042.htm>

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Pakistan: School Bombing Kills Students

Anwar Shakir & Khalid Qayum, Bloomberg.com. 3 February 2010

A bomb outside a northwest Pakistan girls' school killed 10 people including students and three U.S. soldiers who were training government paramilitary forces, Pakistan's army said.

The Taliban, a collection of ethnic Pashtun militant movements in northwestern Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan, have attacked girls' schools in both countries. While they charge that education for girls violates Islamic principles, the region's strict isolation of women behind veils or in the home is a Pashtun cultural tradition.

Militants in Dir have threatened women's rights activists in recent years, while the government says Taliban have destroyed hundreds of schools in the region. “We have been facing these attacks on schools, especially for girls, for the past three years,” said Pasha, whose organization, Khwendo Kor, runs programs for women's and children's welfare in north-western Pakistan.

During that time, about 490 schools “have been burned or bombed in Dir and the nearby districts,” he said in a telephone interview. “Sometimes the Taliban claim responsibility for these attacks and sometimes they deny them,” Pasha said.

“Usually the bombings happen in the middle of the night, but this time they bombed while the girls were in the classroom,” he said.

Read entire article: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aOyyd6JIThaA&pos=8>

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Scotland: Teachers log on for web safety training

Scotsman, 10 February 2010

EVERY teacher in Scotland is to be given training in keeping children safe online, the Scottish Government announced today, as it launched a £70,000 advertising campaign to warn parents of the dangers.

The government said it wanted to give everyone who cares for or works with children the skills and knowledge to help youngsters stay safe when they log on.

Children's minister Adam Ingram unveiled an action plan to prevent problems such as cyber bullying, internet fraud and on-line grooming as he visited Edinburgh's Firrhill High School.

It includes the provision of on-line training and guidance for all teachers and working with the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency to include the issue in training for police officers.

Read more: <http://news.scotsman.com/politics/Teachers-log-on-for-web.6058408.jp>

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Scotland: Teachers to back delay in new Curriculum for Excellence implementation

BBC News, 1 March 2010

The Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) said delay may be necessary to fully prepare secondary schools for the changeover. The union is to debate a motion this week, calling for a year-long delay.

Preparations for the new curriculum, which is currently due to be introduced in all schools in Scotland in August, are generally thought to be going better in primary schools than secondary.

The new system, which has been described as "revolutionary", is intended to encourage children to find out more information for themselves by offering more "joined-up" lessons rather than the traditional, more rigid separation between different subjects.

But SSTA general secretary Ann Ballinger told BBC Scotland: "The evidence we have suggests very strongly that secondary schools are just not ready to implement Curriculum for Excellence.

"There isn't the concrete information we need to produce the correct courses and to give our pupils in Scotland what they deserve - the very, very best courses from day one."

Read entire article: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/8542007.stm

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Singapore: Schools to devote 20% of curriculum to ICT to support learning

ChannelnewsAsia.com, 4 March 2010

Over the next five years, schools will progressively devote at least 20 per cent of their curriculum to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to support learning. They will also train cyber wellness student ambassadors to teach fellow students how to use the net safely.

These are the key thrusts of the Education Ministry's third ICT Master plan, which aims to prepare students for the 21st century workplace.

S Iswaran, Senior Minister of State for Education, said: "By the end of this year, we would have trained cyber wellness student ambassadors in 50 per cent of our schools and by 2013, we will have such student ambassadors in every school."

While schools will continue to be the main driver of ICT innovations, the Education Ministry will work alongside them to develop lessons. It will also link schools with institutes of higher learning and industry partners to test-bed emerging technologies for learning.

In addition, there will be a new online platform called ICT Connection, which will engage teachers on the effective integration of ICT.

Read entire article: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1041479/1.html>

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South Korea: Spiraling Education Spending

Korea Times, Editorial Comment, 10 February 2010

Education spending scoffed at the unprecedented global economic crisis by surging to a record high in South Korea. According to the Bank of Korea, the nation's households spent a total of 40.5 trillion won (\$35 billion) on education in the October 2008-September 2009 period, up 3.5 percent from a year earlier.

It was the first time that education expenditures surpassed the 40-trillion-won mark. They accounted for 7.4 percent of total household consumption.

The increase was in contrast with alcohol and tobacco consumption that edged down 0.5 percent to 13.9 trillion won in the same period as people cut down on drinking and smoking in the aftermath of the "Great Recession". This indicated that education spending was not affected by the worldwide turmoil, reflecting parents' uncompromising enthusiasm for giving their children a better education.

In other words, parents must have had difficulty grappling with the ever-increasing education bills. They had to reduce other spending to cover costs for schooling and other educational costs for their offspring. No doubt parents were subject to all the more acute pain arising from spiraling education costs, while they had to endure wage cuts and job losses amid the global economic and financial turbulence.

South Korea has long been notorious for excessive private tutoring which cost parents 20.9 trillion won in 2008. Last year's figure is not yet available. But it is apparent that the sum has continued to rise.

Read more: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2010/02/202_60645.html

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South Korea: Robotic Technology - Good Idea but Not for Classrooms

Benson Kamary, Korea Times, 10 February 2010

A recent suggestion that English-speaking robots would soon replace English native teachers calls for a deeper reflection beyond technological ambitions.

While robots and related technology may facilitate teaching and boost efficiency to some extent, they must not replace human teachers since there is more to education than giving instructions. Robots cannot exhibit the human relational ability needed in the teaching process.

As opposed to robots, human beings are fundamentally relational. We understand ourselves and the world around us in the milieu of critical interactions with other human beings. A relational pedagogy is constitutive in nature where people are a nexus of a whole range of relations.

As relational beings, character building is not generated merely by seeing and listening but also understanding the instructor: his human strengths or weaknesses his bliss or discontent; his experiences and aspirations. It zeroes down to the understanding of the fundamental make-up of social humans.

Teaching and learning is a relational social activity even when an individual learns by himself from the nature or abstract reality because the application of knowledge involves human interactions.

Read entire article: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2010/02/137_60621.html

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South Korea: Robot as second language?

Leslie Katz, cnet news, 23 February 2010

It should come as no surprise that Korea, the same country that's building a robot theme park, is planning to send English-speaking robots into its schools. Are we sensing a theme here?

After ongoing classroom trials, South Korea will spend approximately \$45 million for an "R-Learning" program that places a range of robotic teaching assistants in 500 preschools by 2010 and in 8,000 preschools and kindergartens by 2013.

For now the terribly cute robot instructors – which teach via voice recognition and telepresence technology – won't take over all classroom duties but will do things like recite stories and lead kids in sing-alongs aimed at honing their language skills.

The bots, mostly made by the Korea Institute of Science & Technology, will help make up for the lack of accredited English teachers in Korea, and they'll probably do their part to get kids there comfortable early with the ideas of robots at the head of the class.

Read entire article: http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938_105-10458620-1.html

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South Korea: Teacher evaluation system includes parents & students

Song Sang-ho, Korea Herald, 2 March 2010

Teacher evaluations aimed at enhancing teachers' capabilities will begin at all primary and secondary schools across the country this month.

Fellow teachers, students and parents will participate in the evaluations through which high-performing teachers will be given a variety of incentives while underperforming ones would have to receive training to enhance their performance.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology said yesterday that 16 education offices across the country have finished establishing basic rules governing the evaluation system, and that each school will begin implementing them this month.

Students' and parents' satisfaction with teachers' performance will also be included in the evaluations.

Opponents have voiced concern over whether parents and students can render objective and unbiased evaluations.

Read entire article: http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/NEWKHSITE/data/html_dir/2010/03/02/201003020025.asp

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Spain: Israel makes official complaint to Spain about anti-Semitism in Spanish schools

HB, Typically Spanish, Feb 28, 2010

The Israeli Embassy in Madrid has been receiving letters written by Spanish children

Israel has made an official complaint to Spain about alleged anti-Semitism in Spanish schools. The Israeli Foreign Minister, Naor Gilón, made the complaint to the Spanish Ambassador in Tel Aviv, Álvaro Iranzo.

He claimed that the Israeli Embassy in Madrid had received letters from children accusing the Israelis of killing children.

Dozens of postcards have been received from children aged 5 or 6 including phrases such as 'Jews kill for money' and 'Leave the country for the Palestinians'.

A source at the Spanish Foreign Ministry told the newspaper 'Haaretz' that it was an organised campaign outside the education system.

Read more: http://www.typicallyspanish.com/news/publish/article_25252.shtml#ixzz0hp53xVN7

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Tanzania: Pregnant Teens Forced Out of School

Arnaud Bébien, IPS, 10 March 2010

Pregnancy is the leading cause of dropouts for school girls in Tanzania. And a national law forbidding young mothers to return to school after giving birth did not make it any easier for them to continue their education.

But thanks to pressure from the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the Tanzania government has now adopted a new law that allows young mothers to continue their education at their former schools.

Before the revision of the law, some girls studied at vocational centres which made it easier to return to school.

Centres exist throughout the country and depend on the ministry of education. The training is funded thanks to family support: the girls learn a trade (such as hairdressing or dressmaking) or take refresher courses in the evening.

Read more at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201003101059.html>

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UK: Parents and teachers bid to run new schools

Graeme Paton, Telegraph (UK), 3 February 2010

Hundreds of parents disillusioned with standards of state education are bidding to open their own schools.

They could be among the first to take advantage of new legislation expected to be unveiled in the first term of a Conservative government to create a generation of schools run free of local council control. Under plans, groups will be able to open their own publicly-funded primaries or secondaries to meet local demand for alternative education.

A charity set up to help families and other organisations said it had been "inundated" with requests for advice in recent months. Interest in new schools has been fuelled by teachers and existing private education companies, said the New Schools Network, which has already fielded 350 enquiries.

Rachel Wolf, director of the New Schools Network, said: "Our education system suits some families, but too many children leave school with no real prospects - through no fault of their own. We must give those children alternatives. "That is why we're going to try to help create new, independent state schools that will give parents a second chance to get their child into a good school."

The Conservative "free schools" policy is modelled on a hybrid of the Swedish and American systems, where schools are taken out of state control and run by independent organisations.

Read entire article: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/7149178/Parents-and-teachers-bid-to-run-new-schools.html>

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UK: Teacher qualifications 'too low'

Katherine Sellgren, BBC News, 9 February 2010

Entry requirements for teacher training in England are too low and damage the status of the profession, the Commons education select committee has said.

Its Training of Teachers report said: "It is of great concern to us that those with no A-levels, or those with just a pass degree, can gain entry to the teaching profession."

Teaching should also be established as a Masters-level profession in time.

The MPs welcomed government plans to require teachers to hold a licence to practise to "weed out poor performers". The cross-party Commons education select committee said it was clear "the bar must be raised across the board".

Read entire article: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/8504341.stm

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UK: Why we need another great education debate

The emphasis on league tables does not encourage young people to learn to think for themselves

Anthony Seldon, the Observer, 14 February 2010

It is nearly 35 years since James Callaghan gave his speech in 1976 at Ruskin College, Oxford, calling for a "great debate" on education to address the disappointing performance of far too many children.

From the Ruskin speech flowed a greater involvement of government in state education and the founding of the national curriculum 10 years later.

The years after 1976 have seen school teaching change beyond recognition. The curriculum has become more uniform, inspection is much tighter and more prescriptive, and targets and league tables are the principal drivers of school improvement. Lazy teachers and ineffective schools have been tackled under this centralising imperative.

However, concerns are now heard that the new focus on league tables is narrowing the quality and breadth of education.

Read more: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/feb/14/anthony-seldon-great-education-debate>

Anthony Seldon is master of Wellington College and a political commentator

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UK: Study shows working mums fail to help with homework

Mothers who stay at home spend four times longer helping children

Lewis Smith & Kay Smith, Independent, 15 February 2010

Mothers who work full-time spend just three minutes a day alone with their sons helping them with homework, researchers have found.

The figure is less than a quarter of the time devoted to children's homework by mothers who work part-time or who stay at home. Their absence prompts children to spend more time watching television, according to the study, published in the British Journal of Sociology.

Fathers, who manage only three minutes on average each day, increase by a minute a day the amount of time they help with homework when their partner works full-time. But that is insufficient to compensate for the loss of attention caused by the mother going out to work.

Daughters fare slightly better than sons in households where both parents work, getting seven minutes of concentrated attention from their mothers, but that still falls far short of the average of 14 minutes that each child gets in a traditional one-income household.

Read entire article: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/working-mums-fail-to-help-with-homework-1899540.html>

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UK: What is the real secret of a good school?

How do you turn a sink school into one of the country's best state academies?

Helen Rumbelow, the Times, 16 February 2010

Catherine Myers is very proud of her chairs. Myers is proud of everything and everyone in her amazingly successful state school but the new chairs, they sort of sum it up.

They are from Sweden (where Myers has drawn so much inspiration for her vision), double-padded for comfort (the last detail in encouraging children to enjoy lessons) and designed with a funky slot to hook them on the desks after each class (high expectations of respect).

What makes a school good? We all know it when we see it but teachers and politicians have found it confoundingly hard to reproduce. It starts with a good head teacher — but what is it that he or she does? And it demands excellent facilities — but what should they be? And the ethos, that's important — but a dizzying array of fashions, from strict to creative, have come and gone.

Read entire article: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article7027999.ece

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UK: Independent schools start to get tough with parents over unpaid fees

Nicola Woolcock, the Times, 15 February 2010

Independent schools are getting tough with parents over unpaid fees and using unusual tactics such as hosting weddings in an attempt to make ends meet.

Bankers and lawyers who advise independent schools are telling them to merge, cut out perks, sell or rent spare land, make staff part-time and pursue unsettled debts. Schools are hiring lawyers to chase fees as the effects of the downturn are felt, and sneaking added extras on to parents' bills.

While leading public schools have coped so far, some even charging record fees, several smaller schools have had to close because of parents removing their children. Experts predict that worse is to come.

There was a lag after the last recession, with pupil numbers holding up initially but declining for years afterwards. Advisers suggest that some of the schools now struggling invested heavily in sporting and music facilities in more affluent times, as part of an "arms race" with other schools.

A recent survey of independent schools in the South of England found that 85 per cent were setting up contingency plans to cope with a reduced income in the next two or three years. The respondents were heads, bursars and governors at a seminar hosted by Wilsons law firm.

Read entire article: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/education/article7026706.ece>

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UK: Teaching profession 'under-rated' in survey

BBC News, 24 February 2010

When members of the general public in work were asked to rank professions by opportunities for career progression, teaching came towards the bottom, beating only journalism and careers in human resources.

Careers in financial services, medicine and the Civil Service were rated as the top jobs for career progression.

Two-thirds (66%) of the 1,000 finalists at 30 top UK universities surveyed thought teaching offered slow career progression and limited chances of promotion. Over 80% of these of students underestimated the starting salary of a teacher, some believing it to be under half the actual wage.

The TDA said the public and final-year students were misguided, with recent research from the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services showing 81% of teachers felt there were plenty of opportunities to progress.

Read entire article: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/8531347.stm

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UK: More men applying to be teachers

BBC News, 5 March 2010

The number of men applying for teacher training has risen sharply because of the recession, says the body responsible for training teachers.

There was a 52% rise in the number of men wanting to be primary school teachers - more than 4,700 in 2009/10, up about 1,500 compared with 2008/09.

Redundancies in the City have prompted the change, says the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA).

The number of applicants to teach maths and modern languages has also risen.

Read entire article: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/8550506.stm

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UK: Frustrated pupils 'bored by their factory schools'

Richard Garner, The Independent, 10 March 2010

Pupils are being turned into "a seething mass of bored, frustrated, alienated children" by today's education system, a leading professor will claim tonight.

James Tooley, a professor of education policy at Newcastle University, will say modern state schools are built on a "factory model" which denies students the chance of an individual education tailored to meet their needs.

"The innovation required to transform education is dismally lacking in current schooling," Professor Tooley will say, as he presents one of a series of lectures on education policy, jointly sponsored by The Independent and the Learning Skills Foundation.

"One of the most startling deficiencies of schooling today is that the majority of it is still carried out with 20 to 30 children of the same age in a classroom with one teacher. It is the factory model that was there when I was a child and my father and grandfather before me."

Read more: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/frustrated-pupils-bored-by-their-factory-schools-1918845.html>

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USA: Myths About Paying Good Teachers More

Thomas Toch, Washington Post, October 11, 2009

Education Secretary Arne Duncan says paying public school teachers based on their performance is his "highest priority," and he plans to dole out hundreds of millions of dollars to states and school systems that embrace the idea. In the District, Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee has made such reform a cornerstone of her agenda - and a backdrop to her recent move to lay off 229 teachers in response to budget cuts.

But school reformers have been trying unsuccessfully to introduce performance pay in public education for decades. If today's reformers want to break the deadlock, they're going to have to let go of several myths hanging over the debate:

1. Merit pay has a strong track record.
2. Teachers unions are the biggest barrier to merit pay.
3. Principals are good judges of teacher talent.
4. Student test scores offer a simple solution to the evaluation problem.
5. Teachers are most motivated by money.

Read more at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/09/AR2009100902571_pf.html

Thomas Toch is the executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington.

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USA: If Your Kids Are Awake, They're Probably Online

Tamar Lewin, New York Times, January 20, 2010

The average young American now spends practically every waking minute — except for the time in school — using a smart phone, computer, television or other electronic device, according to a new study from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Those ages 8 to 18 spend more than seven and a half hours a day with such devices, compared with less than six and a half hours five years ago, when the study was last conducted. And that does not count the hour and a half that youths spend texting, or the half-hour they talk on their cellphones.

And because so many of them are multitasking — say, surfing the Internet while listening to music — they pack on average nearly 11 hours of media content into that seven and a half hours.

"I feel like my days would be boring without it," said Francisco Sepulveda, a 14-year-old Bronx eighth grader who uses his smart phone to surf the Web, watch videos, listen to music — and send or receive about 500 texts a day.

The study's findings shocked its authors, who had concluded in 2005 that use could not possibly grow further, and confirmed the fears of many parents whose children are constantly tethered to media devices. It found, moreover, that heavy media use is associated with several negatives, including behavior problems and lower grades.

Read entire article:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/20/education/20wired.html?scp=27&sq=music%20education&st=cse>

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USA: Survey - Supportive leadership helps retain top teachers

Nick Anderson, Washington Post, March 3, 2010

A national survey of more than 40,000 public school teachers suggests that while higher salaries are far more likely than performance pay to help keep top talent in the classroom, supportive leadership trumps financial incentives.

The survey also shows that teachers have mixed feelings about proposals for new academic standards: Slightly more than half think that establishing common standards across all states would have a strong or very strong impact on student achievement, but two-thirds believe the rigor of standards in their own state is "about right."

Among the survey's findings:

To retain good teachers, 68 percent called supportive leadership "absolutely essential," 45 percent said the same of higher salaries and 8 percent listed performance pay. Many of those surveyed also described "relevant" professional development as essential, along with "clean and safe" working conditions, time for teachers to collaborate and access to high-quality curriculum. In addition, 71 percent said monetary rewards for teacher performance would have moderate or no impact on student achievement.

Fifty-nine percent said establishing common standards across states would have a strong or very strong impact on achievement, and 73 percent said clearer academic standards would produce such benefits. But 69 percent said the rigor of their own state's standards was "about right," and teachers were nearly evenly split on whether their own state has "too many standards" or "the right amount."

Read entire article: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/02/AR2010030204203_pf.html

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USA: Fitness May Boost Kids' Grades

Study finds link between physical health and academic test scores

Kathleen Doherty. Bloomberg.com, 3 March 2010

Fit bodies may bring kids better test scores in school, a new study finds.

"Children's physical fitness is associated with their academic performance," said study author Lesley Cottrell, an associate professor of pediatrics at West Virginia University, in Morgantown. She is due to present the findings this week at the American Heart Association's 2010 Conference on Nutrition, Physical Activity and Metabolism in San Francisco.

In general, the fitter the student, the better the test scores.

The researchers evaluated almost 1,200 students, assessing their fitness in the fifth grade and then again in the seventh grade. They tested them in four subjects in seventh grade - reading, math, science and social studies - using standardized tests.

The researchers hypothesized that those children who maintained fitness over the two-year span would have the best test scores, and they were right.

Across each of the four academic areas, a child who was fit in fifth grade and maintained it at seventh grade had the highest scores, on average, in the standardized tests.

Read the entire article: <http://www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/healthday/636498.html>

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USA: Officials Step Up Enforcement of Rights Laws in Education

Sam Dillon, New York Times, March 7, 2010

Seeking to step up enforcement of civil rights laws, the federal Department of Education says it will be sending letters in coming weeks to thousands of school districts and colleges, outlining their responsibilities on issues of fairness and equal opportunity.

As part of that effort, the department intends to open investigations known as compliance reviews in about 32 school districts nationwide, seeking to verify that students of both sexes and all races are getting equal access to college preparatory curriculums and to advanced placement courses.

The department plans to open similar civil rights investigations at half a dozen colleges.

Read more at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/08/education/08educ.html?ref=education>

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USA: The U.S. Math-Teaching Crisis: 'The Elephant in the Room'

Anthony Reborja, Teacher Magazine, March 7, 2010

By far the most sobering session I attended at this conference was a conversation between PBS journalist David Brancaccio and Jim Simons, the founder of a teacher-recruitment program called Math for America.

Simons is a mathematician who made a fortune as the CEO of Renaissance Technologies, a private investment firm. In his retirement, he told Brancaccio, he has dedicated himself to wrestling with the "issue of why we do so poorly as a nation in high school math."

Simons actually thinks the answer to that question is pretty straightforward: "We don't have enough teachers of math and science who actually know math and science," he said bluntly. "It's the elephant in the room."

He then explained that at least part of the reason for this situation is that there are so many better professional opportunities available to individuals who are highly skilled in math. There's an enormous "gap" in terms of compensation and professional respect, he said, and as a nation we've done very little close that gap.

Read more at http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/webwatch/2010/03/the_us_math-teaching_crisis_th.html

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USA: \$2b later, Kansas City, Mo., may close half its schools

Heather Hollingsworth, Associated Press / March 8, 2010

Kansas City was viewed as a national example of bold thinking when it tried to integrate its schools by making them better than the suburban districts where many children were moving. The result was one school with an Olympic-size swimming pool and another with recording studios.

Now it's on the brink of bankruptcy and considering another bold move: closing nearly half its schools to stay afloat.

Officials say the cuts are necessary to keep the district from plowing through what little is left of the \$2 billion it received as part of a groundbreaking desegregation case.

Buffeted for years by declining enrollment, political squabbling, and a revolving door of leadership, the district's fortunes are so bleak that Superintendent John Covington has said diplomas given to many graduates "aren't worth the paper they're printed on."

Read more at

http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2010/03/08/2b_later_kansas_city_mo_may_close_half_its_schools/

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USA: National technology plan prods K-12 to innovate

Katie Ash, Education Week, 9 March 2010

The Obama administration urged educators and policymakers to embrace a host of digital-learning approaches it says will make K-12 schools better, including putting a computing device in the hands of every student.

Guided by an overarching goal set by President Barack Obama to raise national college-completion rates from 40 percent to 60 percent by 2020, the first National Educational Technology Plan issued by his administration outlines the big-picture approaches it says U.S. schools need to employ in the areas of classroom learning, assessment, teaching, infrastructure, and productivity to help meet that goal.

The plan, titled "Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology," was written over nine months by educators, researchers, and policymakers, with input from the public. It emphasizes the importance of leveraging technology to customize learning for each student, citing tactics such as mobile computing and online course-taking.

It recommends enabling every student to learn through digital technology in school and at home, a 1-to-1 computing approach using cell-phones, laptops, and other mobile-learning devices that is taking hold in a growing number of school districts.

Read entire article: <http://www.tmcnet.com/usubmit/2010/03/05/4659856.htm>

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Vietnam: Male kindergarten teacher one of a kind

VietNamNet/VNS, February 6, 2010

Hoan was one of two male students among thousands of females but his determination showed men can be kindergarten teachers too.

Lai Cong Hoan, 29, begins his work day by singing Chau Di Mau Giao (I go to kindergarten) with students in his Vu Ninh Commune kindergarten classroom in northern Thai Binh Province.

Hoan stands in front of the blackboard, clapping his hands to the song's tune. Wide-eyed students sit on wooden chairs and sing along with him.

This morning's lesson is about enhancing the sense of music in three-year-old children. The image of children learning about music is common at pre-schools, but finding a male teacher singing and playing with kids is quite out of the ordinary in Viet Nam.

Read more at: <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2010/02/male-kindergarten-teacher-one-of-a-kind.html>

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Zimbabwe: People Must Help Their Former Schools

Editorial, The Herald, 10 March 2010

THERE are many well-educated Zimbabweans who, over the decades, were privileged to attend some first class schools, or at least schools that were adequate and gave them the opportunity they needed to make their way in life.

Now many schools and many parents are suffering. It is worse than useless to state that the costs of education must be reduced.

Quality costs money and spending less money simply means that quality will suffer.

So now, for those who benefited in the past, it is payback time. The chairman of Kutama Old Boys Association, Mr Dakarayi Mapuranga, put it in a nutshell this week when he said that Zimbabweans should start giving financial and technical support to their old schools.

Read more at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201003100103.html>

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- Languages Education : <http://www.languageseducation.com/news.htm> (monthly)
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- Public Education Voice : <http://www.acsso.org.au/public-education-voice> (quarterly)

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