

Low-literacy (Part 3): Education as a driver of cultural divergence, learning from diversity in pop music

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Due to globalisation, especially in urban areas in the western world, more and more nationalities are present, each with their own cultural background. As a result, there is an increasing cultural diversity in the cities as well as an ever increasing global culture. Education plays a major role in this paradox: the cultural diversity that is increased by immigration is eliminated by successful education: education aims to maximise the opportunities for every child within the emerging global culture and thus reduce cultural diversity. Yet it appears time and again that children up to the third generation of immigrants from non-Western (or 'less Western') cultures lag behind in school success and Social Economic Status (SES). We then speak of disadvantaged groups. How come?

It is important to realise that the most successful schools in terms of final level mainly have a homogeneous intake of children from a (native) middle class. Apparently diversity stands in the way of success. Although some schools are very successful in getting children from "new" cultures to average or even good results, as a rule, the lower the SES (culturally diverse intake), the lower the results. This is, it is generally believed, that these children simply experience less support from home in adjusting to Western culture. In other words, the aspects that are considered important enough in the dominant Western culture to be hammered into the school and whose results are then carefully evaluated do not become so at home. However, school results (and later academic and work performance) are a reflection of the dominant (white western) values and culture. Is this as obviously correct as it seems?

The road from the Enlightenment that would bring us a better world is increasingly proving to be a dead end, especially with regard to the climate and the depletion of the resources the planet can provide (ecology). Just now that a global culture has emerged into which all those other cultures are assimilated, the question is whether cultures that deal more sustainably with ecology and have problems accommodating to global culture, should not be given more voice in the transition to a more sustainable global culture. Just about everywhere from education to academic and job performance, economic interest takes precedence over ecology. Exactly that is untenable. The emphasis is on counting, measuring and weighing, on turnover and on continuous short-term adaptation to new (digital) techniques, possibilities and then inevitably more comprehensive problems. Exaggeratedly, you succeed if you manage to live like a literate in a systems dictatorship, or you drop out as a low-literate who has given up the competition to live as a robot in the quantified systems. It starts in school, increasingly the domain of systems and less and less the domain of authority, creativity, exploration, knowledge and wisdom, where children are initiated into a culture of which we can be proud. On the other hand, despite the lower SES, that pride is still regularly present in other cultures and traditions. Perhaps this is precisely what makes education and the teaching profession less attractive, because everything is so emphatically channelled into one (Western) cultural reality.

Converging could also be diverging. An example is pop music, in which successful productions have a multitude of cultural styles, from world music to hip-hop to rock. In fact, almost everyone from various cultural backgrounds can relate to a certain style. Pop music therefore does not necessarily work as an institution that reduces diversity. Education does just that, unconsciously, and often with extensive inclusion programs. She could learn from pop music. The sustainability agenda drawn up by the United Nations is not going well. As it looks now, we are not going to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in any way. Perhaps there is a great deal of knowledge, insight and manners in other cultures that we could use. School as the centre of diverging (rather than as a convergent melting pot). Do we dare to allow a little more successful multicultural adaptation of pop music in education?