

Education Dialogue Group

Colleen McLaughlin, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education

The Long View - Education: Its key role and its nature?

It is unnecessary to remind everyone of the sense of turbulence around us at the moment. Much of the turbulence is around deeply personal, social and emotional aspects – how the other is seen and how the other is treated. I would like to raise a conversation around the role of education in both seeing people as objects and in creating a human dialogue and the development of empathy. We have across the world started to see education as a functional and technical activity linked primarily to a country's economic purposes. In this view some students are more acceptable, or desirable as pupils, than others. This view must begin to affect how we view ourselves and others. I want to suggest that the wider and more human purposes of education need to be emphasised now and that education plays a key role in developing empathy and in learning how to be with others. It has already been shown to have a key role in radicalisation and other difficult experiences many young people are being exposed to. The long-term aim of educating young people as much as we can is essential to the development of dialogue and the ability to live in complex social worlds. This is a challenge to a pervasive view of education as a technical activity. It means we must use resources differently.

I will draw on my experience in work in Africa and Kazakhstan in this conversation. My work in Africa has consisted of researching and developing through dialogue with teachers, young people and stakeholders a curriculum for sexuality education so as to engage with HIV/AIDS. The Faculty is currently working with the Niger State Government on the transformation of their education system, in collaboration with others in and outside Cambridge. The work in Kazakhstan has consisted of a partnership between the Faculty of Education (and other Cambridge organisations) and the Ministry of Education in Kazakhstan to assist in the reform of their education system. This partnership has existed for six years.