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Save the World

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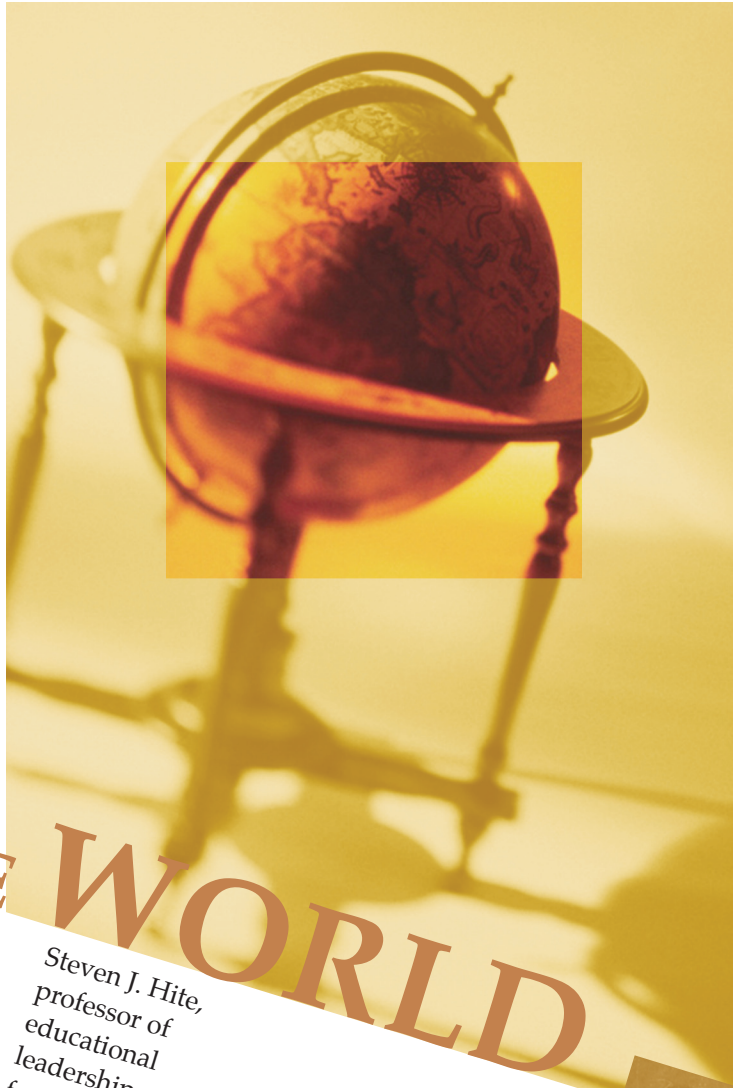
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SAVE THE WORLD

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Development education, or the use of education as a tool for human capital development, is an intensely interesting and diverse field. First catalyzed by my experiences as a missionary in Apartheid-era South Africa, my conviction is that equitable access to quality educational opportunities is the key to development and, consequently, life advancement for individuals, families, communities, and nations. Within that basic conviction, I find development education fascinating in the “compound” nature of endeavors in the field: it is concurrently theoretical and practical, as well as technical and human. I don’t think of these four dimensions as geometrically aligned neatly along some Cartesian coordinate system but rather as “in play” at any given time in any particular project or opportunity.

The fascinating compound nature of development education is reflected in one of my first experiences working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). I was in Paris helping to put together the capacity-

development team for a project in Nepal that had been funded by DANIDA, the Danish government’s aid agency. The project was theoretically interesting as it applied to thinking about the potential meaning(s) and impact of intervening as an “outsider” in the ancient and complex social context of Nepal’s education system, largely comprised of small rural schools serving Hindu, Nepali, Muslim, Tibetan, and secularized populations (in order of decreasing proportions). At the same time, it was practical because we were responsible for developing an actual data collection and tracking system to follow enormous amounts of resources, along with the anticipated

outcomes of those resources, dedicated to increasing the equity, access, and quality of educational opportunities for lower-caste Hindu girls under the age of fourteen.

Geo-locating schools on the precipitous slopes and chasms in the Himalayan mountain regions of Everest (called Sagarmatha in Nepali) and Annapurna, as well as designing data collection instruments that could be accurately and meaningfully completed by educators



It is feared that there may be more than 80 million orphans in India and Asia.

Mothers Without Borders (<http://www.motherswithoutborders.org>)

speaking several languages in these remote regions, were both technically challenging and exciting. At the same time, the powerfully human dimension of visiting the homes, schools, and villages of the children, families, and teachers that we were attempting to help was both humbling and touching.

The meaning or intent of development education is often reduced in textbooks and the academic discourse to a simple formula indicating how human capital is increased:

$$\text{Human Capital} = \text{Education} + \text{Experience} + \text{Training}$$

This algorithm is considered generally accurate and acceptable in development education circles and points to education as the most critical of the variables leading to human capital increase.

The positive outcomes of increased human capital are usually expressed in terms of associated increases in personal income potential and increased robustness in the larger economy. However, while education is related in important ways to the increase of human capital, does increasing human capital alone sufficiently motivate the social, personal,

and professional costs of pursuing development education programs? For many, the answer is “yes.” For me, and many dedicated workers in this field whom I know, the answer is a resounding “no.” What, then, is the necessary and sufficient force beyond increasing human capital that motivates development educationists to subject themselves to challenging personal and working conditions that most people from developed countries would never contemplate?

I believe the answer is found in the words of my colleague at UNESCO, Anton DeGrauwe, when we were putting together the capacity-development team for Nepal. At one point in our struggles to compose a strong team, he turned to me and said something to the effect of: “We may not make any money doing this work, it might even cost us out of our own pockets, but we will have the opportunity to participate in saving the world one place and one action at a time.”

I’m not sure when Anton and I share the words “save the world” that we both mean the same thing. To be sure,

what we each mean is morally important and is comprised of theoretical and practical, as well as technical and human meaning—all at once. But as I approach “saving the world” in my development education opportunities as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I feel the additional moral and spiritual obligation of the “double portion” with which we are all blessed and burdened. While we often find ourselves talking about the (double portion) blessings of the gospel in our lives coupled with the benefits of living in a country where we have substantial material wealth and opportunities, we often forget to mention the burdens and obligations those “blessings” bring with them. For me, the blessing and burden of the double portion adds the critical element of motivation to my work as a development educationist—and this extra motivation makes all the difference in the world.

Certainly there are many ways, disciplines, and fields in which we each can and should do our best to “save the world.” In development education, I have found a domain in which I find great personal, professional, and spiritual satisfaction and have never doubted that my

own small efforts can and do make a meaningful, moral difference. I challenge each of us to consider the true meaning and purpose of the blessings



and burdens of our double portion as we continue to seek and find opportunities to “save the world one place and one action at a time” in whatever lifework we choose to engage. 🌍

