



## **Seed-Idea: The Coming Revolution in Education**

There are many kinds and degrees of freedom – political, social, psychological and spiritual. The end of colonialism following WWII liberated a third of humanity from the oppression of foreign rule. The end of the Cold War brought the freedom of democracy to hundreds of millions more in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. The birth of the Internet brought unprecedented freedom of access to information, ushering in a revolution in knowledge that is breaking down the confining structures of ignorance, misinformation and prejudice that divide and separate people even when they are living side by side.

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But for all this astounding progress, humanity remains imprisoned and oppressed by the limitations of a social structure that separates the educated from the uneducated, those who possess the knowledge and certification which are passports to economic opportunity and social respectability and those who do not. For every privileged aristocratic elite it has abolished, education has created a new, albeit much larger and more inclusive social elite distinguished from the rest by the status of a diploma.

Freedom can liberate and empower like nothing else. We are now on the cusp of a revolution in education that will be both liberating and empowering. Education is a great leveler. It levels politically by generating awareness of rights and awakening the aspiration for freedom and equality. It levels economically by equipping youth with the knowledge and skills to rise beyond the occupations of their forefathers. It levels socially by dissolving invisible barriers to mobility and opening doors of opportunity. But, more importantly, education inspires and empowers the individual to come into his own, to discover his own potential, to become self-reliant and find his own place in the world. Knowledge provides access to information, but not necessarily the capacity to absorb or utilize it effectively. Education imparts that capacity to absorb what is available, process, interpret, apply and utilize it for individual accomplishment and social advancement. The coming revolution in education is a harbinger of the coming freedom of the individual, the empowerment of the individual to play his true role as co-creator for the further evolution of society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It may sound naive to speak of a revolution in higher education, an institution which in its constitution and mode of functioning has remained immune to alteration by all the revolutions of the past in which it has itself played a crucial role as incubator for disruptive ideas, break-through technologies and impatient energies demanding radical change. The institution of higher education itself is still based on a pedagogy and technology developed centuries ago. Therefore it is wise to recall that even the most visionary failed to conceive in 1995 of what the World Wide Web would become in a mere 20 years.

The quantitative extension of access to free quality higher education made possible by the MOOCs is itself only the beginning of something far more important. The coming revolution will not only make education accessible to all; It will also upgrade quality and unleash creativity and innovation in the field of education as never before. It will tear down the barriers that separate the ivory tower from the real world. As Ismail Serageldin observed during the

April 2014 Biovision conference at the Library of Alexandria, “we are in the earliest stage of a transformation in the structure of the institutions of education and learning which will morph into something unrecognizable to those who think of yesterday’s schools as a model or those who yearn for their collegiate university experience. We need to think even more boldly and dream of reinventing education completely.”

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Imagine a global system in which every student can choose from thousands of courses offered by universities around the world and from among the top lecturers in the world on every subject with automatic translation into any language of choice. Imagine a system in which other institutions – research institutes, NGOs, companies, governmental and international organizations – can offer their own expertise and experience as course material through a process of backward integration from live practice to theoretical knowledge in the world’s virtual classroom. Imagine a system in which the often impermeable barriers between the university and society become a porous and dynamic marketplace for continuous exchange of ideas in both directions. To imagine these things is to envision a world in which all individuals have unprecedented opportunity to develop their own capacities for independent thinking, creativity, personality and individuality. It is to envision a human-centered society in place of the technology, money and status-centered society in which we now live – a society which strives to develop and realize the full potential of every human being. That is indeed a dream today, but a dream that can soon be realized.

**Alberto Zucconi and Garry Jacobs**