

THE GREEN, THE BLUE, THE RED AND THE PINK SCHOOLS *

by Rosa-María Torres

They had built and lived all their lives with these green schools of theirs,
green as the landscape and the mountains they had grown accustomed to.

Children learned to be children and to prepare themselves for adolescence,
adolescents learned to be adolescents and to prepare themselves for adulthood,
adults learned to be adults, husbands and wives, parents,
full members of their group and their society.

They cultivated the language of the body,
the art of observing and touching,
of listening and speaking.

They learned while playing and while working,
from folktales and dances,
and from the advice of the elderly.

The curriculum was life
and learning a life-long commitment.

And then, one day, the blue-eyed men came with their blue schools,
blue as the ocean that had brought them there.

Reading and writing
 spelling
mathematics
 science
history and geography
 subjects and homework
uniforms and schedules
 multiple choice tests
exams and certificates.

Children learned how to become adolescents,
adolescents learned how to become adults,
adults were not supposed to learn any more
and forgot to keep on learning.

Common knowledge was denied in the classroom
playing, singing and dancing were labeled "extra-curricular"
the written word was placed in a shrine
wisdom was declared the property of teachers and books.

The ties between education and life
between the school and the community
became thinner and thinner.

A sophisticated term -- "informal education" --
was invented for something as simple as *life learning*
and *learning for life* -- until then the realm of the obvious --
came to entail complicated curriculum planning,
search for relevance and "life skills" packages.

The blue schools, with their blue power,
began to spread all over,
like the lakes and the rivers
and soon someone started to speak of the "Blue System".
Blue became synonymous with good, modern, advanced.

The green schools were frowned upon and hidden
behind the green bushes, the green mountains, the green jungle.
They began to be called "traditional"
and "traditional" meant bad, backward, savage.

Green and blue proved very hard to mix.

And although many green children started to go to the blue schools
and were forced to learn in the new blue language they did not understand
no one could stop them from learning in their green homes and communities
their green values and their green curriculum that was useful for life.

With time, inevitably, with so much green in and around them,
blue schools began to look a little green,
a little greenish.

Green schools, inevitably, also changed
for good and for bad.
Some disappeared, some survived,
some remained unchanged, tied to the past,
some evolved with time, open to the present and to the future.

The Blue System, with its formal garments and circumspect manners
made soon evident its inadequacies and problems
and new words were necessary in order to name them:

illiteracy
 functional illiteracy
 repetition
 drop-out

inefficiency
low quality
poor learning achievement
exclusion
inequity

Curiously enough,
blue schools
with their long checklist of weaknesses and vices
began to be called "traditional schools" ...
just as they had once called the green schools!

And so great confusion arose
and nobody could understand anything anymore.

Someone proposed a brilliant idea:

red schools!

non-green, non-blue:

red!

Another type of school:

active

flexible

relevant

learner-centred

problem-solving-oriented

community-based.

Some, enthusiastically, went even further:

another *system*!

a Red System!

Many welcomed the idea
and dedicated themselves vehemently to building the new
red
non-green
non-blue
schools.

But after some time
non-blue innovators started to realise
that they needed to build thousands, millions of red schools.
And that it would take them a thousand, a million years.
And that green schools and blue schools paid little attention to red schools.
And that red schools were in fact blue and green in many aspects
because green and blue were not simply colors
but mentalities, values and cultures
long-entrenched in people's minds and in people's histories.

And so renovators and innovators came to the conclusion
that red had to be spread all over
not in a separate Red School System
but in all schools, green and blue,
taking the best of both
working with children, youth and adults
in community meetings and government assemblies
using songs and poems
formal documents and comic strips
newspapers and fliers
television and radio
at home, at the workplace, in the church.

They have initiated the painting
and the pink schools that are starting to result and to blossom
make the green and the blue behind them look much brighter.

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