“Constructing a Curriculum for Sustainability”

John Abbott
President, The 21st Century Learning Initiative

Supporting documentation for this discussion can be downloaded from the Initiative’s Website: www.21learn.org
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Addis Ababa, 6th and 8th October 2006 and Johannesburg, 14th and 16th October 2006
“Why is education around the world in such a mess; are we bold enough to do anything about it?”

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Addis Ababa, 7th October 2006 and
Johannesburg, 15th October 2006
“Can the learning species fit into school?”

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Johannesburg, 12th October 2006
“Have you people ever stopped to think what the over-emphasis on Western education has done to my country, and countries like it? You came to Africa and told us that our traditional way of learning was out-of-date. You said that our way of formulating knowledge was inappropriate. You emphasised the dominance of narrowly defined intellectual skills. We listened too carefully to your advice. So we told parents that they needed to care for their children only when they were very young, but that proper learning would now be organised by professionals in schools. The old men were saddened as no one wanted to learn their wisdom, and the old women mourned for the grandchildren who would never come and talk with them.
We emphasised higher education, and our students did well, many of them very well. So well that they were over-qualified and there were no challenging jobs for them in Ethiopia. They started to leave for lucrative careers here in America, in Europe, and in Australia.

Many of them left our country for good, denying it the leadership it desperately needed. Society became increasingly unstable. We had, as it were, too many people trained to be clerks and few wise enough to be leaders, nor did we have responsible enough workers for the good of the country.
“So these men, like me, had to flee. My country became ever more unhappy. Far too many of those who remained have been de-skilled by this alien system of knowledge of learning. I look around me in Washington where I now live, and I see many young people who through the nature of their personalities, just do not fit into this restricted western view of learning. It is not what their inherited predispositions cry out for. So you Americans fail them. Once rejected, they become a threat to your lifestyle, and a rebuke to your ignorance to how it is that, through learning, we achieve our full humanity.”
The day is not far off when the economic problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and the head will be occupied or reoccupied by or real problems — the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion.

John Maynard Keynes
1883 – 1946