

# CALL FOR CHANGE IN EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

By Hendra Gunawan\*

Albert Einstein once said, “Nothing stays unchanged, except the change itself.” Indeed, since the beginning, we have been living in a world that keeps changing from time to time. We were never worried about it. But now things are changing so rapidly that almost everybody is concerned about it.

Nowadays, political, economic, social and cultural change are taking place at accelerating rates. Change characterizes life today and, more than that, rules the world we live today. One says plainly, “If you cannot manage change, then you have to change management.” In this era, only those who can adapt to change will survive.

We know, for instance, that a long time ago our earth was populated by dinosaurs. But then something happened to the earth, and soon the dinosaurs became extinct. Until now, scientists still have no clue what had really happened. But one thing is for sure: the dinosaurs could not adapt to change.

So, if we want to survive living in this changing world, we must have the adaptability to change. In *Empires of the Mind* (1995), Denis Waitley suggested that rather than trying to resist change, we’d better seek harmony with it — like surfers who ride the waves, using their power to take them where they want to go.

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And those who could anticipate change, or even create change, would eventually benefit from it. Bill Gates is certainly a good example of people who have contributed change to the modern world and benefit from it.

### **OECD report**

In a recent study of education policies and achievements, OECD found that one in four people in industrialized countries lacks the education to cope with the everyday life demands in this rapidly-changing world (*The Jakarta Post*, 12 December 1997).

It also reported that a significant number of people with high academic credentials are unable to perform reading and mathematics tasks at a high level in everyday situations.

The report stated further that in a globalised technological economy, innovations leading to changing skill requirements occur more frequently and more quickly. In addition, the old definition of 'literacy' as the basic ability to read and write is no longer appropriate.

"To be literate in the modern world means to have the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community."

So how can we keep up with these changes? The report suggested that whatever the level of education one achieved initially, he or she will need to return to some kind of schooling or training during his or her working life.

"Human capital investment, like investment in physical assets, needs to be constantly renewed," said the report.

## **A hallmark of successful education**

The message brought by OECD report for schools and educational institutes is loud and clear: they have to change their management too! Perhaps they even have to reorient their mission and vision.

Yesterday's mission — to provide students with a set of skills that would be useful for them when they get to work — is no longer suitable, since we cannot precisely predict what skills will be required in three or ten years time.

What we can predict now is that those skills will be different from time to time. And so the students cannot just merely memorize and reproduce what they have studied at school.

Instead, they have to understand what is often hidden behind the subject. And thus what is important is not the material itself, but often how to learn about it. Learning how to learn should now be our main concern.

Only those who know how to learn will finally have the adaptability to change. And the adaptability to change — as Peter Hilton put it in his foreword to Jan Gullberg's book *Mathematics: From the Birth of Numbers* (1997) — is undoubtedly “a hallmark of successful education”.

Hilton argued further that “a genuine education should enable one to acquire, for oneself, the skill one happens to need at a given stage of one's life.” It is this kind of education that we wish to have in the world we live today.

## **Concluding remark**

When we consider our education, with its various problems, including overloaded curricula, nonexistence of schools' autonomy, underpaid teachers, *et*

*cetera*, we are aware that there are many things that need to be done in order to meet the modern life demands.

To be able to compete and succeed in this rapidly-changing world, our country needs more and more educated people who have the adaptability to change (including the ability to think in creative ways).

For that, we have no alternatives but to fix our education system and overcome the crucial problems. Otherwise we will always be left behind and, perhaps, dictated by other nations.

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