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## Diploma Disease

*The Diploma Disease* is the title of Ronald Dore's controversial book (1976, 1997a) on education, qualification and development. It provides the theme of two documentary films broadcast on Japanese and British television networks, the title of a teaching video, the subject of edited collections (Oxenham, 1984; SLOG, 1987), special issues of development and education journals (see IDS, 1980; AIE, 1997, 2000) and reviews and encyclopaedia entries (Little, 1992, 1997a).

The diploma disease is a ritualised process of qualification-earning whose consequences were thought to be especially deplorable in developing countries. 'It is something that societies, not individuals, get through the aggregation of the (mutually interacting) unintended consequences of . . . "processes common to all societies"' (Dore, 1997b, p. 24). Those processes derive from modern bureaucratic organisations that 'rationalise' recruitment of persons for jobs by the use of educational records, especially in general education subjects. This renders schooling a 'positional good' whose value depends on how many other people have it. One consequence of this is qualification escalation, a rise in the qualifications required for a particular job. If the raised qualification enhances productivity then this process is economically efficient. If it leads to improved quality of life and citizenship it is socially rational. Dore questions this assumed efficiency and rationality, for reasons that have to do with the processes of learning and motivation. Distinguishing three motives for learning – learning for its own sake, learning to do a job, and learning to get a job – Dore suggests that in many societies learning to get a job has come to dominate the learning process. In displacing the other two motives for learning it undermines the potential of schools to develop human capital. The 'misallocation of social resources and the degradation of the teaching-learning process were thus the two "deplorable consequences" which prompted [Dore] to speak of the diploma disease' (ibid., p. 27).

The thesis draws strength from two lively theoretical debates contemporary to the 1960s and 1970s – (1) between human capital and screening theorists about variations in earnings; and (2) between the nurture and nature theorists about variations in human abilities. Dore's leanings were towards screening and nature.

While labour economists, sociologists and comparative educators have shown interest in the general thesis, those in development studies derive added value from its elaboration of three general propositions linked to the concept of 'late development'. Dore proposed that the later development starts (that is, the later the point in world history that a country starts on a modernisation drive):

1. the more widely education certificates are used for occupational selection; and
2. the faster the rate of qualification inflation; and
3. the more examination-orientated schooling becomes at the expense of genuine education (Dore, 1997a, p. 72).

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Evidence for these 'late development' propositions was drawn from the experiences of England, Japan, Sri Lanka and Kenya, placed on a continuum from early to late development.

Three qualifications to the late development propositions followed. The size and prestige of public sector employment and the presence of a vibrant small-scale private sector would temper the first. The ability of governments to resist popular pressure for educational expansion would temper the second; and the strength of pre-modern educational traditions the third.

Drawing on the experiences of radical reform then current in China, Cuba and Tanzania, Dore also explored the prospects for stemming some of the processes linking jobs, qualifications and education, and develops his own modest proposals.

The original book and thesis met with mixed reactions. The plaudits stressed the elegance, wit, vigour and brilliance of the argument. Some critics questioned some of the basic tenets of the thesis, while others displayed a less than adequate reading and understanding of the (quite complex) argument (see Little, 1992, 1997a for summaries of the critiques and Dore's 1997b response).

Twenty years after its original publication, researchers have commented on the diagnosis and predicted course of the disease in the countries addressed originally by Dore. Aspects of the thesis in relation to England are explored by Wolf (1997, 2002). The England of the 1970s was relatively 'disease free'. Since then qualifications have proliferated; so too the number of young people sitting them. Wolf attributes this to a rational cost-benefit analysis by young people and their parents and the simple faith of politicians in the link between economic prosperity and education rather than to an increasing bureaucratisation of the workplace. While government planned and created a number of new vocational qualifications, uptake by young people was modest. These qualifications were viewed as the 'lemons' of the diploma world. Instead, young people opted for university courses in unprecedented numbers, transforming the higher education sector and the value attached to university diplomas in the labour market and increasing the pressure on young people to stay on in school. Despite these pressures, several associated with the symptoms of the diploma disease, there is little evidence that the quality of school education has been reduced.

Japan's case is explored by Amano (1997). The restructuring of the Japanese economy and society after the Second World War established extremely clear bureaucratic links between levels of jobs, incomes, labour market entrants and educational qualifications. Over time and as numbers expanded, Japanese employers began to pay attention not only to the level of qualification held by recruits but also to the institution or school attended. Japan became a 'which institution' rather than a 'which level' credentialling society. This process was assisted by developments in the educational assessment system itself and the development of the standard score system that ranked individuals, high schools and universities. But there are signs that the diploma disease may have run its course for some segments of the student population. Not all are participating in the examination and increasing numbers are turning against the traditional academic meritocratic values of school.

The Sri Lankan case is explored by Little (1997b). While confirming much of the original diagnosis for the Sri Lanka of the early 1970s, she identifies two processes that changed its subsequent course. The first was economic liberalisation introduced in 1978,

the growth of the private sector and the paradoxical institutionalisation of political criteria for recruitment to government jobs. The second was the increasing competition between the country's two major ethnic groups – the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils – for economic and political resources, the intensification of a civil war and the re-emergence of the Sinhala anti-state militancy that had made such an impression on Dore, some 17 years earlier (Dore, 1997b, p. 24). Since 1978, economic and educational growth increased, the gap between job seekers and jobs available decreased and political criteria for resource allocation increased.

Following Dore's thesis, one might infer that the value attached to educational qualifications would decline. Evidence suggests the contrary. Two reasons are advanced. First, the civil war, the politicisation of recruitment to government jobs and the resurgence of Sinhala militancy served to enhance, rather than diminish, the legitimacy of qualifications as a 'just' allocator of scarce resources, including jobs. Despite earlier problems associated with examinations and university entry, most ordinary Sinhala and Tamil war-tired citizens regard examinations as the only legitimate and fair way of allocating scarce resources in a conflict-ridden society. Second, economic liberalisation served to increase the supply of courses and qualifications by foreign suppliers and open up many more opportunities for the youth to travel abroad for further education and for jobs (Hettige, 2000; Little and Evans, 2005). Foreign suppliers of qualifications work alongside domestic suppliers in an ever-expanding market of qualifications and provide opportunities to labour markets worldwide. Where Dore's original analysis had focused on the emergence of national education systems and the use of credentials within national economies, more recent analyses suggest that the landscape of youth aspirations for education and jobs extends beyond the shores of Sri Lanka to a greater degree than in the periods about which Dore wrote. Not all youth can so aspire and there is a growing tendency for aspirations beyond national boundaries and participation in 'international' examinations to be the preserve of the better off (Lowe, 2000).

The case of Kenya – the most recent 'developer' in Dore's continuum of 'late development' – is addressed by Toyoda (1997) and Somerset (1997). Charting the massive expansion in primary and secondary enrolments in the 1975–92 period and the raising of the first major selection hurdle from Primary 7 to 8, Toyoda confirms that the demand for education and qualifications is as high as ever. Somerset describes the attempts made in Kenya to reform the quality of the Primary 7 and 8 selection exams in order to mitigate the worst effects of the examination on the process of learning, in particular the rote and ritualistic learning so abhorred by Dore. Arguing that many poor-quality national examination systems test 'passive, inert knowledge', Somerset (1997, p. 91) suggests that good examinations test active ideas and require learners 'to think about what they know, and to restructure it in some way', thus supporting, not subverting pedagogy.

### **Reflections**

In a set of 'reflections' Dore (1997c) reassesses the original diagnosis in the light of the experiences of England, Japan, Sri Lanka and Kenya, on those of the countries who, in the 1970s, had held out some promise of reform, in particular China, Cuba and Tanzania and of other research that has addressed aspects of the thesis over the past 25 years. 'How rudely history erupts in sociologists' attempts to arrive at generalisations about long-term

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trends!' he bewails (*ibid.*, p. 189). While the original diagnosis had acknowledged the role of specific class structures, educational traditions and small-scale private sectors in modifying the three propositions about trends, the thesis did not provide for the impact on trends of traumatic historical events. Such events include the enormous changes in Japan as a result of the Second World War (Amano, 1997), the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on the economic and educational system of Cuba (Eckstein, 1997), the effects of civil war in Sri Lanka (Little, 1997b) and the switch from Maoist socialism to market socialism in China (Lewin, 1997).

Reflecting on the process of qualification inflation, Dore notes how some governments have called a halt to qualification spirals, even in the absence of traumatic historical events, and how employers inflate criteria within the same level of certificate, the grade of the level and the institution attended by the student. The propensity to do this, Dore suggests, may 'reflect a society's predisposition to believe in the human capital theory or screening theory explanation of how education systems work' (Dore, 1997c, p. 191).

Fundamental to the diploma disease thesis is the notion that the bureaucratisation of working life was a long-term and irreversible trend. Writing in the early 1970s, Dore did not foresee 'Thatcherism, Reagonomics and the neo-liberal marketist individualist revolution in the Anglo-Saxon world' (*ibid.*, p. 194), all of which advocated that the public sector introduce performance-related pay systems and short-term contracts, in marked contrast to the security of a job for life offered by public and many large private corporation bureaucracies (especially in Japan). And if bureaucratisation is so important for the diploma does its reversal mean the end of the disease? Dore's reflection on Cooksey and Riedmiller's (1997) account of recent developments in Tanzania, especially the decline in primary level enrolments, suggests this might be so. 'The IMF and the World Bank's imposition of Thatcherite anti-public sector policies as a condition for survival loans, has so cut back on the bureaucratically organised jobs in government and the parastatals that the drive has gone out of the search for qualifications' (Dore, 1997c, p. 194).

Implicit in the original thesis were twin assumptions about the impact of qualification seeking qualifications on learning and working. The first was that the effects of a qualification-earning educational experience – ritualistic, tedious and suffused with anxiety and boredom, destructive of curiosity and imagination – would be the same for all ability groups. The second was that those 'who have been subjected to a ritualistic examination-oriented learning as children and adolescents are likely to turn into ritualistic, performance-evaluation workers, incapable of the sort of entrepreneurial initiative-taking which developing countries need' (Dore, 1997a, p. xxvii). Dore now suggests that it is not the brightest who are likely to suffer most from qualification-orientated schooling, but 'those who are bright without being the brightest, those who are within sight of whatever are socially defined as the desirable prizes in the competition, but by no means certain of reaching them without a very great deal of anxious effort' (Dore, 1997c, p. 200). And the complexity of relationships between learning motivations developed in school and in the workplace has been amply demonstrated by subsequent studies (SLOG, 1987; Little and Singh, 1992; Little, 2003).

Notwithstanding the caveats and qualifications to the original thesis it is interesting that several of Dore's concerns and issues, raised in the context of developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s, are now surfacing at a policy level in some developed countries. Wolf's

(2002) account of young people's views of vocational qualifications in England and the fate of vocational qualifications resonates with Foster's (1963) vocational school fallacy, identified in the Ghana of the 1950s and influential in Dore's thinking. Her questioning of the social rationality underpinning the expansion of higher education in the UK and elsewhere, resonates with Dore's descriptions of qualification escalation in developing countries. And some of the basic questions raised by Dore on the impact of external examinations on student motivations for learning are now attracting high-level policy interest in the United States and England and systematic reviews of research (for example, see Kellaghan et al., 1996; Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2003). The reviews underline the importance of understanding the motivation of learners and teachers in the process of education and the development of human capital. Harlen and Deakin Crick identify negative and positive impacts of summative evaluation on learners. Their recommendations for policy makers include one with clear links to the notion of human capital and lifelong learning. 'Not only is there growing recognition of the value of learning to learn and of the drive and energy to continue learning, but there is empirical evidence that these are positively related to attainment' (ibid., p. 203).

The debate about qualifications, examinations, motivation and learning will run for many more years to come.

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## **Disability and Development**

Disability is any long-term impairment, which leads to social and economic disadvantages and to the denial of rights. Impairment is defined as any loss or 'abnormality' of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function. The development of the concept of the 'handicap' has emphasised environmental shortcomings, which prevent disabled people from participating in social life and working in the economy on a par with others (Yeo, 2001).

Disability is a serious development problem worldwide, and one for which data are unusually defective. Global estimates are built from scant and irregular surveys with inconsistent classifications, and from case material. Over 600 million people, or approximately 10 per cent of the world's population, are thought to live with a disability – at least two-thirds of them in developing countries (DFID, 2000). The proportion of the population deprived by disabilities increases with levels of economic development. With development, disability undergoes its own epidemiological transition, involving a decline in disabilities attributable to malnutrition/infectious disease and increases in both life expectation and survival rates from disabling accidents and degenerative disease (Harriss-White, 1996). The prevalence of moderate to severe disability worldwide increases from 2 per cent in infancy to 55 per cent in people over 80 (Yeo and Moore, 2003).

Although disability cuts across class, region, the rural–urban divide, the income distribution, and social segmentation by gender, ethnicity and religion, disability and poverty are strongly associated. As many as 50 per cent of disabilities are preventable and linked to poverty. Disabled people are estimated to account for 20 per cent of the world's poorest people – and for this reason alone disability reduction ought to be an essential element of development – whether conceived of as poverty reduction or capability expansion (*ibid.*). Yet disability is strikingly absent from utilitarian, welfare and Rawlsian theories of justice and well-being, and, as Sen pointed out in late 2004, both capability expansion and poverty reduction require attention to the earnings gaps of disabled people and the large and hidden 'conversion gap' made up by the costs of achieving parity with non-disabled people (Sen, 2004).