



The Rebirth of Education: Schooling Ain't Learning

By Lant Pritchett

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The Rebirth of Education: Schooling Ain't Learning By Lant Pritchett

Despite great progress around the world in getting more kids into schools, too many leave without even the most basic skills. In India's rural Andhra Pradesh, for instance, only about one in twenty children in fifth grade can perform basic arithmetic.

The problem is that schooling is not the same as learning. In *The Rebirth of Education*, Lant Pritchett uses two metaphors from nature to explain why. The first draws on Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom's book about the difference between centralized and decentralized organizations, *The Starfish and the Spider*. Schools systems tend to be centralized and suffer from the limitations inherent in top-down designs. The second metaphor is the concept of isomorphic mimicry. Pritchett argues that many developing countries superficially imitate systems that were successful in other nations—much as a nonpoisonous snake mimics the look of a poisonous one.

Pritchett argues that the solution is to allow functional systems to evolve locally out of an environment pressured for success. Such an ecosystem needs to be open to variety and experimentation, locally operated, and flexibly financed. The only main cost is ceding control; the reward would be the rebirth of education suited for today's world.

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Editorial Review

Review

"UN Declaration of Human Rights Article 26 guarantees the right of every child to free elementary education. Today, nearly 90 percent of children are enrolled in primary school, but enrollment is only the first step. Pritchett's insightful analysis and rigorous evidence point to the next step in realizing every child's right to education: the need for governments and donors to move from a focus on enrollment to a focus on learning."?S. E. M. Vuk Jeremic, president of the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

"A timely call to build on the success of expanding schooling to now focus the same dedication, energy, resources, and creativity on learning. Innovation in close partnership with our developing-country colleagues, whose voices must be heard on the systemic challenges, will be critical to the success of this next phase."?Alice Albright, CEO of the Global Partnership for Education

"With abundant data, experience, and clear thinking, Pritchett makes a compelling case for why more of the same won't cut it anymore, how we need to think deeply about how change happens and who can drive it, and why we need to be suspicious of experts and blueprints."?Rakesh Rajani, founder and head of Twaweza

"Lant Pritchett's recommendations will disappoint both orthodox economists and orthodox educators since they do not reinforce any of the standard recipes. But those willing to be convinced by Pritchett's logic and the particular blend of caring and impishness that characterizes his writing will be justifiably alarmed, then enlightened, and finally filled with hope. I urge all my colleagues to read it immediately."?Luis Crouch, chief technical officer, International Development Group

"With his unique voice, full of data and analogies (after all, what book on education reform also mentions snakes, spiders, and elephants?), Lant Pritchett will make people rethink what they know (or think they know) about education, schooling, and learning."?Elizabeth King, director of education, World Bank

"Lant Pritchett's pathbreaking and courageous work exposes the scandal of education policy which contents itself with achieving quantitative targets on student enrollment even when no real education is happening. Pritchett documents convincingly the problem of missing education, while offering constructive alternatives

to the unacceptable complacency of the status quo. Nobody reading this book will ever think about education the same way again."?William Easterly, professor of economics, New York University

About the Author

Lant Pritchett is a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development and professor of the practice of international development at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

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Barbara Richardson:

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