The Role of Values in Education

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Abstract: *This paper is concerned with a delicate and sensitive issue most academicians and policy-makers do not wish to dwell on, for it deals with the personal choices and innermost motivations of people, their values and priorities, their moral and ethical principles, their freedoms and responsibilities, their lifestyles and behaviors. Yet, learning how to value, how to appreciate and to love, to choose what is right and just, what is true and good, is an imperative in today's world of rapidly advancing technology and fast deteriorating morality and spiritual stagnancy.*

Keywords: values, behaviors, morality, spititual, imperative

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with a delicate and sensitive issue most academicians and policy-makers do not wish to dwell on, for it deals with the personal choices and innermost motivations of people, their values and priorities, their moral and ethical principles, their freedoms and responsibilities, their lifestyles and behaviors. Yet, learning how to value, how to appreciate and to love, to choose what is right and just, what is true and good, is an imperative in today's world of rapidly advancing technology and fast deteriorating morality and spiritual stagnancy.

Indeed, we face the modern dilemma of scientific breakthroughs and dramatic technological revolutions on one hand, and the daily occurrence of human misery and tragedy on the other. Our communication superhighways bring us close to the reality of conflict and violence, bloodshed, cruelty and crime, injustice, ethnocentrism and religious extremism resulting in terrorism and genocide. Our progressive and materialistic civilization has not been able to overcome the persistent problems of inequality, poverty, ignorance, disease, the enslavement of the human person, body and spirit through all forms of addiction, the destruction of our environment, the depletion of non-renewable resources, the breakdown of our moral and spiritual values.

It can be said that the true progress of humankind is in crisis amidst our materialistic and mechanistic Capitalism that has forgotten the human soul. The worship of knowledge over wisdom, greed over justice and compassion, the satisfaction of the wants of a few at the expense of the needs of most, unbridled competition over cooperation, -- is bringing our technologically–advanced world to the precarious condition it is in today, -- the brink of the destruction of the human spirit.

The victory of technological civilization has instilled a spiritual insecurity in us. Its gifts enrich, but enslave as well. As is finally reduced to self-interest, a struggle for material things; but an inner voice tells us that we have lost something noble and pure, elevated and fragile. We have ceased to see the real purpose of our lives. Spiritual and moral development has become stagnant; moral and ethical values have been eroded. The soul is dry. Surfeit brings with it a nagging sadness of the heart.

Having allowed our wants to grow unchecked, (we want more and more) we are now at a loss where and how to direct them. We find no true fulfillment, And we never shall… unless the trials and tribulations of our century have taught us a few things to hand over to the next generation. Perhaps we can begin by asking ourselves a simple question, while admitting even if only in a whisper, but not only to ourselves, our blindness. In this business of life at breakneck-speed, - what we are living for?

It should be come immediately clear to us, that Higher Education faces tremendous and increasingly more complex problems and challenges as we prepare our students to become professionals and the leaders of the future. Yes, indeed, today we have to deal with the problem of EQUITY, DEMOCRATIZATION of ACCESS, to serve the higher demands of more and more who wish to pursue college or university education, to make higher education or specialized training available to all, including culturally-diverse populations, and the economically or physically disadvantaged. We have to be concerned with the need for QUALITY and COMPETENCE to meet the rising levels of expectations and requirements of a changing job landscape. We have to be RELEVANT, FUNCTIONAL, FLEXIBLE and CREATIVE to enable our graduates to survive and develop in a rapidly-changing environment. We have to provide opportunities towards LIFELONG EDUCATION for ALL.

2. Values Education for Today's World

I agree that the above valid concerns must be seriously addressed, but I also believe that our first priority s to help our students to become fully HUMAN PERSONS, with minds that can think clearly and critically, with hearts that can love and care deeply, and with wills that can decide to act freely and responsibly. This means, we have to enable our students how to value, to choose among alternatives, and to translate knowledge and skills into practice. This is what is referred to when we speak of VALUES EDUCATION, neglected component in today's education. Indeed, VALUES EDUCATION which is the heart of all

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education should be an integral part of a holistic education that develops all the human faculties of intellect, emotions and will: That it is not simple matter to introduce it in the school curriculum is no reason why we should not try.

There are many misconceptions regarding VALUES EDUCATION. A relatively new field in the behavioral sciences, it has a cognitive base with an affective element which finds its expression in behavior. One cannot deny that values are a powerful motivating force in one's life, because they have the power to translate knowledge and skills into practice. Values development embraces more than the formal subjects of Religion and Ethics. It enables the student not only to know and understand norms and rules of conduct, but to accept and treasure them as guides to decisions and life-choices. It does not prescribe or dictate, but leads the learner to discover and to commit oneself to chosen ideals and values. It teaches one how to prioritize, to reflect on the consistency between one's values and behavior, to evaluate, to reinforce or to modify.

Since Values Education requires different approaches and strategies, its methodology varies from that of content subjects or skills training. Hence, values educators have to be trained or re-trained, administrators re-oriented, curriculum materials developed, research carried out. Universally recognized and shared values have to be situated in the socio-cultural milieu of the learner and adapted to the person's needs and experiences.

Value sources abound in the cultural heritage and traditions of humankind and of each specific group; in their histories and accumulated achievements, as they too are found in the living contemporary present, in daily life and occurrences, as well as in the people's aspirations and dreams of a preferred future. The world's great religions, the belief and normative systems of cultural groups as well as universally shared and common values of humankind, - such as respect for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Truth, Justice and Peace, Security and Liberty, Life, Health, Love and Happiness, are rich sources of values education. The complexity and difficulty of introducing the values dimension in education is not insurmountable. It is feasible to integrate values in the formal curriculum since every subject area has a value component or to introduce it as a separate course, where values as motivations and mainsprings of human behavior are dealt with in a total cognitive-affective-experiential approach.

The saying that values are caught rather than taught is a truism. We all know too well that personal example, not precepts, is the best teacher and that the values educator to be effective has to be a role model, for one teaches more by how one lives than by what one says.

3. Values for Globalism and the Information Revolution

Today, people are beginning to view globalism as a trend in the relationships of nations and their citizens with one another towards interdependence and solidarity. They envision a global village made possible by the increasing exchange of information, current events, views, and opinions, free trade, common enterprises, agreements, treaties, and networks through the information and communication superhighways that crisis-cross the globe.

Our universities today are in hurry to adapt the curriculum to the trends and goals of their respective national economies/democracies towards Globalism, to produce graduates who have competitive advantage in knowledge and skills required in the global market, who are functional in the global arena. Van Steenbergen (1994) suggest a new stage of global ecological citizenship and Sakamoto (1994) announces the beginning of the age of global democracy. In truth, there has been a great progress on the universalization of human rights and democracy, on the liberalization of trade and commerce, but there is also a widening gap between the ideal as enshrined in international documents and agreements, and the practices of the real world.

In too many places, we see cruelty and inhumanity inconceivable in this modern enlightened age, and the outlook to reverse the trend is not too promising. The rights of future generations are at stake. The way we live today does not guarantee their survival and development. Even in developed countries, there is widespread discontent. Chomsky (1994) hold a vision of democracy's slow death as a de facto world government takes shape, by and for the rich. Globalism gradually leads to a superculture, a monoculture imposed by the powerful and the rich, threatening the existence of diverse cultures and depriving us of the wealth of our cultural diversity, of the contributions of nations less materially developed but possessed of valuable spiritual and cultural heritage the world can learn from – unless we learn and teach the values of tolerance and mutual respect, of acceptance and appreciation of "the other", of openmindedness, of harmony and peace.

Educators should be able to identify the main tensions central to the problems of the future which pose great risks and grave threats to the freedom of the human person and of society. Jacques Delors in his Commission's Report to UNESCO on Education for the Twenty-first Century writes about the tensions between:

- The global and the local: how to become world citizens without losing one's roots and while continuing to play an active role in the life of their nation and local community;
- The universal and the individual: as cultures become gradually globalized the risks of forgetting and ignoring the unique character of human beings, their right to choose their own future and to achieve their full potential in the context of their own rich cultures and traditions;
- Tradition and modernity: how to adapt to change without losing the past, how to assimilate scientific progress without losing one's freedom and cherished values;
- Long-term and short-term considerations: how to balance the over-abundance of transient information and emotions, and the dependence on quick answers

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and ready solutions, - with the need for well-thought of, carefully-planned, concerted and negotiated strategy for reform, which requires time and patience;

- The need for competition and the concern for equality of opportunity;
- The knowledge and information revolution and the capacity of human beings to assimilate, to reflect and to discern, to choose, to accept or to reject; and,
- Lastly, the spiritual and the material, for the world, without realizing it, have a longing for deep human, ethical and spiritual values.

A related phenomenon today is the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies. This on-going revolution may have faster and greater impact than any of the past technological advances humankind has ever known. The world is being transformed from an industrial to an information society. Computer technology, telecommunications, and satellites are already revolutionizing the economy, production, consumption and trade, as well as our cultural values, tastes and habits, our forms of entertainment and lifestyles. What their effects on education and learning of our youth, on lifelong education, on cultural diversity and pluralism, on citizenship and governance, on the moral, ethical and spiritual fiber of peoples around the globe, - is a serious matter to ponder about.

From print to electronic media, instant rapid information holds its viewers especially the young as captive audiences, all their senses glued to the tube, so to speak, rendering them vulnerable to the onslaught of views, sounds and images dictated by powerful conglomerates who, knowingly or unknowingly, control the thinking, judgments, emotions and values of a susceptible public who are unprepared to sift and evaluate information, to weigh alternatives, to form reasoned opinions, and to make intelligent and free decisions.

The "City of Bytes" is sketched as the new capital of the 21st Century. Some view the increasing globalization of communication as facing the risk of cultural homogenization, the rise of a monoculture swallowing up the world's diverse cultures. Others fear the existing gap between the info-rich and the info-poor may widen and lead to further imbalances between developed and less developed countries, leading to a new type of exclusion. Already in 1980, the MacBride Report stated that the rapid increase of the volume of information and entertainment has brought about the homogenization of different societies, and people have become more cut-off from the society in which they live.

And what about the internet and the e-mail? They have revolutionized our modes of learning and communicating. They have opened wide avenues of knowledge, expanded horizons as never before, bridged distances; overcome the barriers of time and space. Yet, untold risks and dangers abound, especially for the young. Who care and who sees to it that their young minds and hearts, their needs and problems, their rights and sensibilities are taken into consideration? Who protects the right to privacy and decency? Who safeguards intellectual properties?

The issue of the uses and challenges raised by the internet was discussed by the Executive Board of UNESCO in its 150th Session in October 1996. It was recognized that the internet is "a revolution that changes our vision of things," and that the issue is not merely technical, but also ethical, including aspects of intellectual property and confidentiality; that the new information technologies are already affecting people's lives in many important ways; and that UNESCO will take the lead in reflecting on legal, ethical and societal issues while maintaining the "free flow of information and ideas" as a top priority.

4. Conclusion

Indeed, information technology is a two-faced coin. As it informs and spreads knowledge, it can form and transform us or it can destroy and deform the humanity in us. Whatever opinions are expressed about the pros and cons of the new revolution, there is a common emerging realization that technology should accommodate itself to the needs and capabilities of humanity, and not the other way around, that is should be guided by a genuine concern for the rights of all, the development of the present and protection of generations to come.

Thus, technology is not of itself beneficial or harmful. It is a tool invented and developed by human creativity and industry. Its real worth depends on the use we make of it. It should not therefore suppress other forms of communication that create a sense of community and enhance human ingenuity, aesthetics and art, culture and religion. The right to information and communication, to data security and confidentiality, to participation in policy and decision-making, should be recognized and safeguarded. It should protect the morals and consciences of young people from being warped by gross immorality, unbridled pornography, and violence. It should be guided by a balanced and reasonable policy which recognizes both the right of access to information as well as the right to select or to reject communication technology. Particular attention should be given to the fact that simulated or virtual realities are not actual realities. Those are educative aspects to be considered to form part of the planning and policy-making activities of IT.

It behooves us, educators, to promote reflection on the societal and individual impacts, both positive and negative, of the new information and communication technologies, to develop those values that ensure the safeguarding of the rights and welfare of their users, present, and future, and to foster their potential for the advancement of education, science, culture, democracy and peace.

Colleagues and partners in education let us stop worshipping at the altar of high-tech. Its value is only instrumental and has to be judged by how efficiently and effectively it promotes the welfare of the human person, his physical and economic well-being as well as his deep ethical, moral and spiritual values. Let us be concerned to make our students not merely smart, but also good. Let us strive for moral excellence, alongside with academic excellence. Let us educate the whole person, and recognize that values education is the heart of all education which is

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human, holistic and democratic, progressive and modern, yet respectful of differences, tolerant and appreciative of diversity, - for these are the ingredients we need to transform our culture of violence to a genuine and sustainable culture of peace.

I end by asking these questions: Does IT make us more human, more capable of thinking clearly and critically, of loving and caring more deeply, or does it make us more like a machine? Will IT be a tool for transforming our culture of violence to genuine culture of peace, where people love and care for each other, accept and cherish each other's uniqueness and differences, and learn to live together in peace and in harmony? Or will it sharpen and widen the great divide between the haves and the have nots, the info-rich and the info-poor, the powerful and the downtrodden, the masters of the future and those that have no voice, no face, and no count in shaping their own destiny?

Colleagues in education, I am afraid I have left you with more questions than answers. But for the sake of the future generations, we must have the courage, the will and the commitment to grapple with these problems, face the challenges, and search for solutions.

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