

Education for Sustainable Development: Evolving New Consciousness

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It is alarming for all concerned with future of the Arab World to have a look at the indications for science, technology and the contribution of this part of the world to the global discourse in knowledge. At the individual level, people do have an amazing human and intellectual capital. However, the institutions and governance systems impedes the nurturing of “free thinkers” and champions for change. The lack of enabling environment to resource the human in the Arab World offers two simple options for educated people either to accept decadence by accepting the status quo or escape to a more enabling environment and thus contributing to more “brain drain and mental drought”. There is another way, however, which is to transform the current situation into more creative and purposeful manner by addressing the core issue(s) and root causes of the problems; i.e, education.

It is through education that we can enable the mind to see beyond the “text” to “context” and beyond sight to insight. More importantly, through “eco-education” we have the opportunity to charge the mind and soul to transcend the “seen” to the “unseen” and to evolve/ transform a human society who has a purpose from “consumerism” and exploitation to “cultivation”.

We must find the strength to choose and turn into a creative force the past historical, and literary factors which have changed to superstition, and have caused inertia and corruption in our societies. Further, as in economics, where we convert raw materials to energy and consequently start a great industry and production, we have to use the same spirit in building up our personality and cultural independence in thinking, spirituality and human development.

The way forward is to ensure that we evolve and co-create an education system that is able to flourish and nurture free thinkers. A free-thinker is a human who finds a distinct way of acting, living and thinking his philosophy. Throughout history such free thinkers are those whose consciousness has been transformed into moving the masses and guiding the society. Like a spark from a flint, free thinkers enlighten thoughts, create movements, and excitement. The greatest danger we face is the separation of the free-thinker from the society’s context. As such the society remains forever corrupted.

To transform the state of “a nation in crisis” to a “nation of hope”, we need to help evolve and co-create an education system where such a system contributes in developing students’ competencies which will enable them to cope with uncertainty, conflicting values and reality construction. This is one thing that sets higher education apart from

training and conditioning as it stifles creativity, homogenizes thinking, narrows choices and limits autonomous thinking and degrees of self-determination.

To be able to do so, the conventional mental model needs to be transformed. Education must be viewed as a means to evolve self-actualized members of society, looking for meaning, developing their own potential and jointly creating solutions. Besides, a sustainable society cannot be created without the full and democratic involvement of all members of society. We can envision a very transparent society, with action from competent citizens, who actively and critically participate in problem solving and decision making, and value and respect alternative ways of thinking, valuing and doing. This society, I aspire to, is analogous to an ecological system. However, such an ecological system implies the emergence of “organic leadership” at all levels and for various organizational settings.

The following are implications from an initiative for transforming and incorporating “the notion of learning and critical thinking versus conventional modes of teaching in educational system in Jordan:

1. Re-thinking institutional mission. My strong belief is that such re-thinking should lead to re-formulation of aims and objectives of teaching and research programs.
2. Accepting divergence in terminology. Critical thinking has many dimensions and features which may enhance its educational potential from a more emancipatory perspective. Transforming “teaching” to “learning” requires the transformation of mental models. This implies that those who teach consider themselves learners as well.
3. Education demands critical reflections on one’s teaching. It also requires the empowerment of learners by enabling them to work on the resolution of real issues that they themselves have identified. It requires appreciation and respect of differences. I see the transformation in the educational orientation as follows::
 - a. from consumptive learning to discovery learning
 - b. from teacher-centered to learner-centered
 - c. from content oriented learning to self-regulative learning
 - d. from institutional staff-based learning to learning with and from outsiders
 - e. from emphasizing only cognitive objectives to also emphasizing affective and skill-related objectives.

We need to develop an educational vision embedded in a functional cosmology that is designed to initiate a deep planetary consciousness. Our economic market vision has left our whole culture with a crisis of meaning and a felt sense of homelessness. My vision is to nurture an education system that calls for meaning and value. It is about our need for a transformative education vision that is linked with nature and universe. In sum, what we need is education for a quality of life. This form of education is our way of growing into life with energy, vitality and joy. Simply, what is needed is an education that counters the forces of monoculture and opens all of us to the richer planetary culture of diversity.