

A Vision for A Better World: True Education

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ABSTRACT: In this brief account I outline the failings of the educational system worldwide (and in general) and reveal certain symptoms that result from this twisted form of knowledge transference. I then diagnosed this illness, but the cancer (the ills of the world) need not spread unchecked and in this light, I offer some potential medicines, remedies and operations so to speak of the educational system in a general paradigm shifting account, that may solve these problems and restore health and equilibrium. I suggest that this problem is urgent and needs to be addressed at this juncture in human history, lest history repeat itself and violence, greed and ignorance win the day.

KEYWORDS: education; knowledge; curiosity; philosophy; morality

1. INTRODUCTION

The problems of the world may be attributed to many things. Primary among them – and perhaps of most importance – is the poor educational system, and in particular a flawed account of what constitutes the right kind of education. Underlying any notion of education requires some conception of what being human means and in what sense the human self can aspire, grow and fruitfully engage with the world.

The history of our species is an endless battle between peoples and the desire for domination, power and mass coercion. This cycle has never abated punctuated, however by enormous strides in culture, technology and ideas. Nevertheless, such discoveries, inventions and quantum leaps in our understanding of ourselves and the universe have not foiled this endless cycle of destruction, hate and violence.

While literacy levels are higher than it has ever been in human history and a grade 7 student “knows” more about the universe than the great scientists of a few hundred years ago, civilization has not progressed as current times and certainly the last century can testify. So, what has been the cause of this? Why, even with knowledge and civilization, does the beast still dominate?

In this brief essay, I shall argue that education itself is the culprit, that a new kind of education needs to come into play, unashamedly based on a theory of persons that engenders the idea that we all have souls, that life is sacred and the universe a great wonder. This is not necessarily enshrined as a religious impulse with its doctrine and beliefs, nor yet as some universalism or humanism. It has no name or creed or race. Or dogma. It is simply the nature of persons, just as nature itself carries with it a soul, a kind of will or volition, where growth, survival, connection and beauty are the essence that overcomes inertia, death, destruction and repulsion. I will argue in this account that clearly education is failing (even more frightening is the great mass who do not even have access to education or do not pursue any higher form of education either through an institution or through self-study) and that the results are clear for all to see. I analyze these symptoms and diagnose what is lacking and then offer in turn certain solutions that may cure this disease and perhaps usher in a better world should this be “followed”. If such changes do not occur, we are at the precipice not of a brave new world but a catastrophe, and the dinosaurs would have outlived us by thousands of years.

2. SYMPTOMS

The nature of this pervasive disease evident in even top Universities and Institutes of higher education and certainly at the foundational level at school reveals a number of symptoms which indicate a grave illness of spirit (and body):

a) Lack of critical thinking; Curiously, even in a scientific culture which praises logic, there is a lack of critical analysis and application of logic in assessing how one ought to position oneself in the prevailing culture; how to live; what one cherishes and what purpose one might have in one’s sojourn on this planet. Unless an individual scrutinizes such aspects for him/herself he/she is but a puppet of the system whether willingly or by force. Education should equip one with tools for thinking through life decisions, not simply acquiring skills to outdo the competition and be a slave to money, honor, prestige and so on.

b) Hedonism or fundamentalism: this dichotomy appears to surface where young people either veer to one extreme or the other with terrible consequences being either deception and emptiness or hatred and blind belief. This of course is fueled by the

A Vision for A Better World: True Education

postmodern agenda that many professors and authorities preach, namely an age of post history/truth, a denial of history, increasing racism and categorization. The lack of boundaries and identities especially around gender, family values and the like is the result or a conservatism that turns to violence, control and male domination.

c) A lack of empathy – with the transfer of knowledge, it is often cold and clinical with little education in softer skills like compassion and empathy. As a result this digital age lacks the refinement and is not sensitive to texture, touch, and more subtle senses.

d) There is a tendency to emphasize performance and skill, as if education were simply the information needed to the “take on the world” and make money, without mind to nourishing the spirit and developing an open heart.

3. DIAGNOSIS

The education system is failing top-down. There is an acute anti-intellectualism, an aversion to spirit. It is not interdisciplinary enough as subjects are partitioned and there is no sense of the whole, of synthetic thinking and unifying knowledge as an integrated unit. Philosophy is no longer considered serious; art has lost its way and most significantly there is little sense of wonder and curiosity instilled in learners at the marvelous nature of the universe and the self or consciousness. The main culprit of all this is a lack of humility, accountability and moral integrity. There is also a general down playing of the arts as been a necessary cog in the wheel of education, rather than simply a focus on language and numeracy – indeed, the arts can also be said to improve all round academic performance and not be valuable only on its own terms. The idea that the arts have a strong link with academic prowess is not new. Indeed, several studies in recent years (Egani deSol 2023, Joseph 2019, Gulatt 2007) building on earlier theories of different kinds of learning, ranging from the play factor (Huizinga 1949), Dewey’s pragmatism (1887), tacit knowledge (Polanski 1966) and even the old Kantian ideas concerning the aesthetic sense (1790 {1952}), suggest that the arts has a deep and lasting effect on overall academic excellence and life-enhancing modalities. However, there is scant literature and research on the impact and the necessity for arts education from elementary to higher education where this unfortunately has been overlooked. The present study aims to address such an oversight, and after reviewing the literature and theory assessing and supporting such a thesis of a causal connection between the arts, in particular the visual arts, and improved academic performance - notwithstanding its critique (Schneider & Rohmann 2021)

4. SOLUTIONS:

Following Gardner’s (1987) theory concerning multiple intelligence and the need to cater to all such domains through the process of education, I would suggest the following “medications” or “operations”:

- 1) Connect subject areas: there is a need to maintain subject differentiation but also give the student a picture of how all aspects – artistic, scientific, traditional knowledge systems together explain “the object” or can be elicited through various kinds of expression in relation to “the object” or through the subject itself, including the self that thinks, creates, intuitively and feels. While teachers will be experts in a single area usually, there should also be cross-disciplinary communication and perhaps another subject denoted as “synthetics”, where discussions on how the various subject-components coalesce in our understanding. Classes should also be places of curiosity, testing experiments, thought experiments, questioning and so on. Within particular subject domains it is also not necessary to just accrue knowledge and cover the syllabus but enrich the student beyond the mechanics into the why’s of that subject, that is, what prompts such questions and why certain methods are employed. In this way, even those who don’t easily perform or have poor intellectual self-esteem may be stimulated and reach their potential.
- 2) Philosophy and metaphysics: I think philosophy or just open-ended curiosity ought to be ignited already at elementary level. For this to happen teachers themselves – even at foundational level – should be aware of philosophy and of the beauty of open-ended questioning, not necessarily in an academic form (this can assume form later on), but in the true spirit of knowledge, which is a child that can begin to ask – “what?”, “why?” etc. and not just skill-based “how to” questions and answers. The point is to make education a game of hide and seek, of sincere investigation open to all, rather than rigid, formal, authoritarian, factual. Thus, imagination is praised and as the child grows up the “what” and “why” might become a more logically robust questioning (and perhaps some answers, though that is less significant than the questions!). In University and College, I believe it should be mandatory to study a course in metaphysics in order to broaden the students’ mind and not only focus on knowledge for the sake of a vocation or outdoing one’s peers in the job market eventually.
- 3) Education is not simply the teaching of beliefs, or adherence to a paradigm out of fear and simply following the herd. Rather than doctrine (and this applies to traditional religion as much as it does to the priests and bishops of modern culture and science or the artistic fashions of the day), but the process of thinking, and most importantly of individuation. A person should exit college not simply with a toolbox but with the conviction of what that toolbox can do in terms of not just the material world but how that relates to his/her inner, real self and in concord with the spirit.

A Vision for A Better World: True Education

- 4) True education is also concerned with self-care, with a sense of universal, human brotherhood, with cultivating an individual with morality without religious fundamentalism and this might be achieved through a culture of meditation or silence. Could we teach our elementary kids to sit still for two minutes and just breathe and practice that twice a day, and then once part of the “system” develop that further in secondary school, and beyond that meditation rooms in higher education facilities – again without doctrine, image-worship and the like, but simply facing the self in silence, breathing, observing within, finding a quiet space to recharge and then inspire further learning. I believe this would be a good idea and again, one then needs teachers to be at least equally aware of such practices, both sensitive and harboring love for their subject-areas, yet open to continuous learning and improvement.

5. CONCLUSION

This essay has outlined certain alarming symptoms of our age borne out of the wrong kind of education and a postmodern paradigm, particularly in the West that is stifling the individual, that is often morally reprehensible (consider the support of terrorism around campuses in the United States) and lacking a sense of spirit, heart and intellectual curiosity. Thus, I diagnosed a heinous malady. I offered solutions in this brief analysis but believe it is sufficient at least as a start to reorganize the educational system from ground up and inculcating a new spirit of open-mindedness amongst tomorrow’s teachers. Is it too late? Perhaps the moment is poignant: It has to be fixed now else we are all at peril.

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