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THE VALUE OF BROAD-BASED EDUCATION IN A MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper examines the value of broad-based education in an increasingly multicultural and globalized society. As demographic changes continue to transform nations into pluralistic communities characterized by cultural, religious, ethnic, and intellectual diversity, education must move beyond narrow vocational training to embrace a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. Drawing on the educational philosophies of John Dewey, Aristotle, Martha Nussbaum, Alfred North Whitehead, and other scholars, the paper argues that broadbased education develops critical thinking, adaptability, cultural literacy, creativity, and ethical responsibility. Such an education equips individuals not only with specialized professional competencies but also with the capacity to engage constructively with diverse perspectives, participate actively in democratic life, and respond effectively to complex social and economic challenges. The study highlights the role of broad-based education in fostering global citizenship, social cohesion, and intercultural understanding while preparing graduates for an unpredictable and rapidly changing labour market. It further demonstrates that the integration of humanities, social sciences, and professional disciplines enhances intellectual flexibility and promotes lifelong learning. The paper concludes that broad-based education is indispensable for personal development, national progress, and the cultivation of citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to a multicultural world.

Keywords: Education, multicultural society, global citizenship, cultural literacy, critical thinking, diversity, social cohesion.

Introduction

Today, every nation is undergoing rapidly changing demographics which implies that our society is becoming pluralistic. Every single city in the world is suffused with people of all races, cultural outlook, religion and diverse educational background. It means that to be able to meet up the dynamics of this changing world, broad-based or liberal education which stimulates principles such as inclusion, diversity, democracy, skill acquisition, inquiry, critical thought, value of perspectives and self-reflection has become indispensable. Broadbased education equips students with knowledge, values, and skills necessary to evoke and participate in societal changes, resulting in justice for otherwise victimized and excluded ethnic groups. It is a preparation for an active, participatory citizenship.

Gone are days when we feel comfortable graduating from professional schools like engineering, pharmacy, medicine, law etc. and being useful within a small society. Today, leaders who graduate from such professional schools need broad-based education to succeed in our increasingly plural and complex world. It is no longer time when one discipline alone could solve a problem, or when people held the same job for a lifetime. Today's leaders must be nimble if they're going to develop multidisciplinary solutions and succeed in an everchanging global system; the broad-based education helps the people stand high against the challenges posed by the multicultural world and pass through the numerous doors and seas of opportunities now open to it. It is the aim of this article then to consider the value of broadbased education in the light of today's multicultural world or the similar version of what Martha Nussbaum calls cosmopolitanism/ global citizenship.

Meaning of Education

The term "Education" is derived from two Latin words Educare (Educere) and Educatum. "Educare" means to train or mould. It again means to lead out or to draw out, propulsion from inward to outward. The term "Educatum" designates the act of teaching. It throws light on the principles and practice of teaching. The term Educare or Educere mainly indicates development of the latent faculties of the child. But a child does not know these possibilities. It is the educator or the teacher who knows these and takes appropriate methods to develop those powers. Education then is the complete development of the individuality of the child so that he can make an original contribution to human life according to the best of his capacity. One of the famous educationists John Dewey defines it as a "process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfil his possibilities".¹

Education is a form of human interaction. It is a social act that is made possible through a network of human relationships. Every nation has its own specific needs and there is always the pressure on the institutions to see that these needs are met by the way they fashion their curriculum. This trend for instance, helps to take care of the nation's workforce needs and the desired moral formation of the members of that society. In Short, education can also be defined as the development of individual according to his needs and demands of society, of which he

is an integral part. Discussing education in his last chapter of *Politics* Aristotle opened with these words:

*No one will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of the youth...The citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives.*²

The above citation brings out the connection between education and societal needs. Very early in life a child must start to learn a vast, intricate, and often confusing way of life –the culture – which is not biologically inherited but learned. Education in its widest sense therefore, may be thought of as the socialization process through which a person learns some way of life; and it is a continuing process from birth to death; “it is a relentless process of becoming”.³

General Value of Education

In his famous essay called “The Aims of Education,” delivered as his presidential address to the Mathematical Association of England in 1916, Alfred North Whitehead stated clearly the value of education by x-raying the tragedy which awaits individuals and states that neglect education. He writes:

*When one considers in its length and in its breadth the importance of this question of the education of a nation's young, the broken lives, the defeated hopes, the national failures, which result from the frivolous inertia with which it is treated, it is difficult to restrain within oneself a savage rage. In the conditions of modern life the rule is absolute; the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed. Not all your heroism, not all your social charm, not all your wit, not all your victories on land or at sea, can move back the finger of fate. To-day we maintain ourselves. To-morrow science will have moved forward yet one more step, and there will be no appeal from the judgment which will then be pronounced on the uneducated.*⁴

The purpose of education could be variously interpreted, ranging from the mundane to the spiritual. But to say that education helps to understand the meaning of life, to realise the creative potential of human beings, and to locate oneself in society is generally considered indisputable. It opens doors to the world and the future, and gives pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and grounding.

The former secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan speaking once on literacy attested to the importance of it as follows:

*Literacy is a bride from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity...For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.*⁵

The same ideas were espoused by Martin Luther King Jr. when speaking to his black American people at the Golden Anniversary Conference of the National Urban League he took time to tell them the pressing need to develop positive programs to improve their standards, constructive programs to solve their problems. He insisted that they had no option than to “constantly stimulate their youth to rise above the stagnant level of mediocrity and seek to achieve excellence in their various fields of endeavour”. Doors, he said ‘are opening now that were not open in the past, and the great challenge facing minority groups is to be ready to enter these doors as they open. No greater tragedy could befall us at this hour but that of allowing new opportunities to emerge without the concomitant preparedness to meet them.’⁶

It was this exhortation that the Negroes clasped upon and did effectively improve their educational chances. Martin Luther King Jr. thus expressed his delight at this rising educational consciousness among the Negro population to the point that they were then inserting themselves in the larger world. It was clearly evident that one of the factors responsible for their new self-consciousness and insertion into the mainstream society had been their rapid educational advance. He said to them:

*Over the years there has been a steady decline of crippling illiteracy. At emancipation only five percent of the Negroes were literate; today more than ninety-five percent are literate. Constant streams of Negro students are finishing colleges and universities every year... These educational advances have naturally broadened his thinking. They have given the Negro not only a large view of the world, but also a larger view of himself.*⁷

To broaden one's thinking about oneself and offer oneself a larger view of the world is to satisfy two major pillars of education which Jacques Delors identified as "learning to be" and "learning to live together". They connote some of the fundamental values education tries to impart in any society. While "learning to be" addresses the question of development of the inner capacity of the individual, and prepare him or her to meet social and political responsibilities, "learning to live together" involves the creation of a harmonious life, transcending sectarian loyalties and differences. There is no education without values, and in all societies these values are a mixed bag due to differing ideological needs, i.e. subject to changes according to the differing patterns of human experience.⁸

Value of broad-based education in a globalised/multicultural world

From 1900 education has been passing tremendous changes than the world had previously seen. It has seen changes in curriculum and constant retraining of workers given the growing alterations in modes of production and human relations. In the face of the Industrial revolution the major difficulty in education became how to train the people not only in respect of the needs of the time, but vis-à-vis what their future would look like. It was certain that the future would be very different from the present. Hence, emphasis started to be laid on adaptability, on the readiness to accept and welcome change and novelty; and in consequence thereof, came everywhere a growing acceptance of the comprehensive school and college. Elitism and selectivity started being abandoned, even rejected, almost everywhere.

Today, most technologically advanced nations have moved toward an occupational structure requiring growth at every level of the educational system. To the extent that the schools react to or anticipate employment needs, it suggests the trend that schools will be continually revising curriculum, adjusting facilities, and retraining teachers.⁹ This trend is further made urgent by the ever-changing demography occasioned by the multicultural world. Emerging global economies have no option, if they want to maintain their pace, than to incorporate in their educational system the conditions that favour a multicultural existence. All these go to confirm the ideas of John Dewey on education that it is something continuous, 'a reconstruction of accumulated experiences which must be directed towards social efficiency.'¹⁰ Days are gone when people remain with one set of literatures and materials. The world has become so diverse that only with open mind and diverse talents can one enter into it successfully.

In the context of the multicultural nature of our societies then, the universities have to consider as primary mission the training of leaders through a comprehensive education that combines a broad-based classroom curriculum and other rich experiences. Of course it is not that the students should not develop expertise in specific fields. It is rather that they leave universities also with skills to think critically and create solutions, to evaluate and make sense of the flood of information that's now at their fingertips. In other words, while the students specialise in certain fields to meet specific workforce, they need a well-rounded training in all fields if they are to meet the demands of the ever changing diverse world oriented towards prosperity and vibrancy, a broad-based education that prepares them for successful careers and meaningful lives in the present multicultural world.

Before now nations were contented that universities were providing graduates well equipped for the needs of the world, i.e., the various expertise required to move the economy. But nowadays the tide seems to be turning, with business leaders lamenting that, although the new talent arriving at their doorsteps has deep technical knowledge, it lacks the skills needed to put this knowledge to full use. The CEOs of many companies often state that they need a broad liberal-arts education, not students who are trained to do a particular job. This is so because unlike yesteryears, to stay globally competitive, nations which are multiculturally constituted and other burgeoning economies need populations that are intellectually agile and well-trained.

The Googles of the world may require and value technical ability, but they reward those who also have softer skills and cultural sophistication first and foremost. It is the same with the rising economic powerhouses in the East who are acting on similar principles. Here is what Stephen Castles writes with regard to Korea hiring migrants who have broad educational qualification to contribute in growing their economy:

Korea no longer has to decide whether it wants to become a multicultural society. It made that decision years ago – perhaps unconsciously – when it decided to be a full participant in the emerging global economy. It confirmed that decision when it decided to actively recruit foreign migrants to meet the economic and demographic needs of a fast-growing society.¹¹

A broad-based education is one that provides a critical habit of mind. Such an education goes beyond mere description and unquestioning acceptance. This is the education that best equips

the undergraduate student for the analytical challenges of their courses, be that engineering, computer, medicine, law, etc. The students receive an education that is flexible yet comprehensive; that prepares them to think with creativity and rigor, and position them to succeed in whatever career they choose, both immediately after graduation and later in life. This is why education is defined today by some people as acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally preparing intellectually for mature life.

Nussbaum sees liberal/broad-based education as a liberator of minds from the “bondage of habit and custom” and thus provides an educational vehicle capable of producing students whose sensibilities and rationality are consistent with that required by a cosmopolitan citizenry.¹² The cosmopolitan/global citizenry as reflected in the views of Cicero obtains when citizens legitimately prioritize particular allegiances, but remain principally connected and morally accountable to the larger human community through a general moral consensus.¹³ Nussbaum argues that becoming a world citizen does not necessarily mean relinquishing local affinities, identities or beliefs. Local identities inevitably define certain elements of human character that inevitably influence our interaction with others. However, an individual’s primary moral focus remains on interconnecting human values to ensure that cultural divisions do not usurp the set of universal principles that identify acceptable behaviour. It is the type of education that leverages the multicultural existence and possibility of migrants’ workforce.

Nussbaum suggests that a properly designed liberal education should cultivate three basic capacities among cosmopolitan citizens to free their minds from narrow tradition, custom and habit including the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions, the capacity to identify with a global moral and human community, and finally the capacity for narrative imagination, or the ability to imagine cultural difference in order to decipher alternative narratives of the ‘other’ and relate or connect to them in a meaningful and sympathetic way.¹⁴ It is the liberal/broad-based education that guarantees membership of the world community which entails according to Nussbaum “a willingness to doubt the goodness of one’s own way and to enter into the give-and-take of critical argument about ethical and political choices.”¹⁵

If one casts a glance at the broad sweep of economic history, one might notice a temporary imbalance between the higher education skills such as engineering, pharmacy, architecture

informatics and other sciences that people bring and the number of jobs available for them. It is not unusual for a country to experience, as part of a cycle, a situation where the number of people with higher education degrees greatly outstrips the demand for those types of skills. The outcome of this glut is that people land up in what they have not studied. Schapiro offers as the only way out, the broad-based education. According to him, “the best preparation for a lifetime, for business success, is broad training ... If there is anything that pays in the market, it is cultural literacy. The ability to not just survive but also thrive in different cultures, pays off pretty nicely”.¹⁶ He maintained that the best defence against off-shoring is what is called “whole brain learning” — logic and maths with aesthetic appreciation and creative thinking. What Schapiro did not quite well express is that even for off-shoring, it does not just suffice having a specific skill but also intellectual preparation for a mature life. It is becoming more evident that if a student does one and not the other, he/she treads a very risky path. Cultural literacy with core knowledge is the key.

A well-rounded technology person should also be well-versed in the humanities and social sciences in order to gain currency in our multicultural world. The labour market changes so rapidly that people have to be trained for broader thinking. For today’s diverse and complex society which expresses itself in competitiveness and goal directedness, one has to develop a pluralistic approach to life; he must become cosmopolitan/global citizen which is achieved through comprehensive education. Although a lawyer by profession for instance, St. Paul had also this instinct of global citizenship, the spirit that made him succeed in all the society of human argument and aspiration. He said in his letter to the Corinthians:

Though I belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. While working with the Jews, I live like a Jew in order to win them; and even though I myself am not subject to the Law of Moses, I live as though I were when working with those who are, in order to win them. In the same way, when working with Gentiles, I live like a Gentile, outside the Jewish Law, in order to win Gentiles. This does not mean that I don't obey God's law; I am really under Christ's law. Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them. So, I become all things to all people, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible (1Cor. 9:19-22).

St. Paul was versatile and his adaptability instinct as a modus of navigating the diverse constitution of the human societies was next to none. In other words, to be a good leader one must be able to live in the awareness of diverse characters and multifaceted value orientations among men and develop proper attitude in dealing with them which in many degrees is achieved through broad-based education.

Conclusion

Aristotle did rightly point out that the legislator's duty is to educate the youth according to the needs of the constitution in which the child lives. Universities have to be aware of the employment market and what the country needs; but increasingly, people think that education is only for instrumental and vocational needs to the point that they hardly think about education in the broader sense of the term. The need for broader development as the economy experiences fundamental changes in multiple ways, of instilling flexibility of thinking for an unpredictable labour market and especially the multicultural constitution of the human societies has been seen to be paramount and does respect the idea of education as 'a continuous reconstruction of experiences' on the basis of the diverse nature of human needs and development of human potentialities.

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