

Workable Ideas for Implementing “Education for Sustainable Development”

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report as “Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The commission also notified that sustainable development has four dimensions: social, cultural, economic and environmental, the commission further stressed that these four dimensions needs to be meticulously balanced in the pursuit of an improved quality of life. With the passage of time the concept of education for sustainable development has been integrated into many global frameworks and conventions related to key areas of sustainable development.

The United Nation’s “**Decade in Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005 to 2014)**” was a global movement it was an endeavor that aims to reorient education policy, practice and investment to address sustainability. As the lead agency for the Decade, UNESCO is responsible for ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are in place optimize the implementation of the Decade. The principal aim of it was not only to transform education policies, investment and practice but also transform education keeping in view current global challenges and demands. It is believed that if this educational movement succeeds it could change not only education systems in a positive manner but also improve the quality of life for many people across the globe. Hence they put highest emphasis on achieving education for all (EFA) and recommended member nations to implement the kind of education system which would encourage equity, inclusion, quality learning, flexibility and innovation in their educational institutions in order to accomplish social cohesion and social justice through lifelong learning by improving educational systems with a view to increase both the quality and the relevance of education in this fast changing world.

In this scenario the author of this research paper feels that education systems need to be transformed constructively, various curriculums be redesigned in order to meet the challenges of highly uncertain future as well as to conform to norms of the Education for Sustainable Development.

Prof. Daniella Tilbury in her expert review on DESD pointed out that ESD refers to learning to ask critical questions, learning to clarify one’s own values, learning to envision more positive and sustainable futures , learning to think systemically, learning to respond through applied and learning to explore the dialectic between tradition and innovation.

The following headings have been used to express workable ideas which can work as effective tools to achieve “Education for Sustainable Development” 1. Acquisition of knowledge and its application, 2. Holistic approach to Science and Arts Streams 3. Skill Acquisition and Mind Expansion 4. Inculcation of Values in Personal and Community Life 5. Pursuit of Excellence and 6. Enlightened Nationalism.

Keywords: education, sustainable development, globalization, knowledge society, values, skill acquisition, pursuit of excellence, enlightened nationalism.

Introduction: Education for Sustainable Development have become buzzwords in the global era but at the same time it drives educational policy makers, academicians and social thinkers into a situation of unease and discomfort. It makes them think and ponder upon various questions which crop up on daily basis. The questions like: What kind of education would contribute to Sustainable Development? Is the present education system capable to deliver goods? Is the current curriculum update and adequate to make learners self-reliant? How can school and university education gain relevance in the present digital age? How should education respond to the changing realities? What kind of students should be prepared by the educational institutions to meet global challenges? What kind of students may contribute for a better future? These types of questions have long been important components of Education for sustainable development. Nowadays it is not a thing of surprise or shock to confront well educated people who ended up their careers because their university education which they received in the past became obsolete and irrelevant as a result they turned to be unfit for the current job.

In the era of globalization and knowledge society and in such an academic scenario, the author of this paper has got some innovative ideas and vision for the present knowledge society. Needless to mention, we are today living in a knowledge society and knowledge increasingly shapes our destiny. His ideas on learning and mental attitudes may prove quite apt. He strongly feels that what we teach today in schools and colleges have become outdated. He is very critical about the absence of innovation, imagination and creativity in our educational system. He is also against compartmentalization of arts and science, he builds up an argument, a point of view and an action statement on various vital issues such education for sustainable development.

This research paper may be remarkable for workable ideas for change and development. The author is acting like a member of the “Men of culture” whose job according to Mathew Arnold is to disseminate the best knowledge and ideas of their time all through the society, so let’s discuss about his workable ideas for successfully implementing education for sustainable development.

1. Acquisition of Knowledge and its Application: *(Education should facilitate the learners to acquire adequate knowledge and should focus on application of knowledge in their day to day life)*

We are living in the knowledge society where knowledge acts as an agent of change and development. Societies that do not use most important resource for growth will be in serious trouble in the immediate future. Knowledge shapes the society in an unprecedented manner and future leaders are invariably those who possess not only knowledge but those who are able to apply it for problem solving and innovations. In an economy where repetitive jobs are fast vanishing, it is the duty of the education system and society to train the youth and build their capabilities so that they can reap the benefits of a knowledge society. But our country's inability to turn this historical necessity into an advantage is one of our tragic failures. We are still continuing with, in the words of the popular fiction writer Chetan Bhagat "the flawed Indian education system, which focuses on knowledge more than application. Even in science subjects, but particularly in the arts, Indian students can score good marks by rote knowledge, rather than being forced to apply themselves. Teaching materials and methods in humanities are archaic and outdated. Many postgraduates in wonderful subjects like sociology, philosophy, psychology and economics have excellent knowledge, but find it difficult to apply their knowledge to the Indian context, and impossible to give a specific solution" (Bhagat 2012: 150). The author's intention is not to denigrate every postgraduate coming out of the portal of Indian universities, he only points out a general malaise that is affecting the employability and usefulness of the post graduate. "Knowledge", Chetan Bhagat says in one of his essay, "is only one part of education; the other, equally important aspect is application".

2. Holistic Approach to Science and Arts Stream: *(Education system should not compartmentalize Arts and science stream, they should be looked upon as complementary to each other)*

Our approach to knowledge should be holistic and comprehensive; we should believe in the totality of knowledge. And stress the equal importance of both science and arts stream for creating a just and sustainable society. "Arts and science streams are just man-made divisions. To progress, we Indians need to learn and apply from both disciplines" (Ibid). The above observation should be an eye-opener to all those

who believe that teaching and learning of humanities is a waste of resources in this technological age, and who sideline these subjects in any academic programme. But the fact is that the modern approach to knowledge is interdisciplinary and holistic. The compartmentalized approach to knowledge is an outdated one. The students of arts must also grasp the significance and impact of modern scientific discoveries and science students need to be illuminated by artistic insight. Victor F. Weisskopf writes: May be there will come a day when scientific and artistic meaning will combine and help to bring forth that ground swell of meaning and value for which there is a great need. The growing awareness of this need is in itself an important element that brings people together and creates common values and even elations. There is always hope-for hope (Weiskopf 79: 485).

Chetan Bhagat also invites our attention to the most indisputable commonality of both science and art: Surely arts and science have something in common: both are ways to deal with our experiences and to lift our spirits from daily drudgery to universal values (Ibid: 473).

Though in a different context, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also makes a fervent appeal to strengthen the study of humanities in our country: Higher education in the humanities should be strengthened so that the literary imagination can continue to de-transcendentalism the nation and shore up the redistributive powers of the regionalist state in the face of global priorities (Spivak 2207: 18).

3. Skill Acquisition and Mind Expansion: (*Education System should promote skill acquisition and expansion of mental abilities instead of encouraging rote learning and mugging up of information*)

The author also makes it very clear that he has no intention to view education as simply a means for an end which is none other than landing up a job. And for that matter, a large number of Indians link education with career and advancement in life. They cannot be faulted for this. In our nation, the first priority for everyone is a stable and settled job. But the painful reality is that, much of what is going on in the name of education has no real connection with skill acquisition or mind expansion. In this connection Chetan Bhagat writes in his article: “We emphasis sticking to the course, testing endlessly how well the student has revised the lessons. We treat lessons as rules to be adhered to, and the better you conform, the more likely you are to score. Innovation, imagination and creativity crucial for the country as well as more likely to bring the best out of any student have no place in our education system. In fact, we actually ensure we kill this spirit in the child as fast as possible. Because innovation by definition means challenging the existing way, and that is just not something good Indian kids who respect elders do. The cycle perpetuates itself, and we continue to create a second-rate society of followers rather than change-embracing leaders” Needless to mention, what we need in today's knowledge society are not followers but change-producing leaders. For this we have to be critical and self-introspective, and must be willing to learn from the global best practices. Challenging the existing way and blazing a trail need extraordinary courage, effort and vision. The situation demands this, and if we ignore the country will be the worst sufferer.

4. Values in Personal and Community Life: (*Value based education and inculcation of ethics among the learners are very important*)

Chetan Bhagat in his essay “*Adding value to Life*” says “values make bedrock of any stable society”. In the same essay, he discusses the significance of values in a simple and straightforward manner. According to him, it is culture that defines us and culture "contains the implicit rules by which we live-our values" (Bhagat 2012:3). Bhagat asks the readers to develop a larger concept about values. This concept encompasses not only personal values such as family, religion, and respect for elders but also community values. Bhagat writes: “Values tell people what is good and important. They bind society. Social scientists believe that without values, a society could disintegrate, a risk often present in India. Religious heads believe that without values, human life is meaningless and all the worldly pleasures will not lead to any satisfaction. Yes, a lack of good values is why scams happen, nepotism exists and the government doesn't care about its people. Core values are essential to any society and human being (Ibid: 4-5). As Bhagat has rightly observed, values are central to all our programmes. It is values that truly guide and lead the individual, society and the nation. Bhagat's observations lead us to the Indian concept of dharma. Dharma is the leading light behind all our right actions. In the absence of values, there is no real development. Our

entire race towards growth and happiness will come to an abrupt stop, if we abandon values on our way. Bhagat writes". "It is critical that along with our efforts to build up our economy, alleviate poverty and so on, we spend time building our values. Leaders, opinion-makers and all of us in our discussions should continue to bring up this single question: What should an average Indian live, work and strive for in his life" (Ibid: 5). Bhagat is sincere in his attempt to add value to life so that life becomes truly meaningful. A life without values is hollow. Those who live valueless life are hollow men inhabiting a waste land. T.S. Eliot described such people in his poem *The Hollow Men*:

5. In Pursuit of Excellence: (*Education System should emphasize pursuit of excellence. It is the pursuit of excellence and only excellence that enables a country to accomplish its goals and remain on the track of change and development*)

It is excellent performance in all walks of life that truly takes the country to great and glorious heights. The people of a nation where excellence is valued and practiced will remain at a higher level of peace and joy, and will be able to contribute significantly for the health of the planet, well being of humanity and world peace. On the contrary, mediocrity and underperformance leads to the waste of scarce resources, disharmony and discontentment. Excellence is a way of life, a life-enhancing and life enriching practice of values and optimal and sustainable use of natural and human resources. The world has today phenomenally developed and global communication network has become a powerful unifying and connecting factor between the nations. The world can even be described as a global village though there are occasional setbacks and drawbacks to this concept. But the heart of the matter is this. It is the pursuit of excellence that has fuelled all this civilization, cultural and technological advancement. We are what we are today because of the earnest pursuit of excellence by a few. The author enthusiastic and vigorous promotion of excellence and success does not mean that he glorifies success in a disproportionate manner, and ignores those who do not succeed despite of their best efforts. His intentions are positive. He only wants to convince his readers that it is the path of excellence that leads us to the accomplishment of our goals. It is not success and failure that he is interested in. His concern is the promotion of human excellence in every walk of life and building a strong nation. If you look back in history, the people who have made India awesome aren't all politicians. Most of the people that did this are not from the government. Whether it is entrepreneurs like J.R.D Tata and N. R. Naryana Murthy, sports persons like Sachin Tendulker or musicians like A. R. Rahman, people from all walks of life have helped improve our nation. Not just celebrities, but E. Sreedharan, responsible for the Delhi: Metro, and Dr. Varghese Kurien, who created the Amul revolution, all are ordinary people doing their work extraordinarily well. Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, two of the most influential figures in India's history, never held political office. Aim to be one of those people who made India awesome (Bhagat 2015: 176).

6. Enlightened Nationalism: (*Education system should inculcate enlightened nationalism*) 'Nation' and 'nationalism' are terms that have no simple and universally accepted meanings. Almost everyone has got some idea, at least a vague notion of what these terms are. Any person who lives in a nation experiences nationalism in different ways. Some people nurture a very broad-based, liberal and egalitarian view of the nation while others have a very restricted and narrow conception of it. We can prefer the first class, and our nationalism should be broad-based, liberal and enlightened. Nation and nationalism should be lived entities for us; our thoughts and ideas should be shaped by national imagination. The nation should live in our mind and heart; we should never keep away from the national issues, sometimes get fully involved in them, and comes up with our own bold and independent views. As citizens we should not keep aloof from the social, political and economic issues, policy matters, gender justice and above all from the struggle and suffering of the common man.

Conclusion

Gandhi defines “By education I mean, an all round drawing out of the best in child and man –body mind and spirit” According to Gandhi the goal of education should be moral education or character building; and cultivation of conviction that one should forget everything selfish in working towards great aims. He

also said that the earth has enough resources to meet the needs of all but not enough to satisfy the greed of even one person. To conclude it can be said that if world's education systems strive to turn mankind into good human beings then only we can imagine for sustainable development. It is only when all global citizens are ready for a self-introspection; the world will be ready for change. The author fearlessly asks every one of us to do soul-searching in order to expose our real selves.

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