

SHAPING THE FUTURE EDUCATION FOR A GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

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The future does not simply happen. Despite the inevitable and unpredictable variables, and room for in-determination, the future is basically shaped by us; it is rather a consequence, than a continuation, of the present. It depends mostly on the accuracy of our perceptions of the present and, on the other hand, on the decisions and actions we take as responses to those perceptions.

To deal with this fast-changing world, to understand the challenges and dilemmas of the present, and controversial time, and to help future generations, one major overall responsibility is to lead education towards a new global responsibility (education, comes from Latin "educare = educere"). This takes much more than striving for the continued growth of the present material wealth of the world. It essentially means the process of forming the whole person, which also implies a full commitment towards the preservation and sustainability of the total human patrimony. More than ecology, bio-values are all about the fundamental respect for human dignity and the theology of creation.

The authors of *Global 2000 Revisited* (The Millennium Institute, 1993) state: "Values we often take for granted have important consequences for the way we treat each other and the way we treat the Earth. A great danger in a materialistic and mechanistic view of the world's problems is that even when we see the problems, we often assume that the solutions are to be found only in the same material realm. Thus, most proposals for cleaning up the environment focus on technical fixes. But the greatest help, and the only lasting solutions to the violence we do to the world and to each other, will come from wisdom - from rediscovering ways of seeing ourselves clearly." So, education in its broadest sense, is the most basic and probably the most powerful instrument for shaping humankind's future quality of life.

It is important to note that education intrinsically has a perspective of generations. In one sense we need to restore the classical Greek's Paideia concept, and promote bio-values at all levels of every educational system. Governments work on a limited time horizon, usually related and restricted to the "next election" interest, not to that of the "next generation." Only education and spiritual traditions have a longer horizon and a global perspective.

We have traditionally dedicated our educational efforts to the mere acquisition of some necessary skills, knowledge and abilities. This is good and necessary but, not sufficient. Present educational processes are based upon the old paradigms, now undergoing a profound transformation. The fundamental necessity for creating a solid and comprehensive vision, which embraces our responsibility for the global environment, has been overlooked. Bio-values must be an indispensable component of all educational programmes, from the kindergarten to the post-graduate level. In order to define or redefine goals and priorities, we must become concerned citizens of the world, going beyond national or regional boundaries and developing a new attitude toward planetary society. For this reason, education must be revised and perform a new role.

Although Earth is one unity, environmentally-speaking, it is not, socially or culturally. Therefore, it is crucial to reduce these discrepancies and to reconcile these views in order to restore the fundamental unity of Earth. Bio-education cannot be just one more discipline to be learned, as part of the so-called bio-sciences. It must become a way of thinking, a most fundamental approach to understanding the complexity of the human condition.

The so-called new paradigm represents a profound transformation, not only of scientific knowledge, but also of the overall conceptual basis used to deal with present realities. Because of this, some values are also changing, while other values must be created.

Factually, values are the essential elements which form attitudes. Psychologically, an attitude is some sort of preparation for thinking, feeling or behaving in a given way, and is the implicit basis of our external behaviour. Therefore, to change people's behaviour, the process must start by changing attitudes and by altering people's values. But, since values are always influenced by culture, the new paradigm may have its major impact on education.

Education is a major force for social change. Every generation receives from the previous one the heritage of a common human patrimony. It must conserve and enrich this patrimony up to the point of transmitting it to a new generation. Therefore, it is to this "enriching" process that our generation can add a new attitude, stabilising and transmitting it to the next generation. And part of this attitude should be a commitment towards the sustainability of the earth.

Since we still live under the old paradigm, it is "natural" that we are still attached to some old prejudices and biases. The surviving Industrial-State Era can be typified by a number of obsolescent premises, such as:

- Progress is synonymous with economic growth and consumption.
- Humankind is separate from nature and it is the human destiny to conquer and fully explore nature.
- Natural resources are infinite.
- Economic efficiency and scientific reductionism are the best approaches to the fulfilment of the goals of humanity. Such premises could eventually be appropriate for transition from a low technology and agrarian world, to one marked by high technology and an urbanised-industrialised society.

But this dominating paradigm has resulted in severe societal problems and in the global crisis of the present time. If we wish to see a planetary society capable of, and willing to distribute its affluence equitably and regulate itself humanely and peaceably, then we must support an evolutionary transformation; global in nature, peaceable, humane and coherent, with an image of universal, basic, human dignity.

This new image of a possible and better future must primarily be based on a new educational approach. This education must develop a universal sense of holistic perspective, must create an environmental ethic, emphasising the total community of life-in-nature and the oneness of the human race, must support a self-realisation process, must support self-sustainability, must be multi-level and integrative, accommodating cultural differences. By following this possibility, humanity may well come to a new image of mankind, a set of assumptions held about the human being's origin, nature, abilities, relationships with others, rights and responsibilities and place in the universe. Humanity will accept being a part of, instead of being separated from, nature. On the other hand, not changing will only aggravate the present crisis.

However painful, every crisis is beneficial in several ways. First, a crisis situation forces an awareness of a situation for which we are, by definition, ill-equipped. The responses we have developed to face situations tend to be inappropriate, so equilibrium is lost; this is the configuration of a crisis - be it personal, social, economic or cultural. Second, the lost equilibrium drives us to practise introspection, by examining what is going on, why, how and so on. And finally, to overcome a crisis situation, we are forced to look for new alternative patterns, hopefully more innovative. The final result is always a new piece of behaviour which adopts a new attitude and probably a new set of values. This means change. Therefore, change is the result, and the ultimate benefit, of a crisis.

The global crisis at the end of this century will force change. Under the present circumstances change is inevitable; it can be peaceful or disruptive, but it is going to happen in any case. Planned change is always desirable, more productive and helps us to shape a new reality in an ordered way. We are changing societies but we must learn how to change; we must promote the necessary changes. For all of these purposes, education is certainly the most powerful instrument. Bio-education is, therefore, a way of living, a human choice and a societal responsibility, for the preservation and sustainability of our common patrimony.

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