

Ibrahim Ozdemir,
Prof. Dr.
Uskudar University, Istanbul, Turkey

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

In September 2015, Governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centered set of universal and transformative goals and targets. Governments envisage a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. Doing so a new world is dreamed for all:

A world of over 9 billion people in which consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources — from air to land, from deserts to forests, from rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas and from frozen tundra to expanding towns and cities — is sustainable; democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at national and international levels, which are essential for sustainable development, includes sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; development and the application of technology is climate-sensitive, respects biodiversity and is resilient, and humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected (UNEP, 2016).

Therefore, it called all nations for critical action to address urgent and increasing environmental degradation, and related challenges of social and economic unsustainability.

Provided that it is not difficult to understand that every nation has to re-think her education system to prepare students to understand our major global problems such climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem loss, pollution, deforestation, desertification and unsustainable land and water use, and then come up with new solutions. In other words, without changing our education system and mind sets, we cannot expect from our students who will live in the future to reach these shared vision of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

When we integrate environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda in our education system, then our students can propose and promote strong, inclusive, green, sustainable and transformative economies, based on circularity, sharing and collaboration, and alternative measures of growth and wellbeing. Moreover, they can “significantly contribute to ending extreme poverty, leaving no one behind when addressing multi-dimensional poverty and related challenges such as the rights of women, youth and minorities, and access for all to basic services” (ibid). Therefore, it has become more urgent than ever to re-think about the role of education as a key to respond the challenges of global World.

However, despite the advances in technology and mass communication, mass travel, the intermingling of races, the ever-growing reduction of the mysteries of our world, a depressing fact of our time is that inequalities, misunderstandings, prejudices, and stereotypes among members of different faiths, religions, and cultures still endure. Moreover, these misunderstandings cause regional and globalized major problems and tensions, wars, and mass migrations. Eric Hobsbawm, when arguing our major problems and underlying mentality, makes following observations:

We live in a world captured, rooted and upturned by the titanic economic and techno-scientific process of the development of capitalism, which has dominated for the past two or three centuries. We know that it cannot go on ad *infinitum*. The future cannot be a continuation of the past, and there are signs that we have reached a point of historic crisis.

The forces generated by the techno-scientific economy are enough to destroy the environment, that is to say, the material foundations of human life... Our world risks both explosion and implosion. It must change... If humanity is to have a recognisable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or present... The price of failure, that the alternative to a changed society, is darkness (Hobsbawm, 1994).

If we want a better, bright and sustainable future for ourselves and our societies, we have to decide today as French futurist Jacques Attali warned us a few years ago that “what the world will be in 2050 and it’s today that we prepare what the world will be in 2100. Depending on how we behave, our children and our

grandchildren will live in a livable world or they will live hate us to death” (Attali, 2011). Although Hobsbawm and Attali offer no concrete proposals and solutions to respond these challenges, I think, it is a major responsibility of Higher Education institutions to find the cure. Neil Postman even argued that “universities have a sacred responsibility to define for their society what is worthwhile knowledge.” (Postman, 1988).

In fact, many thinkers, philosophers and prophets, including Confucius, Socrates, Prophet Muhammad, (pbuh) Rumi, J.J. Rousseau, Kant, Alfred North Whitehead, and Gandhi, stressed the importance of education for humanity. Humanization, civilization, and possession of a future are all made possible by the quality of education. Above all, education is a fundamental right to which all men and women are entitled. Moreover, social and economic sustainable development are ensured through high-quality education. Likewise, better health services, greater participation in social activities and enjoyment of fundamental rights are possible through education.

Therefore, at the outset, the beliefs, the assumptions, the myths, the truths, and stereotypes which shape our understanding of ourselves and others must be questioned and challenged. Here “others” means not only other humans, but also the whole environment. We have to look at the mirror and try to see our face, identity, and psyche. We have to reunderstand our perception and relationship not only with our human fellows of different cultures, religions, ethnicities, but also our relationship with nature and all creatures living in it. In other words, we have to understand and then criticize the present selfish, materialistic, and consumer-oriented understanding of modernity at the individual and multi-national corporation levels. In the words of Thomas Berry, what is needed is “a new story”.

Erich Fromm, the American psychologist, told us as early as the 1960s that “we are living in a period when the human race is threatened by physical destruction through nuclear war, and by spiritual decay through an ever-increasing alienation of man from himself, his fellow man, from nature and from the products of his own work”. (Fromm, Rumi, 1974: vii, italics added)

This paper, therefore, will argue that we cannot create a better, brighter, and sustainable future with traditional and out modeled education systems which was enough to master the “*reading, writing, and arithmetic*» skills. We may use critical and creative thinking as a tool and skill to unearth the potentialities of our children and youth and encourage them to be actors of change in a positive and creative way.

In fact, many educators and politicians have been aware of this phenomenon in recent decades and some developed countries took revolutionary steps while leaving behind the old paradigm and developing a new one, which is described as critical/creative education. Scholars and experts on the subject stated the task quite clearly: «[there is a need to produce] graduates who can live, work and contribute as productive citizens in an increasingly fluid and borderless global context». (Huitt, 2013). Thus, a new vision for educating children and youth, both formally and informally, is required if they are to become successful adults in the twenty-first century. Therefore, the youth of underdeveloped and developing countries and societies needs a new education paradigm to respond economic challenges and have descent work on the one hand, and to have *critical reflective minds* to overcome ideological, authoritarian, and marginal ideologies de-stabilizing the world on the other.

Today, indoctrinated and brainwashed by ruthless and marginalized ideologies, sometimes in the name of religion sometimes in the name of ethnic nationalism, young people easily used in terrorist acts over the globe. If our educational system does not provide a better future and employment as well as a critical mentality to understand the realities of modern World, unemployed, marginalized and uneducated youngster can easily be used by marginal groups for so-called self-claimed lofty causes by a seducing language and impact of social media. (Stern, 2003).

Therefore, it is time to think deeply on these issues and discover the root causes of the problems at hand. Moreover, different responds and alternative views of education should not be feared and seen as a threat to society and policy makers. As John Dewey recommends that “individuals” and communities can and should grow through seeking insight into and solution of problems. Problems, contrary to the wishes of many, should not be ignored or avoided in the interest of harmony (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 5).

In short, we should “dig deep” to understand the present situation of education in the developed and underdeveloped counties and the root causes of educational problems, then propose a new system based on

the spirit of critical thinking. Albert Einstein once observed that problems cannot be solved at the same level at which they are created. This insight seems profoundly relevant today as we need to step back and gain a whole-systems perspective if we are to respond effectively to major problems annoying our societies.

New Role of Universities in 21st Century

As the forces of globalization shake the world and especially their economies, it is an imperative for higher education institutions and governments to understand the realities of globalized world and the new dynamics of higher education in the 21st century. In fact, when EU leaders convened in Lisbon in 2000 to draft what we call today the Lisbon Strategy, their major aim was to make the EU *«the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion»* by 2010. (EU, 2000) (italics added). The document is updated as Lisbon 2020 recently. Interestingly, five headline targets the EU wants to achieve by the end of 2020 cover employment; research and development; climate/energy; education; social inclusion and poverty reduction.

The OECD's perspective on the new role of Higher Education, summarized by Angel Gurría, former OECD Secretary-General, is also instructive. Gurría argues that three simple tasks of Higher Education are *«ensuring access and equity, improving efficiency and effectiveness, and raising quality and relevance»*. Moreover, Gurría also underlined that *“globalization of higher education can foster an exchange of cultures and ideas, opening minds, creating mutual understanding”* (Gurría, 2009).

We should also remember the second part of the Lisbon Strategy's above-mentioned sentence is *“greater social cohesion” through peace education*. In the words of Lourdes R. Quisumbing, *“we must accept the reality of the dramatic changes that are affecting our lifestyles, our ways of thinking, feeling and acting. As educators, we must guide our students to discern between the potentials and prospects, the benefits and opportunities of Глобал ҳамкорлик - барҳарор ривожланиши шартӣ ва кафолати globalization and the new information technologies on one hand, and the dangers, threats, and pitfalls on the other. We must develop in them the sense of freedom and responsibility in making the right choices”* (Quisumbing, 2002). Here, I want to emphasize critical/ creative thinking and peace education as key concepts to respond challenges engulfing us and ache the MDGs goals with the spirit of sustainability.

Critical Thinking

The literature on critical thinking has roots in two primary academic disciplines: philosophy and psychology (Lewis & Smith, 1993). Sternberg has also noted a third critical thinking strand within the field of education. These separate academic strands have developed different approaches to defining critical thinking that reflect their respective concerns (Sternberg, 1986).

According to the philosophical approach the history of critical thinking can be traced back to Socrates famous motto *“unexamined [uncritical] life is not worth living”*. In other words, he tells us to examine our lives to the extent that it can challenge our lives. With his tragic death, Socrates stick to what he advises to coming generations. Moreover, critical thinking and examining life was an imperative of moral life, that is what is good and what is bad; what is just and what is unjust. Therefore, it differs little bit from the narrow meaning of learning critical and problem-solving skills just for a better job and career. It is not surprising to see the same spirit of critical and creative thinking in life and the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant in West; Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd in the Muslim world. How we can neglect the legacy of Ibn Sina, who was a philosopher, a physician, a scientist, a mathematician, a poet, and specialist in literature.

When we look at the history of philosophy, it is difficult to reach a consensus on a definition of what they understand by term *“critical”*. However, **the American Philosophical Association's** consensus portrait of the ideal critical thinker is very meaningful and important for our case here. According to this definition, a critical thinker is *“someone who is inquisitive in nature, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded, has a desire to be well-informed, understands diverse viewpoints, and is willing to both suspend judgment and to consider other perspectives”* (Facione, 1990, italics added).

Linda Elder, a guru on critical thinking, summarizes all these with a new emphasize on the role of critical think for education and society. According to her, *“critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way”*. Moreover, people who [learn how to] think critically *“consistently attempt to live rationally, reasonably, empathically”* (Paul-Elder, 2008).

Peace Education

Michael Wessells defines peace education as *“the cornerstone of a culture of peace”* (Wessells, 1994,

43). The creation of such culture of peace is a major responsibility of universities. As Homer said once, “*one generation grows, another dies away*”, ours is a new generation who has to discover the language of diversity, dialogue, and peace. What is more important is to make this new language a part of our national curricula through education. Then, we can expect from the next generation the construction of a new world and a better future. So, today's universities cannot confine themselves to educate young minds for the global markets and the demand of the economy alone. Mostly, universities must teach them the courage, ability, and skills to build a more peaceful world and future, where inequalities, environmental problems, violence, and conflicts minimized, if cannot be uprooted.

Reardon's concept of peace education can also help us to understand the role of universities in 21st century in peace education. According to Reardon peace education should be situated within “the broader issue of citizenship”. Then, she argues that “peace education should be fundamentally concerned with the development of the political efficacy of future citizens”. We should remember that “learning how to think *concerns conceptual clarity, thinking within conceptual frameworks, posing questions, rationality, and most importantly reflective inquiry*” (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2011, italics added).

So, one of the major features of a Higher Education institutions of our time is the content and method of teaching system. It must provide instruction, to students as well as to the public, in the spirit of life-long learning, on how to reach “*conceptual clarity, thinking within conceptual frameworks, posing questions, rationality, and most importantly reflective inquiry*”.

Moreover, it also should teach a habit of creative and critical thinking in the spirit of great masters of philosophy, from Socrates to Kant and all other major critical thinkers. Kant argues forcefully that philosophy values the thing that makes the university modern and gives the university its critical function: reason, and the capacity to reason freely (Kant, 1979). So, today's universities must provide a new mindset and a critical outlook to students to solve complex problems challenging us. This may include a new vision to teach not only bio-diversity but also cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity as assets for humanity.

It seems that education is a matter of survival for any nation in the 21st century. In a world of interconnectedness and interdependence characterized by high technology and enhanced means of communication, education appears to be the most important issue. It is not possible for countries ignoring the importance of education to gain full economic and political independence. In addition, high-quality education and investment in human capital is necessary to enjoy the benefits of the globalization process.

To conclude, “the need to develop an approach to schooling and education that both prepares individuals to live successfully in the current context as well as prepare for flourishing in a more sustainable future is just one of the challenges facing educators and societies” (Huitt, 2012).

It will be very meaningful to remember Margaret Mead's (1901-1978), a notable for her studies of both primitive peoples and complex contemporary cultures, powerful argument that “war is an invention”. Explaining her argument with historical data and in convincing way, she underlies that “the people must recognize the defects of the old invention, and someone must make a new one”. To do this “propaganda against warfare, documentation of its terrible cost in human suffering and social waste, these prepare the ground by teaching people to feel that warfare is a defective social institution”. Then, we have to take a second courageous step forward that is “a belief that social invention is possible and the invention of new methods which will render warfare as outdated as the tractor is making the plow, or the motor car the horse and buggy”. She concludes that “a form of behavior becomes outdated only when something else takes its place, and in order to invent forms of behavior which will make war obsolete, it is a first requirement to believe that an invention is possible” (Mead, 1990).

Today, the very idea and concept of sustainability is a strong indication that many ideas shaping modern world since the dawn of enlightenment are obsolete and we have to invent new one, in the spirit of sustainability of the whole system, not only humanity. Now, we had learnt at a high price that we could not solve “new problems with old concepts”. Even we try once effective concepts and tools “they do not respond” (Laszlo, 2005, 2). In other words, “ideas and beliefs that were reasonable and productive at one time become irrational and nonproductive at another time” (ibid). Therefore, it is time to ponder over what the Sufi master and philosopher Rumi advised us in 13th century that “*Make peace with the universe. Take joy in it. It will turn to gold. Resurrection will be now. Every moment, anew beauty*” (Rumi, 2005, 110).

Rumi, as we know, was born in Balkh, Persia, passed away in Konya, Turkey. Today, he lives in the hearts of humanity as a master and symbol of love, wisdom, peace, and brotherhood. I understand his message, as Mead recommends us earlier, is to invent a new culture of peace, prosperity, and sustainability. When it is an imperative to teach a culture of peace and co-existence, our major tools will be critical and creative education.

REFERENCES:

1. Attali, Jacques (2011). *A Brief History of the Future: A Brave and Controversial Look at the Twenty-First Century*, NY: Arcade Publishing.
2. Dewey, John. (1938/1963). *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books.
3. Elder, Linda-Paul, Richard Paul (2008), *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*, Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.
4. EU, (2000) European Union Parliament Website Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000, Presidency Conclusion: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lisl_en.htm>
5. Facione, Dr. Peter A. (1990) "The Delphi Report", The California Academic Press, <https://assessment.trinity.duke.edu/documents/Delphi_Report.pdf>
6. Glaser, Edward. (1941), *An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking*, New York: Columbia University.
7. Gurria, A. (2009) Introductory Remarks by Angel Gurria, Secretary-General OECD 5 July 2009 UNESCO, Paris. <<http://www.unesco.org/education/wche/speeches/Angel-Gurria-OECD-20Q9WCHE.pdf>>
8. Huitt, W. (2013). *Developing curriculum for global citizenship: What should be learned and why?* Revision of paper presented at the Alliance for International Education World Conference, Doha, Qatar, October 22. <http://www.cosmic-citizenship.org/dev-curr-global-citizen.html>.
9. Huitt, W. (2012). "What is a human being and why is education necessary". *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. <<http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/intro/human.html>>
10. Laszlo, Ervin. (2005) *Vision 2020: Reordering Chaos for Global Survival*, New York: Gordon and Breach, 2005.
11. Mead, Margaret. (1990) "Warfare is Only an Invention-Not a Biological Necessity." In *The Dolphin Reader*. 2nd edition. Ed. Douglas Hunt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990. 415-421..
12. Quisumbing, Lourdes R. (2002) "Citizenship Education for Better World Societies: A Holistic Approach". Paper read at the 8th UNESCO APEIII International Conference on Education 29 November 2002, Bangkok. <<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/QuisumbingCitizenship.pdf>>
13. Rumi, Jalaluddin (2005). *The Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy and Longing*, trnas. Coleman Barks (New York: Harper Collins).
14. Simpson, Douglas, J., (Fall 1998). Thinking about Educator Preparation in the Twenty- First Century: A Deweyan Perspective, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, <http://www.teqjournal.org/backvols/1998/25_4/1998v25n418.PDF>, 24.12.2015.
15. UNEP (2016). *Environment, Religion and Culture in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi.
16. UNESCO. (1974). "Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms". Paris, France: UNESCO. Recommendation adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at the 18th Session, on 19 November 1974.
17. Shermuxamedova, N. "Philosophy and methodology of science." Tashkent: Publishing House of the National University of Uzbekistan (2005): 21-27.
18. Namazova, Yulduz Muzapparovna. "MINISTRY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION AND CONFESSIOAL (RELIGIOUS) SCHOOLS IN TURKESTAN." *Scientific and Technical Journal of Namangan Institute of Engineering and Technology* 1.7 (2019): 135-139.

19. Абдуллаева, Н. (2023). Вопросы языкового и речевого этикета в произведении «Кутадгу билиг», in *Library*, 22(4), 171-180. извлечено от <https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/archive/article/view/21752>
20. Нишанова, Озода Джалолитдиновна. "O 'ZBEK ETNOMADANIYATI GENEZISINING ILMIY TANLILI." ФИЛОСОФИЯ И ЖИЗНЬ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ 3 (14) (2021).