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Contextual, Relational, Human-Centered Knowledge

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Our education gives us knowledge, mostly scientific knowledge, but it does not supplement it with a context or perception. This system prevents us from seeing the complete picture due to its emphasis on compartmentalization and objective facts. In such a system, our emotions, feelings, ideology, beliefs, and our organization of reality do not find a place. In reality, no issue can be understood in isolation. All issues are interdisciplinary, and can be understood only within a context and when linked to everything else. Specialization has its place, but so does inter-disciplinarity.

Sometimes the study of history reduces the individual human being to an automaton of society. Psychology may ignore society focusing exclusively on the individual. Science becomes a subject of study without reference to anything else. We need to add to all these studies the link to the human being. The human trinity includes the species, the individual, and the society, the three inseparable realities. Any of the three can be understood only in relation to the other two. This relationship must be embedded in our education.

Similarly, it has to recognize that pure reason does not exist. All humans are a mix of reason and passion. Passion without reason slips into delirium; a reason without passion tends towards rigidity. It is not possible to separate the human being from his or her beliefs—be they ethical, moral or religious. We may often seem to be solely interested in our own well-being, but we are also capable of selfless generosity. We are neither entirely rational nor entirely irrational. But some of the subjects we teach, such as Economics, ignore this truth. Education must make this aspect of our conceptual framework explicit.

Our education also witnesses a widening gap between science and the humanities. We cannot effectively address the complex problems humanity faces if we disconnect the two streams. We need to reconnect the physical and metaphysical. The contribution of literature and poetry to the formation of human consciousness is significant. Piecemeal attempts at solving problems that ignore the human context and interrelationships between issues are of no avail. Real education must equip the mind to synthesize information from many sources, understand relationships, and see the whole.

Errors and mistakes in taking decisions, managing relationships, career or politics can have great negative consequences. It may not be possible to teach an infallible method for avoiding mistakes. But it is possible to teach about the ways of thinking and ways of knowing that commonly lead to errors and illusions. To bring about these changes, a government decree is not enough. We need to implement these reforms, beginning with pilot projects. We need to supply real life experiences to students, not just information in textbooks. Correspondingly, teachers need enriching training. The role of teachers will continue to be valuable. Computers, internet, Wikipedia and Google search can supply students with information, but humans will always need human contact. Students will always benefit from the presence, the contact of the teacher. Many a student has been inspired and transformed by the teacher.

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