

COMMENT

Finding spirit, soul of education

CHALLENGING TIMES:

Scholars need to nurture research, teach and learn for wisdom



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THESE are exciting and stressful times for scholars. It is an era of changes, innovations and confusion. It is also an era of demanding managerialism, global competition, and great challenges for those in the teaching profession, at all levels. Schools and universities are driven to review and re-examine all aspects of their policies and practices.

In instructional leadership or leadership for learning, the following are some of the changes educators and education systems must make:

FROM learning objectives to learning outcomes;

TEACHER centred to student centred;

CONTENT centred to process centred;

SINGLE discipline to multi-discipline;

ROTE learning to inquiry, discovery, problem solving based learning;

TEACHER as sage on stage to teacher as guide by the side;

THEORY to practical experience;

LOW-TECH learning contact to high tech learning context;

INSTITUTION based to evidence-based learning;

OBJECTIVE tests to subject tests;

TEACHER teaching to peer learning;

DEPENDENCY to co-creations of knowledge and learning;

TEXTBOOK-BASED teaching to research based teaching; and,

EXAMINATION-BASED to project and portfolio-based learning.

These changes sometimes move back and forth as in the case of essay-type questions and answers, to objective multiple-choice kind of questions and answers.

The educational pendulums also swing between independent and dependent learning, from self-learning to peer learning, from textbook learning to computer assisted learning.

Experts cynically say that there is so much data available on education, but poor interpretations,

and therefore, little information gained. From all the above initiatives there are some missing elements.

Educators say the missing elements are the soul and spirit of human conscience. Educators also say, with all these efforts on measurement and teacher-proof teaching, professionalism is missing.

Professionalism is about trusting the professional, intellectually, attitudinally and functionally. Accountability is about distrust. Accountability is about putting in control mechanisms in order to assure accountability.

Professionalism is about the individual professional upholding professional codes of ethics and oaths, guided by the mature knowledge of the profession.

Professionals consider themselves as having moved from the beginner and amateur, to professional stages, presumably having mastered over 10,000 hours of knowledge-based competencies in their areas of specialisation.

Within the knowledge base, scholars distinguish the context, culture, and cognition of realities. In contemporary knowledge domains, the dominant knowledge base is from the West. The definitions of realities are also dominantly from the West.

The transfer and flow of knowledge seems to be one way. Also, it seems that large education reform initiatives are being driven not by

educators but by such international consultancy groups as KPMG, Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey, Price Waterhouse, Parthenon Group and others from management, accountancy and engineering fields.

A growing group of scholars in the education field is testing these assumptions. For the last six years, education researchers and professors meet at the Asian Leadership Roundtable (ALR), to understand the phenomena of the knowledge bases in education and educational leadership in Asian and western countries.

Painstaking identification, analyses of research papers and articles in the English language in international, or university journals, and theses, note that instruments and theories-in use are mainly generated from the English research-writing traditions.

Materials in Asian languages are limited. Where they exist they have not been translated and not shared with the outside world. If this situation persists, the flow, transfer and influence of knowledge will continue to be from the West. The world will not reap the advantage of the knowledge and wisdom of the East.

There is, therefore, now even more reason to translate the works of the great thinkers of the past, and, the present scholars and researchers from the East, to benefit humankind.

Institutions like the National Institute of Translation, universities and professional organisations have the challenge to translate seminal works from national languages to world languages.

Researchers who are monolinguals will need to develop international language competencies in order to share their research works with the international community of scholars.

As a group the ALR concludes that education must move from mechanistic procedures and protocols, and find the spirit and soul of education East and West. Anthropologists, ethnographers, philosophers are significant research contributors who should be invited again to the education fields, besides the economists and sociologists.

The quantitative research traditions must be enhanced by the qualitative, ethnographic traditions of understanding culture and human behaviour inside out, as evolving, holistic, dynamic and incomplete.

Failure to do so would be to guarantee the failure of the societal and educational reforms and transformation desired. The way forward is to nurture research for wisdom, teaching for wisdom and learning for wisdom.

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