Education, the Educator and the Educatee (the child/student)

Education may mean scores, grades, civic consciousness, ethics and more to different people. Personally, it goes way beyond academic bliss, if ethics and humanness aren’t present. The preoccupation with academic performance as indicators of success, educational potential and achievement has over the years thrown a “wet blanket” over the idea of being human. This preoccupation has seen the mushrooming of schools and educational centres, institutions and learning programs for fast-paced rote learning. We even have programs geared to prepare students for IQ tests.

Learning for understanding, inquiry and ethics seem to be on the back burner as being “educated” today seems to mean being literate more than anything else. Education has to a great extent become more of a commercial venture, rather than teaching and learning to know and apply for a better world. We seem to value literacy, knowledge/information and grades for themselves, rather than for their applicability, relevance and function in society or for humanity.

Education over the years, more so recently, has produced many, many clever, tech-savvy people who are able to enhance their abilities and personal development in unimaginable ways. The downside, however, is that it is unclear how they affect humanity as a whole, positively. The age of automation and technology has inadvertently “robotized” us. We seem to have lost the ability to observe, think, and synthesize information - to apply for specific purposes other than self-improvement only. We seem to lack empathy, sympathy, reliability. We condone success or achievement by any means – ethical or not. Respect for diversity, be it religion, race, gender and other issues needs to be addressed. What we are living and seeing everyday on the global arena in politics, economics and even health services is worrisome. So what is the role of education?
Is this the world we wish for the next generations? It does look bleak but there is hope that, “education” through educators can address this. I can’t even begin to address how important an educator is. Who is an educator? One who knows it all? Is there someone like that? One with academic qualifications? In an informal environment, parents, grandparents, other family members and child minders can be awesome educators as they are the first ones to facilitate any learning. Role modeling is a tough act to carry through.

Those of us who can “learn, unlearn, relearn” (Alvin Toffler) are the true educators as we have a passion. Those of us who can admit to not knowing but strive to improve for the children as well as ourselves are great examples of educators. Those of us who are willing to listen and adapt for the child or educatee can be educators. Those of us who are able to give children the benefit of being different and still have ability to facilitate and guide learning are great educators. Those of us who recognize, respect and accept diversity are educators.

The educatee is the most important factor in this whole equation yet they seem to be forgotten. The educatee is actually in a very challenging position. Their world seems so exciting, being inundated with technology, with access to information at their fingertips, endless opportunities and a borderless world. Yet they are at crossroads as their future appears more uncertain and maybe even chaotic and volatile. Many of them are caught up in this race to keep up the fast pace at which technology makes information seem redundant, irrelevant or even obsolete so quickly. Many are torn by the traditional, perhaps archaic (in some people’s views) value systems of the past and the present trends. How do they transition successfully to be relevant in the present and future global context? They are also caught up in the quagmire of policy makers, often not “educators” or visionaries, significant others and educators, who are still in a time warp.

Schools appear to be conduits for commercialism, politics or as preparatory centres for jobs, careers or employment. They need to become places to nurture, develop human potential with loads and loads of stimulation, facilitation and guidance. Authorities need to recognize that learning has to be integrated, multi-disciplinary to engage more interests and talents. Inquiry-based learning such as Future Problem Solving Program (FPSP) would definitely be a path to pursue. Having said that educators, coaches and facilitators need to be proactive, and be challenged along with the educatee.

Educators need to keep up and be informed of global perspectives to encourage inclusion, and better understanding rather than instill bigotry and prejudices due to ignorance. Educators need to move the student “beyond memorization” and facilitate the “application of information learned to complex issues.” They need to emphasize “foresight and the implications of ethical problem solving and decision making brought to bear on relevant, real-life, topical issues” and be able to do something productive with that information.” Students need to understand “the importance of systems -- simple to complex and adapt to effective use in diverse settings”. (Futures Education: The significance of future-oriented learning, adapted from AU FPSP Materials 2013)

The tools are ever so present yet the will to make changes in education does not seem to be on the same page. We need to equip the educator and educatee with the skills of flexibility, self-learning, creative and critical futuristic thinking, research, teamwork, oral and written communication, and coping with ambiguity (based on FPSPI goals, www.fpspi.org).
Introduction of programs like the International Baccalaureate and Future Problem Solving into the school/education system would be an encouraging start. We also need to instill that education, be it formal or informal, is meant to develop the child’s fullest potential, not grades or scores or fulfill parents’ aspirations or schools’ reputations. There is no ideal way but adaptability and sensitivity to cultural, political, socio-economic-status (SES) and ethnic diversity would be a great start in the journey for change.

The genius of the future will be the creative mind adapting itself to the shape of things to come.” E. Paul Torrance, Creativity, (1991)

The documentary “Where to invade next?” by Michael Moore provoked me to write this. My views on education over the years have been shaped by ideas of E. Paul Torrance, Sir Ken Robinson, Joseph Renzulli and Don Treffinger to name a few. The strong, diverse cultural and social influences of my educational background and environment have allowed for my cross-cultural and interdisciplinary views on the present and future state of education. These are my views after more than 40 years in education and as a coach, evaluator with Future Problem Solving Program for about 19 years.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
~ Nelson Mandela~

We’re back! After taking a brief break, the Parent Outreach committee is reforming, and we welcome your input, suggestions, and submissions to our newsletter. Please feel free to join us or reach out to us via:
Deb: dwoythal@gmail.com
Cyd: cyd.rogers@austinisd.org

We are seeking testimonials and tips for a successful IC for our next issue. Please submit your testimonials, ideas, and tips by April 18, 2018 to Deb or Cyd!