This issue of Parent Perspectives contains a thought provoking look at Diversity in Education by Malaysian Affiliate Director, Lalitha Nair. Lalitha discusses some very relevant points and gives us all much to think about in this article. Thank you Lalitha for this in-depth look at a very important subject that affects us all!

Diversity in Education: An Opportunity for Change

To begin at the beginning would be to admit we all have personal, unique views on education. Mine, like many others, is the belief that it is a collection of learning which moulds us and guides us in our actions within society and humanity as a whole. Schooling is a subset of this which provides a formal process of knowledge acquisition, emphasizing abilities for employability and basic societal skills.

The concept of diversity also means a variety of things to each individual. At its core, it means to be heterogeneous in nature, and as such, could be applied to cultures and backgrounds and the resulting mindsets, ideas, and perspectives. From my perspective, my upbringing in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic/racial environment, diversity was and is our way of life. There was no need for terminology and labels. Diversity was omnipresent and embraced by all, but not without subtle nuances and undercurrents of bias. To me, the term diversity extends far beyond differences in practices, food, mindsets, moral values, or ethics. In recognizing, respecting, and accepting these differences, we learn to understand and apply these in our lives. Diversity, therefore, creates space for exploring the manifoldness of abilities, limitations, and ideas from all perspectives.

Applying the concepts of diversity to education and vice-versa begs the question of how they are interlinked: Can one help understand the other? Are they mutually exclusive or interdependent?

I believe that education, in all its forms, equips individuals to integrate into society, by teaching and guiding them with values of society and humanity. It helps us understand our social responsibilities in that society. It provides us with the knowledge to analyze our social structure and adopt appropriate and adequate social reforms. Education then further nurtures individuals for work in the economy as well as facilitates communication and collaboration, therefore keeping society at a smooth functional pace.

Intrinsically, education should diminish ignorance and enhance the human experience by absorbing new ideas and directions for development. Sociologically, education may function to "preserve work with knowledge, culture, and heritage of the past," transmit "desirable cultural elements into new generations," and disseminate new knowledge and experience for new invention and creation of society.” It truly is a powerful tool for humanity.

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“Education for all, at all levels, and for all ages of children” is a very common and earnest call, yet is far from being in place in almost every part of the globe, irrespective of economic standing.

Why? Is it the lack of will? Or is it because there is a lack of understanding of education? Is it because of rigid views and a lack of diversity of thoughts and mindsets?

Education has to motivate youth in different ways to remain dynamic, relevant, and forward-looking. Education differs according to the needs of the individual and society to promote ideas for changes in all fields of life. Formal educational institutions sometimes do not allow for these differences, as many support and control education in very set and theoretical ways. This situation leads to further alienation and marginalisation of many across our diverse societies. These also infamously lead to social issues of radicalisation and more social and economic challenges due to lack of flexibility or understanding to embrace differences or be inclusive.

Curiosity and enquiry are integral parts of learning and belong to all, recognizing these diversities will help kindle interest on more levels. As an example, the illiterate among us may crave literacy to acquire knowledge in that way, where conversely, the literate may be more motivated to learn through real experience. That would be an exciting way to experiment with education: idealistic but not impossible.

By reaching out to the diverse groups in society, rural, suburban, urban, education trends can be better understood. If we only gleaned insight from academic research papers and educated assumptions based on selected populations (understanding that these are the limitations to academic research), we would miss the learning from immersion into these other communities. Many traditional educational practices and theories are out there to be tapped, adapted (with permission from these communities), and mobilized to fit into our society at large.

Let this be a call to action: to go beyond literacy, scores, exams as the cursors of education.

The advent of learning technologies in the late 20th century has changed education systems globally and played its role to help education forge forward. It has enabled learning during these exhausting pandemic times. It has moved at a greater pace than I could ever have imagined as a student, educator, and parent. I am still grappling with my tech skill set to catch up. Technology has provided a “proactive, easy access and comprehensive teaching and learning environment.”

But who does it really enable and provide for?

The pandemic has highlighted the challenges of provision for all. The other very pertinent challenge of technology is that of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news.

Left: From Malaysia to the FPS Stage!
How will technology affect education in the long run?

Education is more than academic qualifications and success. It involves greater commitment and pragmatic decision-making to handle real social issues of inclusion, inequalities, and related opportunities. It has to go beyond lip service and disclaimers on paper. FPSP, like similar programs, is used as a teaching/learning tool for the development of skills sets, mostly for academic advancements and development.

Does it need to go beyond? Who, how, and what needs to be addressed to start this journey?

I, for one, am excited about the opportunity for some diverse, educated outcomes!

~Lalitha Nair, Affiliate Director FPSP Malaysia~

Sources utilized:
https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-bd&q=role+of+education+in+social+change
http://www.adpcollege.ac.in/online/attendance/classnotes/files/1588613166.pdf

Above: Reaching out to populations outside of the capital city of Kuala Lumpur.

As your students prepare for the 2021 Virtual International Conference, consider purchasing the FPSPI research packet on the topic of Neurotechnology! Cost is $25

“Strength lies in differences, not similarities.”

~Stephen R. Covey~