

# Education and the knowledge society at odds with the draconian mindset

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## Education and the Knowledge Society At Odds With The Draconian Mindset

Education is the backbone of any country, person, and society. It is very vital as it frames the life of an individual and also the world around them.

Education is to receive knowledge. Knowledge is to know things around us; this helps us understand things better. Knowledge or education has no limit and no end. Education has been quoted in different ways by different people — but the one thread they have in common is that it encompasses knowledge — rather than just the storage of information. Quotes by the following people indicate the diversity of thinking that relates to Knowledge:

“ The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think - rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with thoughts of other men. ~Bill Beattie

The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows. ~Sydney J.

Harris Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has

learned in school. ~Albert Einstein The school is the last expenditure upon

which America should be willing to economize. ~Franklin D. Roosevelt An

educational system isn't worth a great deal if it teaches young people how to

make a living but doesn't teach them how to make a life. Habib: " Facebook

It can be defined as: 1. The act or state of knowing; clear perception of fact, truth, or duty; certain apprehension; familiar cognizance; cognition. "

Knowledge, which is the highest degree of the speculative faculties, consists in the perception of the truth of affirmative or negative propositions." Locke.

2. That which is or may be known; the object of an act of knowing; a

cognition; 3. That which is gained and preserved by knowing; instruction;

acquaintance; enlightenment; learning; scholarship; erudition. 4. That

familiarity which is gained by actual experience; practical skill; as, a knowledge of life. 5. Scope of information; cognizance; notice; as, it has not come to my knowledge. Synonyms -- See Wisdom. (Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913) Page 17) Francis Bacon said " Knowledge is power" and therefore very important. Some of the things that come to mind immediately are that initially knowledge gives the holder an edge over others who lack it. Another importance of knowledge is in the area of scientific and technological advancement, which has made today's life much easier than it was in the past. Nowadays, movement from one place to another can be facilitated easily and quickly through aviation, cars, etc; inter-connectivity has been simplified globally via the internet, telephones, etc; agriculture and manufacturing mechanization has assisted in the increase of production thereby increasing economic stability. Furthermore, knowledge earns respect. We remember people like Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, and Ibn Battuta because of their knowledge and their achievements. It can actually make you look younger because knowledgeable people are problem-solvers. Consequently they have little or nothing to worry about so don't age as quickly, since it is a well known fact that too much stress is known to increase the aging factor. In addition, the knowledge they have acquired helps them enjoy a healthier lifestyle. The importance of knowledge cannot be over-emphasized because it is part-and-parcel of life. In my opinion I would say that 'Knowledge is life' because both are inseparable. Education is one of the acts through which a person is imparted with knowledge or skill through oral, written, or practical instructive programs. Classroom teaching, usually conducted in schools, higher

educational facilities or private institutes is a prime example of where this process takes place. In these facilities society tries to transmit all its accumulated knowledge, skills, and values, on to their next generation. It is the teachers who play a vital role in the process of transmitting the knowledge to students. Education is a very vast field which covers the entire globe, with topics like science, math's, history, economics, religion, and language. However, knowledge is not just this — it encompasses the culture and customs of our own society and what we see in the world around us. The UAE government, since the inception of the federation in 1971 has recognized that illiteracy for their citizens is unacceptable and has formulated long ranging plans to improve the education sector to embrace a knowledge society. To this end the government allocates a sizeable budget to support teachers, counselors, and other service providers. The general public are also involved in choosing the “ right” education that caters to their need. This is essential as it will decide the future of the child and in turn the society and the community where they reside. Schools have been built, and the population has a wide range of government and private educational facilities to choose from. Education role models have been instigated through “ Model and Future Schools” and other initiatives such as the E-Learning University to allow the citizens to experience cutting edge technologies in their learning facilities. Students can compete in today’s technological world and fulfill their needs and requirements by applying the knowledge they gained through their education. There is a famous proverb that really suits education which the late Sheikh Zayed often quoted: “ The future of the nation is in the hands of youth” Education is one area that has undergone

tremendous changes. The field of education is one area where the changes are revolutionary and effective in bringing about marked changes in the acquiring and delivering of subject matter so it is vital public policy-makers focus on education as a key factor in strengthening competitiveness, employment and social cohesion. The pace of technological change worldwide is now so fast that policy-makers must plan for the unknown. The only certainty is that education is needed to drive these changes. If it does not, then the government will fail its citizens. For education policy-makers, the challenge is to fully recognize the connections that bind together the various public policies which have an impact on learners of all ages. For policy-makers outside the education sector, who see education in purely economic terms, the challenge is to recognize that the primary purpose of education is to provide everyone with the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential, both as individuals and as a member of society. We may be living in the knowledge society but, of course, it is not only knowledge workers who contribute to society. In addition to technological skills, competencies in creativity, tolerance, appreciation of diversity and social skills form an important part of any high quality education system. Getting the balance right between the needs of the economy and the wider social aims of education systems is one of the most significant challenges facing education policy-makers. This is taking place against the background of education becoming a tradable commodity. Every day individual learners are making choices about education programs delivered across national boundaries and from a variety of education providers, often through technological media. This has huge implications for mutual recognition of qualifications, quality

assurance and accreditation. The world will not stand still while those in the education sector decide the best way to go. As the knowledge society is still in its infancy, the focus on education by all parties is set to increase even further over the coming years. The challenge for education policymakers will be to develop education systems that support sustainable economic well-being without losing sight of the wider social consequences. Discussing the issues with each other, strengthening the links between the OECD and other organizations, and maintaining a strong bias towards research-based action represents the best approach to achieving this balance. The technology, knowledge and society community is guided by the ideals of an open society, where technology is used to address human needs and serve community interests. Educators need to examine the nature of the new technologies, their connection with community, their use as tools for learning, and their place in a 'knowledge society'. as well as the impact of the new media, intelligent systems or human-machine interfaces. There is little doubt that 'e-learning' is destined to become a larger part of the experience of learning at school, in universities, on the job, at home – indeed, lifelong and life wide learning. Technology is now a central concern of education, not only from the point of view of preparing students for a world of work where networked computers are pervasive, but also from the point of view of community participation and citizenship. Learners who are excluded from the new information spaces, will clearly be economically, socially and culturally disadvantaged. At its best, e-learning is a refreshingly new medium with a pedagogically new message. However, much of what passes for e-learning is lock step, mechanical and individualized (one user/one screen), reflecting

and reproducing pedagogies that are best dubious and at worst regressive. On the other hand, a more optimistic view notes the capacity of the new information and communication technologies to transform learning relationships. Instead of being the recipients of transmitted knowledge through syllabuses, textbooks, 'information' resources, institutions of learning might become places where teachers and learners develop knowledge banks, and where traditional classrooms, dominated by teacher talk, are replaced by open learning in which groups of students work autonomously and collaboratively on knowledge projects within a structured 'content management' environment. In a "knowledge society" information and communications technologies, and their human effects, play a central part in this development. These digital technologies allow new, bottom-up structures of knowledge to emerge, building from the collaborative endeavors of knowledge creating communities – in, for instance, workplaces, schools and associations of common interest. In each case, they provide the means by which personal knowledge may be shared and transformed into common knowledge. From being receptors of knowledge, persons, organizations and communities become makers and publishers of knowledge, reversing at least in part the fundamental epistemic flows of modernity and replacing this with a new 'dialogic' of knowledge. Given all the changes and challenges mentioned above, the teachers of today and tomorrow need to embrace the changes and adapt their teaching methodologies to ensure tomorrow's leaders are equipped to face the challenges of the future — to serve society in the best way and ensure progressive development of their countries. Unfortunately, although the

government has the interests of the country at heart, and has put the legislation, budgets and programs in place to ensure the education sector embraces the changes, the truth is those who are responsible for the delivery of education at times have a draconian mindset. That is to say — their minds are locked into teaching methodologies which reflect the past era of education — rote teaching, static lessons, all of which do nothing to encourage the students of today to be prepared for the requirements of society. Curricula which fail to address the requirements of society cannot possibly inspire students to have enquiring minds or to be ready for the workplace. Teachers are not inspired or trained to deliver lessons using the new technology. Although there are some schools which are equipped to teach in this way such as the Model and Future schools, for the most part private schools are still using methods which reflect a classroom of the early 20th century. The use of chalk blackboards, no smart-boards, restricted access to limited resources are the norm rather than the exception. Administrators look at budgets rather than educational outcomes, and curricula is chosen for the same reason, rather than the suitability for today's world. Teachers themselves are reluctant to embrace new technology — most of them being unable to use this. Their students are more technologically adept than the teacher. Personal career development is the exception rather than the norm, despite the fact that there are series such as the “ Open Lectures” conducted to try and open the minds of teachers to the options available for modern teaching. Those who are not resistant to change and have introduced these new technologies into the classroom have shown success through their student's abilities and the marks they have



gained, but not only that, they have also gained the respect of their students because they have challenged their minds to explore and be creative. The Ministry Of Education does not help matters when it demeans the teaching profession by stating that the minimum wage for a teacher is 2500 Dhs per month. When a secretary or driver can earn more than this, what message are we sending to the educators of this country? Although universities pay their professors colossal salaries and benefits, the majority of teachers are paid according to the MOE guidelines. There needs to be a realistic salary base to ensure that good quality teachers are hired, not just what schools want to pay to ensure maximum profits for their coffers. When the instructors for the future leaders of tomorrow are worth less than a secretary what message are we sending to teachers? That they are worthless. And their response to this demeaning tag is that they do the minimum amount they have to, to justify their pittance salary. Another challenge is the draconian mindset of the private education facilities which input the minimum effort to maximize profit margins. Education today has become a business and this is dangerous — education should be something that is for knowledge, for society and for the future. When we compromise on the principles of education and focus on profit it augers ill for the future generations. Throughout the history of formal schooling questions have been raised and debates held arguing the issue that schools kill creativity. There are those who maintain that school is actually a place that promotes creativity through arts, music, play and problem solving in various parts of curriculum and thus advances it rather than extinguishes it. However, many children would never engage in these creative activities unless they were

given opportunities to do so in school. Elementary schools have traditionally been places where more creative action and thinking have occurred than in further stages of education. But then there are those, like Sir Ken Robinson, Seymour Sarason, Shlomo Sharan and Robert Sternberg, who argue that as young people progress through their school education, their genuine interest and innate curiosity in exploring the world around them gradually decline and they seem to be educated out of creativity (Robinson, 2009; Sarason, 1990; Sharan & Chin Tan, 2008; Sternberg, 2006). This happens, they say, because much of what young people do in school is driven by an idea of 'the right answer' and one standard way to get it. The older young people get, the less they have courage to try other ways of thinking and the more they try to avoid being wrong. How much of this is directly due to school and how much it is just a normal course of development remains a disputable issue. Rather interestingly, within arts in schools drawing and music are higher in the hierarchy than drama and dance. Therefore it is common in many countries that as the call for more creativity in school education is responded to, it means more lesson time for drawing and music. The notion that many more education policymakers and practitioners need to accept is that there are many of us who need to move to be able to think and to create new ideas. Too much deskwork and listening to a teacher is not good for nurturing creativity. A vast majority of students' time in school is spent sitting quietly and receiving information from teachers (Sahlberg & Boce, in print). Field research has indicated that in a typical first year upper secondary school lesson there is less than 30 seconds time in total for student-initiated talk. This makes any creative thinking or behavior in such

classrooms practically impossible. Thinking that developing creative thinking and skills is a business of drawing and music in school is, however, a rather narrow view of creativity. If creativity means having original ideas that are useful, it can relate to any activity in school and any subject in curriculum. And it certainly should. Students can engage in creative learning in sciences, foreign languages and mathematics, among many others. All teachers can teach almost anything in a creative way so that students need to do things in new ways and come up with novel ideas. But many teachers find this a real challenge for two main reasons. First, many of them think that they are not themselves creative and cannot therefore teach creatively; second, even more teachers think that their own teaching in school should be more creative but they are forced to follow standardized procedures to guarantee that students learn what is included in curricula and textbooks. In the UAE teachers have autonomy in their own classrooms to decide how teaching and learning is arranged. Curricula, textbooks and educational guidelines normally stipulate the content and schedule for teaching but methodology is, in most cases, up to a teacher to decide. The emergence of the global educational reform movement has brought to many education systems new elements that seem also to regulate how teachers design teaching and learning in their classrooms (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Sahlberg, 2010). Some of these global trends are particularly interesting and important when creativity and innovation in schools are concerned. However, along with these demands comes the necessity for the way we train new teachers themselves to change and for existing teachers to have access to training in the new methodologies. More importantly, the teachers themselves must be

motivated to embrace the necessary changes if this is to be successful on a national level in the UAE. Appeal for more creativity and innovation in education comes, not from the education community but from a global economical emergency, technological advancement and the urgent need for change. The main reason is that all national education systems are based on two underlying models: an economic model and an intellectual model. These two systems models are operationally linked to each other. The economic model of education is industrialism that views education as the production of knowledge and skills for predetermined purposes and markets (Robinson, 2009). Teaching and learning are steered by the principles of efficiency and rationalism and are therefore sequenced into manageable units and programmed by a predetermined schedule. The logic of the economic model of education is based on a belief in competition and information as the key drivers of educational improvement – just like they drive efficiency and productivity in market economies. The intellectual model, in turn, views intelligence primarily as an academic ability that is dominated by memory and rote academic skills rather than by broader intellectual, interpersonal or creative processes. This model assumes that intelligence can and should be measured to determine individuals' educational progress (Sahlberg, 2010). The problem today is that the economic model is outdated and the intellectual model is inadequate for the needs of the unpredictably changing innovation-driven society. Education reforms rarely attempt to challenge seriously these two underlying assumptions of school organisation. Instead, education policies today aim at raising standards, extending time for learning or having more computers in schools. These particular efforts will

remain an insufficient means of improving the quality of education unless the basic economic and the intellectual models of education are reconsidered. This has been a long-standing claim by Seymour Sarason (1990), for example, who has predicted that most educational reforms will fail unless the culture of the school will become the focus of change. In the Arabic based schools in the UAE there are only some restricted outlets for creativity which are found in music art and drama. However the majority of schools in the UAE tend to view these subjects as optional extracurricular activities and deem them a waste of time. Much effort is concentrated on achieving marks in the core subjects and administrators shun new teaching methods in favor of standardized teaching methods. Resource rooms are restricted for usage as are computer laboratories and libraries are poorly stocked. Equipment is at best basic, with mainly OHP and cassette recorders being used. The range of teaching resources for listening and speaking is limited and they are expensive so administrators put them on the wish list rather than where they should be — the necessary list. English language instruction is conducted in the main with Arabic translation, which results in poor understanding of the language and inability to function successfully in the language itself. This is a huge barrier when it is mandatory for all Higher Education facilities to conduct classes in English and to this end employ native speakers to impart the instruction. A huge proportion of a university budget and indeed the Education budget in the UAE is spent on remedial English classes to bring the students up to an acceptable level prior to university entrance, which necessitates an extra cost burden on the parents. Each university has a section which teaches English language as part of their campus, and this is

money that could be better spent on developing courses for students to take in fields of meaningful study instead of teaching what should have been a core development in primary, elementary and secondary studies. With the examinations being standardized from the Ministry Of Education, or worse, being given by private schools prior to the exam as content revision questions which the students learn by rote there is no development of creative thinking. Moreover, the MOE examinations, especially those for secondary classes 10 to 12 are way below the level needed for the student to be able to perform at university level. This leads to an abysmal failure rate of students attempting to sit university mandatory entrance exams such as TOEFL and IELTS. Students themselves are not motivated to study. They are interested only in attaining marks and therefore want only what is taught in the curriculum, nothing more. Basic skills such as Listening, Speaking and Writing are often ignored or given minimal input and students are very poor in these areas, which impacts on their progress at university. In the UAE the students who are weak simply pay someone else to do their assignments and therefore achieve success despite the fact they do not actually know the subject. There are some, who by their position in society, have no interest in studying just in attaining a degree from University so they have a paper to put on the wall. Their philosophy is that they will inherit their father's business and so there is no need for them to put anything except minimal effort into study. Others think the government is duty bound to create jobs for them and so look at careers in the police and armed forces where they mistakenly believe they are not required to have anything except secondary educational certification. These draconian or set mindsets on behalf of both

teachers and students themselves create a real barrier to teaching in a knowledge society. Although what has been said above might paint a dismal picture for education in the UAE there are solutions to the challenges. Lack of creativity in a typical school is therefore a universal phenomenon. Before it makes sense to measure creativity in schools, we need to be sure that (i) there is something related to schools in creativity that could be measured, and (ii) policies and practices for enhance creativity are in place. Despite the many barriers, there are important enablers such as increasing cooperative learning and making being wrong acceptable in schools that could bring about change. Trying to do more or less of something in schools is not likely to lead to change in behavioral regularities in schools unless we give up some draconian fixed assumptions about what are the most important purposes of schooling. Other enablers would be to ensure that teachers of tomorrow receive adequate training in the new methods which are suited for the knowledge society. Existing teachers should have mandatory professional development enhancement to ensure they are up to the task of imparting lessons suitable to the needs of the students and the society as a whole. Administrators and schools, especially private schools, should be rigorously inspected across the nation to ensure that the curricula is suitable for the ease of advancement for students into university. All schools should have a minimum requirement of resources embracing the technological age as well as resources for listening speaking and reading. There should be a set curriculum for private schools to ensure students are being taught the same level — there could be choices to be made — but it must have some sort of standardization. Currently private schools have a myriad of curricula

which also makes it difficult for students to move from one school to another without high costs ( unless they attend a public school). As private schools form the base of education here in the UAE it is essential that this area is controlled in some way — both in curricula content and the standard of teachers they hire. In conclusion, we are in the knowledge age — the age of technology and the education system needs to move with the times if they are to prepare their citizens for the future. Today’s students are tomorrow’s leaders and as such they need to be able to take the nation forward with confidence into the future. Education is never static and neither should policy makers and school administrators be allowed to be. Students, parents, and the nation have the right to ask of, and expect, cutting edge technologies in their learning so they can take their place in society as well prepared citizens. Society has the right to demand of the government an education system that enables the nation to move forward into the 22nd century and beyond. The knowledge society is here to stay and there is no place in it for the draconian mindset. Open minds and open learning will be the way of the future. References Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2009). *The Fourth Way: The inspiring future of educational change*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin. Robinson, K. (with Aronica, L.) (2009). *The element. How finding your passion changes everything*. New York: Viking Books. Sacks, P. (2000). *Standardized minds: The high price of America’s testing culture and what we can do to change it*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books. Sahlberg, P. (2006). Education reform for raising economic competitiveness, *Journal of Educational Change*, 7(4), 259—287. Sahlberg, P. (2009). Creativity and innovation through lifelong learning, *Lifelong Learning in Europe*, 14(1), 53-



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