CONCEPT NOTE - Dzulkifli (Dzul) Razak

Moving away from the WEIRD

The current education ecosystem can be aptly summed up by the acronym WEIRD, that is, Westernised (as per the post-industrial revolution), Economic-centric, Industry-led, Reputation-obsessed and consequently Dehumanising with a resultant inhumane world (Dzulkifli, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic further reaffirms the "weird" state as spelled by the acronym, yet there is no attempt to move away from it. This is further reinforced by issues related to the "vaccine nationalism" of late.

The Whole Institution Transformation

To do so, the Whole Institution Transformation (WIT) approach is recommended to mainstream change for the future involving all stakeholders in the university. WIT is holistic and well-aligned to the local context related to education (including indigenous, religious etc.) in achieving prosperity for the family, community, and nation, even globally. The WIT is also linked with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in what is known as Education 2030 aimed at the promotion of sustainable development in the context of inclusivity and indigeneity.

Breaking Down the Silos

Through WIT, the existence of silos be it at the academic and administrative levels can be minimised in consistent ways designed specifically to integrate programmes that are collaborative in character framed by an interdisciplinary platform. They are aimed at generating "comprehensive" model solutions to meet vital challenges faced by the community (and humanity), and at the very least to create an awareness of the problem among the general public. All programmes are opened to the community of staff and students, as well the larger community.

Humanising Education

The pandemic crisis has once again highlighted how truly (ir)relevant today's learning is to the lives of the learners, and the ultimate survival of humanity. Of particular interest is the purported Industrial Revolution 4.0, which is not without its own dilemma (Dzulkifli, 2018) with respect to WEIRD as mentioned before. Like the previous industrial revolutions, it gives rise to an equivalent factory-like model to mass produce "human capital" for industry. In a nutshell, it creates employment (read, "manpower") that emphasises profitability and marketability. Invariably, it emphasises the use of mechanical-technical tools and means to deliver mainly technical innovations (relative to the social aspects). The focus is largely on training the mind directed at building a better (innovative) economy. These three goals are very much dependent on the marketplace as per the pre-Covid-19 era, making up the four (4) Ms - Manpower, Mind, and Machine, driven predominantly by the Marketplace to manipulate knowledge into commoditised products for business opportunities and profits. In the final analysis they are characterised by figures and numbers generally known as Key Performance

Indicators (KPIs). As in the factory, KPIs are used to evaluate the level of success in meeting targets laid down by the organisation where staff members would resort to any means, fair and foul, to meet the requirements of the set KPIs in terms of monetary value.

Similarly, some universities measure, monitor, and evaluate the performance of the staff, and direct their policy formulation and target setting. These KPIs may adversely impact the behaviours of academic staff and stimulate a culture of greed and push out the boundaries of moral behaviours. KPI-driven academics tend to devote excessive attention to their measured personal performance, and its rewards, making them less sensitive to their social and ethical obligations. Such self-interest may weaken ethical norms in the university as well as lead to dangerous trust deficits in communities. This kind of education is dubbed "education without a soul." Sheldon and Abidoye, (2018: 22) noted: "The factory mass teaching methods of the third revolution era have failed to conquer enduring problems of inequity and unfairness."

The Key Intangible Performance

To counterbalance the KPI it is essential to re-look at the latter. Although the KPI is important, equally important is the intangible indicator (KIP, Key Intangible Performance) for those things that cannot be measured. This requires creating a new mindset, new thinking, and a new ecosystem where people will live together in a better world. Intangible assets cannot be touched, cannot be felt, and cannot be seen. Unlike KPI which is all about numbers, earnings, and figures, KIP is about values, faith, and the like. It is also about goodwill, patent, trademarks, copyrights, and computer software. It is about being a human who is engaged in activities that are beneficial, not limited to oneself, and also all for humanity. This makes KIP a very noble idea that would make a person balance his/her work with what is externally given. In other words, it is also about internal values rather than external values alone, and the two needs to be well balanced. Working on KIP may propel you to meet the KPI as a complete person in learning to become WISER. Moving into this higher intellectual pursuit may impart a better sense of magnanimity to give to others so that others can also benefit from what one has accomplished.

Learning to become WISER

What Futures of Education needs, therefore, is education with a soul. Education should prepare learners not only for livelihood but also for life. Namely, aspects of moral, ethical, civic, emotional skills since educational institutions are not merely about learning a subject but also about articulating ideals and recognising one's responsibilities to those ideals. They should help develop capacities for integrity and courage, for diligence and resiliency, for responsibility and service to others with a sense of higher purpose. Short of this, the existing fragmented approach to (higher) education has brought about an imbalance not only between the first three of the 5Ps – Profit, Planet, and People, but also impacting the remaining 2Ps, Peace and Partnership.

What is urgently required, therefore, is to bring back much-needed balance in 5Ps based on the framework of Education 2030. This is to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in providing a "new" framework for higher education to develop inter-institutional collaborations in pursuit of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It desires a more human-centric and humanistic dimension to fashion education of the

future. In other words, WEIRD needs to quickly give way to a more wholesome, inclusive, sustainable, equitable and resilient (WISER) framework that will lead to a more just and humane world as a higher purpose of life. It must take the lead for Education 2030, focused on "The World We Want" adding to UNESCO's Pillars of Learning for the 21st Century, namely: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be, and learning to become with a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals (UNESCO, 2014: 93). Learning to become requires reimagining the strategies to realign knowledge and learning in shaping the future of humanity and the planet.

In tandem, there is a need to shift the four Ms model into a four Hs to in embracing the demands of the 21st century, particularly post-pandemic, as summarised in the Figure below.
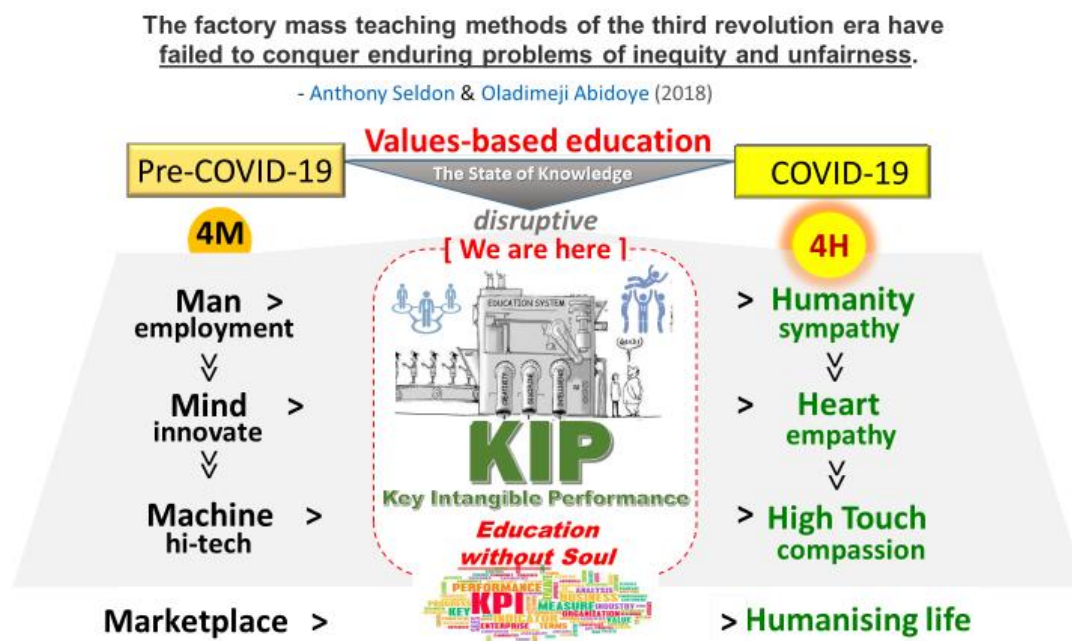

Figure: Pre and Post COVID-19 Education models. Source: Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, 2020

Shifting from 4Ms to 4Hs Model

This call to (1) replace Manpower and employment with Humanity and sympathy which is innate but not much attended to in today's factory-like education; (2) couple Mind and innovation with Heart and empathy to understand and acknowledge the feelings of another. Empathy is closely related to the heart and is integral to most people's lives is the cornerstone of healthy human relationships. This is where community engagement becomes meaningful when education inculcates this value as part of learning to become; and lastly (3) expand Machine and hi-tech to Hi-Touch which is defined as "the ability to empathize with others, understand the subtle yearnings, and interactions of human beings, and pursue beyond every day for a new purpose and meaning…" (Pink, 2005: 17). It enables one to be compassionate in relating to people and reacting appropriately to the sufferings. According to Mengzi, one without a mind directed by compassion, one is not human (Van Norden, 2008: 46). Compassionate people would help others, especially the needy, as part of their duty.

Ultimately, it must de-emphasise the notion of the Market with Humanising life, meaning valuing humanity first in all interactions. In sum, sympathy, empathy, compassion and humanity are key attributes to living a healthy and dignified life. These values are generally missing in education which has become merely a tool to gain a sound and financially secured future livelihood. Though financial security is a necessity of life, it cannot override the humanitarian considerations. The end goal of education is to produce a whole person characterised by material, intellectual, and spiritual development. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct a factory-based utilitarian and mechanistic structure with one that is informed by sympathetic, empathetic, compassionate, and humanising values. In other words, a values-based education where the four Hs play a key role towards an all-round development of the whole person.

Values-Based Leadership

In pushing for Futures of Education, leadership plays a vital role. In a global survey with 1,592 respondents from 112 countries, conducted in July 2014, the World Economic Forum, 2014, reported that the leaders, in general, tend to do well for themselves and their families and they do not serve for the common good. A lack of values in leadership featured seventh among the top ten trends ranked by global significance. Leaders failed to realise that the common good is the only way to prosper in the long run. Instead, leaders should be driven by values so that humanity may move forward together. If leaders lack sympathy, empathy and compassion and are not guided by values, they tend to simply care about their own interests, rather than being motivated by something more worthwhile. In the above-mentioned survey, respondents under 40 were not satisfied with the government not paying attention to a lack of values in leadership.

In relation to this, institutional readiness leading to organisational readiness will ensure that members of the university community share the resolve to implement a change and share the belief in their collective capability to do so. If the community is disciplined in its approach to problem solving and is capable of working across teams, by breaking the silos, it will have a strong foundation for tackling global problems. This will finally culminate in humanising education characterised by intellectual honesty, integrity, humility, and hard work to produce a better human being, bring back human dignity, and realise humanitarian values. It will bring about harmony, peace, sustainability, and balance.

Interestingly, Covid-19 also brings to the fore the importance of well-being and quality life through a more balanced and sustainable lifestyle. It combines the need to ensure personal security and safety, contact and spacing, the practice of thrift or prudence as responsible consumption of finite resources, and avoiding waste, lavishness, or extravagance. Such a lifestyle is one way to "equalise," in a practical sense so that more people can share the limited available resources. It teaches convergence on values, integrity, prudence and discipline. This is one way to "equalise" in the practical sense so that more people can be provided for. "The more people are educated in adopting this lifestyle, the more people can share the limited available resources" (Dzulkifli, 2020).

Conclusion

While Covid-19 is a reminder to respond to the shocks to the education system, it also presents an opportunity to find new ways to address the learning crisis and bring about a set of solutions previously considered difficult or impossible to implement. In reality, however, the impact on improving higher education is unevenly distributed and has exacerbated future inequalities. Education, it has been pointed out, should be delivered to all equally regardless of geographical location, socio-economic status, beliefs and the like.

Futures of Education must substitute Covid-19 as the equaliser based on its overall impact. It treats them all equally in that no amount of money and wealth can make a difference based on a set of stringent key principles without the necessary values being internalised through education.

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