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Life in a Democratic Iran: A Plan for Success

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Abstract

As Iran transitions into a democratic nation, there are many changes that will take place. Along with the changes occurring in the country, there are also worldwide changes. New trends for success in the 21st century are emerging and it is necessary that Iran understands the trends needed for success in a newly formed democracy. Decentralization and an emphasis on personal growth and community are two such trends. Along with new trends, are needed attributes to obtain success in the 21st century such as the ability to think critically and set goals for the future. To prepare the younger Iranian generation for success in the newly formed democratic nation, these trends and attributes must be addressed in the classroom through meaningful learning experiences. Along with individual classrooms, school systems should also adopt a more holistic approach to education that encourages content knowledge as well as knowledge of the changing world and the attributes for success in this world.

Life in a Democratic Iran: A Plan for Success

Iran as a newly democratic nation must face many changes. The characteristics of a democratic nation include individual rights and freedoms, voting rights, free elections, as well as more gender equality. These are all elements that will be new for the Iranian people. Along with the changes presented by a new democracy, Iran must also prepare for the changes present in the 21st century. The world as a whole is changing as technology and policy increase globalization and the need for countries to work together.

As the world continues to change, so too do the requirements for success. Iran as a democratic nation needs to be aware of these changes. Huitt (2007) discusses how success in the Conceptual Age revolves around the ability to function in a technologically-advanced society. The Internet creates a global community that cannot be overlooked. Iran needs to begin forging relationships with other democratic nations in an effort to participate in a global economy. Success in the Conceptual Age does not only depend on economic gain and technological advances, though. There is also a human side to this new age. Pink (as cited in Huitt, 2007) states that a person must have empathy, be able to tell a story, and take time to enjoy life. All of the focus should not be on getting ahead economically, but also in creating a more enjoyable existence. Success in the Conceptual Age must also include good health and the ability to enjoy life.

Another paradigm that Iran needs to address for success as a democratic nation is the living-systems paradigm. Elgin and LeDrew (1997) proposes many changes that are necessary for the current and future world. Instead of focusing on the individual person or country, the world should be viewed as a whole and complete entity. Economically there should be fair competition. Individuals should participate in life in such a way that is fulfilling and exciting, but

also working towards a greater and global good. This is a very different perspective for the Iranian government, but to be successful in the new age it is a necessary shift in thinking.

Trends

Two trends for success that are pertinent for the Iranians are decentralization and an emphasis on personal growth and community. Each of these trends is essential for a newly developed democratic nation. They are fundamental for success in the Conceptual Age or Reflective/Living-Systems Paradigm.

Huitt (1999a) first emphasized decentralization in his writings on the Informational Age. According to Huitt's definition, "decentralization is the process of putting the responsibility and authority for making decisions into the hands of the people who will be implementing the decision" (p. 2). This trend is vital for success in a newly democratic Iran. The implementation of democracy depends on decentralization. The government in Iran must trust the people to make decisions regarding the government, economy, and religious activities. In the end it is the people in Iran who will implement the newly democratic policies and it should be these same people who are a part of the decision making process. Decentralization was more recently mentioned as a part of the reflective/living-systems paradigm (Elgin & LeDrew, 1997). In this paradigm, "each person takes responsibility for the well-being of the world, enabling high levels of decentralization and freedom at the local level, and a sustainable harmony at the global level" (p. 5). This is in direct contrast to the industrial/materialistic paradigm in which government bureaucracies were allowed to make all of the important decisions. One aspect of decentralization that is important for the Iranians as they learn how to participate in a democratic nation is the concept of freedom, the freedom to make choices about the government, economy, and even religion.

A second trend that is meaningful for life in a democratic nation is the focus on personal growth and community (Elgin & LeDrew, 1997). This trend is also discussed as part of the reflective/living systems paradigm. It is presented in contrast to an earlier trend of autonomy. In a democratic nation, citizens are allowed to grow personally but there should also be a sense of community. Personal growth includes spiritual fulfillment as well as the ability to enjoy life (Pink as cited in Huitt, 2007). To create a sense of community in Iran, the country must work to resolve conflicts, small and large, that cause strife in the country (Huitt). The trend of personal growth and community is especially important for the women in Iran. Gender equality is an important component of democracy. Women should be encouraged to grow as individuals, but should also be given ample rights and opportunities to work within the Iranian community.

Attributes

For decentralization to be successful, Iran must first mold citizens who are able to make appropriate decisions. One attribute that is needed for success in a democratic society and is also essential for decentralization is critical thinking. Critical thinking was reported as needed for the 21st century by Huitt (1999b) in his article, *The SCANS Report Revisited*. This paper emphasized key areas of success for the 21st century and included critical thinking as one of those attributes. For decentralization to work, citizens must first be able to critically think about conflict, problems, and solutions prior to developing a plan for the nation to follow. Since decentralization focuses on giving the entire nation a voice, rather than a bureaucratic minority, every citizen must be given the opportunity to learn how to critically think.

Goal setting and self-regulation are needed attributes for the success of personal growth and community. These attributes are also mentioned by Huitt (1999b) as needed for success in the 21st century. For personal growth to occur goal setting and self regulation must also transpire.

Goal setting is important for personal growth because it “guide[s] thinking, feeling and behavior” (Huitt, 1999b, p. 4). Self-regulation is a step by step process of setting goals, developing a plan of action, implementing needed strategies, and evaluating the process and achievement of the goal. While goal setting and self-regulation are crucial for personal growth, they are also needed for the growth of a community. The nation of Iran needs to set goals for the country and community to be successful in a democratic 21st century.

Developing attributes in the classroom

Teachers in a newly democratic nation have a responsibility to their students to provide learning experiences that promote the trends and attributes needed for success in this environment. Not only should content be taught, but also skills such as critical thinking and goal setting. The younger Iranian generation needs to be taught how to participate in a democratic system. They must understand the trends of decentralization and personal growth and community and the role of these trends in the 21st century. Since learning occurs as the result of an experience, it is important for teachers to development experiences in the classroom that promote the attributes needed for success in a democratic nation (Huitt, 2001).

In a social studies classroom, it is quite easy for teachers to mix content material with information needed for success in the 21st century. Since critical thinking is important in a decentralized environment, teachers should create experiences for students to think critically in the context of a new government. A lesson that would promote critical thinking is comparing and contrasting dictatorships and democracies. The teacher should first provide the students with examples of a country with a dictatorship such as Zimbabwe and a country with a democracy such as the United States. The students would complete charts comparing the leadership of each country, the role of the citizen, voting rights, and individual rights and freedoms. After

completing the comparison, students would be required to develop their own country with a democratic model. For this country, they must provide information about the leader, the role of the government, and the role of the people. The students should also provide a list of freedoms and rights that the people have in the democratic nation. Upon completing the fictitious country, students should compare their created country with the current state of Iran. They should find both similarities as well as differences between the two countries. The students should then outline areas in which Iran still needs to improve to be a better functioning democracy.

Since democracies emphasize personal growth as well as the strength of the community, teachers should also create learning experiences that allow students to gain the attributes needed for success in this trend such as goal setting. This lesson could easily follow the one described for critical thinking. Students should be instructed to create a list of goals. These goals should include elements of personal growth, ways to strengthen the community, as well as goals for the nation as a new democracy. After writing these goals, the teacher should instruct the students to create an action plan for meeting these goals. For the community goals and country goals, the students should be allowed to work in cooperative learning groups to come up with ways to work towards the goal. The goals for the country should come from the previous lesson in which students outlined areas in which Iran needs to improve in terms of being a democratic nation. The teacher should conclude with a discussion of civic responsibility in relation to the success of a democratic nation. The students should be encouraged to pursue their goals. They should also be taught the importance of every citizen in a democracy and how each person must participate for the government to work.

Professional development

To successfully impact all of the students in Iran, the push towards teaching the needed attributes for success must go beyond individual teachers and should become a system wide plan. As stated by Huitt (2007), an education system that focuses on content knowledge alone is not preparing students for success in the 21st century. As stated in *The Scans Report Revisted*, “human beings are inherently pliant and modifiable and can acquire the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for success if given the proper learning experiences” (Huitt, 1999b, p. 3). If given those learning experiences students can learn the needed skills for a democratic 21st century, but the school system must first value these attributes as much as they do content knowledge.

I would encourage educators and administration to read the article *Becoming a Brilliant Star: An Introduction* (Huitt, 2006). This paper presents a holistic approach to education that includes a variety of domains to be explored in the classroom. This approach can be combined with content knowledge to prepare students to think, feel, and participate as successful citizens in a democratic nation. I would also encourage school systems to read *Global Consciousness Change: Indicators of an Emerging Paradigm* and *Success in the Conceptual Age* (Elgin & LeDrew, 1997) to prepare for the new trends present in the 21st century. I would also encourage educators to keep current with the trends that are important for success. The world continues to changes daily as will the trends and attributes necessary for success. If a framework is developed, as in the states, that adheres to rigid standards and goals it will not be flexible enough for this changing world. Education must be flexible and ready to change with the times for there to be success among the generation that is being taught at any given time.

Summary and Conclusions

The rapidly changing environment that all nations are experiencing requires educators to consider what changes need to be made in schools in order to more adequately prepare children and youth for successful adulthood. There appears to be no end in sight to these changes; in fact, there is every indication that the speed of the change is increasing. Educators, as well as parents, government officials, and others concerned about young people need to be constantly aware of the present and future needs of their society. This is especially true in a developing, newly democratic country such as Iran. Deciding what not to change in order to continue the Iranian culture, which dates back thousands of years, is just as important as deciding what changes need to be adopted. Hopefully, the analysis and suggestions made in this paper will make a positive addition to this discussion.

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