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Educating the Children and Youth of Iran

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Abstract

The world is changing as a result of technology, communications, and environmental awareness. As a result of these changes there are many sociocultural, environmental, and lifestyle trends emerging. Two trends that will be important for a democratic Iran are globalization and postmodern social values. In addition, educators will need to help the children and youth of Iran develop the attributes of optimism and self-regulation to ensure success as adults. These attributes will be important for the citizens of Iran as they develop relationships with other nations and adopt practices and beliefs different from those previously held. It is important that educators, through professional development, study, and school teams, acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to help the children and youth of Iran develop these attributes.

Educating the Children and Youth of Iran

The world is rapidly changing. The attitudes and attributes needed to succeed in the past are not the same as those needed today for success over the next several decades. What are the attitudes and attributes that educators will need to teach children in Iran to prepare them to become successful adults in their democratic nation? This paper will look at two important trends that are emerging in the world: globalization and post-modern social values. These trends will affect all of the world's citizens and how they live their lives. I believe these trends are especially important for the citizens of Iran.

History of Iran

It is important to note that Iran's religion is predominantly Muslim and in the past the nation has been governed by secular and religious leaders through governing bodies (U.S. Department of State, 2008). When looking at Iran's current economy there are several factors to consider. Information obtained from the U.S. Department of State (2008) lists several factors pertaining to Iran's economic hardships and why their youth, after receiving an education, choose to leave the country in pursuit of better opportunity. Iran's economy is oil-reliant and, although there have been efforts to diversify that reliance, there has been little progress made toward that goal. This, in addition to inflation, state control, war and upheavals, inefficient bureaucracy and political infighting, and high unemployment continues to hamper the economy. Iran's economic hardships, along with its' history of supporting terrorism, anti- U.S. and anti-Israel stances, religious intolerance, human rights violations acts, and defiance against other nations in regards to nuclear weapons technology are practices that, with their new democracy, will dissolve in a democratic Iran. Equipping Iran's children and youth with attributes for success as adults will be an important factor in sustaining Iran for future generations.

Reflective/Living Systems Paradigm

Elgin and LeDrew (1997) present their view that the world is moving toward a new paradigm. In the history of human civilization there have been few paradigm shifts, these being during the transitions from the hunter-gatherer era to an agricultural one, then to the industrial era, and then again to the communications era. The authors explain a paradigm as a stable and enduring way of perceiving and relating to the world, and explain that human civilization will continue in its' current paradigm until there is a need for change. According to Elgin and LeDrew, human civilization is beginning to shift into a new paradigm as a result of ecological problems that have emerged which include not only physical but social and spiritual ecologies as well. The paradigm that these authors believe human civilization is moving towards, one which includes the Earth as a living system, is called the reflective/living-systems paradigm.

There are two primary features of this paradigm: humans' growing capacity for self-reflection and the paradigm's "whole-systems" or "living-systems" view (Elgin & LeDrew, 1997). The views of this paradigm are important to the trends that will be discussed because the paradigm views the earth and its' occupants as interrelated and connected to each other. The children and youth of Iran will also need to view the earth in this whole and unifying context and see the need for interconnection and interrelation with the rest of the earth's inhabitants, and then develop the attributes needed for success in the emerging trends identified by the reflective/living systems paradigm.

Trends

While there are quite a large number of trends that are likely to be important for Iran's future development, two important sociocultural trends that I believe are especially critical for Iran to consider are globalization and postmodern values.

Globalization

One trend that is impacting all world citizens, and one that I believe is especially important for Iran, is globalization. Globalization is a very broad topic and includes the scopes of economy, politics, culture, and law. The Global Policy Forum (2009) website defines globalization as the interdependency of the world on each other in response to closer contacts made with each other through advanced modes of transportation, communication, and trade. This, along with freely circulating ideas, cultures, and materials across borders, is creating a trend that is largely seen as inevitable, globalization. There are many advocates for and adversaries against globalization. However, as Pearce (2004) writes, “the global dispersion of goods production and the uneven distribution of oil, gas, and critical minerals worldwide have combined to make international interdependence a fundamental economic reality, and corporate enterprises are building upon that reality” (p. 3).

Elgin and LeDrew (1997) present the idea that, with all the technology that makes up our system of global communications including computers, televisions, telephones, and satellites, there is a new level of communication emerging. As this level of human connection and communication is achieved, they believe that it is possible that a “global brain” will emerge. And “the emerging global brain may be a powerful force for encouraging humanity to live more compassionately and harmoniously” (Elgin & LeDrew, p.9). For a country who has previously been known for its’ strained foreign relations the trend of globalization will be very important for Iran.

While there are opposing views to globalization, Moller (2004) gives a compelling argument for the characteristics that leaders will need to possess in order for globalization to be a positive trend for everyone. Moller says that “globalization gives us an opportunity to solve

problems in a new way—with a worldview of cooperation rather than conflict” (p.1). He identifies four characteristics that leaders must develop and adhere to in order for a movement towards globalization to occur: 1) acceptance of and adherence to common values, 2) the creation of a tradition of cohesiveness, 3) defining the moral use of power, and 4) redefining tolerance: empathy for other people’s futures.

Moller (2004) argues that common values consist of an understanding of ideas among people about what is good and bad, pointing out that after World War II there was a common set of values of which their emphasis was on increasing economic and social welfare as a priority, without giving priority to something else like cultural identity. He also states that this common set of values will form cohesiveness and that “globalization’s supporters must be prepared to introduce a set of values on the international level to safeguard people’s ethnic, religious, and other identities, irrespective of nationality as the criterion for their international rights and obligations” (Moller, p.5). In addition, power must be used in conjunction with agreed upon rules and norms, and leaders must develop empathy, respecting that individuals do not always think and act alike and that they are free to think and act differently so long as it is within a mutually agreed upon framework. (Moller) This trend will be important for Iran as they abandon the ideas that previously kept them from interrelating efficiently with the world around them and form cohesiveness among citizens of their own country as well as with other nations.

Postmodern Social Values

Another emerging trend that will be especially important to Iran is postmodern social values. Postmodern values “focus on the importance of individual choices, identity construction, and self-expression” (Hines, 2008, p. 5). These postmodern social values will consist of a belief in gender equality, tolerance for others, engagement with family and community, a need for

meaningful work, concern for environmental sustainability and the placing of subjective well-being over material success (Elgin & LeDrew, 1997). In a country that in the past has been ruled by religious leaders it is important to note that with this trend there is an increased emphasis on an individual's personal authority. In a country that is predominantly Muslim, with few other recognized legal minority religions (U.S. Department of State, 2008), there will have to be a new order of thinking for the individual's in Iran to show greater tolerance for different groups, including those with different ethnic backgrounds, gender, and political views.

While Iran needs to grow economically, the authors point out that a major attribute of this trend is a tendency for economic growth to be subordinate to concerns for environmental sustainability. (Elgin & LeDrew, 1997) Considering that Iran is one of the world's top three holders of proven oil and natural gas reserves (Energy Information Administration, 2009) and their economical reliance on the oil sector (U.S. Department of State, 2008), environmental sustainability will be an important concern to Iran in order to ensure a viable economy for generations to come.

Another factor under the trend of postmodern social values concerns the growth of democracy. One characteristic of democracy is that "democratic societies are committed to the values of tolerance, cooperation, and compromise" (America.gov, 2008). These values are important to Iran as they adopt ideas of gender equality and tolerance.

Attributes

Given the importance of globalization and the development of postmodern social values, there are two attributes that I believe must receive special focus by educators in Iran: optimism and self-regulation.

Optimism

Optimism is generally considered to be “the inclination to anticipate the best possible outcome for actions or events” (Huitt, 2005). Huitt (1999) describes three components of optimism: mastery, positivity, and explanatory style. Mastery is the individual’s perception or belief that they control their environment, positivity is an individual’s feeling that the world is a positive place to live, and explanatory style is the belief that things generally will or will not work out in a positive manner. In an environment where there previously has been governmental control, the children and youth of Iran will need to develop the attribute of optimism and be taught that, under a democracy, they do have the freedom to control their environment. The future of Iran, including the culture, economy, resources and environment, will be controlled by their generation. With the development of this mastery, children and youth can be educated in all the traditional academic areas that are needed to succeed. They can be taught that with this academic knowledge, along with the freedom to choose, they are in control of their future.

Children and youth of Iran will also need to develop positivity, doing away with any previous anti-nation views and seeing the world as a positive place to live. Developing this component of optimism will be important for the trend of globalization because with this trend individuals of different nations must not only interact with, but view the other with trust and respect or else they will not be able to efficiently develop relationships with each other. These relationships will be necessary for a nation to be successful in emerging globalization.

Self-regulation

A second important attribute that the children and youth of Iran will need to develop is self-regulation. “Self-regulation is an integrated learning process, consisting of the development of a set of constructive behaviors that affect one's learning. These processes are planned and

adapted to support the pursuit of personal goals in changing learning environments” (National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, The, n.d.). Self regulation is an important attribute for an individual to have in order to succeed as an adult. Huitt (1999) states “in the rapidly changing context in which we live, one’s beliefs about one’s success and one’s skills in directing oneself to meeting those goals would seem of paramount importance. In fact, these factors may even be more important than any specific set of knowledge and/or technology skills” (p. 5).

Self-regulation is an attribute the children and youth of Iran need to develop in order to acquire the skills and abilities needed to achieve goals they have set for themselves. As their country faces the rapid changes that democracy brings, the children and youth will need to develop the behaviors and skills needed for continued learning and success in their changing environment. Self-regulation will teach them how to set and work toward goals, decide the best way to achieve those goals, and that sometimes change may be required to accomplish desired results.

Educator Preparation

As a high-school level educator it is important that I help students I teach develop these attributes. Optimism is related to four factors: 1) social acceptance of an individual, 2) success of executives, 3) physical health and stress management/coping, and 4) tendencies toward depression and its’ severity (Huitt, 1999). Social acceptance would constitute many different areas. As an educator I can teach my students tolerance and respect for the cultural and religious differences of others. I can also teach them the personal characteristics needed of individuals to be successful in society, including the workforce. These characteristics would include the development of traits such as empathy, responsibility, dependability, integrity, and reliability among others. I can also provide learning experiences through group work in which the students

interact and develop relationships with each other. One of these group projects might be to have the students to research and report on different cultures or religions. Another lesson might involve having the students explain why the above listed characteristics would be necessary for success as an individual.

Educators themselves must also be prepared with the knowledge of these trends and attributes to be able to help their students develop desired attributes for success in adulthood. Ways in which educators can develop the necessary knowledge and skills include professional development courses, reading information about sociocultural, environmental, and lifestyle trends as well as attributes identified by futurists as desirable for success, and the development of school based study teams who regularly check for developments or changes in emerging trends.

Summary and Conclusion

There are several emerging trends that will impact the world as identified by the reflective/living systems paradigm. As the world moves into a new era, there is an increased awareness on the Earth and the fact that its inhabitants are interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent on each other. With this new paradigm humans will be more aware of the need to assess the impact they have had on Earth and its' ecology as well as the importance of maintaining and sustaining the Earth for future generations. In addition, humans are becoming more aware of the spiritual components of life and seeking a deeper meaning for life.

These are especially of concern for a developing country such as Iran. Once a theocracy, the government of Iran is now a democracy. Iran experiences the changes that this democracy, along with modernization, brings it will be imperative that the citizens of Iran, especially those who make up the future workforce and leaders, attain the attitudes and attributes needed for success in their society. The global trends of globalization and an acceptance of postmodern

social values are of special significance to Iran. Both of these trends will require that the citizens of Iran develop different views than those held in the past. Globalization will require that Iran develop closer, more trusting relations with other nations in order to effectively initiate the exchange of ideas, technology, and goods. The development of more democratic views of equality and human freedoms will be important for Iran as the trend of postmodern social values emerges in the world. These ideas will include religious and cultural acceptance and tolerance of different views and beliefs of others as well as equality for all people.

The attributes of optimism and self-regulation are ones that educators will need to help the children and youth of Iran develop, as both of these will help them become successful adults in the changing culture and lifestyle of Iran for years to come. In order to do this, it will be imperative that educators acquire the skills and knowledge of these trends and attributes as well as ways in which to help others develop them. As there are already large numbers of teachers in Iran, continuing professional development is vital. Regular development and assessment of progress in this area will be required for years to come. Iran has a culture that dates back thousands of years and there is every expectation that it can become a world leader if it focuses on developing its human resources.

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