

EDUCATION TRAINING AND DEMOCRACY

The general concept of education implies the basic right of people to learn and to develop to the utmost of their abilities. The fact that childhood in human beings stretches over many years of dependency on adults, when compared with the rest of the animal kingdom is an indication of how much humanity depends on education, since pre-historic times, to fulfill the basic needs for its survival and continuity. May be this dependency on adults is a natural characteristic of the intelligent human race, and may be it is the reason for its supremacy on the planet earth.

Training is learning, may be more learning skills. Learning to play a musical instrument is learning a skill; problem solving is a mental skill; learning the art of teaching is a skill. Training on life skills also implies learning.

Education as a basic human right that needs to be fulfilled has been acknowledged by the nations of the world nationally and internationally. The International Education For All Summit that took place in 1990 in Jumetine, targeted the year 2000 for eradication of illiteracy around the world, which is an effort by the international community to promote equality and hence democracy across the world.

Investment in the human being is considered very essential for the development and welfare of societies. Education - be it formal, informal or non-formal - is the most effective and most important mechanism through which future generations will be shaped. Thus a clear, comprehensive vision for education, is a reflection of the socio-economic ideology adopted by the authority responsible for devolving this ideology, through various channels and imparting tools available to the public. This will be reflected in the various sectors of life inter alias education which is our concern here.

Education can either hinder democracy, or it can enhance it, depending again on how those people responsible for education perceive what they expect for the future citizens to be. What kind of economic development those people seek, what kind of social system do they want, what kind of economic development they aspire for, will shape what education discourse they would pursue.

It all starts at home, where the child encounters his / her first learning experiences. If his / her first learning experiences for example are based on understanding, sharing, accepting and respecting the others, etc., that is; based on democratic concepts, the child will start internalizing attitudes and dynamics of democracy. The mechanisms underlying these processes are not written codes, nor orders and instructions; they are hidden processes that the child will emulate and eventually become integral components of his personality.

When the child's environment starts to expand to include other children and other places and other adults he / she gets in contact with, also his / her learning experiences are expanded. But how? Also this depends on the processes underlying the learning experiences. If they are child friendly, child respectful, etc. then the child builds up on his previous home experiences positive democratic attitudes and dynamics, and at the

same time strengthens the old experiences, modify them, and some time qualitatively changes them. This process of internalizing positive attitudes towards one self and the others; towards equality, justice, freedom and peace, towards the basic concepts of democracy - not necessarily the traditional western model - these processes are in my opinion the corner stone for promoting democracy and not preaching it.

In education, these processes take two forms, one explicit process which includes: curricula, administrative structures and procedures, text book production, pedagogic training for teachers / administrators / supervisors, and planning and evaluation. Two, the implicit, the hidden, and not the declared written processes. These are very crucial processes, they are the hidden curriculum, the most effective instrument that is not mentioned in the class room, that does not require reading and memorizing, that does not need exams and tests to measure and evaluate its effect. Yet it has the most lasting impact on the learner. It is how social knowledge is learned and how the learner internalizes it unconsciously and assimilates it so that it becomes part of his / her accumulated experiences. Democracy is social knowledge that one internalizes through the practices he / she encounters in his / her ever continuous learning processes. If the practices that a learner is experiencing are democratic, then without naming them or preaching them, the learner assimilates them and practices them. If, on the other hand, the learner had experienced autocratic, imposing, oppressive practices, then this is what he / she is going to learn and practice in future.

Where do we stand as Palestinians from democracy and how are democratic processes being dealt with on the part of Education? We must admit that is going to be a long time before we see results. We are talking about evolution rather than revolution, which happens to be the case in Palestine now. If evolution is what we believe in, then we are on the right track in the sense that democracy is a very important component that is acknowledged by everybody including The Palestinian Authority. However, where are we from practice?! That is the big question.

I believe that democracy is a concept that evolves as an outcome of societies experiences, to address needs for social order organization, but it does not necessarily mean not considering other peoples experiences and practices. It is an evolutionary process that could be enhanced dramatically by education, when the word education is taken to mean the broad concept of education mentioned earlier, the formal, the non-formal and the informal.

The NGO sector in Palestine, has been and still is playing a role in this direction. The fact that the NGO sector considers itself as an important component of civil society and rightly so, has been involved in issues mainly related to democracy. Education NGOs representing the non-formal sector of education also have been working in education towards democracy, for a long time and have been advocating for a social contract based on social justice, sustainable human development, democratic transformation, human rights respect and civil society building.

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