

# Learning to Do, Learning to Be, Learning to Learn

## *Education for Tomorrow*

Dr Rajesh Tandon UNESCO Chair on Community-based Research & Social Responsibility in Higher Education, President PRIA

Today, there are multiple reasons that indicate our civilization paradigm is in crisis. Some of the indicators of this crisis are the magnitude, acceleration, speed and interrelationship of the changes, and their quantitative and qualitative effects. The indicators of the challenging times we face today are evident by trends such as co-existence of unprecedented material prosperity with widespread deprivations; economic growth and ecological degradation, rise in the number of power structures and growing insecurity among the citizens; ironical situation where citizens face exclusion in a democracy, and so on and so forth.

The time has come when we need to pose the question of “WHY SO”? We need to introspect as to *why our civilization is faced with such critical times, despite being at the peak of success, prosperity and growth like never before? Where are we lacking? What are we missing out in this mad race for material growth? And the most important question, what do we do now?*

Therefore, as we can see, the challenge is not small. A new conception of human progress is what is needed today. We need to realize that we are on the verge of a change in a model of civilization, which cannot be built from the old paradigm of a system that has reached its limits. Therefore, the way in which the world will evolve in the long run will in turn depend on the responses that we will be able to articulate in the present and the future. In this respect, education and knowledge emerge as key elements and the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) assume a central role in its creation and promotion of its social use.

However, in the recent decades changes in the context of education has been focused on short term instrumental performance within a socio-economic system. Therefore, today, there is a need to widen the scope of education and move beyond creating socio-economic well-being towards a true knowledge-based society, through engagement with citizenry at all scales, for addressing day to day and global issues. Such education can further contribute in transforming the old paradigms and beliefs and help in moving forward towards establishing creative and innovative ways of thinking and imagining new realities. In this way, education can also help in developing ethical awareness and facilitate the civic commitment of citizens and professionals.

Therefore, HEIs as agents of education and knowledge creation, exchange and dissemination need to become more conscious of its importance and responsibility towards society. Thus, the time is ripe for *‘reviewing and reconsidering the interchange of value between university and society; that is to say, we need to begin thinking on the lines of ‘social relevance of universities’* (GUNi, 2014).

### **Engagement vis-à-vis Higher Education: Practical considerations**

Higher Education Institutions relate to their surrounding communities in performing some of its functions. HEIs are mostly construed as serving its core missions of teaching, research and

service, through the various functions it performs. Here, engagement of HEIs with the communities is mostly viewed through the lens of service. It is important to note here that the engagement function of HEIs with respect to the communities is not limited to its service function alone, and encompasses the other missions of teaching and research as well. When we talk about engagement vis-à-vis higher education, it signifies mutual exchange of knowledge between the universities and communities in an attempt to produce an output which is of benefit to the larger society. Such engagement is possible through the teaching and research function of the university, as much as it is through its service function.

The critical role of knowledge has also been outlined by the emphasis placed by the UN in its sustainable development goals. One of the targets under achieving SDG number 4, relating to inclusive and quality education states that:

*'By 2030, it needs to be ensured that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development' (UN, 2016) .*

Therefore, education for tomorrow needs to be situated in this vision of society as agreed to by SDGs Agenda 2030. In this vision, all citizens have to become active producers of knowledge and well-being, not mere apathetic consumers. Education has to trigger that excitement that promotes civic values embedded in notions of inclusive citizenship.

Education does prepare us for doing our economic functions, jobs, employment, livelihoods. Therefore, *learning to do* is important purpose of education. Yet, education for tomorrow also demands *learning to be* an active and responsible citizen. Capacity to live in harmony with respect for human and ecological diversity is urgently required in the world of tomorrow. Such an education can only be learnt in an **engaged** stance, engaged in society, engaged with society. The exclusionary walls of universities have to become porous for engagement with wider society.

The future demands much more if society has to become sustainable. It requires *learning to learn*. Such a capacity is essential among individuals, groups and organisations because pathways to future are not fixed or known. We will need to make our paths as we walk. Such a capacity needs to be the focus of education for tomorrow. Such a capacity requires engagement with the world around, with all our senses. Education for tomorrow must prepare citizens to be able to see, hear, feel, touch, think and act consistently and ethically. *Learning to learn* will entail learning to use all our senses equally.

This kind of engagement, where the institution and the community are involved in a common enterprise, gives added depth and meaning to traditional concepts like 'service' and 'outreach', by making the community, a partner in education & knowledge. Therefore, across the world, colleges, universities and academic associations are striving to make civic engagement an integral part of the way they do their work. This gives rise to the concept of '**engaged universities**'.