

# **HUMAN EDUCATION IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**

## **A Declaration**

### **PREAMBLE**

*This text was developed within the framework of the international initiative "Human Education in the 3rd Millennium" by a group of scholars and thinkers from several countries who shared their work with a broader circle of colleagues from all continents.*

*In the face of existential challenges across society, the world and the planet, we educators recognize our responsibility to address these both individually and collectively. We believe that more than any other single factor, transformed educational institutions, curricula and methodologies could help in meeting the challenges of our era.*

*We see the need to confront and change certain aspects of current education practices and policies and to declare positions that are essential for education, people, and the world. We hope, therefore, that this Declaration will both assist educational debates and actions wherever they take place. We identify the following concerns:*

1. The failure of education to respond as it should to the climate and ecological crisis; education does not sufficiently enable students to understand that humanity is destroying nature and, in the process, making the earth uninhabitable;
2. The rise of authoritarianism in many places across the world and the lack of clarity about what 'democracy' is and its educational role; challenges to the realization of justice, equity, and human rights principles;
3. Education systems often do not declare clear value positions that oppose hatred of others, violence, chauvinism and wars, and sometimes even promote them;
4. The 'crisis in humanities' in education, particularly in universities, resulting in an undue focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM);
5. The current dominant understanding of education has developed under the influence of economic imperialism which reduces human to 'homo economicus,' undervaluing and neglecting other human dimensions. This results in the positioning of education as 'neutral' and 'apolitical,' divorced from its crucial role in preparing active community builders;
6. Education policies throughout the world are imbued with managerialist and neoliberal ideologies, which deprive educators of professional and academic autonomy, reduce teachers and students to economic units who primarily produce and consume. This privileges the concept of 'learning' over 'education' creating miseducated cultures. The impact of this is evident in metrics-driven approaches, technocratic efficiencies, undue accountability structures, performance management, over-testing regimes, and commercialization;
7. The rise of populism which drives the masses into beliefs in conspiracy theories, xenophobia and hostile sentiments towards others, the divisions and cleavages in society are urgent challenges to education;
8. The failure to address fundamental human values, with education predominantly being grounded in instrumental purposes;

9. Education systems are not sufficiently preparing people to question the world but function to produce managed subjects;

10. Education reflects a globalized culture shaped in large part by the Global North, which takes its bearing from the Enlightenment, valuing rationalism and scientific reason as the main drivers of progress, however, they are insufficient and are thus criticized. Education should not be limited to instrumental rationality. It needs meanings inspired by ideals and the long-term prospects of humanity and the Earth.

*This set of concerns prompted the following global declaration.*

## **BODY**

*Our understanding is built on what has been developing over millennia by different cultures world-wide. It remains essential for people to be enabled to do productive work, to provide for themselves and their dependents, to collaborate with others in common pursuits, and become participating citizens in their communities. Therefore it remains essential to become literate in relevant types of literacy and be exposed to the major disciplines of knowledge as well as ways of thinking and communicating that human beings have developed over the centuries.*

*But at the beginning of the new millennium, the understanding of education and its aims in the face of particular challenges needs to be reconsidered.*

### **I.**

#### **THE HUMAN BEING, SOCIETY, WORLD AND AIMS OF EDUCATION**

##### ***The human being and the aims of education***

1. There is no education without an implicit or explicit concept of the human being.
2. A significant goal of education is to assist each person to discover what he or she is, in order to learn how to engage with oneself, others, and the world. In doing so, students become aware of their universal features and capacities that all humans share, as well as their individual evolving identity.
3. The task today is rather not to confirm what we are but to confront what we are not and reveal the multiple modes of manipulation (political, economic, informational, cultural, biopolitical) that shape our identity. The task of education is to help realize the importance of such questions as: ‘What does it mean to be human?’ and ‘What kind of humanity are we developing?’ and continue keeping these questions alive since the potential of human beings is inexhaustible.
4. Education now needs to engage with the challenges of a ‘post-human’ era which is likely to bring radical shifts in the concept of a human being, largely due to the continuously developing internet, the 4IR (fourth industrial revolution), cyber technologies, and social media. Thus, today it is especially important to recognize and defend human identity as distinct from machines and artificial intelligence. They are human creations and tools, but it remains for a person to make decisions and ethical choices. Human identity needs to be placed in the context of a renewed relationship with all other living beings on this Earth so that humans learn not to exploit but to integrate with the planet.
5. To be human also implies searching *for what* it means to be human, what people need, desire and strive to achieve. This has been referred to as *eudaimonia* or human flourishing and meaningfulness. Educational ideals, based on being a subject with agency, associated with self-determination and personal autonomy, are essential for this pursuit.
6. One of the aims of education is to recognize and engage with the human need for an inner life, particularly the ethical and spiritual dimensions associated with self-relatedness, self-transformation and self-transcendence, which are uniquely human and go beyond functionalism and instrumentalism.

### *The world, society and the aims of education*

7. Education has an aim to present to students the world as a living entity, full of challenges but also possibilities, and to enable them to see connections with it, their place in it and human responsibilities towards it.
8. Education is a social institution that initiates students into a common cultural world. Education is needed for every person and society as a whole. Thus, since education is a shared responsibility, civil societies should play their part in shaping the aims of education.
9. Instead of education that prepares students to enter the labour market as human capital and labour resources and socializes them to the existing social and political systems, the relationships between education, society, and the state should evolve within a paradigm of human growth and the development of society.
10. Education is social by its nature and impact. Therefore its essential aim is a social one: the all-round maturing of students as members of society. This should be understood as enabling them to become responsible people participating in public policy life with, and as equals to, policy makers.
11. Since education has a mission of raising future generations, this implies, on the one hand, the transfer and mastery of past collective experience, and on the other hand, a change for the better, that is, for the desired imaginary future.
12. Educational systems are conditioned by the current government and state policy but are, in fact, wider in scope and time frame. The task of education is to promote the improvement of individual and public life, for which it needs to look at the given in terms of change, and to remain open. Thus, education is not about reproducing what exists but about learning to be consciously critical of the 'given' and of narrow 'common sense'. It is also about fighting for ideals.
13. Higher education has the special aims of helping society to address more complex matters and contesting taken-for-granted frameworks.
14. In a globalized world that faces major challenges, the task of cultivating humanity that is maturely motivated, concerned for the future of planet Earth and capable of global mobilization for survival comes to the fore. In this sense, **the development of shared local and global responsibility becomes the main goal in education.**
15. One of the main threats to humanity is violence. Unless human beings learn to live together, peacefully and cooperatively, violence will continue to be experienced in the world, and, indeed, the world may cease to exist. Thus, one educational goal is to examine how hostilities between individuals and groups arise and to advocate for peace and respect amidst diversity and contradiction.
16. For a person to be educated, educational aims related to knowing must include not only a critical capacity and a scientific disposition to objective accounts of the world, but also a complex picture of subjective human relations, desires, feelings and thinking.

*Thus, a salient goal of education includes the growth not just of acquired knowledge and skills, but also, and primarily the growth of the student's personality. And this consists not only of intellectual growth or the growth of freedom and individual opportunities, but a holistic growth, especially with regard to the breadth of motivation, extending to care and concern for the world, as well as a deepening of experience up to spiritual depth.*

*The aims of education are to prepare students to cope with and by themselves through self-regulation and self-formation, not to harm others (non-violence), to be disposed to take responsibility for their society and the world (ethics of responsibility), and exercise this responsibility through professional competencies, social and civil skills and qualities, along with an ability to solve problems and resolve conflicts.*

## II.

### DEFINING EDUCATION

*Education for the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium implies the following transformations, based on human-oriented principles. Educators should:*

1. educate in accordance with what we humans are, advancing our ability to be with others and with ourselves and to live a meaningful human life. This is an understanding of education in the human dimension. It entails:

teaching what it means to be a human being and about human diversity through reasoned inquiry; going beyond rational knowledge and skills so as to constitute a ‘whole human’ education. This must include bodily awareness, desires, experiences, feelings, intuitions, creativity, relationships, values, and the human ability to accept and take on responsibility. The humanities are essential for all of this. Education should not adopt models of machines and operating systems. Instead, all technologies should be adapted to people;

helping students to believe in the worth and potential of their unique life and in the world’s need for them; providing education for an ‘inner life’ that is distanced from instrumentalization and includes the development of students’ self-awareness, values, emotional maturity, empathy and morality, as well as the ability to discover and treasure meanings; cultivating courage in the face of difficulties, complexity, suffering and death;

developing the ability to love something and someone in the world along with friendliness and respect for others;

2. encourage active subjective human nature and agency among students so as to empower them, and help them find themselves in activities;

3. educate for a global human society and for the entire earth, which requires an ethic of collective responsibility and the assimilation of wisdom from diverse traditions that are harmonious with nature;

4. help to reduce violence and hostility and teach peaceful co-existence of individuals and peoples based on commonality and interconnectedness with others;

5. produce critical and responsible citizens who exhibit the best aspects of democratic norms and outlook, teach democracy as a way of life and thought, develop criticality in its fullest sense and not just ‘critical thinking skills’, encouraging students to question the status quo, to deliberate and contest ideals, and suspect propaganda as political lies;

6. enable students to distinguish between information and practical wisdom, discover meanings, differentiate the important from unimportant, and find ways to their own flourishing and that of others, as well as helping them to resist the pressure of unnecessary and/or manipulative information;

7. create just, dialogic and cooperative spaces, cultivate searching, questioning, curiosity and thinking beyond what is taken for granted, together with reflexivity, self-questioning, openness and appreciation of difference;

8. cultivate not only the ascent of children to the values of the adult world, but also the ascent of adults to the values of childhood.

#### *Institutional dimension*

9. The financing of schools and universities should be borne largely by the state, overseen by democratically accountable bodies that answer to the interests of teachers, students, families and communities.

10. We need educational institutions that pursue not instrumental but meaningful goals and approaches and give priority to the human factor.

11. Teachers should be regarded as a decisive element and the main treasure of educational institutions, since their personalities serve as a “model of what it is to be human”, a source of inspiration and multifaceted influence for students. Teacher education as the development of a professional personality should encourage imagination, reflection, openness, dialogue, as well as the search for personal meanings and values.

12. Teachers require respect, trust, peace, and security in their work environment. Management should adopt more of a language of mutuality, nurture and encouragement to better ensure that their teachers can flourish. Teachers and administrators should be accountable to each other.

13. Educational policy should recognize and reduce the overwhelming workload and demands that many accountability frameworks place upon educators. Moreover, educational policy should include educators' own voices as an active force.

14. The ideal of autonomy in education can be embodied only through autonomous teachers being accorded professional freedoms in autonomous, democratically managed institutions.

15. Today, the idea of de-schooling and forms of non-school education are gaining momentum. Yet schooling remains important as a public system ensuring universal access to our human heritage, as well as a channel for socialization, preparing students to take responsibility for their freedom.

16. The examination system should primarily serve educational purposes and aid students' full development. Schools, universities and teachers are each unique and must be valued as such, and not judged just by their ratings or by some arbitrary quantitative system. The norms of performance and assessment of teachers should be developed with their participation.

### ***The relational dimension of teachers, students, and others***

*implies:*

17. respect for teachers' agency, attention to the intrinsic motivation of all adults who bear responsibility for the education of children, without subjecting them to undue management disciplines, relational norms of a learning professional community;

18. a non-hierarchical interpersonal teaching-learning environment, free from any form of coercion and violence;

19. empathy as a norm and a necessary framework for pedagogical practice; recognition of the emotions of students and teachers;

20. a caring approach, supporting students in their development with attention to the challenges that students face and to what is happening in society.

### ***The educational activity dimension***

*should include:*

21. a pedagogy of change implying transformative learning and a pedagogy of self-transcendence, as the educational process implies transformation for students through overcoming one's own limitations and, thus, involving self-liberation;

22. an awareness pedagogy, which is a process of mastering one's own milieu and oneself, in learning concentration, self-awareness, self-regulation, self-actualization;

23. a pedagogy of responsibility aimed at the discovery by students of their own freedom and role in the world;

24. an activity-based education and an experiential pedagogy, founded on the students' activities and their experiences within and, often, outside formal arrangements;
25. an agonistic pedagogy (agon - Greek: fight) teaching students to identify contradictions in a complex world and learn from conflicts rather than ignore them. The ability to struggle is significant, particularly in education where it implies confronting one's own habitual manner of being, prejudices, and naivety;
26. a meaning-making pedagogy helping students discover meanings and create a system of personally and socially grounded meanings;
27. a diversity pedagogy, meeting the diversity of students, dialogical in nature, using not just 'knowledge' but 'knowledges' plural and not one, but many pedagogical models;
28. the use of extracurricular and informal student learning in on-course programs to enrich the educational experience;
29. learning, with teachers and students exploring together as co-learners, and with teachers maintaining the openness to learning from students, to diverse ways of thinking, articulating and implicit being;
30. teaching young people how to interpret data, understand the function of information algorithms as a cultural creation, and how to create their own algorithms;
31. in today's world of visual culture, using images to develop students' imaginations and teaching them how to deal with images not only as information but as a cultural reality, and how to overcome the bewitching qualities of images.

### ***Primary level of education***

*Preschool and primary school education should*

32. create a nest for the growth of the child, especially in terms of personality;
33. rely on, and cultivate further, the natural openness of children, their inclination to responsiveness, sympathy and closeness to nature;
34. model human norms in relation to people, themselves, nature and living beings, and also technical devices;
35. encourage children to create, explore and discover, while allowing them to make mistakes.

### ***Secondary level of education***

*Schooling/ Educators should*

- 36.** push the boundaries of the formal and hidden curriculum from skills training and preparation for work towards personal development, citizenship education and values education;
37. broaden the approach to current problems under discussion from a national perspective to an international perspective and a concern for the whole world;
38. encourage students to value the public good, human rights, democratic values, and inculcate an engagement with democratic procedures such as elections, etc.;
39. in the modern information society, teach students to inquire, search for meaning and know things as interconnected, in particular, how they are connected to the students themselves;
40. respect religious and ethnic diversity in school;

### ***Tertiary level of education***

#### *Higher education should:*

41. evolve a higher education ethic that is pre-eminently independent both of geo-politics and the large technology corporations, and which is oriented to the fate of societies, the whole humanity and the earth;
42. educate in students, along with academic objectivity, not indifference, but a position of responsibility for their lives and the life of society;
43. follow developments in the wider world and acknowledge the mission of universities to promote and inform public debate, especially on pressing issues, and to help society address complex matters;
44. develop the academic community with its values, freedoms and mechanisms, within which a significant civil model for making collective decisions is being refined.

### ***Adult Education***

#### *should*

45. expand the sphere of relations with and personal involvement in society, particularly regarding civic affairs;
46. help to discover meanings in life;
47. develop in adults responsibility for the younger generations, society and the world;
48. strengthen the ability to live with uncertainty and ambiguity in a changing world;
49. promote solidarity with regard to global problems and personal participation in their solutions.