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Educational Epistemology

Learning

Ghazali believes that human's soul is acceptable for education, for there is basically knowledge and wisdom in such a soul. These two items have been given to the soul from the very beginning of creation and one should try to actualize them, as one should try to dig a well and then extract water.

Knowledge is obtained from two different ways: first) divine revelation and inspiration. God's or divine revelation belongs to God's prophets which finished with the prophet of Islam, and inspiration belongs to the saints and still continues and does not end. Second) usual and current instruction and learning in schools. For this this particular kind of learning to happen, some principles should be observed:

- 1. Cultivation and reinforcement of moral aspect, before instruction,
- 2. Consideration of individual differences and aptitudes,
- 3. graduality and sequence in instruction and learning.
- 4. rewarding and punishment.
- 5. Encouragement and motivation,
- 6. having a master (teacher), and presence in classroom (instruction),
- 7. Practice, action, and repetition,
- 8. involvement in schooling

Ghazali invites people to an open attitude to different sciences and showing an open face to them, whatever their subjects might be, because knowledge, irrespective of its subject is noble.

It is necessary that differences among ideas to be accepted. Diversity of ideas and views in a single

subject is not a reason for invalidation of that subject. There are two reasons for this opinion of Ghazali: first) there are many kinds of potential sciences that have not been yet actualized, and humans can achieve them. Second) discovering of one new science causes deepness in one's faith and firmness in Islam.

If religious sciences cause cognition of God and His Attributes, natural sciences reveal and expose the Acts of the exalted God in being. Thus, Ghazali invites teachers to inform their students of the value of all science in order that the students, observing graduality and sequence, to study other sciences after learning each branch of science. Ghazali is of the opinion that it is up to the wise of a society to study and investigate the new or foreign subject and make it suitable for their own society adorned with values.

According to this viewpoint, scientific and cultural interaction and exchange are carried out among the wise, because Ghazali believes that it is dangerous for the beginners in knowledge to go to an environment which is against their own beliefs and values (Kilani, Translation, Criticism and additions by Rafiie, 2007).

Ghazali believes that education can bring humans from what they are to what they should be. Education, as life, is the natural right of everyone. Man has been created for worship and servitude of God, and education is not only the perquisite of worship of God, but it is also a kind of worship. Ghazali considers education both as an individual necessity and as a social necessity for it is in the light of which, that culture and thought remain, and it is also a means for transmission from a generation to another.

Therefore, what culture and thought man has is from education without which man worth nothing and he is the product of his own education. Imam Ali, in a very educational warning says to the educators to educate their children for today. The delicate point of this wise statement is that the development of a child should at least be in harmony with the natural development of culture and civilization and positive transformations of humans' life.

Some parents have no view from life except that which they themselves wish. Then, they educate their children as they themselves have desired or as they had been educated. While according to the saying of Imam Ali, Parents should think beyond their own time. It is not only the student that needs to be educated, but it is even the educator that needs to be educated, and he or she needs to educate someone else (the student), and this need is satisfied through education of another person (the student), and this is one of the reasons of affection of the great teachers to their noble students (Rafiei, 2002).

Ibn Sina has mentioned the necessity of this fact that student's interests should be known and discovered and they should be much cared for to be educated to become moderate persons. To do this one should not let sever anger or grief overcome him. They should be kept away from what they hate. Moral modification causes body and spirit health.

Ibn Sina also wants that education to be a means for entering in the production and participation in the economic activities of society. Thus Ibn Sina deems it necessary that the boy after learning the Qur'an

and the principles of the Arabic language, to be led to one of crafts and occupations which is consistent to his nature (Ali & Reza; translation, Criticism and additions by Rafiee, 2005).

Teaching and instruction methods should bring the students to the educational goals. Therefore, to reach the goals envisioned by Sa'di, there is emphasis on such activities as question and answer, and improved lecture methods. He also suggested some points in teaching, instruction, and learning that can improve students' education.

He not only emphasized paying attention to the techniques of speaking or talking, but also placed much emphasis on the distinct role of silence as one of the greatest techniques or methods of increasing and improving educational policies.

The importance of questioning and asking from Sa'di's viewpoint is revealed when he says, "They asked Imam Mursheed Muhammad Ben Muhammad Ghazali, (on whom be the mercy of God!) by what means he had attained such a degree of knowledge. He replied, 'In this manner, whatever I did not know, I was not ashamed to enquire about..."

He tells people to inquire about everything you do not know; "since for the small trouble of asking, you will be guided in the respectable road of knowledge (Gulistan, chapter VIII, tale LXXVII). However, he also notes "that whenever you are certain that anything will be known to you in time, be not hasty in inquiring after it" (ibid, tale LXXVIII). One should think and then answer. He says that "whosoever doth not reflect before he giveth an answer, will generally speak improperly" (Gulistan, chapter VIII, tale XXXVI).

Sa'di refers to three points in applying the question-and-answer method. First, we should question for knowledge: He believes that one should not ask a question for pedantry, ostentation and dawdling, and for getting information about the other's private and personal affairs. Therefore, if the questioner receives his answer without asking and with patience and silence, it is not necessary that he asks a question.

Second, ask questions of the wise ones: Sa'di is of the opinion that one should ask educated, knowledgeable and well-intentioned scholars. Third, he believes in the necessity of a well-thought-out answer. When a wise person wants to give the answer to a question, he will do this in a thought-provoking way, technically and with good intentions because the unexamined speech can mislead instead of increasing knowledge (Beheshti, Fagihi & Abuja'fari, 2001).

When speaking and questioning or answering, Sa'di emphasizes not interrupting the others. "No one confesses his own ignorance, excepting he who begins speaking whilst another is talking; and before the discourse is ended" (Gulistan, chapter IV, tale VII).

The reason Sa'di says this is that "a discourse hath a commencement and a conclusion" (ibid).In another instance, he says, "Whosoever interrupts the conversation of others, to make a display of his own wisdom, certainly betrays his ignorance" (Gulistan, chapter VIII, tale LXXXII). And he adds, "A wise

man speaketh not until they ask him a question" (ibid).

Sa'di orders all people, "Till you perceive a convenient time for conversing, lose not your own consequence by talking to no purpose" (Gulistan, chapter I, tale XIII). Sa'di says that when a business can be managed without his interference, it is not proper for him to speak on the subject; but if he sees a blind man in the way of a well, if he keeps silence, it is a crime (Gulistan, chapter I, tale XXXVIII).

Therefore, Sa'di concludes, "Until you are persuaded that the discourse is strictly proper, speak not; and whatever you know will not obtain a favorable answer, ask not" (Gulistan, chapter VII, tale XIII). "He who listens not to advice, studies to hear reprehension. When advice gains not admission into the ear, if they reprehend you, be silent" (Gulistan, chapter VIII, tale XLVIII).

Since Sa'di believed the sources of knowledge are unlimited, he did not confine himself to formal and classic textbooks. He placed particular emphasis on informal learning, by which the students try to take lessons from the great school of nature and the individual events of their lives, and the lives of other people, in all places and times.

Thus, people should not confine themselves to the appearance of matters; rather, they should make great effort to get to the essence of matters and subjects and try to comprehend their truth. The educational method of storytelling utilized by Sa'di in both poetry and prose can be considered as an epitome of the teaching methods.

Therefore, students should be committed to this approach in that they not only study history books, for example, but also must pay great attention to all of history, nature, and all human beings, if they wish to reach the highest educational goals. This is also a task of all scholars and authorities in the educational system.

Sa'di believes in hidden learning and learning from all things: For example, he relates, "They asked Lokman from whom he had learnt urbanity. He replied, 'From those of rude manners; for whatsoever I saw in them that was disagreeable, I avoided doing the same.' Not a word can be said, even in the midst of sport, from which a wise man will not derive instruction" (*Gulistan*. Chapter II, tale XXI).

Sa'di believes in "informal learning" and says, "Listen to the discourse of the learned man with the utmost attention" (*Gullistan*. Chapter II, tale XXXVIII). Sa'di wants all people to pay attention to the admonitions of the advisers and take lessons from them.

He says, "Know you not, that you will see your feet in fetters, when you listen not to the admonition of mankind" (*Gulistan*, chapter I, tale XVI). Sa'di believes that "admonish" comes before "confinement," saying, "Great men first admonish, and then confine; when they give advice, and you listen not, they put you in fetters" (*Gulistan*, chapter XIII, tale XC).

Sa'di says that it is up to humans to admonish even though the other does not listen: "Admonish and

exhort as your duty requires; if they mind not, it does not concern you. Although thou knowest that they will not listen, nevertheless speak whatever you know that is advisable. It will soon come to pass that you will see the silly fellow with his feet in the stocks, there smiting his hands and exclaiming, 'Alas! that I did not listen to the wise man's advice'" (*Gulistan*, chapter VII, tale V).

Sa'di also believes, "The fortunate take warning from the histories and precepts of the ancients, in order that they themselves not become an example to posterity" (*Gulistan*, chapter XIII, tale XC). Therefore, Sa'di orders all people, "Take warning by the misfortunes of others, that others may not take example from you" (ibid).

Teaching methods and instructional content alone are not sufficient to bring students to the educational goals. It is also necessary to utilize particular techniques to improve and accelerate the gradual progress of students toward those goals. Encouragement and punishment of students are necessary techniques.

The reasons for using these two are the same: leading students to educational goals. It is necessary for educators and teachers to be the epitome of both authority and affection, so students will both respect and love them.

A teacher should be the epitome of affection and authority. He explains, "Anger, when excessive, createth terror; and kindness out of season destroys authority" (*Gulistan*, chapter VIII, tale XVIII). Therefore, Sa'di believes that teachers should be not so severe as to cause disgust, nor so lenient as to encourage audacity. Severity and leniency should be tempered together; a wise man carries not severity to excess, nor suffers such relaxation as will lessen his own dignity. Thus, one should be complacent, but not to that degree that they may insult him with the sharp teeth of the wolf (ibid).

Sa'di believes that one should use both encouragement and punishment in a timely manner, adequately and thoughtfully, because undue, unnecessary and unexamined anger and punishment makes the student truant; and the undue encouragement makes him or her arrogant, egoistic and exigent to the extent that the he doesn't obey the teacher or the educator.

From the viewpoint of Sa'di, encouragement and motivating others is of particular importance and can influence them for better performance to accomplish the desired goals (*Gulistan*, chapter I, tale III).

Sa'di puts emphasis on praise the student and says in this regard, "If you wish to preserve peace with your enemy, whenever he slanders you in your absence, in return praise him to his face; at any rate as the words will issue from the lips of the pernicious man, if you wish that his speech should not be bitter, make his mouth sweet" (*Gulistan*, chapter I, tale XXIV). Sa'di doesn't think it advisable to overindulge in blame, when the blame is necessary (*Gulistan*, chapter I, tale XVI).

It appears that Sa'di affirms punishment when necessary. Sa'di says, "A king sent his son to school, and placed a silver tablet under his arm. On the face of the tablet was written in gold, "The severity of the master is better than the indulgence of the father" (*Gulistan*, chapter VII, tale IV).

However, punishment should be the last method in education and not the first one. He professes, "When the hand has failed in every trick, it is lawful to draw the sword" (*Gulistan*, chapter XIII, tale XV). "Forgiveness is commendable, but apply not ointment to the wound of an oppressor. Knoweth he not that whosoever spareth the life of a serpent, committeth injury towards the sons of Adam (ibid, tale XVI).

The reason Sa'di confirms punishment in some cases is that "An enemy does not become a friend, through indulgence; nay, it increases his avarice. Be humble unto him who shows you kindness" (*Gulistan*, chapter VIII, tale LXXXI). In another tale, he adds, "When you speak to a low fellow with kindness and benignity, it increases his arrogance and perverseness" (*Gulistan*, chapter VIII, tale LXI).

He believes the base men do not deserve affections because "when you connect yourself with base men, and show them favor, they commit crimes with your power, whereby you participate in their guilt" (*Gulistan*, chapter VIII, tale VIII). And in another instance, he says, "When you support and favor the vicious, you commit wickedness with your power, by participation (*Gulistan*, chapter VIII, tale LIII).

Sa'di believes that in spite of some of similarities between different people, there are some differences in their aptitudes as compared with each other, i.e. there are differences between their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and moral aptitudes.

Sa'di says that people should consider the extent of their abilities. He is of the opinion that "whosoever contendeth with the great, sheds his own blood. He who thinks himself great has been compared to one who squints and sees double. You will get a broken front by sporting your head against a ram" (*Gulistan*, chapter XIII, tale XLV).

In another example of this, he says, "It is not the part of a wise man to box with a lion, or to strike his fist against a sword. Neither fight nor contend with one more powerful than yourself; put your hand under your arm-pit" (ibid, tale XLVI). He also warns, "A weak man, who contents with one that is strong, befriends his adversary, by his own death". (ibid, tale XLVII). Sa'di emphasizes that the teachers should speak to students in conformity with the temper of the hearer (*Gulistan*, chapter VIII, tale XXIX).

From the viewpoint of Moulavi, one of the points that the teacher should consider is the individual differences of the students, that is the teacher must pay attention to the fact that the addresses and the students are quite different in aptitudes, attitudes, interests, knowledge, etc., and therefore, the sayings and teachings of the teacher should be in accordance with these differences.

It is also up to the teacher to consider the spiritual capacity of his students. The word "reminding" can indicate that Moulavi believes that man has the best potential aptitudes in himself, and one of the responsibilities of the tutor and teacher is to nurture those aptitudes.

Mutahhari (1997) emphasizes that teacher should pay attention to the mental and psychological states of students, and not to make them tired when they are not ready for learning.

According to Mutahhari (1997) if a teacher uses encouragement or punishment for students, they should be aware of the reason of this action of teacher; because these actions might become useless when the students do not know which behaviors of them should continue or which of them should be improved or avoided.

Mutahhari (1996 and 1997) takes much emphasis on harmonious cultivation and breeding of all of the students' aptitudes: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, moral and religious.

Mutahhari (1997) does not accept those habits which individuals do passively without any thinking, brightness and luminosity (of the soul). He emphasizes the education and acquisition of knowledge in childhood and narrates this say that knowledge in childhood is like inscription on a stone.

He introduces work as a factor for concentration, and prevention from committing sins. He also believes that the particular aptitudes of every person should be considered in choosing any job or occupation for him or her. A good work can be very effective in man's feelings, personality and self– esteem.

According to Mutahhari (2003), the necessity of society is not only for satisfying one's biological needs, rather human being needs social life in his or her spiritual dimension. Therefore, many natural aptitudes of humans are not actualized without society.

Mutahhari considered "teaching" of his students as a religious worship and obligation ((Educational Facilities Affaires and Libraries Bureau or EFALB, 2007). In addition to the fact that Mutahhari mastered teaching, he also had a great piety, and moral obligation and commitment. That was one of the reasons why he was well accepted by his students. Mutahhari never gave a contemptuous look to his students.

He listened to his students and answered their questions carefully. In addition to his gentility, his behavior towards the students was friendly and kindly. He tried to solve his students' problems. Mutahhari made much effort to educate his students to be alert and sensible critics. He was much interested in seeking truth.

Mutahhari put forward the scientific and religious problems, and then encouraged his students to pursue and solve them. He respected scientific opinions even though he was opposed to them. He deeply investigated the subjects, and he reacted scientifically to them. He sometimes used discussion teaching method, and he often used question and answer teaching method.

Sometimes, one third or more of the time of the class was spent on solving the lesson-related problems of the students and answering their questions. He warmly welcomed student's questions, and gave suitable answers to them. Mutahhari had a clear speech when teaching and explaining the subject matters.

He had also a regular and disciplined way of teaching. He described well the prefatory notes at the beginning of his teaching, and determined all the lesson upon which the preliminaries were based. He

spoke clearly and wrote in a simple style and used many examples. He taught with enthusiasm, and mastered the relations of sciences with each other. The materials he taught were new, and his students knew the benefit and application of those materials.

He paid attention to individual differences of the students and encouraged the active and cheerful pupils. Therefore, his teaching did not appear to be monotonous, and his students did not become tired (EFALB, 2007).

Educating a Child

Family should be so fit that they can represent admirable and useful children to society. Avicenna takes much emphasis on the product of a marriage, i.e. children and their education. He has introduced the following periods as the stages of a child development and growth upon which his or her education should be based:

1) prior to instruction: Ibn Sina considers the first stage of the development of a child from birth to about six years old. The duty of parents in this stage is giving a name to their child. It is up to them to choose a good name for the child a name which is admirable from religious and social viewpoint. The second duty of the parents is milking their child.

Avicenna recommends that child should eat her or his mother's milk. In the event of choosing a nanny, she should have a praiseworthy morality, a healthy nature, and away from foolishness and illness, because her milk affects the child. The third duty of parents in the above stage is correction of their child.

When the child weans, his or her correction should be started before blameworthy dispositions and reproachable habits attack him or her. That's because Avicenna believes that the child tends to evil and appeals to reprehensible habits and dispositions faster, then these bad properties overcome his or her nature, and it will hardly be possible to separate these habits and properties from him or her.

The second stage starts when the child's joints have grown and the child has possessed verbal, aural readiness, and suggestibility ability. Although Avicenna has not mentioned a particular age for this stage, but he has considered the suitable age for beginning primary education when the child is six years old. Ibn Sina is of the opinion that the subject matters the child should learn and should be are: the Qur'an, writing and knowledge of the religion, besides the instruction of those poems which instigate the child. Simultaneous with this, intellectual and moral education should be carried out.

Avicenna believes that memorizing poems, understanding and repeating them can cause intellectual cultivation, strengthening the memory, intellectual readiness, and promotion of the level of comprehension on one hand, and on the other, it leads the child to good morality and behavior of which the poems are composed, and installs the moral virtues in the child's soul, and the child gradually appeals to good deeds through speculative accepting the good morality and habits.

In the stage of vocational training, an adolescent should learn the occupation and crafts he loves, select them, and make herself or himself ready for them. When she or he masters that occupation, she or he should turn to acquisition of income and earn his livelihood by his own wage.

After the above stage one can get married and create an independent family. Avicenna does not mention a definite age four this stage, but so much is certain that this new stage can begin when a person has passed successfully the previous for stages: has been adorned with praiseworthy properties and habits morally and behaviorally, has possessed the necessary ability economically and intellectually for managing his family.

Although Avicenna himself has not directly defined education, but considering the ideas of him, it can be deduced that he believes the nature of education is planning and activity of society and individual, for health of family, child development and management of social affairs to bring human being to happiness in this world and hereafter (Howzeh- University Co-Operation Center, 1998). Avicenna emphasizes education of children, and has put forward new subjects in this field (Shiite encyclopedia, 2007).

Curriculum and Educational Contents

Khajeh Naseer Tusi has formulated the children's educational plan according to their natural development. Thus, he believes that this plan should extend consistent with the development of the children's powers and abilities. Appetitive faculty should be first paid attention to in the beginning, because it is the first faculty that appears in humans, and it has been installed in them for their survival, and that's the reason why children search first for food, water and sleep.

Therefore, before overcoming blameworthy morals and habits through satisfying this faculty, they should be corrected with good manners and praiseworthy disposition, and manners of living such as manners of eating food, speaking, socializing, taking exercise, and also good dispositions such as humbleness, obeying parents and teachers, and religious teachings should be taught to them.

When children grow more, they should the taught with reason and proof what they had already learned through imitation, and appeal to science or crafts on the basis of their capacity, aptitude and interest. If they want to learn wisdom, they should first learn logics so that they might learn the procedure of thinking correctly, to be kept from intellectual errors, and they should then learn mathematics to become familiar with argumentative problems, and at the end, they should engage in philosophy and wisdom.

Khajeh Naseer has mentioned three fundamental points regarding educational plans:

- 1. Educational plans should start with those texts which are simple in content and small in volume in order that children enjoy acquiring knowledge, and then harder texts should gradually be started.
- 2. Educational plans should be formulated in such a manner that every person who is involved in acquiring each branch of science and skill, may bring it to its final and ultimate state, and does not give it

up in the middle of the way.

3. in educational plans, fundamental, durable and old sciences should be preferred to new and endurable sciences. Islamic sciences should be considered as the most valuable ones, and prayer and relation with God should be more paid attention to, because these two are very fruitful for learning sciences and achieving to nearness to God, and makes man familiar with origin and end (Beheshi, Abuja'afari & Faqihi, 2000).

Khajeh Naseer recommends that it is necessary that the principles of health to be taught to students (Modarresi, 2000). Khajeh Naseer believed that medicine, astrology and philosophy could be applied for welfare and health of people. Therefore, he was always thinking to find a way to encourage people to empirical sciences. He himself was famous because of his very comprehensive information regarding wisdom, astrology, medicine, mathematics and religious sciences (Badkubehee Hazavehee, 2004).

Khajeh Naseer Tusi mentions that it was in the light of "knowledge" that God showed the superiority of Adam to angels and ordered them to prostrate Adam. In addition to this, knowledge is the means for bringing humankind to the eternal happiness. Therefore, the seeker of knowledge is a growing existence that does not accept to surrender to ignorance.

It is up to a learner to choose the best from each branch of science, and seek for a science that is needed now and in the affairs of the world, and then for a science that is needed in the future, and it is also to the learner to prefer knowledge of Divine Unity (unity of God) and try to recognize God through argument and reason. Students should choose the more aware, pious and older ones as their teachers.

In addition to consignment of their teachers, it is necessary that students themselves always try to speculate regarding the accurate problems and points, for these things can only be comprehended through a deep consideration.

A student should have self-esteem and should be high-minded, and seek simultaneously for acquisition of knowledge and earning a living and never stares people's properties. There is not only a particular time for acquiring knowledge, rather students should always seek for knowledge so that they achieve virtues.

This is a picture that Khajeh Naseer portraits for a student, and shows him or her as a person who has decided to strive in the cause of God and transacts with God to exalt the esteem of knowledge and extend its lights in the boundaries of life, in order that he or she might be purified, and this is the task and duty of all the God's prophets.

From Ghazali's viewpoint, curriculum has an extensive and complete structure in which religious sciences and worldly occupations interact and are taught with each other. Religious sciences can't be comprehended and understood and intellectual sciences are like drug for health and religious sciences are like food.

It is not meant in such a comprehensive instruction that learner should achieve expertise in all fields of the curriculum, rather it is meant that the learner should become familiar with the general features of sciences in order that might help him or her to achieve a cognitive perfection, and then become expert and master in a particular field of science.

Curriculum is extensive and includes diverse fields of knowledge and work. Ghazali believes that the standard and criteria of value and distinguishing of sciences from each other are the result of each branch of science, and the firmness of the reasons for that science.

From the viewpoint of Ghazali for both obligatory and voluntary sciences, their rate of obligation is determined based on one's life development and the conditions of a society, e.g. when an individual reaches legal age (at which he or she should do religious commandments) having the knowledge of prayer becomes obligatory for him or her, or whenever a person has had a wealth that should pay alms from it, he or she should have the knowledge of almsgiving.

Such a concept for Ghazali is a changeable concept that causes the curriculum to develop in harmony with an individual's life and society conditions development. The domains of curriculum from Ghazali's viewpoint is almost equal to the educational principles of the Qur'an and Islamic traditions, the most important of which are: domain of Islamic belief, domain of soul purification, domain of study of the Qur'an and the systems and principles mentioned in it, domain of applied skills (Kilani; translation, Criticism and additions by Rafiie, 2007).

Ghazali believes that curriculum should consist of Qur'an instruction, good news, stories and biographies of the good and memorizing good poems. Ghazali also is of the opinion that the child should herself or himself face problems and difficulties in order that she or he might acquire the necessary readiness for tolerating and solving the life problems.

He considers physical training as a necessary part of curriculum to move the students away from weakness and infirmity. He considers play as a natural means for learning and progress of students (Sheari Nejad, 1998).

Avicenna recommends learners to decide to learn "natural sciences, " pure mathematics science and arithmetic science", "divine science" and "logic science " that help to know the truth for itself and virtue for its acceptance and acting according to them. He deems also necessary to instruct knowledge of language and words, because it is necessary for all of us to apply the words, and these help thinking.

Despite all of these, Avicenna believes that it is necessary to learn philosophy before other sciences, because it makes humans familiar with the truth of the facts and phenomena as far as it is possible for humankind. Phenomena are divided into two groups: first) those affaires which their existence depends on our will power and our actions, second) those affaires the existence of which is not dependent upon our will power or our actions.

Knowledge or cognition to the first group is called speculative philosophy, and to the second group is called practical philosophy. The aim of the speculative philosophy is the Perfection of human's soul through learning, and the aim of practical philosophy is completion and perfection of the soul not only through instruction, but also through instruction of what is done and acting according to them (Ali & Reza; translation, criticism and additions, by Rafiee, 2005).

Mutahhari (1997) lakes emphasis on this fact that we should also pay attention to the future, its needs and conditions in educational and curriculum planning, and teaching.

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