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Education as the fullness of life and at
the heart of every human settlement

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Item Type	Conference paper/presentation
Authors	Ike, Obiora F.
Publisher	Globethics.net
Rights	All rights reserved
Download date	2026-07-11 15:31:18
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4263347

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ETHICS AND VALUES AT THE HEART OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Education as the Fullness of Life and at the heart of every human settlement

“Sow a thought and reap an act. Sow an act and reap a habit.

Sow a habit and reap a character, Sow a character and reap a destiny”.

(African and universal wisdom)

The conclusion of this contribution is that one should not despair too readily over our contemporary state of affairs. Ethics education and values orientation are necessary for character formation for the young who need guiding principles to preserve and understand the world around them as they grow, wonder and find their own answers. Education is thus the fullness of life and at the heart of every human settlement.

The Greek philosopher Plato some thousands of years ago, in *The Republic*, complains that in democratic times a teacher “*fears and fawns upon the pupils, and the pupils pay no heed to the teacher ... or to their overseers either.*” *The youth ignore their elders, while those supposedly wiser and more experienced “are full of pleasantry and graciousness, imitating the young for fear they may be thought disagreeable and authoritative.*” In the world renowned treatise, St Augustine of Hippo in his *Confessions* written in the fourth century bemoans the intransigence of his students as well as their unwillingness to give back what they owe to him for their education.

The twentieth century Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* contrasts the academic seriousness of Jude Fawley with his classmates, who are not serious with their formation and have no adequate commitment to their education leaving much to be desired. As Jeffrey Polet, Professor at Hope College and director of the Leadership Forum at the Gerald Ford Presidential Foundation has once said, *the current generation may not have invented academic corruption, but they have gone a ways toward perfecting it. Still, it is worth remembering that every generation has its scoundrels and saints, good and bad students and teachers. In many ways the basics of education haven’t changed that much: There are things worth knowing that require much study; those that engage in that study seek to communicate what they’ve learned; the knowledge gained proves both useful and generative of personal growth.*

What can be said therefore is that the problems with modern higher education are all too familiar. We can think of solutions through issues of policy frameworks in education, improved interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches, critical thinking, capacity building of both the people who teach and learn and of the required resources for deployment in education. Furthermore, values-driven formation and accountability concerns that ensure that policies are followed and persons in responsibility carry out their assignments or face

consequences. It is thus possible to say that solutions are closer to hand than one might think. Start with “*do your job.*”

Through education in ethics, the realization of meaning and purpose in society are enabled and beneficiaries are empowered to gain more access to opportunities, resources and power. The evidences experienced in the way humanity is driving the global train has made the assertion necessary that the future of humanity rests on some critical point which is that there can be no sustainable development universally if there are no ethical values integrated across sectors and built within the education industry at all levels. There is no inhibition to integrate our ability to translate powerful motives into action, through the tool and knowledge of ethics for through the learning and living of ethics as a way of life, society retains their original power for realization of their full potentials.

THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR IS TO PROMOTE HUMAN POTENTIALS

Education for the 21st century must assist and lead the student to learn how to be truly and fully human, how to use the rare gift of freedom balanced with responsibility to think critically, innovate, create and decide his or her own destiny. The teacher has the duty to guide the student to know how to acquire knowledge that is not mere information but a knowledge that is reflected, offering essential insights needed for effective living. Such knowledge bears the ingredients of Ethics – which is the discipline, process and action of thinking the right thing, of doing the right thing and of living rightly. This shift in orientation belongs to the domain of ETHICS

KNOWLEDGE AND VIRTUE ARE TWO WINGS OF SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION

Whereas education was designed to serve the pursuit of wisdom, the moulding of human character, the cultivation of virtues and beauty, taking to the examples of Socrates and the wise sages of history in all cultures and civilizations through time, the reality is quite different in the 21st century. What has become an unfortunate conclusion across nations is that the current education systems which ordinarily would be useful tools for the change all of us envisage has failed globally due to conflicts of interest in the last thirty years because education has shifted from pedagogically-based academic values to market-based values. C.S.Lewis made the point quite succinctly that “*education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make humans more clever devils*”. The reality as is commonly expressed in many places, using the strong words of the Founder of the Globalization for the Common Good Initiative (GCGI) is that “education is been designed, controlled and implemented by political and business elites, indulged in a reckless ideology of neoliberalism that advances market forces and market values even in the field of education where access is lacking for many “ (Kamran Mofid).

WHY ETHICS AND VALUES?

With ethics and values, the potential to respect and promote LIFE in everything by doing Right in Thought and Action which Socrates, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas with Nelson Mandela called the GOOD assumes practical effect. ETHICS brings in principles to serve the common good of all, promotes values of respect for human dignity and human rights, the integrity of creation, inclusion, justice, fairness, quality first, cooperation, competence, sustainability, holistic approach and need for a united global effort to channel the forces of science and technology positively and govern the peaceful evolution of human society. It is in ethics, with ethics and through ethics that the rapidly rising expectations to solve problems that have increased frustrations and tensions that threaten the fabric of global society can find sustainable solutions. Ethics and values remain central and at the heart of quality education in the past and

into the future. Currently the noticeable gaps in errant behaviour of educated people points to this missing link. We must rise and truly reflect on these three pertinent questions that T. S. Eliot has asked us: *"Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"*

COVID 19 GLOBAL HEALTH INTRUSION AS CHANCE AND CHALLENGE

Following the tragic covid 19 pandemic and its consequences on all spheres of society, humanity is at a new and irreversible dawn. This is indeed a great chance to reverse negative trends in the ways things were done and to allow space for the vision to more effectively direct our intellectual, moral and scientific capabilities for world peace, global security, human dignity and social justice. Today the world needs evolutionary ideas that can spur our collective progress without the wake of destructive violence that threatens to undermine the huge but fragile political, social, financial and ecological infrastructures on which we depend and strive to build a better world. We all recognise the urgent need for leadership in thought and action, a radical rethink in order to protect the environment, advance cultures, progress history and preserve our humanity and our ecosystem – body, mind, soul and planet.

ETHICS EDUCATION AS BASIS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The founders of Globethics.net were motivated by a deep emotional commitment and sense of responsibility to bring into the forum of global conversations, the topic of ETHICS as a basis for sustainable development and the benchmark for values-based education. Such education promotes the betterment of all humankind. Until recently, history has recorded the acts of creative individual thinkers and dynamic leaders who altered the path of human progress and left a lasting mark on society. In recent centuries the world has been propelled by the battle cry of revolutionary ideas—freedom, equality, fraternity, universal education, including paroles such as “workers of the world unite”. Such revolutions in the past have always brought vast upheavals and destructions in their wake, unimaginable in their ability for tumultuous and violent change that has torn societies asunder and precipitated devastating wars.

Unprecedented material and technological achievements co-exist with unconscionable and in some cases increasing poverty, inequality and injustice. Advances in science have unleashed remarkable powers, yet these very powers as presently wielded threaten to undermine the very future of our planet. In order to solve the grave global problems we face some of which include – climate change, population growth, environmental degradation, extinction of species, war, acts of terrorism, inequality, intolerance, racism, refugees, xenophobia, building walls between nations and peoples, and the rest – we need governments to act appropriately. If Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest in the world with the numbers of its clients pulled from every country and generation beyond cultures, religions and ideologies. What skills, resources and content are available for these clients, not only in knowledge acquisition, but also the application of basic ethical values and principles in the training of the youth, towards overall transformation?

INTEGRATING ETHICS INTO MANAGEMENT AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION WITH SKILLS, RESOURCES AND CONTENT

At a time of complexity of issues, rather than offer narrow responses, what is called for requires interdisciplinary approaches. Universities must move from being the Ivory Towers of the past

to become spaces for balance, inclusivity and access. Higher education institutions are bearers and catalysts for integral development which provides opportunities for many – prepares women and men, privileged and underprivileged – to address the complex issues of society with broad values founded on ETHICS – here an acronym for: Empowerment, Transformation, Holistic, Integrity, Competence and Sustainability.

Part of the many problems institutions of higher education face in ethics education, particularly in developing countries, is not a lack of awareness of the need for ethics, but rather the lack of adequate and required resources, skills and content towards integrating the discipline of ethics into university governance and management and in the classroom. In today's world, more and more attention is given to the critical role of higher education institutions in fostering students to not only be well educated but also to be values-driven, as citizens and as leaders. As such, higher education institutions and business schools are challenged to ensure that they abide by the highest ethical standards and that they build an ethos on their campus, among teachers, students and administrators that inspires trust, credibility and hard work.

- **Strengthen the ethical reputation of higher education institutions by supporting efforts to integrate values-based decisions in governance, management and in the daily practices of staff, management and board.**
- **Promote professional ethical awareness and provide support to teachers so that they are adequately equipped to teach.**
- **Support students with tools and resources to think and act according to values.**
- **Integrate ethical reflection and action in research, ensuring that research goals and methods are beneficial and not harmful;**
- **Raise awareness of policy makers on the need to integrate values-based policies in education and research.**

By making education a tool for profit maximization, consequences have signalled not only a change in the fundamentals of education philosophy in tertiary education but also presented us, using the words of Emiliano Bosio “*with a real-world crises of economic irresponsibility, displacement, exclusion, division and inequality*”. Nelson Mandela is once quoted as saying that “*destroying any nation does not require the use of atomic bombs or long range missiles. It only requires lowering the quality of education and allowing unethical practices to flourish*”. Such unethical practices are the abuse of power, cheating, sexual harassment, indiscipline, corruption and corruption. People die at the hands of a doctor who bought their medical degree, thereby brining their profession into disrepute. Buildings collapse at e corruption, he hands of an engineer who paid for another person to sit their exams. Money is lost at the hands of economists and accountants who do not abide by the rules and standards of their trade. Humanity is divided due to the hate teachings of bigots – political, religious or racist – who do not understand the healing power of dialogue, listening and reconciliation. And justice is lost at the hands of police officers, security agents and judges and magistrates who receive bribes.

And lives are lost at the hands of all those involved in the food and health sector who produce fake medicine and fake food to make profit.

We experience and witness vulnerabilities which arise from instabilities caused by such vices as greed, lust for power and control, egomaniac tendencies and selfishness, unethical practices and outright corruption. Not that these vices are new under the sun, but the current global environment of populations anywhere between 7 to 8 billion people, constantly under mobility propelled by science, technology and socio-economic interconnectedness makes the point blunt. There is a generalized crisis which cries for solutions.

The banking sectors, credit and markets are laden with volatility. Climatic changes of recent bring with it environmental and ecological consequences including unknown heat waves, a scorched earth, dying trees, mammals and fauna and ocean levels roaring for vengeance with massive scales of natural destruction, floods and winds. The housing crisis and the mega trends in big cities question the sustainability of cities planned for less than ten million people are now housing the double populations. Indifference is not an answer. Fake news complicates the situation. The spiritual and moral crisis all of us face is another way of saying that the greatest disability in life is a bad character, for people cannot climb beyond the limitation of their character.

Peter Schulz, the former executive of Porsche car making industry once said: “*Hire character – Train Skills*”. And the famous literature guru of all times, William Shakespeare captured it succinctly when he wrote. “*The fault is not in our stars, but in us ourselves*”. My life’s experience has taught me that honesty is the best policy. It is the medicine for good health and old age. A clear conscience fears no accusation. It is unbelievable to watch how people for the satisfaction of greed and ambition pretend to be what they are not! And such spend entire life trying to cover up the obvious. In lacking character, they lack virtue, and therefore ethical grounding and basic respect both to themselves and others. This is one of the causes of high blood pressure among youth. It is pitiable how people self-sabotage themselves by seeking solutions outside for character and integrity deficiency syndromes. They look around at everybody as suspects for their predicaments when their real and greatest demons lurk within them – their character. People with great visions and dreams are always very sensitive to their character and the character of people around them.

What we often call our destiny is actually our character. And since we can manage to build up habits to crystallise into character that can change, destiny can be also changed. Character is destiny. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States of America once said that nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal. Nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.

Over the past half century, the role of pioneering individuals is increasingly being replaced by that of new and progressive organizations, including the international organizations of the UN system and NGOs such as the Club of Rome, Pugwash and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. These organizations stand out because they are inspired by high values and committed to the achievement of practical, but far-reaching goals.

Today circumstances are more conducive, the international environment is more developed. No single organization can by itself harness the motive force needed to change the world, but a group of like-minded organizations founded with such powerful intentions can become a magnet and focal point to project creative ideas that possess the inherent dynamism for self-fulfillment.

ANCIENT CHINA AND LESSONS OF THE CHINESE WALL FOR ETHICS AND VALUES One of the most impressive architectural feats and the military defence project in history is the Great China Wall. In 1987, UNESCO designated this Great Wall a World Heritage site, and a popular controversial claim that emerged in the 20th century holds that it is the only man-made structure that is visible from space.

Originally conceived by Emperor Qin Shi Huang (c 259 -210 BC) in the 3rd century as a means of preventing incursions from Mongolians and other barbarian nomads into the Chinese Empire, the wall is one of the most extensive constructions projects ever completed. History has it that when the ancient Chinese decided to live in peace, they made the Great Wall of China. They thought no one could climb it due to its height. During the hundred years of its existence, the Chinese were invaded three times and each time, the hordes of enemy infantry had no need of penetrating or climbing over the Wall because they bribed the guards at the entrance gate and these opened the gates of China to the enemy – without a big fight or resistance.

The Chinese built the wall, but at that time forgot to build the character of the wall guards. Though the Great Wall has over the years become a powerful symbol of the country's enduring strength and spirit, it has actually been a good reminder to the Chinese of the superiority of human character. Much later it was realised that the best defence against the enemy is not a fortified wall outside, but a fortified character inside. The building of human character comes before the building of anything else. Our dreams can withstand any form of assault, but not a defective character. Hence the greatest killer of dreams is not the enemy out there, but our character inside here.

Character and Integrity are becoming endangered species in the world. In organisations, liabilities increase with staff constantly nagging and having integrity deficiency and character defects through absenteeism, loitering during work, disruptive behaviours that undermine their institutions with constant claims for more rights and freedoms but with less desire to fulfil required duties and responsibilities.

Virtually all the fraud and redundancy perpetrated are done due to lack of character. How do we explain that funds allocated to fight malaria and other diseases end up in people's private pockets – and the children die in millions? And who explains how pharmaceuticals and health related providers, including insurance companies, governments, lobbyists and heir likes offer sacrifice of millions of deaths for monetary gain? This brings me to the topic I have been assigned to discuss namely: Issues of Ethics and Sustainable Health. I would rather frame the topic as

CONCLUSION – SOW A CHARACTER AND REAP A DESTINY

I am a story on the topic of character and integrity in a world where greed and ambitions make people malign, lie, abuse, maim and go to the extreme of killing another or even destroying an entire family, nation or culture – just because of lack of character. And someone says: *“They can’t kill your dreams, so they assassinate your character, thus the easiest way to assassinate your dreams is to surround yourself with people of questionable character”*. A successful business man had built up a really large company with resources, high reputation and solid money but knew it was time to gradually hand over the business to someone else as he was growing old. He believed that the secret of his success was character based and not simply ability in skills or talent. Instead of choosing any of his seven children or one of his company senior directors, he decided to do something different. He invited all the young executives in the company together and addressed them in the following words:

“As you may all know, age has caught up with me and it is time to gradually hand over and leave the stage to someone else. I desire to step down in one year from my role but mention that one you shall succeed me as the next CEO”.

Of course, they were all surprised and shocked at this possibility and felt challenged to do whatever it takes to qualify and be appointed to this high position with plenty of wealth and money, authority and power, societal and corporate image and fame. The aging boss continued: *“I am going to give each one of you a SEED today – one very special SEED. I want you to plant the seed, water it and come back here in one year from today with what you have grown from the seed I have given you. I will then judge the plants that you bring and the one I chose will be my successor”*.

One man named Jim was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly told his wife the story. She helped him get a pot, soil and compost and he planted the seed. Every day, he would water it and watch to see if it had grown. After about three weeks, some of the other executives began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were growing.

Jim kept checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four, five and months went by but still nothing was growing of the seed. His colleagues always spoke of their own successful plants, but Jim’s plant was yet to germinate and grow and he felt like a failure.

Six months went by – and still nothing in Jim’s pot. He feared he had made a mistake killed his seed since everyone else’s plant was growing into plants and trees and the colleagues bragged about their successful plants but Jim had nothing. Jim of course did not say anything but kept watering and fertilising the soil with the hope that the seed would germinate and grow.

After one year, it was time for each of the young executives of the company to bring their plants for inspection to the aging owner of the company – with their gaze and hopes on being appointed the next CEO of the company. Jim was shy to go with an empty pot but told his wife with her encouragement that they must be honest about what happened. It was of course going

to be an embarrassing moment in his life and career but it as important to stand to truth and to oneself.

When Jim arrived he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by the other young staff and executives. They were beautiful in all shapes and sizes. Jim simply put his empty pot on the floor and many of his colleagues laughed and a few felt sorry for him. When the CEO arrived, he inspected and surveyed the room and greeted his young executives. Jim managed to sit on the last bench in the hall.

The CEO spoke: *“My! What great plants, trees and flowers you have all grown within the space of one year. From one of you therefore, I shall appoint my next successor as the CEO”*.

All of a sudden, the old entrepreneur went to Jim at the back of the room with his empty spot and ordered that the Financial Director bring him to the front of the room in the full gaze of all. Jim was terrified. He thought: *“The CEO knows I am failure and shall expose me and possibly fire me”*

He was asked to tell his story and what had happened and how his efforts to get the seed grow was unsuccessful. The CEO then asked everyone to sit down except Jim and then announced to all:

“Behold Jim – your next Chief Executive Officer! One year ago, I gave everyone in this room a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it and bring it back to me today. But I gave you boiled seed which were dead. It was not possible for them to grow. All of you except Jim have brought me trees and plants and followers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Jim was the only one with the COURAGE; CHARACTER AND INTEGRITY to bring me a pot with my original seed in it. Therefore he is the one who will be the new Leader and Chief Executive. Officer.”

Any surprise? Character in this story was the main reason for the progress and promotion. And it is the ingredient upon which that famous word is built - TRUST: As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus has said: “a man’s character is his fate”. And character is built through education founded on values. Mark the words – greed, egoism, vanity and ambition!

When ethics becomes a lifestyle, education achieves its raison d’etre!