On Education Today:
A Thought Experiment

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Introduction

"Man is the only being who ***needs*** education," said Immanuel Kant. For him, education means nurturing, disciplining, and teaching together with the culture. Each person needs to be nurtured with tender care and attention from the parents. Discipline is needed in order to change one's *animal nature* into human nature. It is a merely negative part of education, said Kant, because it counteracts man's natural unruliness. However it educates a person to live with other people. Later on, when accustomed to following the reason more than the instinct, instruction can be further given, that is, the positive part.

This reflection paper focuses on the positive part of education which is instruction or teaching together with the culture, or today what we have as higher education. First, it will elaborate on some observations and problems in education in the 21st century, at least what is evident here in the Philippines. Second, it will analyze and evaluate the current education system with Kant's idea *On Education*[1] specifically with the help of Chapter VI where he discussed practical education. Lastly, it will propose some theories for a new education system.

A Critique of Education Today

Many students today perceive that the higher education system is just something "required" to get a degree and a

1 Immanuel Kant, *On Education* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1899)

job. Furthermore, higher education seems to be reduced to skill-learning instead of a profound character formation that Immanuel Kant and many educators would like to propose. The perception is unavoidable since people observe that only students who are good in English, Mathematics, and Science excel in the academic field. Basing the scholastic excellence on these three main subjects is like assessing them if they are capable of working in the industry or not. What if a student is not good at these three subjects but is artistic, creative, and kind-hearted, is she to fail? What if a student is good at these three subjects but has a bad character, is she to pass? What is the goal of our higher education?

We must rethink and reassess our education system because of two reasons: (1) If higher education's goal is only to teach skills and certify students to get a good job, then it is at a threat of extinction today; (2) If the objective of higher education is only to produce employees to work for big companies than being good persons and active part of the society, humanity is destined to fail.

Many of us, young people, think that we do not need to go to college or university anymore because the skills we need to learn for work are found on the internet. Almost any knowledge under the sky can be accessible now. During the Ancient and Medieval periods, books were limited. To have a hand in Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine's books was a big deal and was only for the elite! But today, great philosophical and scientific books are downloadable on the internet with just one click. During the Modern period, one needs to pay a professional to do a specific job and a skill-master to teach how it can be done but today, if our *tubo* (tube) has a problem, I do not need to call a *tubero* (plumber) anymore because I can learn how to fix the tube by watching tutorials on YouTube! One

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can even be a professional IT programmer just by learning online. There is a website called www.freecodecamp.org where anyone can learn programming for free. They reward verified certifications if you can finish the projects. These certificates may be used to apply to big companies such as Google, Microsoft, and Amazon. I have a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and I can affirm that this NGO's website teaches more programming skills that are more updated and useful for the IT industry than what I have learned through my four years in college. One can study almost anything and earn certifications while sitting and drinking coffee at home. So, the big question is, "why go to college?"

Another issue at hand is that if the current education system creates skilled workers without forming their characters, then the system can lead humanity to a terrible disaster. A bad person who is uneducated is less dangerous than a bad person who has a college degree. If a madman is intelligent but not wise, he can duplicate COVID-19 in many ways and keep on spreading it to the world. An intelligent madman can create a website that corrupts the minds of children and the youth. We know that there are already a lot of pornographic websites, abusive videos, games full of violence, and discrimination on social media accessible even to kids and teenagers. A street thief can steal P10,000 but an intelligent thief like a corrupt politician can steal billions of pesos from his fellow countrymen. An intelligent madman can create war weapons that can ruin the world. Science, mathematics, and language are powers and when they are placed in the wrong hands, they can be used to destroy everything.

On Education by Immanuel Kant

Higher education today must focus on teaching morality or else we will be back to our *animal nature* like what Kant

argued, although now we can be skilled and intelligent animals or be like chimpanzees with missiles! Proper education is not only skill learning but character formation. Kant said, "Our ultimate aim is the formation of character."[2]

Higher education must include practical training or in other words ***moral*** training which teaches a man how to live as a free being. Kant said, "This is the education of a personal character, of a free being, who is able to maintain himself, and to take his proper place in society, keeping at the same time a proper sense of his own individuality."[3] Practical education consists of *skill*, *discretion*, and *morality*.

Skill training is part of higher education and its aim must be for a better character of a student. Skill training develops one's talent and character through *thoroughness*. Kant said, "thoroughness is an essential element in the formation of a man's character, while skill is necessary for talent."[4] Discretion is mainly about temperament and the art of outward behavior. Morality is the deep and internal formation of a person. For Kant, each person ought to learn their duties and do what is right because it is right, not because of a reward or a selfish interest. "Morality is a matter of character."[5] Morality includes putting our passions on one side, practicing compassion, not sympathy, and learning a few things thoroughly rather than many things but superficially. A person of a character is one with a firm purpose to accomplish a goal and one who actually accomplishes it.

2 Ibid, 94.
3 Ibid, 31.
4 Ibid, 91.
5 Ibid, 93.

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Rethinking the Higher Education System

Immanuel Kant himself noticed during his time that schools lacked the most essential thing in education which is teaching moral values to students. He said, "Almost all our schools are lacking in something which would nevertheless greatly tend to the formation of uprightness in children — namely, *a catechism of right conduct*."[6] For him, the moral formation must contain, "in a popular form, everyday questions of right and wrong."[7] In rethinking the education system, we might want to consider and even elevate this idea.

Morality is something that cannot be taught online. It is not a set of duties and rules that can be memorized and be done blindly nor be followed because of rewards and punishments nor is it only a set of ideas that can be studied three hours a week. I argue that to teach morality or to form the character of a person, it must be exemplified in flesh, lively, and daily. Therefore, the proposal for a different higher education system that must be considered is one of the ***master-disciple systems*** or the "discipleship" model where the students live and learn from a *life master* or a life coach. It is an idea that was practiced during ancient times and is applied today in some instances like in the seminary.

In the Ancient Period, disciples follow their masters and live with them. This is both applied to secular and religious traditions. Philosophers by that time teach wisdom and ideas to their students while the religious authorities teach faith and law. They were in fact, not just a teacher like what we think today who teaches in a classroom three hours a week, gives an assignment, and sometimes scares the students with exams. The students or the "disciples" learn not only through words

6 Ibid, 97.
7 Ibid, 97.

but also through the actions of their master. They observe their master's way of thinking, way of responding to a situation, and way of treating people. They travel with the master, follow him with his schedule, dialogue with him during meal times, study how he speaks, and so on.

If the ultimate aim of higher education is morality, then the model of "discipleship" can be considered today, or else, as I have argued, there will be no need to go to college in the future since all the skills, crafts, and knowledge will be available sooner or later on the internet. The discipleship model is the best way to transmit wisdom and morality which cannot be learned just by sitting on a chair with a laptop.

As a religious person, my novitiate experience in Chile, South America which lasted for two years, was like a character formation using the "discipleship" model. I was with the other five seminarians and two formators who are masters in life, morality, and skills. I learned not only when they teach us but I learned all the time from them. I even learned from one of them a particular way of smiling and finding humor in all things. He did not need to teach me that, instead I only needed to observe him, live with him, and I automatically replicated his good deeds in my own way, freely and joyfully.

Discipleship as an education system for all people is not impossible if we are to invest in it. Countries are willing to invest to train their citizens intensely and rigorously in military service for two years to get them ready to "fight against" other countries. If so, then why not train people to form their character and be moral for two years to get them ready to "work with" other countries, to create peace, communion, and fraternity? The latter needs more courage and valiancy.

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Discipleship Model as the Higher Education System

How can a modern discipleship education system be imagined? This part of the reflection will try to develop general foundations on discipleship as an education system. Just a note that this is a philosophical reflection and is not scientific research, thus it is free to theorize without being confined to the limits of the social, political, and economic reality present today.

The discipleship education system is for students who have finished high school. Ideally and generally, they will be around 16 to 18 years old. Normally at this age, a person is aware of his or her individuality and freedom and has the power to think about and choose what is right or wrong. One can then make decisions on his own thus can train his or her morality properly and consciously.

The students must have the chance to know the masters and the masters, the students. The students can choose a master or a team of masters to follow for a period of time. It can be for one whole year to four years. The masters must be life masters or life coaches. They must be competent, moral, and exemplary in all their work so that they can lead the students well. The masters can be experts of different fields such as philosophy, politics, science, art, social work, theology, medicine, and so on. The students, aside from following their masters who will give them their tasks, will also have some skill subjects that they can take online. The masters are responsible to teach the students proper conduct, learning how to learn, integrating and practicing the skills, the art of living, and so on.

Let us take, for instance, a student named Kyle. He wants to go to higher education and he takes up the course BS Computer Science. He will be needing to take some skill subjects online,

but minimal, and most of his training and formation will be coming from the master he will choose. Let us say Mark and Bill are the masters. They are both knowledgeable in science and humanities and they are competent to form Kyle and the rest of the disciples integrally. Both Kyle, Mark, Bill, and other disciples will live in a university campus. Mark and Bill will lead their students while at the same time they can keep their job as IT or software engineers or IT business owners. The students will observe them and the masters will teach the students. The students may even attend some of their masters' meetings and may join them in their decision-making. In this case, students will have real-life learnings that will help them grow both in skill and in morality.

How about the private life of the students and the masters? If they live with each other, then, how can they relate with their family, friends, and partners? If we think about it, living our private life must also be something to be learned. Most of us do not know what to do in private life and that is problematic. If we will be frank about it, students today with our current education system seem to have no time to learn about relationships because they have a lot of schoolwork to do! Our current education system may seem to be prioritizing calculated outputs than priceless relationships. No wonder why when students become working professionals, they bring this habit.

Relationship is part of moral education hence it must be included in the new education system. The discipleship model is a model of relationship, of learning how to relate to persons as persons and not just for utility. The current system seems to be like students who *use* their professors to learn and earn a degree while teachers *use* their students to earn a salary. Of course, there are a lot of good-hearted students and teachers

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who truly care for each other but nevertheless, the current system does not promote genuine and deep relationships with others. Learning genuine relationships is one of the main goals of the proposed education system. The students must learn to closely relate with their masters who are people-person so it must be ideally not hard to relate with them.

Having said this, we need to address the question of family, friends, and partners. For the family, they can visit them during vacations. Students will learn from their masters how they relate with their families and then apply it to their own families during vacation periods. It aims not at a superficial relationship but an authentic and deeper one. Students will learn how to have a deep and intimate connection with their family even if they are far from them and only visit them for some period. It will prepare them when they become working professionals and live on their own. This is far better than students always being with the family but do not know how to talk, eat, or have fun with them because their relationship skills are not formed. For friends, the students must learn to befriend their co-disciples. It teaches them to love unconditionally whether they like a person or not. This will avoid the issue today that people are centered into exclusive and closed groups, marginalizing many.

Marginalization and divisions are the cause of poverty and war. For partners, they can be set aside during this period of time of higher education. It is not that the system is against romantic partnership but it desires undivided attention on character formation which will ideally equip the students for better and more matured exclusive relationships in the future.

Many complicated details will come along with the idea of the discipleship system but these are the fundamental ideas. I myself would like to learn in this way. If I am honored, I would

be glad to live with Dr. Manuel Dy, Dr. Mark Calano, or Dr. Agustin Rodriguez for a period of time and learn about life with them and from them. I also would like to be a life master myself and have students whom I can teach in this way. I will be treating them with care and gentleness and at the same time with firmness and discipline. I will not even hesitate to treat my students as my children for whom I want nothing but the best. The main goal of the discipleship system is forming the character or teaching morality which is basically to learn to love each other unconditionally and profoundly and to create genuine and intimate relationships.

Conclusion

We must rethink our education system today because time is changing. We live in a world where knowledge is accessible to anyone, at any time, from anywhere. Skills keep on changing in this fast-paced world and skills can now be learned through the internet. Higher education must not only think of equipping and teaching skills to students but of forming their character as Immanuel Kant claimed. If we just stay in our current higher education system, students will no longer see the need to attend college. Furthermore, we are facing the challenge of many intelligent and skilled people who lack moral values. They are endangered to lead themselves and the whole of humanity to destruction. Many young people know a lot but do not know what to do in life and who to be. Humanity today has power, but it lacks direction and purpose.

Discipleship is one system we can consider implementing if we aim for an integral and profound character formation of each person. This model is not only for the elite nor for the religious but for all. It may be first executed for some who can afford it and if the experiment works, it may be done city-scale, country-scale, and worldwide. It can be implemented

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together with the current education system. Skill courses can be taken online while students live with their masters.

The proposed education system does not seem to be so profitable for some but we must be hopeful that the government and business owners would support this system. We must realize that in the end, a good society and good business are built not only by skilled people but especially by good people. The proposed education system also hopes to be the new "military" training because it forms the people not to fight each other but to fight the good fight within and to freely choose to do what is right because it is right. In this new education system, we can level up as humans and make a big leap toward the perfection that Immanuel Kant dreamed of.