Quaid-i-Azam Lecture

Institutional Development

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Transdisciplinary Approaches

None of the challenges and issues we confront in society, including the pandemic, can be solved from a single disciplinary lens. Once we see these challenges through a transdisciplinary lens, the underlying structures and systems start to reveal themselves. So far, most educational institutions use traditional approaches focused on fragmented, discipline-focused knowledge to address issues and challenges. First, let's admit that traditional approaches have not worked as intended, and most interventions to counter social issues have barely made a difference.

Transdisciplinary approaches are the highest level of disciplinary interaction. It goes beyond *multidisciplinary* approaches where disciplines provide several perspectives on a particular issue or problem. For example, bringing together economists, humanists, and scientists to solve a problem. Transdisciplinary approaches go further than *interdisciplinary* approaches, which involve multidisciplinary experts in defining the problem and integrating their respective frameworks to generate solutions. According to Klein,[1] *transdisciplinary* approaches not only integrate disciplines in a comprehensive framework but also require collaboration between different sectors of society and multiple stakeholders to address complex issues. Transdisciplinary approaches are a process; they are not a means to an end.

A good example of transdisciplinary approaches is how universities strengthen centres of excellence. Their strength is derived when faculty break entrenched disciplinary silos and blur internal departmental boundaries. Another example is when centres reach out through cross-disciplinary programmes that directly engage communities.[2] This appears to be what PIDE is doing.

Centres are often defined by "what" questions that guide their research agendas and the challenges that define their work. They evolve by asking what choices are we willing to make today? By addressing the "why" questions, Centres reveal their philosophical stance, which tends to frame the interventions they deploy.

For example, the seminal work of Sen and Mahbub ul Haq, and Elinor Ostrom, expanded the lens of economics to include broader philosophical and anthropological notions of human development. Their focus was on the richness of human life and human capability, where development is a means rather than an end.

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[1]Klein, J.T. (1996). Unity of knowledge and transdisciplinarity: Contexts of definition, theory and the new discourse of problem solving. In International Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS, UK). See: http://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c04/e6-49-01.pdf

[2]See for example, the REACH programme at the University of Toronto's Monk School of Global Affairs.

Human Development

Approaches that value merit, integrity, and resilience are likely to be sustained. One such approach is found in a comprehensive study on youth development that the United Nations Development Programme commissioned in Pakistan.[3] The said report highlights the student's confidence in teachers, which is a positive aspect. Therefore, more than anyone else, teachers deserve our encouragement, our support, and our appreciation.

Ecological Approaches

Let me introduce a different set of philosophical assumptions to describe another (prospective) intervention that speaks to experiential learning. Vision of ecological development is summarised as "*A living mosaic of gardens on a sub-continental scale in the 21st century in which intelligent machines act as companion gardeners to wisdom, to preserve and enhance the quality of human life in line with cultural, aspirational and spiritual traditions.*" This provides a different epistemology to address the grand challenges of our time considering renewable energy, food security, and environmental preservation.

Intellectual Development

Pedagogically, the *Perry Schema for Intellectual and Ethical Development[4]* provides yet another theory of change underlying the learning and teaching exchange we are planning in Skardu. Perry proposed that college students journey through at least four major stages of intellectual and moral development: from *dualism,* where first-year students want to hear "right and wrong" answers, to *multiplicity,* where different perspectives are explored, to *relativism,* where "it all depends" as positions become relative, to *commitment* when students have the confidence to commit to holding positions on issues that matter.

The ruptures in development are caused by periods of confusion and sometimes failure, which one can also interpret as necessary conditions for shifting perspectives. The Perry Schema can also be used to design assessments that better measure coincides with where students are at in their development. More recently, the work of Carol Dweck[5] on fixed and growth mindsets brings fresh insights into how intelligence can be developed through embracing challenges, persistence, effort, feedback, and inspiration (See Figure A).

Policies, Cultural Systems & Leadership

Perhaps the difference between successful and unsuccessful policies rests on the underlying traditions, which shape habits of the mind that comprise the cultural mindset of the department, school, or institution. Generally, faculty find themselves preserving their

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[3]Najm, A., Bari, F., & Ahmad, S. (2017). Unleashing the potential of a young Pakistan. National Human Development Report. United Nations Development Programme.

[4]Perry, William G., Jr. (1970), Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston); reprinted November 1998; Jossey-Bass; ISBN: 0787941182

[5]Dweck, C. S. (2014). Teachers' mindsets: "Every student has something to teach me." *Educational Horizons*, *93*(2), 10–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013175X14561420

micro-cultures whereas leaders find themselves in broader meso or mega cultures, which they try to change.

Cultural systems where leadership values merit and integrity tend to reinforce hard work, risk-taking, and innovation. As these values become pervasive, development tends to flourish. On the other hand, despite identical policies in another system, leadership that reinforces conformity and avoids challenges tends to reinforce a culture of perversion. This might partly explain why national education policies in Pakistan, exacerbated by weak leadership have produced such a culture. This also explains why we see a proliferation of meaningless research, plagiarism, fake and predatory journals, spurious authorship, certification without education, senseless systems for admissions and recruitment, and unreliable and manipulated university rankings.

We have often heard the refrain that "culture eats strategy for breakfast". However, when policies and leadership produce perverse systems, repackaged interventions do not stand a chance. The reform agenda must dismantle fixed, deterministic systems. It must encourage questioning and creative thinking. It must balance social inclusion and yet maintain high expectations.

One big step to get started would abolish and replace the archaic point system of recruitment with best practices followed in the rest of the world. Recruit new faculty, Heads, Deans, VCs, and Commissioners with a developmental and growth mindset. Ensure they are accountable for accomplishing meaningful outcomes. Give them sufficient time to change underlying structures and systems.

Another step is to expect leadership to share power and responsibility while making transparent how scarce resources are being allocated given the hard constraints the institution finds itself in. Finally, an unwavering commitment to values such as merit and integrity does over time evolve into a different cultural mindset.

Impact

Impact assessment is not only important for determining whether we are making a difference but is also situated within institutional demands for transparency in developmental interventions. As focus shifts on outcomes-based education and there is greater demand for accountability in higher education, the need for impact assessment will become even greater.

As mentioned, while a few programs succeed at measuring impact well, most leave the assessment to chance. Christopher Knapper, a colleague and educational guru in Canada said the following about educational development: "…in terms of effects on higher education practice, we would earn at best an A for effort, but probably a D for impact…".[6] If we wish to improve and develop "significant and meaningful descriptions of what and how [our] work makes a difference … we should [not] be exempted from exploring for ourselves and others the impact of our work".[7] To provide a roadmap to measure impact, we developed a practical "how-to" guide containing a step-by-step process to systematise what you may already be doing on an informal basis.

[6] Knapper, C. (2003). Three decades of educational development. *International Journal for Academic Development,* 8(1–2), 5–9.
[7]Weimer, M. (2007). Intriguing connections but not with the past. *International Journal for Academic Development, 12*(1), 5–8.