

Final Project  
Option 1a, 1b and 2

Submitted to  
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## *Letter to My Daughter*

Dear Abeer,

I have been meaning to write this letter to you for so many years. I first thought of it when you started Montessori, then again when you were in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and again when you were about to start high school. On each occasion I picked up pen and paper but gave up the idea instantly thinking that given your age it might not make much sense to you (though now I feel I should have written it, it wasn't yours but my own inability to make it sensible enough for you). However, today as you are about to start university I feel I must write this letter to you. I must share what I believe will help you in your education, i.e. the purpose of education.

*"If you don't have a degree from a renowned institution, you won't be able to get a decent job"*, I am sure by now you have heard (never from me) this a countless time. The only purpose of getting an education is to earn a degree and that too from a famous and almost always expensive institution and ultimately get a good job. The good job which is always defined as a job that pays a lot of money with perks. However, it seems that on a societal level, the education has become an extension of the capitalist system, its sole purpose is to provide a qualified and easily controllable workforce for production of products and eager consumers for mass consumption. And on a personal level the purpose of education is to be able to earn a 'good' living.

You have been an animal lover all your life, you have and continue to take care of your pets, also all the National Geographic and Discovery documentaries we have watched together are still fresh in your memory so I am sure you know animals well. For animals, instinctual and bodily needs are more than enough to bring them together and keep them together to live in a perfectly functioning animal society. Some hunt in packs, some alone, some live on scavenging the hunted, some build colonies to survive and some build hives, no matter what they do they are bound to keep harmony in the animal kingdom. However, we humans have a different way of functioning. Unlike animals we are not limited by nature to follow only the ways that keep human societies harmonious, we must choose to strive to form a viable, harmonious and a just society. This choice requires common beliefs, values, and goals;

a common framework tying its members together to make a whole. Without this framework a human society can neither be developed nor can continue to exist. Here the purpose of education is to guide that choice and functioning of a harmonious society.

While commonalities are the back bone for any society, your ability to stop, think and ask questions is something that will keep you from stagnation and even varied forms of oppression. What any education must give you is the ability to question. You must be wondering that you do it anyway, even a young child who has never even seen a school ask questions; sometimes very intelligent questions. You are right, some questions are to add to information and build knowledge; curiosity is the key here. But, asking questions also helps you better understand the people who are answering, questions create engagements and ensure the answerers that you are listening and what they are saying is important. In groups, when you ask questions and get answers you aren't just helping yourself, you help those who are reluctant or shy and find it hard to ask questions in front of other people. However, asking questions isn't only about curiosity, it is about questioning what others tell you cannot be questioned. To tell you the truth it shouldn't be just others, the toughest questions are the ones that you may ask from yourself, these are the questions that'll help you stay true to your beliefs. In short, questions help you clear your confusions up, they light up your way, keep the powerful in check (they know they are being watched carefully), and above keep your own self in check.

I hope as you get busy in your pursuit of university education and every now and then find yourself lost, you will remember why are there and what is important. You remember you were made a human being and you'll have to work hard to remain one and get better at being human. You remember that education in our country is a privilege and higher education is an absolute privilege as millions of our citizens will never get to school let alone college or university. This alone should make not take your education for granted. May you never stop asking questions, may you always stay true to you self and may your education be beneficial for you and people around you.

Love,

Your Father

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## *Letter to My Teacher*

Dear Teacher,

I know it has been a while since we saw each other; yes, it has been three decades. There are so many things I wanted to tell you, so many that won't fit in one letter, after all it is three decades worth of experiences and learnings. However, I am going to write a few things that I could've right there sitting on a desk in your class and a few things that I can only say now.

You deserve to know that I have always been grateful how you taught, how you cleared up confusions, how you made your difficult subject appear easy, how you cared enough to inquire if I was doing alright and got me in line every time I strayed. I have never forgotten the lessons I learned in your class, not just about science but, about patience, humility, care, responsibility and passion for work. I have not forgotten these lessons because, I remember you, as a person. A person who was kind, calm, composed and a smile that made calmed everyone down.

I wanted you to know that I have become a teacher, and you sure have something to do with it. I teach design to university students. I remember how appreciative you were of good drawings in our biology journal. Although you were not an art teacher but, I remember you always telling us that detailed and well-made drawings make it easier for people to understand the text and the idea imbedded in it. This lesson from biology about images communicating more than words has stuck with me throughout life as a design student and now as a teacher.

I remember how you emphasized on understanding the text rather than memorizing it, you spent extra time in making sure that we were able to make connections with prior learning. It did not make sense at that but now I know why you encouraged us bringing books other than the prescribed course books, why you often asked if we had observed in nature what we were reading in books. How things were connected; biology to chemistry, chemistry to physics, physics to mathematics and so on and so forth. And since everything is connected, you always stressed that if we figured out and understood one concept it will be easier to understand the next and the one after it. I remember when I asked you

about something that MacGyver (a popular TV series in those days) created by mixing some chemicals and things found in a typical kitchen, you explained the chemical reaction behind that mixture. Encouraged me to bring more instances like this in class if I had any confusions. I remember how you encouraged us to ask questions (even though it was always a race against time in those short periods). You said if we keep on asking questions, the answers will keep on coming to us, if not from you, from somewhere, anywhere, as long as we were serious and sincere with our quest. I now know you were helping us learning to learn.

I believe you were (as I later found out) what Paulo Freire calls a 'progressive' teacher, the one who favors the autonomy of the students. I still remember the constant reminders of how being ethical was not only good for the society but it would be necessary for us if we wanted to be and remain true citizens of society. Although the short time in classes rarely allowed you to have detailed discussions on ethics, but now I can have those discussions with my students in university where longer time and smaller number of students allow detailed discussions. I make sure that the students get to know at least two (if not multiple) differing point of views about issues where they must take a position. I do not claim to be completely neutral when offering them differing views but I not am aware of own position and make it known to them as well. I am not sure how important it was in hard science subjects like the ones your taught but it would be criminal to not offer differing point of views in art and design classes where one, right answer is a rarity if not impossible.

I wanted you to know about a course that I am proud of as I am sure it will make you proud as well. It is called 'Design for Social Change' and I have taught it hundreds of students by now. This course is rooted in ideas of John Dewey regarding what education is. He says that "the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs." Making this thought by Dewey as an anchor I designed this course where students leave the comforts of their classrooms and venture out in the society, often in areas where privileges are less and comforts of everyday life are rare. I make sure my students get as close as (using ethnographical research tools) so they can understand the less privileged life before

they suggest solutions to make life a little better, a little easier and a little more comfortable for the less privileged.

Since the school refused to share your address with me (which is the right thing to do), but they agreed to send it to you if I gave it to the school. I hope this letter reaches you and I hope you get to read it, but if it doesn't, I know that all my good wishes will. I am indebted to you for not only teaching me subject specific knowledge, but shared knowledge that becomes a beacon whenever I am lost and shows the right way.

Yours truly,

Amir Mirza

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## *Short Video Narrative*

Meeting of an Oppressive Group of Education Policymakers

(Inspired by '*Iblees Ki Majlis-e-Shura*', a poem by *Allama Iqbal*)

Running Length: 3 mins

Proposed Title: '*The Illusion of freedom*'

Location/Set: *A boardroom with a large round table*

The movie opens with a closeup of a file where we see a hand flipping pages as if the person is having a cursory look at the content. However, the viewer will not be able to understand the text as the camera won't be close enough.

The camera starts pulling back to show a large roundtable with 21 people sitting on high-back chairs around it. They are all going through their files as some are writing notes in them as well. The camera starts moving slowly from one person to the other and we see that 17 out of these 21 people are men and 4 are women. Most of them appear to be of old age between 60 and 75, however there are few middle aged with a couple of relatively young men as all of them look tense and worried. The camera finally stops at an old man with scruffy grey beard as he raises his eyes from the file and looks around and starts speaking loudly, he doesn't seem too happy.

He questions all the people if they could tell him the core reasons behind recent protests across the world such as Indian university students coming out in favor of Kashmiri people, Yellow Vests movement in France, protests in Brazil, BLM protests sparked by murder of George Floyd and many others. Other attendees respond by citing pandemic handling, police brutality, unequal distribution of wealth and other reasons. The scruffy beard man looks away and asks everyone to think deeper and tell him what gave these people the courage to come out of their homes. To this one cunning looking man suggests that almost all these protests are by young university going or graduate students. He says that this shows that despite their best efforts of controlling the flow of information, having hegemonic media on their side with support of the biggest corporations from around the world, the offerings of comfort and luxury and making higher education out of the reach of majority, the policies of taming university going people haven't worked well.

Most people nod their heads in agreement to this explanation as a discussion breaks out and the clocks ticks away through hours. Finally, the room falls silent after this murmur and the camera focuses at the scruffy beard man. He announces the decisions agreed upon by all attendees, one is to review the university curriculum from across the world, second is to promote hard sciences through additional funding, third is to discourage Arts, Humanities and other soft sciences by defunding their research because it was getting harder to control the content and its instruction across universities. Fourth is to promote entertainment through digital mediums to consume most of the time of young people and to make sure that the entertainment industry focuses on mindless entertainment and avoids showing ethical positions such as triumph of truth, justice and equality.

The man continues to read out these decisions as his voice fades out and we see that all the attendees who in the beginning had worrying looks were now smiling with relaxed and hopeful faces. The scene fades to black.

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