

Value Education in Indian Schools and Colleges

- Dr. Ali Khwaja*

For many years schools and colleges used to have classes on religious or moral education, where either a particular faith was taught, or general principles of morality were expounded through parables, stories with morals and books containing sermons. Recent generations of students were found to be totally lacking in interest and attention, and thankfully most managements realized it.

Lately some activity or audio-visual based lessons have been evolved to subtly bring in the concept of values and principles rather than focusing on morals. Some of these lessons rightly emphasize on the benefits of leading a blemish-free and clear conscience life, rather than doing good for the sake of getting rewards in the hereafter. With these techniques, generally developed by private organizations and sold to educational institutions, the interest and involvement of children has picked up significantly. One example is of “School Cinema” which explains the significance of values through short video movies.

In modern environs children do need to understand and explore certain important

aspects, and many schools are becoming aware of their significance. The topics that could be covered when giving value education to students are:

- Honesty and integrity
- Kindness
- Sticking together as a family and supporting each other
- Fairness
- Taking into account each family member’s feelings (both positive and negative)
- Cooperation and thoughtfulness
- Reliability
- Good manners
- Responsibility
- How to treat people worse off than you
- The importance of education
- Kindness to helpless animals
- Acceptable behavior and consequences of certain actions
- How to respond to people more important / rich/ famous than you
- How important each family member is

* The author Dr. Ali Khwaja, B Tech (IIT), MIE, MIIM, Ph.D, is a Counsellor, columnist and life skills coach, Chairman, Banjara Academy, Website: www.banjaraacademy.org

- Eating healthy food and looking after our bodies
- Respect for authority

If explained well, these issues can help a growing child to understand how quality of his life can be improved. The driving force should be the benefit to the individual, and not a vague concept of doing good to others and gaining heaven or Moksha. Most educators who have worked with these concepts in a sensitive way have found tremendous success and long term benefits.

Living with Principles and Values

Principles are like lighthouses. They govern human growth and happiness. They are interwoven into the fabric of every civilized society throughout history and comprise the roots of every family and institution that have endured and prospered.

Principle is the changeless core, inner source of security, guidance, wisdom and power. The degree to which people in a society recognize and live in harmony with principles and values will help them move forward towards perfection.

Values are core beliefs which guide and motivate our attitudes and behaviour. They are the guidelines for human conduct. Values give meaning and strength to a person's character. They are standards for life. Values are ideas, beliefs, norms and principles which shape our priorities and guide us in deciding what is valuable. Principles and values are standards by which particular actions are judged good and desirable. Placing an ideal of perfection above our own personal convenience and interests expands our personality and opens it to wider and higher influences.

Values are generally consistent across various situations. Principles and values are learnt from culture, religion, literature and personal examples. Values are the guidelines for human conduct and behaviour that are proven to have enduring effects. Principles and values give meaning and strength to a person's character and it is often reflected by one's own attitudes, judgement, decisions, preferences, relationships and behaviour, by occupying a significant place in one's life. (Dr. S. Ignacimuthu, SJ, former vice-chancellor of Madras and Bharathiyar Universities, in "Skills & Qualities for Effective Life")

Generate a Debate for Better Learning

A case study was evolved in Europe using a person called Heinz, who could not afford to buy the medicine that would save his dying wife. Lawrence Kohlberg and many other psychologists narrated that story of poor Heinz's agony. In the story Heinz appeals to the pharmacist who refuses to help him. The question that was put to students was, should he steal the drug, and why or why not? When the policeman discovers the thief, and learns all the details of the case, should he arrest Heinz, and why or why not?

These types of case studies have been used to help students understand and justify different possible courses of action. According to Kohlberg, whether they feel Heinz should steal the drug or not, the reasons people give indicate their stage of moral reasoning. 'Yes, he should steal it, because otherwise God will punish him for letting his wife die'. 'No, he should not steal, because stealing is against the

law'. 'Yes, he should steal, because he loves his wife and cannot live without her'. 'No, he should not steal, because then he will go to jail'.

Such case studies show that young children mostly reason pre-conventionally, older children and adults conventionally, and a very few people post-conventionally. Jyotsna Vasudev and Raymond Hummel interviewed a large number of adults and children in Jaipur, Calcutta and Delhi on the Heinz story, and discovered that many Indians possess different moral principles than Kohlberg had considered. These include the sacredness of all life (not only human), the idea of ahimsa, and the feeling that some social issues are greater than individual lives. This last idea led one of Vasudev's participants to say, 'Forget Heinz in Europe, just come to India and you are speaking of the same thing with 60 per cent of the people living below the poverty line.....Heinz's story is being repeated all around us all the time with wives dying, with children dying, and there is no money to save them....So....yes, ok, steal the drug, but it does not make any difference on a larger scale.'

Hence it is imperative that value education should conform to the culture and beliefs of the children, which are obviously fed to them through their elders. India being such a large country, the same values and attitude will not apply in every region. Being sensitive to such factors, educators need to ensure that they adhere to the common issues that are acceptable to all.

After WHO propounded the 10 important Life Skills essential to lead a fulfilling life, many schools and some colleges have adapted

the training of life skills into their time-table. Students are benefiting significantly by learning life skills at a practical level. The next step could be to include Value Education as a part of Life Skills, so that students get the notion that they are being empowered to progress, succeed and be happy, rather than the thought that they are being given sermons on morals.

The journey in this much-needed area has just begun. There is a long way to go. But if all educators accept and acknowledge that value education is as essential, or perhaps more essential, than other subjects that children study, we will be able to constantly evolve better and more effective (and fun also!) techniques to educate children towards enriching their lives.



- By education, I mean an all-round drawing of the best in child and man in body, mind and spirit.
- The real difficulty is that people have no idea of what education truly is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock-exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated. The girls, we say, do not have to earn; so why should they be educated? As long as such ideas persist there is no hope of our ever knowing the true value of education.
- A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them. He who learns nothing from his disciples is, in my opinion, worthless. Whenever I talk with someone I learn from him. I take from him more than I give him. In this way, a true teacher regards himself as a student of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them.

Mahathma Gandhi