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Role of Language Curriculum and Teachers in Imparting Ethics among Students

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'Ethics' cannot be taught overnight. When children are young it is always better to teach them morals through stories. Encouraging ethical reflections means helping students develop the cognitive side of character. To have this character, children should be aware of morals, they should understand the virtues and should be able to apply them in real time situations. They should accept and tolerate others perspective. Students need to be rational (why something is right and something is wrong). Their thoughtful decisions, self knowledge and self criticism are the virtues that may bring difference in their lives. children's thinking develops slowly through a series of stages. It is the duty of the parents and teachers to inculcate values among them without any special, boring lectures. That means, the teachers and parents must be truthful and honest in all their activities. Example is always better than precept.

Ethical questions are abstract. In our daily personal and professional lives we hesitate to reflect even for a moment, about the ethical quality of possible ways of acting or withholding the actions. These situations may be trivial. For example parking in a no-parking zone, throwing garbage on the roads, smoking in the free zone etc. But they are the origin of major questions that propose clear ethical issues.

To think and act as per the ethical norms, children, for that matter people in general need to adopt a way of life which instructs. In this century we see a shift from nature oriented perspective to a person oriented perspective in defining the ultimate criterion for ethical judgement.

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically..... intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education." - 'Martin Luther King Jr'.

Infact higher education in general is becoming less academic and more business like. Schools and colleges are charging high fees and view students as consumers - of education. Students in turn, tend to perceive unfair and unethical behaviour as acceptable. Course curriculum is being designed with undue focus on the practical aspects but courses that encourage deeper understanding of humans have been dwindling. The best example for this is winding up arts and humanities courses in many colleges. In addition, the fast pace of academic and extracurricular activities at campuses do not give students sufficient time for reflection and contemplation.

Dr. Samuel Johnson aptly stated that "integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful".

There is a need to relate and prepare students for citizenship, character and social responsibility in a global society. Colleges and universities generally ignore outcomes related to moral and ethical development as well as other dimensions of personal development. Yet it's effective outcomes such as tolerance, honesty, self understanding and social responsibility that are required for effective leadership and citizenship in our increasingly complex world. Higher education must be viewed as a public good.

Language is not a general subject that demands rote learning sometimes. It is a skill that has to be learnt through practice. In this connection, teacher plays vital role. Language can be learnt contextually. It can be a tool to inculcate good manners and behaviour among students. Language class should be refreshing. In the form of stories many values and morals can be taught to children.

Neil Gaiman once wrote, "Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten". This is one of the many reasons a literature - rich childhood is as important to a child's moral development as vegetables are to his health.

"To teach men how they may grow independently and for themselves is, perhaps, the greatest service that one man can do for another" - Jowett.

If the school - college fails to guide the students, we naturally produce educated misfits - round pegs in square holes. Discouragement, failure and crime are the natural results of misguided lives.

Through English literature classes the students are taught about adolescent boys who bully and murder one another, a man, fearing shame and betrayal, who smothers his wife and commits suicide, and another man who hangs himself as colonizers pulverize his culture. They also read about a woman who kills her baby daughter so she won't experience the physical and emotional horror of slavery. By teaching texts like "Lord of the Flies", Othello, Things Fall Apart, Beloved, The Stranger, That hedge Eye and Scarlet letter etc, The English teachers expect the students to batter with the darkness in human nature. If we set academic goals aside English teachers always help students cope with real life. Literature plays a vital role in helping people understand the lives and minds of others.

Texts like "Crime and punishment" introduce the Hegelian man (the Übermensch or extraordinary man) to the students. They come to know about the transcendence of conscience and the punishment undergone by 'Raskolnikov'. They can analyse the fate of Nihilistic and skeptical youth. The youth understand that the humane aspect of one's life cannot be separated from the intellectual aspect. Society and literature cannot be separated. Curriculum of language and literature classes always gives a realistic picture of the world.

Tata Institute of Social Sciences introduced a course called "Youth leadership and people skills". This is a wonderful course for students who are in their undergraduate courses. This makes them responsible citizens. They start analyzing, interacting and think positively is the prime outcome of this course. They can assess people through different profiles like personal, social etc.

Youth form an integral part of any society and are part and parcel of the development process. Youth should be given a chance to identify their rights and responsibilities and should facilitate their participation in issues affecting them.

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