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views

How to Engage Students with Global Values?



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T.S. Eliot in his famous poem, *The Waste Land*, cries for regaining global vitality, cultural vibrancy and not to get distressed with devastations due to demanding situations like world war, even though the title of the poem may be pessimistic. Such sentiments are valid till this day. The need to be globally engaged and looking forward to opportunities is more than ever important in present times, when there are unrests in Europe, high inflationary pressures, and ongoing pandemic issues. More and more there is acute need for social and cultural harmony, with the current geopolitical economic and other global scenarios.

Global harmony, caring for the society and taking care of each other are important values, which must be taught from early age so that when students grow up to citizens, their views will be inclusive and broad.

Textbook vs Field Education

Parents and educators insist the need for extracurricular skill sets to live in the society and face complex challenges. Not being myopic and accepting others as they are, will be much needed these days. Such inclusive nature will enable individual and global growth.

Education gained should be of use to the society. In a recent speech in Varanasi at an educational summit, Honorable Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India encouraged the translation of academic research into reality that will be of use to the society. This is a valuable and timely advice for academic, industry and research community. The takeaway message is that stakeholders must be communicative and understand each other's requirements first and bring minds with varied expertise to find solutions. Basic understanding of requirements of people in the society will enable new understanding of problems and find solutions.



Dr Vaidyanathan Krishnakumar

“In educational institutions, the focus will be more on curriculum engagement. But students should be given more opportunity to develop their overall capabilities rather than academic aspects. During their course of study, their communication skills, analytical skills, critical thinking skills and general attitude are honed by making them to take part in various activities like hackathon, competitions, symposia, seminars, and conferences,” stated Dr. Vaidyanathan Krishnakumar, Director, RVS Group of Institutions, Dindigul.

It is not only enough to transfer ideas and research results from lab to field, but it is equally important to bring knowledge from field to lab and for everyday use stated Prime Minister Modi. Such a transfer can occur effectively if there is good communication, which emphasizes the need for soft skill education and coaching. There can be several players to impart such timely skills such as academia, civic groups, friends, and family. As such traits need to be developed from upper elementary school level, therefore effective parent-teachers association and involvement of civic groups are necessities.

Many civic organizations like Lions Club and Rotary Club around the world are engaging with middle and high school students, emphasizing the importance of leadership qualities such

as team spirit, diplomacy, effective speech and writing abilities, reasoning, and negotiations, etc.



Dandhiraj Krishnaswamy

Dandhiraj Krishnaswamy, active Rotarian with Green City Unit, Rotary Club of Coimbatore, highlighted how his Rotary unit is actively engaging with high school and college students in sporting leadership abilities by honoring students as “Star of the Month,” from each class a month who excel in overall capabilities. Rotary supports Rotaract Clubs in colleges where students engage in discussions with civic minded people and Rotarians on subjects of interest to society. Such active forums help with finding solutions. “If students do not engage and communicate openly, they may not develop confidence to face the world,” stated Dandhiraj. Clubs like Rotary, Lions and others enable students to engage in social activities; parents should encourage children to actively participate in such efforts.

These forums help us to develop human skills such as giving-up ego, developing politeness, engaging, and working with others. In our own personal lives, we see positive results quickly if we give-up ego, pride and be the first one break the ice. These attributes cannot be taught easily but interactive forums at schools, colleges and industries should discuss such personality traits development, as part of societal engagement.

Learning from Society

It takes a village to raise a child is a common adage. Similarly, for a society to effectively function, many sections of the society right from civil service to public distribution, to school system should work in harmony. Although there may be variations among nations by which different services function, they all reveal an important way of life---live and work in harmony for greater good. School children must be exposed early in their life about public systems and their contributions to the society. During high school, say from ninth to twelfth grade short term internships and/or volunteering need to be emphasized. There are multiple benefits for such engagements such as these will enlighten career paths for young students, develop leadership and service attitudes and inculcate social work mindset. Colleges in the United States are supporting “service learning,” as part of credit recognition. For example, upper level undergraduate and graduate students engage with school systems to teach math and languages. Not only college-level students utilize their time effectively, but also learn how to work with other young kids and parents.



Gnanasekar Thiagarajan

Gnanasekar Thiagarajan, Director, Mumbai-based Commtrendz Research, and a noted economic analyst interestingly observes, “Growth away from classrooms is critical because children must be exposed to some extent like a teaser to what they might practically come to experience. The series called “Office” was a revelation for most children of this generation as they are hooked on to the web. Many children even in middle schools, today know about HR, Finance, and marketing, all thanks to the series. Theoretically, dumping information into a child's head is leaving them to their own imagination. So, field visits and interaction with experienced people are key to developing child's interests and giving them a focus on where they should be going on in their life.”

Forward

Fast paced flat world is a demanding one. Subject matter expertise is like a basement. As we need pillars and embellishments to finish a building, societal and soft skill sets are very much in need. These attributes cannot be taught using structured syllabus but approaches such as service learning can be added as part of educational curriculum right from high school level. Colleges and universities are engaging these days with students by using laboratory resources to kindle research in STEM among young minds. Such efforts can be expanded to arts and culture disciplines. It has become abundantly clear that communication is a gateway to success. Students could spend time in journalistic offices and engage with news outlets. Such projects by young students will help to understand the usefulness of unbiased media towards wellbeing.

How many understand that positive attributes will go a long way in building a better society? If we change our way of lives by avoiding unnecessary troubles to others, life will be better. This itself is an art of living. “The main challenge for the country is in developing skilled workforce with good human values. Therefore, curriculum development should be in line with country development, which requires development of soft skills,” opined Dr. Krishnakumar. “Once the child has imbibed all the right qualities, then they automatically start contributing to the world within their limitations. Society should aide students to gather good values,” added Gnanasekar emphasizing the importance of society in the upbringing of children.

Learning from our and others’ mistakes, and admitting mistakes are highways for high living. Society teaches that we need to keep our eyes and ears open. Society is the best university which of course is free for us to utilize. We must live in a society, which is global and hence cultivation of global mindset must be part of our education.