

The Complete Education Portal

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Horizons

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## Students and Engaged Citizenry



## **Involving with community, understanding problems and discussing solutions develop thinking & communication skills in students strengthening democratic values.**

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The whole world is watching the Presidential Election in the United States. Both candidates are encouraging youngsters to actively engage in the democratic process and cast their ballots. It is important that youngsters are informed about important issues that are faced by citizens and make enlightened decisions. While economy and immigration are focus in this election, contributions of youngsters in creating awareness on education, equality, social service, and service to neighbors and community will play important roles going forward.

A clarion call is made by one national party in the U.S. that democracy may be under threat and hence eligible voters must exercise their acts of democracy—speaks a lot about informed citizenry. Not only one should exercise their rights, but they should also involve in educating their neighbors and community about participating democracy.

### **Informed Citizenry**

“Democracy dies in darkness,” is the well-known slogan of the newspaper “The Washington Post.” Information is power currently, which is visible from the power of Google. Search engines like Google have opened-up the minds of several millions all over the world. While this is an encouraging and welcoming trend, next phase of information space should focus on curbing misinformation and fake news. Students from high schools to universities have a role to play in credible information dissemination. In college campuses across the globe there are political activist groups, and such groups should connect with youngsters about ideologies and policies, which are aimed at overall growth of communities and nations. It is troublesome if such groups

focus on divisional politics, which will make interested youngsters to lose interests in engaged participation.

College campuses used to have vibrant debate societies, which have given rise to national leaders. The activities of such positive exchange forums need to be better communicated to the first year and prospective students. The Oxford Union founded in 1823 is a good example for such engaged activities, which builds confidence to communicate with the outside world.



**Prof Dr. Ashwin Thakkar**

While it is not easy to impart these people skills through structured education, family, neighbors, and teachers can influence through their actions and enhance the skills in students. To my query on how youngsters can get their “Ikigai,” i.e., purpose of living, Dr. Ashwin Thakkar, former Head, Department of Textile Technology, L. D. College of Engineering, Ahmedabad stated, “Students are to be taught about their passion (what they love), their vocation (what they are good at), their mission (what the world needs) and their profession (what they can be paid for).”

### **Outreach and Engagement**

Engagement and service learning are some avenues, students can involve themselves to enhance their social, communicative, and diplomatic skills.

There are opportunities in India, United States and other nations for middle schoolers and high school students to bring students/peers as team not only in team sports but also in academic activities like Science Bowl, Math Counts, etc. Not only these activities enrich academic skills, but it also shows the team spirit of students, when one student lifts others so that the team comes out successful.

Western Universities are realizing the potential of student, staff, and faculty engaging with their local community and undertaking research that impact local community.

Senior students in language programs are encouraged to interact with students in elementary school onwards to create interests in languages. College students can add such teaching experiences to their CVs, which will help them if they opt for teaching, communication and foreign office jobs.

### **Volunteering: A Positive Pathway**

In United States while grades occupy an important part in college admissions weightage is given to co-curricular and extra-curricular efforts. The long tradition of such an evaluation is to make sure graduates evolve as a well-rounded personality. Activities like volunteering receive higher weightage in admission to medical schools. Such acts are given credit even in middle schools. While there is no formal credit assigned to such activities in India it is pleasing that teachers and professors are encouraging students to volunteer. Recently, I witnessed such an act from Professor Ashwin Thakkar in Ahmedabad. Dr. Thakkar brought few students to help with the organization of a major international conference which had participants from Government of India, industries such as Reliance Industries, research organizations and academia. The students got complimentary registration for their services at the reception desk, conference stage, etc., which provided opportunity to engage with CEO of companies. Such interactions serve as a gateway to enter companies as interns helping with careers. Alumni play an important part in

bridging their alma mater and the outside world. Professors should play an active role in connecting students with alumni. Engagements enhance interpersonal, communication and leadership attributes of youngsters.

Dr. Thakkar, who is a champion of volunteering, stated, “By making flexibility in the curriculum for such activity and giving due credit to students for carrying out these kinds of activities, we can enhance interest in students.”

To sum up skills to deal with global situations are needed. Given the changing nature of the world, ever increasing regional conflicts, communication and diplomatic skills are needed. Families and academia should both formally and informally impart such skills so that youngsters grow as global citizen scholars.

Enhancing global skills in students is vital stated Professor Thakkar and added, “Students should develop global skills, learn to embrace technology, learn more languages, participate in student exchange programs etc.” Also, it is important to join a professional or social group stated Dr. Thakkar, who serves as the Chairman of the Ahmedabad Unit of the Textile Association (India), which is world’s largest professional society in the field of textile science.

Image by Alexa from Pixabay



*Seshadri Ramkumar*



The author holds a PhD, CText, FTI (UK), FTA (Honorary) and is presently Professor, Nonwovens & Advanced Materials Laboratory, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, USA

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