

Why should we teach ethics and moral science in our schools?

Anil K. Rajvanshi
anilrajvanshi@gmail.com

In recent past a theft of camera, iPod and cash took place in my younger daughter's house in rural Maharashtra. The finger of suspicion fell on a small statured student of class eight from a good local school. He used to live nearby and came often to my daughter's house during her absence since his dog loved to play with my daughter's dog and the maid would allow him to play inside the house.

On questioning by police he admitted to the theft and then dropped a bombshell that most of the students in his class indulged in stealing regularly. They all stole electronic gadgets like smart phones, cameras, etc. and immediately sold them to the local shop owners. It was like a game for them and they would compare notes on who stole the best gadget! The police constable also told us about the other risqué behavior indulged by these school children. This included petty theft, drinking, and serious physical violence.

Such behavior is not unique to our small rural town. It is happening all over the country. What type of children are we raising in our society? These children when they become adults get into bigger crimes and mind you these children were studying in a good school in our town of Phaltan.

Listening to this boy telling, as a matter of fact, his exploits of stealing was extremely depressing and I started wondering about how we can create conditions in school such that this type of behavior does not develop in children!

I think in the race to make the children cram knowledge (and sometimes useless knowledge) we have lost the art of teaching moral science, good and ethical behavior to them.

The society is putting more focus on money, hoarding and buying of goods and this is naturally reflected in the behavior of the children.

However if the children are taught ethics and morality as a part of all courses then even 5-6 hours they spend in school may help in changing their character. This is true since very few parents have the time to spend with their children and feel that their work is over when the children are either sent to coaching classes or show that they are studying late doing their homework. The general discussion on what is right or wrong and ethics is rarely conducted. So they learn the risqué behavior mostly from their peers.

How can we mould these children for better behavior? It can be done partly by making education very enjoyable. Today it is mostly rote learning and passing of examinations. If we engage the students thoroughly in the class with interesting hands-on work and experiments then they will have less time to think about criminal things. After all an empty mind is a devil's workshop.

In some of the great schools all over the world students make things through 3D printers and are engaged in other activities which not only occupy their time but also help them learn about physics, chemistry, mathematics and other subjects in an enjoyable way. This learning method is called "Maker Movement" in the U.S. where students make various items of daily use and in doing so learn a lot about their underlying principles and technologies.

However for this to happen we need great teachers who love to teach and inspire students. Presently the whole teaching system in India is based upon the principle "Those who cannot – teach"!

Even with very good pay for teachers we rarely get great teachers. I feel one can never hire teachers – they are born that way. The trick is to identify them in every walk of life and maybe induce them to join the teaching profession.

Since most people involved in teaching are doing so only for a living, it becomes very easy for them to focus only on curriculum and nothing else. This creates a regime which only emphasizes passing examinations.

Yet with new technologies of 3D printing, reasonably priced materials, internet, etc. one can teach students in such a way so that learning becomes enjoyable.

My daughter teaches English and science in Kamala Nimbkar Bal Bhavan in Phaltan. She teaches 7th and 8th grade students English through movie making. She has taught them to make short videos [which they upload on You tube](#). They have become so interested in making them that they spend a lot of time on the Internet searching for themes, music etc. This creativity bug keeps them very busy and they do not spend much time chatting on social networks.

Another problem in India is that even if you want to teach and have a flair for it, you cannot do so till you have a piece of paper saying you are B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education). This is especially true for government-aided schools.

There is no problem doing B.Ed. but its course work is boring, horrible, and teaches hardly anything let alone how to become a good teacher! Most of the teachers in elementary school have B.Ed. degree. So one can imagine what type of teachers we are producing and these are the teachers who teach in rural schools where major portion of our population lives.

I feel we should reduce the bureaucratic hold on school system and allow innovation and creativity to flower. This may help in getting large number of motivated and dedicated teachers for schools.

Besides teaching the regular curriculum, we should make ethics and moral science a part of every subject. This continuous focus on morality (not religion) will help the students to raise their quality of thinking.

During my school days we used to have a compulsory course in moral science in every grade. Though some of the material was Christian-oriented (it being a missionary school), one book I remember vividly had a great impact on my young mind. It was the life of Nobel Laureate [Albert Schweitzer](#) entitled “All men are brothers; A Portrait of Albert Schweitzer”. Dr. Schweitzer’s life in African jungles and his missionary work in treating the poorest had a great impact on me.

I am sure such inspiring stories of both Indians and others will inspire the young minds. Together with this should be the [program of teaching Indian classics in the schools](#). Such teachings will expose the children to noble ideas – something that they are not exposed to either in electronic or print media.

[HOME](#)

©Anil K Rajvanshi. July 2016

Syndicated by IANS and published in [Business Standard](#), [Yahoo News](#), [Avenuemail](#), [Kerala News](#), [Toronto Telegraph](#), etc. 14 July 2016.