

Value Education II - Term Paper on "A dream school for children"

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I am of the firm belief that, in the past, had our systems of education been better equipped, more widespread and accommodating, we wouldn't have as many complications in our society today.

Education is a fundamental right guaranteed in our constitution, as we all know. But it doesn't change the fact that a not-too-deep analysis into the current states of the minds of the people that our education systems have failed to produce a 100% proportion of empathetically, free and critically thinking individuals - if not, at the very least, a majority of them. It's not that we don't agree on everything but also the manner of our disagreement and the ways in which they're resolved tend towards madness more than order.

Now were I to think up a "dream school" that produces individuals of the same aforementioned description then there are a number of issues that need to be addressed within the average school. And many more in the schools that often cater to the sections of society that need the most help.

Self-learning

If it's anything I've learned growing up it's that school's teach you things, of course, but they do not teach you to teach yourself. Technically referred to as autodidacticism, the practice of self-learning should be of utmost importance in an ideal school. Just because someone's graduated from whatever institution with whatever grade doesn't mean that they have stopped learning for the rest of their lives. The reason that emphasis on self-learning needs to be given lies in that statement. We spend more of our lives outside of school and the classroom than we do in them. So it should naturally follow that someone graduating from secondary school should be able to teach themselves, but that isn't the case.

Now, emphasis being given to self-learning doesn't mean that certain methods and theories for self-learning need to be taught. Rather, the actual act of self-learning should be encouraged in as many ways as possible, with say - self-study hours, take-home assignments that have some questions that need some self-study and others.

The Scientific Method

The scientific method is the set of guides that ensure that we only move forward towards scientific advancement. It is the very basis and reason that we have made every invention and discovery we have done so far as a species, regardless of whether we knew we were following the method. My dream school would definitely feature lessons and examples of the scientific method in action. The harsh reality, though, is that a large portion of our population doesn't need to explicitly follow the method in their daily lives but it remains more important than most people believe. Discussions these days are often plagued with misinformation thus misguided opinions instead of based facts. Knowledge of the scientific method ensures that there is no doubt as to the credibility of knowledge from any source. Ensuring that one cites from sources that are fact-checked, trusted and most importantly peer reviewed is great gravity in the current state of affairs.

Sex Education

An often overlooked and stigmatised, but extremely consequential slice of education is sexual health. Sex Ed remains one of the largest gaps of knowledge in a student's repertoire as they graduate. Despite popular belief - sex education does not increase sexual activity among students, programs that promote abstinence and/or promote reducing the number of sexual partners are not effective. Rather, sex education significantly reduces the number of teen pregnancies and the number of cases of STIs among the population¹. The dream school would have Comprehensive Sexuality Education and follow a curriculum laid out by educationists and experts in the field.

Empathy

A thing that's difficult to teach but is as close to necessary as it gets in this world. Recent events, namely Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine's land, has shown that emotional and psychological development is as important as any other thing in school. This isn't something that can be taught in a classroom with a lecture and prescribed activities. Rather teachers and administration for our dream school must take it upon themselves to create an environment that is conducive to a child's emotional development. And especially to their sympathetic and empathetic tendencies. Children must be taught and, more importantly, shown that they would do well to see the world from the perspectives of others and acknowledge their feelings, opinions and strife. Disputes among classmates must be resolved with a mutual show of respect and admission of mistakes. The child who had wrong done to them must also be asked

to reflect on the other child's circumstances and what brought them to do whatever was done.

Empathy and emotional education can be integrated into the every part of a school's activities. Historical and current figures that children learn about that show a great deal of maturity and sympathy must be highlighted and praised. Team activities must be introduced from an early stage to accustom children to working together rather than against each other. And most importantly, leadership and teachers must be model examples of the behaviour we want to see in the citizens of the future. They must demonstrate an instant show of consideration whenever approached and ensure that they deal with situations, not with an iron fist, but with a logical, perspective-filled view of the problem and come to an equitable, fair verdict.

Mathematics

Mathematics is regularly touted as the apex asset of students from India. Although that may be true, it has less to thank the education system for inculcating rather than forcing it on its students. Mathematics education is not in an ideal spot in India. The way it's taught in a large majority of schools leaves something to be desired in that students learn less about critically approaching a problem and instead learn to follow an algorithm like a computer to eventually come to one of the four options on the question paper. The appearance of quality in our mathematics education is purely due to sheer amount of mathematics that the average students participates in between school, tuition classes, entrance exam coaching and whatnot. An overhaul of the pedagogy of mathematics education in India towards one that teaches children and gives them the tools to approach a problem rather than telling them exactly what to do to be evaluated well is much needed.

Hard Theory based education

Speaking from personal experience - social studies was, and always will be, one of my weakest subjects. I'm acknowledging though, for the first time in writing, that the social studies is an area of awareness that every citizen in any country needs to have a minimal grasp of to function in our society. This one is a little personal since I'd always hated learning about the dates and lists of facts and procedures and timelines and anything else that my teacher decided was important. But the fact remains that it is important.

I am of the belief though that the way in which any theory based subject that follows a pattern of facts and relies a lot on memory is one that needs revision. These subjects are often taught without any background or context or motivation behind them.

Subjects like biology, civics, history, geography, EVS, chemistry and the like are taught and evaluated based on the regurgitation of facts on the answer paper of the student. A more involved and critical approach to teaching these subjects, one that motivates children to ask "why?", "how?". The student must come away with not only a basic recollection of facts needed to form one's own opinions but also the *ability* to form

one's own opinions and the ability to find any other answers that they need for themselves from whichever source they can find.

Exploration vs Competition

A student in our country, in a nutshell, is taught to value a number or a letter grade more than their own evolution as a person. The deciding factor for the lives of a large majority of the student population is one or two attempts at a three hour exam. This one is less to do with the system and more to do with the society around it that deifies the students that gain admissions to institutes that often don't even specialise in areas that the student is interested in. After all, can you blame the kids when they spend most of their developmental years and time they have to explore going after that all important rank?

In an ideal school, a child in their secondary/higher secondary school years should be given as many options as the school can afford to follow and explore whatever passion their heart decides on after their primary and elementary education. Parents are to blame as well so, maybe educating the parents a little in this situation may be a good idea as well - especially to teach them to value their children's happiness over their success.

1. <https://en.unesco.org/news/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-important> ↗