



Sustainable Society: Banking on the 'Past' in Securing the 'Future' of 'Present'

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ABSTRACT

Educational goals over the years have been evolving from mere academics to a concern for the overall quality of life adjustment. Possibility of such type of learning outcomes rests upon planning, designing and executing educational endeavours that emerge out of the insightful reflections. Interdependence of Home, School and Society is integral in sharing this responsibility for nurturing the young ones to develop as contributing members of the society. Experiential learning of the elders presents enormous opportunities to suitably articulate learning situations for the betterment of children. This paper attempts to revisit the role played by elder members of a powerful institution 'family', from an Indian perspective, in impacting the educational outcomes in general and inculcation of values in particular among the young ones to play their roles effectively in establishing sustainable societies.

KEY WORDS: Family Environment, Value Education, Educational Attainment, Sustainable Society

It is satisfying to note that concerted efforts are being made, by individuals as well as institutions, to nurture the young ones to adjust qualitatively in life. Educational goals over the years have been evolving from mere academics to a concern for the overall quality of life adjustment. Possibility of such type of learning outcomes rests upon planning, designing and executing educational endeavours that emerge out of the insightful reflections. Understanding education as a shared responsibility of home, school and society, a closer look at the current scenario indicate towards the all-important role played by elders in the communities as a missing link, in bridging the gap, to accomplishing the well-intended objectives of planners and executors to enable the present generations to learn for life to secure their future. This paper attempts to revisit the role played by elder members of a powerful institution 'family', from an Indian perspective, in impacting the educational outcomes in general and inculcation of values in particular among the young ones to play their roles effectively in establishing sustainable societies.

Advancements in science and technology along with phenomenal explosion of knowledge have influenced the lives of one and all. As a result there is a palpable shift in ideas, life style, thinking, teaching strategies, teaching style, desires and ambitions of people. In other words it can be mentioned that advances of this knowledge society and easy access to the same have led to human being assuming central place in the universe. The self within the human being has immense potential laced with motives, needs, interest and aptitude. Along with material prosperity, we also witness people under the grip of frustration, immorality and self-centeredness. Some time back a meaningful and thought provoking message was forwarded to me by a well-wisher that goes like; "The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider Freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degress but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgment, more experts, yet more problems, more medicine, but less wellness. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life. We conquered outer space but not inner space. We've done larger things, but not

better things. We build more computers to hold more information, to produce more copies than ever, but we communicate less and less.”

Thought behind the message not only mirrors the current status of humanity but also sparks the need to do something about it. Increasing concerns are being expressed everyday about the general deterioration in values in contemporary social life. Ideas, attitudes and beliefs of one and all need to be reoriented to be able to behave as responsible citizen with desirable attitude. Convincing arguments by many thinkers and philosophers have made us aware of the all-encompassing benefits of education for mankind with its inherent capacity to influence the current and future generations. Actualization of the benefit of education depends upon the way it is perceived, comprehended and implemented. Viewing education as a means of development is indicative of the fact that we need to evolve such educational models that facilitate individual's holistic development consummate with societal needs. Individual differences due to genetic influences are beyond the control of educationists.

But identification of factors favourable for individual's development can help in developing such models and creating those conducive and wholesome experiences. Swami Dayanand's views that "Individual's development through education is an important social activity planned and shared by Parents, Teachers, School committee and members of the community" effectively highlights the role played by various agencies in the all-round development of an individual.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

It is an established fact that each student develops within a specific social setting. The nature of specific life space has an influence upon his learning and how he feels about them. Each culture and to an extent each group to which the individual belongs furnishes a set of expectations and relationships which influence the eventual development of social skills, behaviour and attitudes.

The family is one of the primary groups of society concerned with face to face relationships. The term family is usually applied in both narrow and broad sense. In narrow sense it refers to the nuclear or immediate family, meaning parents and their children. In the broad sense it refers to the extended family, meaning not only the parents and children but also such other relatives as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews that are either related by blood or marriage. From it stem the attitudes and behavior habits that set the pattern for social development and adjustment. The child in the family is the recipient of whatever constructive influences may result from the interrelations of his family with the social order. Murdock (1949) suggests that the institution of family is universal. It not only protects the child during its period of biological immunity, but is also an institution, which provides for the child's socialization and initial education. And one of the important aspects of learning process is the influence of family upon the individual's ability to learn and develop.

A student's earliest education is received in his family. It is here that his basic ideas and ideals are initiated, as well as the many attitudes towards himself and his associates that determine his later adjustment to school and other out-of-home situations. The economic status, attitudes and behavioural experiences of parents and family environment, all influence the student's behavior and attitudes, both directly and indirectly.

Early beginnings to knowledge originate within the family, on a simple level in early years, and are then further built on in the school. Family sets the stage for interactions and learning at school later. As such two institutions that influence most directly the nature and quality of student's development are 'the family' and 'the school'. It is a plausible assumption that family prepares and reinforces the

symbolic attribution required by the schooling and that schooling builds upon and elaborates the symbolic resources derived from family membership on a continuous basis.

Stevenson and Baker (1987) through their study on family-school relation and the child's school performance found that the extent to which parents were involved in school activities, such as parent-teacher organization and parent-teacher conference, was positively related to children's school performance. Direct ways through which the family environment can influence student's learning are through cognitive stimulation and assistance with schoolwork. MaCartney and Mouley (1992) observed that many of the home based intervention programs like reading stories to children, talking with them, providing toys and playing games-improve children's later performance in school and at times enhance their cognitive functioning.

Provision of out of home experiences including taking children along for shopping, visiting zoos, museums and libraries can also stimulate cognitive development. These opportunities of informal learning about everyday world increase the fund of general information available to the student a factor that has frequently been found to be predictive of skills in such areas as reading, languages and arts.

However considering the complexity of the interaction between parent and child, and other factors, that might affect the development in the child of a range of characteristics such as cognitive, attitudinal, and emotional relevant to scholastic performance, many investigators have been inspired to explore further and identify dynamic ongoing processes within the larger network of family interaction. Research evidence indicates that school focused interactions like Parental concern for child's education and other activities; Knowledge of progress of the child; Provision of facilities for achieving educational goal; Encouragement and guidance to the child to indulge in thought provoking activities have an important bearing on the student's development. School focused interactions in terms of language stimulation were found to be highly correlated with children's school performance (Dhall 2004).

Balesky's findings (1990) "that parents rearing their children in a climate of affection and responsiveness, using clear and explicable rules, providing developmentally enhancing and autonomy granting environment, are more likely to have children with positive self-concept who are emotionally stable, socially competent, well accepted by their peers, academically successful and intrinsically self-responsible."

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND VALUE EDUCATION

Values are vital to any society because they serve as a criterion for selection of action. Values also act as the basis for judgment, preference, choice or rejection. Therefore students, who are the future citizens, need to be equipped with desirable skills and values to be able to respond to and adjust with current social changes satisfactorily. Dr. Radha Krishnan's views, "Education is not limited to the imparting of the information or training of skills. It has to give the educated a proper sense of values." Highlight the need for appropriate educational actions.

Values are fundamentally social in origin as well as in their manifestation. Values are held as relevant and utilitarian in their social context where intelligence of the student, environment within the home, society and religion play an important role. Accordingly the values that determine and direct our actions are acquired through a series of experiences that we undergo in certain important social institutions. As such the development of values is influenced by a complex network of environmental factors-home, peer group, community, media, and general ethos prevalent in the society. Home

takes the highest priority in the hierarchy followed by school. This means that the type of environment the student grows and develops in has much significance.

Under all circumstances the family's capacity for both preventing and precipitating the cultivation of different types of values is very much there. Lessons learnt in the family can go a long way in shaping of human personality. The family is thus the most important channel through which values considered conducive to individual and social good could be cultivated.

IMPLICATIONS

Being convinced of the impact of interactions within the family prompts us draw out the best. However it is common knowledge that families vary greatly in structure and functioning. Societal changes brought about as a result of greater accessibility and varied opportunities have had a dramatic impact on family environment in both developing as well as developed countries. 'DINK' (double income no kids) and 'DISK' (double income single kid) types of families have emerged along with 'nuclear' and 'joint'. Improved healthcare and facilities have swelled the older population. Such diversity requires a pragmatic orientation of roles that makes up for the deprivation of emotional bonding for the young ones as well as provides a purpose to lives of older people, who have been conditioned to undermine their worth.

A predominant Indian thought that 'God has created human beings for a special purpose; to live; to help others live and to provide further what we can for future generations' acts as a guiding principle of nearly all families in India. Besides a popular belief that 'interest is valued more than the principle amount' exemplifies the special bond shared between children and grandparents. Accordingly enlightened elders can play a vital role in inculcating values.

- First and foremost, it is important for the elders, to understand and realize their roles and responsibilities in developing values in the students at home and in the society. Meaningful communication among the members of the society, participation in social discussions, exposure to mass media can make family members aware of their responsibilities towards the all-round development of the child in general and inculcation of values in particular.
- Many of us would recall our grandparents as best story tellers and how they exposed us to the lives of contemporary great men. Deeper knowledge and understanding of genuine deed of great men can gradually stimulate the young ones. Sri Rama Krishna, the great spiritual leader of nineteenth century, India, used to say that a piece of wet cloth kept near the fireplace for some time would become fit for use. Therefore conscious efforts, like reading biographies, narrating inspirational stories etc. can be made to expose children of impressionable age to the lives of great men so that they are encouraged to follow and emulate desirable ideals and beliefs.
- Values education that is aimed at inculcation of values is a broad framework of sensitizing the educational community towards human excellence based on personal experiences. By exhibiting exemplary behavior, members of the society, can contribute their might in sensitizing the students. Showing respect and taking care of elders; dealing justly and impartially with all the siblings; respecting the right and dignity of the child in expressing his opinion; being kind and considerate towards servant and other help workers; awareness about socially relevant issues and the inclination to be actively involved with the same, refraining from promoting feelings of hatred among different communities are some of the exemplary behaviour expressions to present themselves as role models to young ones so that they can be encouraged to imbibe the same.
- Emotionally starved child can become selfish, demanding and the one showing little interest in others. Such a scenario brings us face to face with crisis in social values like friendliness, cooperation, love for social justice, self-discipline etc. Elders, who are naturally endowed with a

never ending stream of love and nurturance are capable of providing and promoting nurturing environment at home for children.

- Affectionate and intimate interactions effectively communicate the virtues of desirable attitude and behavior as well as develop the ability to differentiate between 'right' and 'wrong'. Alert and oriented elders are favorably placed to replace 'Don't do it as I don't like it' with 'you shouldn't be doing it as it is harmful for you'.
- Elders in the neighborhood and community, coming from different walks of life, need to be encouraged to share their life experiences in order to promote values among children. This can be done in collaboration with school through Parent Teacher Associations. A recent phenomenon of celebrating grandparents' day in schools is a step in this direction.
- Democratic child training techniques at home enable the individual to analyze a situation before reacting to it, because one has been provided with a reason for doing what one is expected to do.

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