

On Education



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Preface

This compilation is addressed to the teachers of the schools of Theosophical Society and for others who may be in sympathy with the philosophy and visions of such schools. They are written not dogmatically, but are meant to encourage inquiry and exploration. Teachers and administrators are asked to discuss together the issues raised in these pages, and not to hesitate to disagree. Your views are solicited and welcome. Wholesome education is a product of insight and experience. It is not static. Hence all of us, administrators, teachers, and parents, are learning things together continuously.

It is suggested that the teachers and administrators write down notes on their thoughts and insights.

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The Goal of Education

The aim of education is “to prepare young people for life.” What is this life that we are preparing for?

In standard education, life is implicitly defined as social life, that is, the young students are being prepared to adapt to society. The values, habits, attitudes, and skills being inculcated are those that are approved by current society. Five centuries ago, these values would be different.

Today’s colleges for example, place an inordinate proportion of the curriculum to subjects that are meant to heighten one’s skill for a certain profession, such as marketing, financing, banking, or computer science. The implied message is that the aim of college education is to “succeed” in one’s career. As a result, the meaning of life of the individual is frequently defined in terms of one’s career.

This assumption that life is to be defined in terms of social values is both superficial and short-termed.

It is superficial because human life is more than social life. It is also about relationships, joy, sorrow, meaning, love, harmony, contentment, and spirituality.

It is short-termed because it does not consider the larger purpose of human life. Human life has a metaphysical or transcendent aspect that goes beyond the changing values of society. Because educators, philosophers and religious people cannot agree about this purpose, this aspect has generally been relegated as secondary among public and secular institutions. In some religious schools, this perceived purpose has been translated in a dogmatic and unhealthy manner that makes people fearful, superstitious, and sometimes irrational.

Preparation for life must embody a view that is both commonsensical and profound, based on the accumulated wisdom of humanity.

Here are some thoughts on what we are preparing for:

- To be able to effectively face the challenges of the natural and social world of an adult. For example, this includes sufficient knowledge about health, technology, skills, as well as general knowledge to be able to navigate in the labyrinth of society.
- To live a generally happy and fulfilling life. This has emotional, cognitive and ethical aspects, that is, knowing how to handle our emotional nature, as well as have a reasonably effective philosophy of life and an ethical way of living based on sound universal moral principles.

- To have effective and fulfilling relationships. Failure in relationships is perhaps the major cause of human unhappiness.
- To be able to discover one's calling and to be able to pursue it meaningfully to the best of one's ability.
- To pursue one's highest potential in terms of human growth. This natural drive is called by many names: the drive towards maturity, self-actualization, or self-realization.
- To be able to meaningfully contribute towards the welfare and happiness of

Good education therefore is one that will prepare a person to face life in its totality, contributing to the happiness and fulfillment of the individual, whereas poor education essentially fails in this task.

human beings, as well as of other sentient creatures in nature; to help humanity attain a state of collective harmony and mutual benevolence on an enduring basis.

An individual who is able to achieve most if not all of the above would be a fulfilled human being. We can hardly ask for more. To realize the above potentials is the highest goal of education.

In the light of the above, much of modern education is a failure, both in the so-called developed as well as the developing countries. In the developed countries, we find a high level of stress, anxiety, alienation, divorce, etc., as well as high incidence of crime, drugs, and suicide. In the developing countries,

there is a high degree of injustice, corruption, insecurity, inequality of income, illiteracy, and social superstitions.

The goal of many progressive schools and alternative education methods is to correct the present imbalance of school curricula, as well as to provide an environment that will nurture wholesomeness of character in the individual. They avoid the many harmful methods that characterize many of our modern schools, such as competitiveness, use of grades in the measurement of competence, and the use of fear and coercion in motivating students to study.

A Preparation for Life

Formal education, then, is a systematic preparation for life in its broadest sense, rather than just prepare for social adaptation.

An "uneducated" person will have to find out the solutions to the puzzles and difficulties in life by trial and error, and will have to depend upon his native intelligence, resourcefulness, endurance, etc. An "educated person," however, is exposed to an educational environment that provides a systematic and accelerated way in which these lessons are learned beforehand, thus lessening the chances of pain and suffering when facing life as an adult.

Good education therefore is one that will prepare a person to face life in its totality, contributing to the happiness and fulfillment of the individual, whereas poor education essentially fails in this task.

Education involves at least three aspects:

Integrated understanding of life. Good education provides an adequate and balanced map of reality that addresses significant facets of life and nature that affect one's happiness and meaning of life. At present, the general maps of reality given by schools are based on a popular understanding of life, which in the long run fails in many significant ways, both for the individual and for society. For the individual, it results in unhappiness. For society, it leads to insecurity, destruction, conflict, and war. Society's popular maps are characterized by serious internal contradictions. They teach honesty, and at the same time teach that honesty is impractical. They teach love, but at the same time view genuine love as too idealistic.

Development of sound character. Dealing with life involves the development of certain qualities, such as perseverance, kindness, absence of fear, sense of justice, truthfulness, etc. that harmonize one's nature with reality. Character development includes a clarity of values, on what is right and wrong, on what is more important and less, and the ability to act in accordance with such a hierarchy. In its loftiest levels, good education will include the nurturing of the transcendent life.

Acquiring of life-skills. By life-skills we refer to capabilities that will address the demands of life in current society. Thus certain levels of knowledge on language, computers, commerce, politics, etc., are needed for an individual to function well in present society. Those who do not acquire such knowledge will tend to be relegated to job functions that are basic, such as manual labor, and may feel a sense of unfulfillment in life.

Generally, standard schools all over the world focus mainly on the third need – to be able to cope with the demands of society: earning a living, becoming well-informed about history and current events, acquiring current social values, etc.

This third aspect, while important, does not result in deep fulfillment in life. Success in it may provide satisfaction, but not necessarily happiness and meaningfulness. This third aspect also tends to wrap the individual in the cocoon of current social values, blind to the larger picture of what life and existence is all about.

The task of the educator then is to formulate a program that will meet the above three needs. A school that merely satisfies the third need will be nurturing young people who will likely encounter insurmountable walls later in life when

It is important for a school to have teachers who are psychologically active, creative and "free." They themselves are not afraid to question things and hence tend to integrate their own understanding of life.

their life-skills are not adequate to meet deeper issues such as happiness, effective relationship, self-mastery, or spirituality.

Integrated Understanding of Life

Children learn about life and its rules through exposure to, and interaction with, people and environment. Their inherent or instinctive reaction to such exposure results in the formation of their personality. Examples of such inherent reaction pattern would be pain avoidance, curiosity, tendency to repeat pleasure, instinct for survival, fear, need for security, need for approval, etc.

The ability to face the challenges of life entails the development of certain character qualities, such as one-pointedness, self-mastery, absence of fear, respectfulness, friendliness, etc. It also entails clarity in one's ethical views and a willingness to practice them in life.

Exposure automatically develops a worldview in the child, and this worldview is his or her understanding of what life is. It is not consciously formulated, but unconsciously formed. Thus, for instance, becoming a bully is an unconscious reaction to insecurity – the need to assert oneself through aggression in the face of perceived threats to oneself.

The child's worldview therefore is but an amalgamation of distinct and disparate learned reactions to environmental situations and pressures. It has two characteristics:

- The worldview is unintegrated, that is, contradictory views within it can co-exist

because children still have a poor capacity for integration. They don't think things thoroughly and do not understand yet the meaning and implication of life issues.

- Such a worldview is also unreviewed, that is, there is a tendency to accept the statement of adults or of books with little questioning.

Schools tend to perpetuate this lack of integration and the failure to review the validity of the worldview or its parts. This is due to a number of factors.

The adults themselves (teachers and administrators) harbor the same contradictory elements in their worldviews so that they do not consider these as unusual or abnormal. Thus, the contradiction between "Honesty is the best policy" and "Honesty is often impractical" is left unresolved. The contradiction between the virtue of love and the justifications for anger is left unresolved. That God is omniscient does not appear to them as inconsistent with the Old Testament teachings that God regrets having done something, or that God changes his mind when someone prays to him.

The ability to review or question the validity of a statement or a presumed fact is a sign of intelligence. The standard school system often does not encourage this because it is too troublesome to have to explain everything to students. Besides, many teachers often do not know the answers, and get irritated when

they are asked questions they cannot answer. They often resort to the power of their authority to inhibit such questionings.

A typical teacher would get irritated if asked, “Teacher, why do I have to study how to solve square roots?” or “Why do we have to memorize the capital cities of the provinces?”

It is easier to *require* children to do a certain assignment, than to *motivate* them to be interested in doing the assignment.

For this reason it is important for a school to have teachers who are psychologically active, creative and “free.” They themselves are not afraid to question things and hence tend to integrate their own understanding of life. They are willing to reject beliefs that are inconsistent with validated views of life. The religious aspect of this inquiry will be discussed under “Religious Education.”

A wholesome school then must also be able to prepare students to meet the demands of an adult life in terms, such as career, hobby, social skills, and other similar capabilities.

Character Building

The ability to face the challenges of life entails the development of certain character qualities, such as one-pointedness, self-mastery, absence of fear, respectfulness, friendliness, etc. It also entails clarity in one’s ethical views and a willingness to practice them in life.

The home and the school environment are the primary training grounds for character. It is not so much taught, as learned from example. Again, this is difficult to teach, primarily because many parents and teachers themselves have not developed sufficiently these character qualities within themselves. For example, it is difficult to teach integrity if a parent or teacher has problems in making his actions consistent with his or her teachings.

But at the same it must be realized that character building is a science in the sense that it can be systematically taught provided the teacher is clear about both the values and the methods. For example, a child who is psychologically secure does not become a bully because there is no psychological motivation for bullying. Honesty can be strengthened in an environment that does not penalize honesty.

But character development is not simply about values and virtues. It is also a quality of self-awareness about psychological conflicts within that need to be integrated and resolved. A virtue like love cannot manifest when a child is not self-aware of the uncontrollable rise of anger. When anger takes over, there is a compulsive desire to hurt others – an act opposite to love.

Thus character building does not simply involve knowing about right and wrong, but the self-mastery that enables one to act according to one’s views or convictions (being honest, free from fear, etc.) The development of this capacity

is the self-transformative aspect of education: the self-mastery of one's behavioral patterns and the awakening of one's higher nature. (See the chapter on "Self-Transformative Education.")

Learning Life Skills

Skills differ from character and worldviews. While character is quite universal in nature, skills are often dependent upon culture, social convention and the prevalent technology.

Communication skills is one of the most important skills that a young person needs to develop. With character as the foundation, the ability to communicate effectively smoothens one's relationship with anyone. This includes the capacity to genuinely listen and to speak assertively without hurting or offending others. An inordinately high percentage of human unhappiness is due to relationship failures. Communication skills are the second level foundation of effective relationships and social skills. The first level is one's character quality, for without the latter, communication skills become just a technique or a manipulative skill.

The development of intellectual ability is needed more and more as the world grows more and more complex. It is said that the volume of information in the world doubles every twenty years. To be able to appreciate the essentials of such information and use them in one's professional life has become a necessity in the modern world. A "good" school is one that is able to adequately prepare young people to acquire these skills such that they become effective in their chosen career or life work.

A wholesome school then must also be able to prepare students to meet the demands of an adult life such as in terms of career, social skills, and other similar capabilities.

The Life Aspect of Education

There is a “life” aspect to education that many teachers often become blind to. It is concerned with the relevance to life not only of the subject matter but also of the teacher’s way of teaching. Blindness to this important aspect becomes intensified when teachers feel compelled to finish the required subject matters to be covered and they start to pressure students to catch up with the lessons according to a certain schedule or pace.

The syllabus becomes all-important. It is rammed into the students regardless of whether they are really learning or not, whether they are enjoying it or not, whether it is relevant to them or not. Subject learning becomes more important than life education.

The Significance of Learning a Subject

I once had a elementary school teacher in music who required us to memorize the different keys (key of F, G, etc.) and how they are sequenced (G, D, A, E, B, F). We had to know what a G clef or a bar or a quarter rest is, and we pass or fail the music subject depending upon whether we can answer exam questions on these. I remember that I was beginning to develop a distaste of the subject as we went on in the semester. Then one day, this teacher was sick and couldn’t teach. A math teacher substituted for her. With a smile in his face, and an enthusiasm in his manner, he led us in fun singing, and then explained along the way why that song was a 4/4 or a 3/4. It was the fun of singing first that he tried to instill, and then gave the technicalities afterwards. Although he taught only for one or two days, this substitute teacher influenced me in my amateur interest in music. It is possible that I might have developed a distaste for music today had I only learned music the way the other teacher was drilling us.

What is the real significance of music to the human life? To the vast majority of people, it is appreciation of music, not its production or composition. Only a small percentage of people need to master chords, harmonics, keys, and other such things about music.

There is a life aspect to teaching. It is not just a matter of meeting the requirements of the lesson plans. Knowing the different music keys is far less

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important than developing a love for music. After all, how many students in a class of grade 6 students will eventually become professional musicians? I would far rather let them flunk in the technicalities of music but learn to love music, than to pass music exams and develop a hatred of it.

Love of Learning

Love of learning about a subject is far more important than learning facts or formulas about the subject. In the former case, the students will become self-motivated to learn more about the subject by themselves. In the latter, the students tend to study the subject just to pass the exam, and are ready to drop and forget it once the semester is over. Such knowledge becomes virtually useless to life.

Love of learning about a subject is far more important than learning facts or formulas about the subject. In the former case, the students will become self-motivated to learn more about the subject by themselves.

When teachers are too absorbed with the lesson plan schedule, they tend to hurry up and pressure students to learn things without preparing the students to be in a state of mind to absorb and learn. They neglect spending time to motivate students or arouse their interest in the subject matter. They consider such efforts as wasted time that could have been devoted to cover the required subject matters. This results in the student just cramming to pass the subject, and not developing a wholesome interest in it.

In life, such a way of learning is counter-productive. The students don't learn how to learn. They sometimes even develop a phobia or hatred of the subject. When they have become professionals, teachers, or executives, they nurture inferiority complexes when it comes to certain fields, such as mathematics, language, science, etc.

Many years ago, I was invited to assist two schools in China in improving their English language course. By the time that the students finished Junior High School, the students of these schools would have studied English for more than six years. But when I sat in their highest junior high school classes, I found that they could hardly understand or speak in English. They had reasonably good textbooks. But what I noted was that the teachers felt compelled to finish covering the contents of the entire textbook within a certain period of time in preparation for final exams. Both the teachers and the students were immersed in the objective of *passing the exam* and not learning how to use English as a second language. This had a disastrous consequence. Not only was it wasteful, but the students developed an impression that they really did not know how to speak English at all, in other words, a fear to speak and use English. The principal of one of the schools told me that he himself studied English for eight years, but he could not speak English at all.

They have forgotten that children from 2-5 years old can learn *any language* in a few years time without any formal schooling or grammatical instructions. Many of us have seen countless children who speak a second or third language perfectly and confidently by the age of 5. Why can't these older students learn English after six or more years of daily instruction? Something is definitely wrong.

Take another subject: history. I have many contemporaries who found history not only one of the most boring subjects but one of the most hated. This is the course that needs the most memorization of dates, names and events. The students flunk the subject when they are not able to supply the dates and names correctly in examinations.

But history can be one of the most fascinating fields of study. It is about human life and people: their ambition, greed, achievements, conflicts, enlightenment, plus countless other facets of human life. It is a series of stories of the human drama. We learn important lessons about the triumphs and failures of individuals and groups that are relevant to what are happening around us today.

Why can't young students become as interested in history as they are in Andersen's fairy tales or Harry Potter's destiny? The fault, I am afraid, lies mainly in the teacher and the school's view about history as a subject. If the school system looks at history as something to pass an exam with, then the pre-occupation is on cramming facts into the heads of the poor students in preparation for the test. But if history is conveyed as a fascinating drama of human life, with anecdotes and stories, then the chances that the students will *love* the subject matter is very high. They will become self-motivated to inquire, read and discuss.

For elementary and secondary students, developing a genuine interest in the subject is almost always more important than memorizing facts about the subject just to pass exams. Of course, examinations or assessments are needed in order to measure the effectiveness of the educational approach. But these are just subsidiary tools to help effectiveness in educating, not the goals of schooling.

Life Lessons from Each Teacher

There is another kind of life education that teachers ignore.

Every single class day, teachers are imparting life lessons to the students while they are teaching history, biology, mathematics or any subject whatsoever. A harsh and tyrannical teacher is imparting the lesson that it is all right to use bullying and oppressive tactics when you have the authority. This attitude may

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later reflect in the parenting style of the students after they get married; or their management style when they assume higher positions.

The way the teachers talk, the way they handle conflicts and problems, the way they interact with other people, their enthusiasm – all these affect the students in very significant ways.

It is a sad mistake for mathematics teachers, for example, to think that their duty is just to let the students learn mathematics, and that their temper is their own personal business. There are teachers who almost take pleasure in scaring students with their sharp stares and threatening language in order to motivate the students to pass math exams. The student may learn how to solve trigonometric problems but they also acquire something worse: fear of authority, dislike of the subject, or hostility as a method of dealing with people.

The Joy of Living

Why are many schools unhappy places? If not for the fun of friendship, a school is often seen as a place of toil and drudgery. As proof of this, observe the reactions of students when they learn that next Monday is a holiday and there are no classes.

But there are schools which are different. Students look forward to being in school almost everyday. They feel a sense of loss or absence when it is a holiday. In one of our schools, Golden Link School, it is not surprising to find students at the gate during a holiday, asking permission to be allowed to be in school even for half a day. One elementary grade pupil was once sick and could not come to school. I happened to be there that day. She called the school at least eight times wanting to talk to the teacher – not for any urgent or important business but just wanting to talk with the teacher. She was missing school.

One of the functions of a good school is for children to imbibe the joy of learning, of accepting challenges, of relationships, of surmounting difficulties – in a word, the joy of living in the midst of challenges and difficulties. This is a subconscious quality that one develops under a certain environment. Of course, the home is the other important environment that is capable of negating whatever influences the school may have on the child. But at least the school should be an influence towards the positive development of this quality, rather than reinforce the feeling that life is a hateful struggle against adults, authority, impositions, rules and discipline.

The school is not information-giving machine. It is indeed a second home. In the same way as the home should be a happy place, every school too should be a happy place.

This capacity for positiveness, enthusiasm, optimism and self-confidence is a crucially important quality in adult life. It is not a Pollyanish, rosy-garden attitude that can border on illusion. It is rather a realistic but positive attitude in dealing with the challenges of living.

On Motivation

A primary capability of teachers is to know how to make students feel motivated to learn. When this is effectively accomplished, the teacher will find it easier to introduce more difficult aspects of the subject without losing the attention of the students. This matter has several aspects:

Factors that Demotivate. The first is the need to be sensitive to factors that *prevent* students from developing an interest in the subject or the class. These factors can be tiredness, personal problems, a negative attitude towards the subject matter, fear, the weather, and many others. As much as possible the teacher must be sensitive to the *state* of the students at the start of each session, and then try to address as much of these as is convenient or possible. For example, if the students are tired after having gone through three hours of consecutive classes, then an interesting physical activity or a game can enliven them again.

The factors that prevent interest can be mental, emotional, physical, environmental, or attitudinal. An activity or discussion that can address as many of these as possible may help eliminate or resolve these obstructions to the learning session. Here are examples:

- standing up and doing an exercise
- a game involving physical movements, such as “7-up” or “Story of the Lion,” so long as it will not disturb classes next door
- a verbal game that will arouse curiosity and emotional excitement, such as insight games like “Black Magic.”

The Use of Fear. The traditional approach in making students become attentive in class and to do their homework is through the imposition of punishment, such as flunking the course, or by embarrassing the student in the class, or asking the them to leave the room if they are inattentive, etc. In other words, the motivation is fear. But this kind of motivation will only make students *try* to pass the examinations, but will not make the students become interested in the subject. Genuine learning involves love of the subject matter.

A primary capability of teachers is to know how to make students feel motivated to learn. When this is effectively accomplished, the teacher will find it easier to introduce more difficult aspects of the subject without losing the attention of the students.

The Teacher's Motivation. A prerequisite to motivating the students is that the teacher must be motivated and interested about the subject matter in the first place. This has at least two aspects:

First, the teacher must have *genuine enthusiasm* about the subject. Students sense this immediately through the teacher's manner of speaking, body language, the glow in the facial expression, etc. The boring or bored manner of a teacher while teaching will immediately infect the students with the same attitude. If the teacher looks grim and unhappy when talking about the subject, it is as if the teacher is saying "I too don't like this subject, but you must pass this course whether you like it or not, otherwise you will not graduate." It is like taking bitter medicine – you will avoid it if you can. But when the teacher looks happy when talking about the subject, then this feeling is infectious too. The students feel lighter or brighter while the teacher is teaching. When they associate this feeling with the subject, then they become more motivated to learn about it.

The teacher must have genuine enthusiasm about the subject. Students sense this immediately through the teacher's manner of speaking, body language, the glow in the facial expression, etc.

Second, the teacher needs to be *creative* in teaching the subject. Explaining things with words is but one of the many approaches to teaching. It can also be demonstrated, acted out, sung with songs, etc. It can be made fun, challenging, exhilarating, or growth-enhancing. Games can be associated with it.

Teach aerodynamics by asking them to make a project that will lift objects when a fan blows into a constructed wing; or the principle of levers or pulleys by challenging them to devise a contraption that will enable one person to lift two students; or trigonometry by asking them to measure the height of an electric pole by the shadow it casts at a certain time.

Besides, enthusiastic teachers are happy teachers. They do not get psychologically exhausted after hours of teaching. They are not even discouraged by the passive reaction of students.

Psychological Self-Reliance. This brings us to a basic quality of effective teachers: they are psychologically self-reliant. They are not discouraged by unenthusiastic students since their eagerness springs from within, and not essentially dependent upon the response of the students. They maintain a passion for the subject regardless of whether others are interested in it or not.

To achieve this state, the teachers must have worked out their own insecurity or low self-esteem, such that they are able to accept themselves as they are.

Rapport. Rapport is a very important aspect in teaching. It links the teacher to the students such that the teacher senses if the students are not absorbing the lessons at that moment.

Sensitivity to the feelings and moods of the students is an important foundation for rapport. Suppose a tragedy happened to one of the students or teachers in school. The mind and feelings of the students will be directed towards

the incident, and not on any subject matter. It is helpful if the teacher devotes at least a few minutes of the class time to address this concern first before gently redirecting the subject to the lesson for the day.

To have rapport is to be relevant to the students' mind, emotions and concerns. To help attain such resonance, the teachers may have to help the students adjust *towards* the subject at hand by discussing, empathizing or doing some activity.

Such capacity for rapport will enable the teachers to make use of the students' concerns to generate interest or enthusiasm on a subject. For example, knowing that college students are now beginning to have serious male-female relationships with each other, a teacher may start a class in sociology or history with a discussion of the social or historical consequences of love relationships, such as Anthony and Cleopatra or Abelard and Heloise.

An excellent book on motivating children is *Motivated Minds* by Deborah Stipek and Kathy Seal. They have well-founded suggestions that shed much light on this subject, specifically the following:

- Grades, prizes and rewards may not be the best approach since they can do damage.
- Children become self-motivated to learn:
 - › when they feel capable and skilled, and confident of becoming more so;
 - › when they have some choice and control over their learning
 - › when they feel loved, supported and respected by their parents
- Children learn well through play
- Create interest in learning by connecting it to the real world

Rapport is a very important aspect in teaching. It links the teacher to the students such that the teacher senses if the students are not absorbing the lessons at that moment.

Enthusiasm and Inspiration

We have mentioned the importance of enthusiasm. We need to add some more words in its relation to inspiration.

Enthusiasm is to be interested in sharing, in teaching. There is an inner energy, a bubbling quality, that emerges from within whenever one talks about the subject matter being taught.

This is intimately connected with being inspired. There is fire in one's soul. One becomes but an instrument of the fascinating subject matter. Then one infects another soul with one's enthusiasm. It uplifts and exalts the listener or the student. The fire within the students is kindled. They become self-motivated. The interest comes now from within, rather than from the teacher.

How does one teach algebra? Or history? Or accounting?

Enthusiasm and inspiration will be difficult to attain when a person is self-absorbed with problems and distresses. One's spirit is not free to explore and appreciate. It is bogged down by low energy, conflict, resentment, or fear.

- Students for example like to be challenged. They are intrigued by puzzles. Pose to them some challenging situations to solve, and they may spend their entire evening trying to figure out your riddle.
- Tell stories related to your subject matter, even if remotely connected. Your enthusiasm and interest will infect them into becoming interested in the subject matter.
- Let them undertake experiments or projects on the subject, such as sprouting beans, making doorbells, or performing “magic” tricks with chemicals.
- Dramatize a story or a historical anecdote.

Read widely about the subject you are teaching. Find out interesting things about the topic. The possibilities are almost limitless: the story of the

Gordian knot (history or language), how a large company collapsed as a result of mismanagement of accounting records (accounting), how compasses were discovered when chariots needed to know where they are going during battles on foggy days (physics), the longest snake known (biology), the fattest human being in history (health), the tallest person in the world (glands and heredity), etc.

Energy Level of Teachers

Enthusiasm and inspiration will be difficult to attain when a person is self-absorbed with problems and distresses. One's spirit is not free to explore and appreciate. It is bogged down by low energy, conflict, resentment, or fear.

Effective teachers must therefore also learn to be effective in dealing with the multifarious aspects of life. They are not merely good in mathematics or history. They are also good in facing life problems. They should also be familiar with the self-awareness processing of their emotional distresses. They become counselors of the students in many ways, not only in the subject matters they are teaching.

On Medals, Honors, and Grades

Most schools regularly give medals, honors and grades to their students. There are subtle but important disadvantages to these methods of motivating children to do well.

Medals and Honors

Children must be motivated to learn not because of medals or honors, but because they are interested to learn. The love of learning and genuine interest in a subject matter are the best kinds of motivation in education. The children will develop their own initiative in learning. They will read and ask questions out of curiosity and interest even if the subjects are outside of their curriculum or their levels. They can advance at their own pace.

Medals or honors have harmful effects on children. They give the wrong impression that the children are learning in order to acquire honors and to be better than other children. This develops the sense of competitiveness. It engenders a feeling of “I against others” in the school, instead of a spirit of cooperativeness. Those who do not receive honors can sometimes feel low self-esteem compared to those who have honors. We do not need to let others feel bad just to express our appreciation to a few pupils.

Children should develop a spirit of excellence rather than competitiveness. Excellence means that one is able to achieve one’s best. This is the most important measure of success – attaining the highest limits of one’s own capabilities, instead of comparing oneself with the capabilities of others. Comparison and competition, on the other hand, foster insecurity and fear, as well as vanity and pride.

The world has so much conflict, insecurity, violence and unhappiness. One root cause of all these is the sense of competition and comparison. One country likes to have more Per Capita Income than another; one corporation would like to have a larger market share than another; one person would like to defeat another in election or wealth. To achieve these, people may resort to injustice, inconsiderateness and even violence.

Children must be motivated to learn not because of medals or honors, but because they are interested to learn. The love of learning and genuine interest in a subject matter are the best kinds of motivation in education.

It is all unnecessary, because a person can achieve true fulfillment and success without comparing oneself with others. Let them become what they can become, let them achieve what they can achieve, according to their best abilities, and not in order to look “more successful” than others, or feeling “inferior” to others. When wholesomely nurtured and motivated, such students will not grow up feeling insecure or inferior when they see others excelling in their own fields. They are glad to express their appreciation or admiration, but at the same time they appreciate their own achievements.

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Some parents may say: “But there is real competition in society. Should we not prepare our children to be competitive?” We should prepare our children for excellence. As they grow up, they will realize that society has competition. It is up to them whether they will join such competition or not. If they do, they will not feel themselves to be failures if they do not win because they were not conditioned to believe that they are inferior just because they are not like other people. But they will continue to do their best.

Children should be nurtured to become natural achievers, without feeling insecure that others are doing better, and not feeling proud that they seem “better than others.” They will be happier in their growth and they will become true achievers. Some of the most outstanding people in history are non-competitive — Einstein, Edison, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Marie Curie, and thousands of others. They did what they have done because of love of

what they were doing, rather than to appear better than others. And they are generally happier people.

Grades and Evaluation

The use of a grading system, whether by numbers (75% or 90%) or letters (A or B+), has become so standard that it is almost inconceivable for a school not to have it, especially in the tertiary level. Yet its use is fraught with disadvantages that if ever it is applied, it must be implemented with care. There are three main reasons why grades are unwholesome:

Misunderstood Purpose. Most people have forgotten the real underlying purpose of having a grading system. It is to have a method of evaluating the learning and progress of the student. Because the grading system is the easiest and most convenient method of evaluating, especially by teachers who are handling more than 10 students per class, it has become the standard way of assessing the progress of students.

Through the centuries, the “grade” has acquired a life of its own. Rather than being seen as a tool, it has become the end in itself for many students, parents and

even teachers. I have seen countless students get worried and upset when they have “failing” grades (or proud when they have high grades), but I see very few students who get worried when they are not learning from a teacher or feel proud when they have mastered a subject.

In standard schools, therefore, students are supposed to have done well when they get high grades in examinations, *regardless of whether they understood the subject or not*. This is weird, queer and funny. And yet we don’t find it alarming that this anomalous situation is accepted matter-of-factly by students, parents, teachers and administrators. Such a system is no longer in pursuit of true education but a parody of it.

Every teacher must keep in mind that the aim of evaluation (whether through grades or other means) is to know whether a student has attained a certain level of competency in a subject matter, and, *if not, it is the duty of the teacher to help the student to attain it*. This is precisely the purpose of a school.

Evaluation is different from an *examination*. A medical graduate will apply for board examinations to qualify him to practice medicine. The government examines whether he meets the required standards. He may pass or fail. It is not the function of the government to teach them to become good doctors, but to ensure that they are competent before allowing them to practice medicine.

The function of the teacher is to evaluate, and not to examine. When giving a “test” or “exam,” the purpose is to understand rather than to reward or punish, and afterwards to help the students who are having difficulty with the subject matter. At the end of the term or school year, it is the function of the school administration to examine whether the student is ready for the next level.

A student once told me that she had a college teacher who told all the students on the first day of class: “Two-thirds of you will fail in this subject.” He said that in previous classes and school years, he always flunked two-thirds of his students, and saying this with some feeling of pride. I am unable to understand such arrogance. It is as if it is not his responsibility to try to make all students meet the expected level of competence. He is acting like an examiner (and even an executioner) and not a teacher.

Many teachers, especially those who are teaching more than 40 students per class, will say that they do not have the time to individually help the students. While this is a fact (some classes have even more than 70 students), it does not

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alter the fact that it is the duty of the teacher to *help* students attain certain levels of competency. The inability to do so is a failure in teaching.¹

Some teachers will say that it is also the responsibility of the students to learn the subject, and it is not just the duty of the

If a teacher constantly uses memory-type tests, Margaret will keep on flunking and may begin to believe that she is dumb in history, when actually she may have understood history better than Susan. Grades based on such exams therefore may not necessarily reflect the true competence of these two students regarding the subject.

teacher. This is true to a certain degree, especially in collegiate levels. But this reasoning is not very valid for elementary levels, where it is the function of the teacher to motivate students as well as to teach a subject matter. In other words, in elementary levels, the teachers are like parents who are guiding and molding young minds. The teacher must be a child psychologist, a motivator, a coach, a parent, and a subject teacher.

Not Accurate Evaluation. A grade is not always a reliable assessment of the progress of the student. A grade assumes an objective benchmark of competence. It has however its biases. When a history examination consists of questions that need memory work in order to answer, Susan may fare well, but Margaret may not. If the exam questions were changed into essay types that involve analysis of historical situations, Margaret may excel but

Susan may flunk. Who has fared better in the subject, Margaret or Susan?

If a teacher constantly uses memory-type tests, Margaret will keep on flunking and may begin to believe that she is dumb in history, when actually she may have understood history better than Susan. Grades based on such exams therefore may not necessarily reflect the true competence of these two students regarding the subject.

Teachers who know their subjects well, and who appreciate the practical significance of the subject, will be better able to evaluate the progress of the students, and whether the students have understood the subject or not. In such cases, particularly for higher years, grades are less harmful because they may be able to reflect to a useful extent the progress of the student. But the best evaluation is still a one-on-one basis where the teacher will give direct feedback to the student on how the teacher sees the strength and weakness of the student regarding the subject. This is of course almost impossible for teachers who are handling many large classes, but efforts must be done in this direction especially for those having difficulties with the subject.

¹ Teachers who feel helpless in such situations must at the same time be aware that there are alternative approaches in assisting students in a large class, such as grouping students, or peer teaching. Let the more advanced students help the ones who are behind. But it is necessary that the leadership of the teacher is able to organize and motivate the class to do this effectively.

If teachers are to conduct evaluation through tests, the tests should be designed in such a way that the teacher will truly understand the essential strengths and weaknesses of the students on the subject. For this purpose, certain types of tests are not very helpful, such as “Choose the correct answer” type of questions, where four answers are given and the student is supposed to encircle the correct one. Some students are good at guessing. They may have a reasonably good score without really comprehending the subject well.

Oral evaluations are the best ones. Next to it would be essay type questions. For math it should be problem solving, not just giving the final answer.

Competitive Nature. There is another aspect of grades that have a pernicious effect on the self-esteem and self-confidence of students, especially in grade school.

Grades have a way of telling children that they are dumber than others. The children begin to believe these subconscious insinuations and they begin to develop a lower esteem of their own capabilities. They feel that in the eyes of their parents and teachers, they are unworthy because they have low grades. These feelings are the roots of future neurosis.

When the giving of grades are not balanced by personal feedback and encouragement, they can become destructive to the self-esteem of students. Some public schools have classes of 70 students per class. In these cases, it is practically impossible for the teacher to give individual attention to each student. But the teacher must be conscious of the harmful effects of undiscussed grades. Efforts must be made so that grades are not taken as a rejection of the person.

While recognizing the inevitable use of grades in standard school systems, we must emphasize the harmfulness of its indiscriminate implementation.

Grades assume that there is a standard benchmark for measuring the competence of each student on a given subject. The grade measures whether the benchmark has been attained, and *not necessarily whether the student has progressed or has high potential*. Thus, for example, a student who started the school having low comprehension of algebra may have progressed a lot during the school year but still not attain the benchmark towards the end, and thus will flunk the subject. His exemplary effort to improve is not counted. What is important to such a system is the benchmark.

But what is that benchmark? It is a standard set by a school and may differ from another school. It is not a measurement of the potential of the child, which is as important, if not more important, than the actual present competence of the child. Remember that Einstein and Edison were considered dumb or slow when they were kids. If they did not have a strongly felt innate potential within, they could have been ruined by the negative feedback of their teachers or elders.

Grades, if they are to be used, must be used with compassion, understanding and encouragement. They must not be given undue importance for they are

merely indicators of certain limited aspects of one's knowledge. Grades are not even accurate measurements of intelligence. If Picasso flunked mathematics, does that make him unintelligent?

Many psychologists today are strongly espousing the view that intelligence cannot just be measured by standard IQ tests. These tests are designed to measure only two or three aspects of intelligence, but not all. One psychologist, Howard Gardner, has put forward the concept of multiple intelligences, consisting of nine types. He frowns at the traditional view that intelligence is measured by linguistic and logical capabilities. Is Michael Jordan less intelligent than a physics professor? Is Isadora Duncan less intelligent than Madame Curie?

These are some issues that teachers and educators must consider when making evaluations and assessments of their students. Education, as we have mentioned, is a preparation for life. It is not to pass IQ tests or have high grades.

On Discipline and Rules

A school needs rules, and certain standards of discipline must be followed. If the school will not instill fear, what guarantee do we have that we will not have chaos since children are not afraid to face consequences?

In considering this issue, the size of the school or the class must be considered. When the number of students is small, then the school can spend time in individual counseling sessions that will enable students to appreciate the need for discipline, such that the students will voluntarily cooperate with the rules.

When the student population is large, however, this kind of one-on-one counseling becomes more difficult. But this also depends upon how many percent of the students violate the rules of the school.

In a school where the students have been nurtured according to our school's way of life since kindergarten, then this problem will have less chances of arising. The students have developed the attitudes and the habits that are compatible with the rules of the school. When there are transferees, then the school must spend time to talk to them, and let them undergo transformation from a fidgety child that lacks self-discipline, to one who has developed self-awareness and self-discipline.

It is important however that in instilling wholesome behavior, it is best that the student be inspired or drawn towards such behavior rather than be coerced. This now depends upon the inspirational power of the teachers themselves. For example, when a teacher cheerfully rearranges the chairs and tables after use, then invites the students to help her, the students may respond very favorably. When however the teacher just stands there and orders students around with an imposing and frightening face, then the students may just do so in her presence but will not be motivated to behave constructively when the teacher is not around.

Let us take some examples of sources of unwholesome behavior among students.

Hyperactivity. This is particularly true for younger children. The teachers must remember that this does not make them "bad" or "naughty" children. They are just full of energy, and oftentimes this energy is not stable or flowing smoothly. Thus there is restlessness, fidgetiness, tendency towards violence, and similar behavior. The teacher must observe the manifestations of bodily energy (including ch'i) in the child, and see whether the energy instability can be

The rules should be implemented in terms of cause-and-effect rather than out of anger and frustration.

normalized by exercise, activities that release pent-up energy, self-awareness processing, or similar methods.

But each school must also be aware of its limitations in dealing with special problems. For example, if the problem is a psychiatric one, and the school or teachers are incompetent to deal with it, then perhaps it is better to refer the child to another institution rather than to try to retain the child and handle the situation incompetently.

When the teacher is loved by the student, the student will tend to respond favorably to feedback.

Violence. This takes a number of forms. Some violence comes from excess energy coupled with impatience or frustration. Or it can come from habitual behavior in the house that has been tolerated by the parents. Or it can be low self-esteem manifesting as bullying. In these cases, the children must be understood and observed, and the appropriate approach to correct such psychological factors can be made by the teacher or counselor.

If a child is hurting others, then the consequence is for him to be separated from the rest of the class (it can be inside or outside the classroom), and will be able to join the class only if he promises that he will not engage in harmful behavior. If the class is interesting, the child will much prefer to go back to class and make the effort to adjust his behavior.

No Motivation. Some children are passive or defiant. They may either have low energy levels (which can be corrected) or they are just manifesting a conditioned reaction pattern towards adults or authorities that have been formed due to unwise parenting techniques. Then the teacher needs to attend to both the student and the parents. The student must be treated with patience, because a coercive attitude of the teachers will only reinforce the resistant mind-set of the student. At the same time, the school must meet with the parents and discuss the probable origins of such behavior, and how the home environment can help in changing such attitudes.

As much as possible, the school must not expel the child except when such behavior is already affecting the other children, in which case it must move to protect the other children. Every effort must be made to help the child overcome the self-destructive or anti-social behavior within the school. (This attitude is similar to a parent being infinitely patient with his or her child, and will not drive the child out of the house just because the child is repeatedly naughty.) If the school cannot help the children, it is likely that the child will be treated in a worse way by either the parents or other schools, in which case, the school would have failed in its duty. It is better for the child to stay in a wholesome environment, even if the student fails to catch up academically, rather than suffer more rejection elsewhere, which can sometimes doom the child for life.

Using Consequences. The rules should be implemented in terms of cause-and-effect rather than out of anger and frustration. If the child breaks something, then let him know that he or his parents will have to pay for it. If the

child can feel the consequences through the lessening of his allowance, then it may help him realize the cause-and-effect relationship between a behavior and his own self-interest or welfare. It is important that the consequences should not be harsh, unjust or cruel. It should reasonably be commensurate to the transgression.

It does not mean, however, that teachers or administrators will be completely unemotional about an anti-social behavior. If a teacher feels disappointment, then the teacher may tell the child of his or her feelings. Telling a child that one is disappointed or unhappy with the behavior is different from being emotionally frightened by the teacher. When the teacher is loved by the student, the student will tend to respond favorably to such a feedback, and will try not to do actions that will make the teacher unhappy. Teachers however must not use feelings to deliberately manipulate the child's behavior. Such a manipulation is different from an honest expression of one's disappointment. Some parents and elders are fond of using emotionally manipulative tactics, such as: "Finish eating your food, or else Mama does not love you anymore." Such approaches are psychologically harmful and reflect one's failure in being a wholesome parent. It is a weird way of dealing with childhood problems. It is important that teachers do not copy these methods of coercing students.

The distinction between *punishment* and *implementing consequences* is an important one. Allowing the student to face consequences is an educative measure and not a punitive one. To punish has the implication of inflicting pain on or hurting the transgressor. In fact the word *pain* derives the Greek work *poena*, which is also the origin of the word *penalty* and *punishment*. The underlying motive of education is love and care, not inflicting pain. It is to reform and not to get even or retaliate.

In determining consequences to actions, we need to recognize two levels of implementation:

- a. School-wide general guidelines on transgressions and consequences. These are written and known to all teachers, administrators, staff and students.
- b. Classroom or individualized decisions on consequences of specific student behaviors. These are specific situations that require individual assessment and judgment by the teachers or administrators and which range from small matters like not doing a classroom task to larger issues like stealing things or violent behavior. These specific situations cannot be put into a manual due to their variety. It is more important that the teachers or administrators rely on their wisdom and creativity.

In modifying unwholesome behavior through consequences, it is important to take note of the following:

1. The teacher must be highly aware of any feeling of being offended, hurt or angered. From such feelings arise the impulse to retaliate and punish. When this arises, the deeper motive is no longer reform but retribution – "an eye for an eye." The punitive action seeks more to satisfy an emotional need within oneself, and often less to bring about reform. A caring attitude on the other hand

is other-oriented, that is, seeking the improvement of the student rather than assuage the ego-need.

2. The consequence should be logically connected to the unwholesome behavior such that the student will understand the reasonableness of the consequence. Children who are hurting or bothering other students in the classroom can be asked to leave or be separated from the others (like being asked to sit alone outside the classroom) after which the teacher or administrator will talk to them about the behavior. It will be advantageous (but not always necessary) if such separation will be felt as unpleasant to the child (due, for example, to missing the interesting lessons or stories) so that there is an added motivation not to repeat the unwanted behavior. To punish a child by, say, detaining him after school hours for two hours will be felt as punitive (unless such detention will be for the purpose of talking about the incident with the student).

3. The transgressing student should be made to understand why the behavior was undesirable. This is an important factor that many teachers fail to do. To effect genuine changes in students (particularly for elementary and older levels), they must have understood the nature and implications of their unwholesome behavior, that is, why it is unwholesome and not acceptable. The purpose of disciplinary action is not simply to stop an action but to develop character.

4. The teacher should be felt as being on the side of the student despite his or her disapproval of the act of the student. The student should feel the love and care of the teacher such that the student will realize that the undesirable consequences is not due to the anger or vindictiveness of the teacher but that it was necessary action that even the teacher would not want to happen if possible. This brings the issue to the student's behavior and not to the teacher's reaction or personality.

One of the important effects of disciplinary approach using consequences is the students' understanding and appreciation of the law of cause and effect. They will see that what happens to them is a result of what they do. The world is not a whimsical environment. It is governed by a consistent law of action and consequence. Whatever effects the students desire in life, they must first produce the appropriate causes. In the East it is called the law of karma. Stephen Covey calls it the law of the farm – you harvest only that which you planted. The New Testament states it thus: “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Gal. 6:7)

This insight about the governing law of cause and effect is an important one in forming the students' philosophy of life. They realize that they can take charge of their destinies rather than just be victims of either past conditionings or external influences.

Teacher Development

The role of teachers is central to right education. Teachers are the single most crucial factor in bringing about a well-rounded development of the student. It becomes necessary then to devote effort in teacher development in providing right education.

Teachers carry with them their own conditionings, contradictions, push buttons, prejudices, etc. When they are not aware of these, and have not processed them, then they will not be in a position to help the students work out the latter's own contradictions. The result will be a perpetuation of the unwholesome conditionings rather than being free of them.

The school must therefore conduct a continuing series of sessions with the teachers that will help them process the contradictions in their lives. The sessions should also be opportunities for the teachers to discuss their difficulties in handling classroom subjects or situations.

The better option is to have one's own college of education, where teachers are nurtured for four or more years in an atmosphere and environment that are conducive to a more enlightened approach to education. Such a college itself must be run by living examples of the educational philosophy being espoused.

The atmosphere of the school must be such that all the teachers and staff are engaged in individual growth and development. Every day is an opportunity for learning something new.

Are the teachers emotionally exhausted after the day? Are they constantly stressed? Is it possible to teach without accumulating stress? The sessions must address these things.

Are the teachers facing personal problems that they seem unable to solve? Can the sessions help them with these? A job is often considered by most businesses and institutions as separate from one's personal or family life. Thus the problems of the home are not supposed to be mixed up with the job. But unfortunately life is not like that. A teacher who is constantly upset about a marital relationship will tend to be less effective as a teacher. Education is about living, and not just about physics or chemistry. Hence if the teacher is personally

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bothered about something, then the school community must try to help as far as feasible.

Teachers too are in a learning environment, not just engaged in teaching. They go through difficulties, challenges, opportunities, and stresses. They are in the process of maturing and perfecting themselves. The more effective they are in facing their own challenges, the more effective they are in being teachers.

Another aspect of teacher development is in upgrading their competence in their respective fields, whether it is physics, math, language, drama, music, etc. The school environment must nurture a spirit of excellence in the chosen field of expertise of the teachers themselves. For this, adequacy of library, equipments, and other resources would be needed. Where possible, the school should encourage research, article writing, presentations, lectures and similar activities, including the publication of an in-house journal where their writings can be published.

Transformative Education

What may be called transformative education entails a knowledge of the higher potentials of a human being, the higher and the lower natures, and the characteristics of these two natures.

In addition to our body, emotions and ordinary thinking mind, we also have an abstract thinking faculty (higher mind), intuitive consciousness, and the true Self within. The latter three can collectively be called our higher or inner nature. They manifest characteristics very different from the conditioned nature of the lower nature or personality (body, emotions and ordinary thinking).

Transformative education must involve the awakening of the higher nature of a person, and the aligning of the personality to such higher nature. This awakening is not through conditioning but rather insight.

Such education therefore differs from the ordinary approach to education in that it emphasizes intelligent thinking. How is this to be done? This highly depends upon the teacher and the teaching tools.

Awakening the higher nature involves rationality, values, sensitivity, compassion, abstract thinking, and awareness.

The teaching approach and tools therefore need to look into the nurturing of these capacities while teaching various subjects such as science, math, language, etc. In teaching language for example, the teacher must be ready with stories or illustrations that have the capacity for awakening the higher nature. In teaching mathematics, the teacher needs to stimulate the abstract thinking capacity by helping the students understand the underlying principles rather than memorize formulas.

This effort of awakening one's higher mental nature will need repetitive attempts from various angles.

The training of teachers must involve familiarity with this deeper purpose of education. The teacher must first personally appreciate higher levels of abstraction in thinking, and discover ways to stimulate or awaken this in young people.

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Some of the approaches that can nurture to the awakening of these higher faculties can include the study of the following:

- Rationality and abstract thinking
- Geometry
- Set theory
- Fallacious thinking
- Values and discussion of hierarchy of values
- Discussion of difficulty of practicing values
- Awareness of the role of values in scientific, economic and politic issues,

In discussing values, the students are likely to encounter conflicts between the values of their families and of society, and those that are arrived at in their school discussion. The teacher should be able to address this issue also in the discussion, such as through role-playing.

- such as health versus the profit motive
- Awareness of body, emotions and thoughts
- Sensitivity and compassion towards the feelings and situations of others
- Service-orientedness
- Meditation or inner silence
- Art appreciation
- Discussion of subjects such as the meaning and purpose of life, the reality of the afterlife, or spirituality versus beliefs.

In discussing values, the students are likely to encounter conflicts between the values of their families and of society, and those that are arrived at in their school discussion. The teacher should be able to address this issue also in the discussion, such as through role-playing. For example, if the father of a student asks the latter to tell a lie about something,

what will the student do if he disagrees with the behavior? Role-play this difficult situation by learning assertiveness, and then explore different approaches in explaining it to the father.

At an early age, students should also learn how to enter into inward silence. The length of this silence will depend upon the age. The teachers must also observe whether some students are having difficulty in entering into voluntary silence due to fidgetiness or restlessness due to imbalance in the flow of ch'i or pranic energy.

Intelligence

One of the functions of education is the development of intelligence in the student. Intelligence is a capacity hard to define, but at the same time not difficult to recognize.

- It is the ability to understand or grasp the essence of things – hence the capacity for abstraction.
- It is the ability to apply knowledge to situations that one faces.

Intelligence also involves the following:

- Energy – A mind requires energy to pursue multifarious angles of a question, and pursue them with depth. A lethargic mind is unable to do this, and hence stops at the surface of things. This energy is the foundation of natural curiosity – a mind that is not easily satisfied with what is obvious.
- Freedom – The capacity to arrive at a correct understanding of things requires freedom. Contrasted to this is the tendency to think in terms of fixed grooves or limited angles due to fear.
- Creativity – A result of freedom is creativity, the ability to see new facets of a question, create new combinations of elements, etc.

Intelligence is the ability to understand or grasp the essence of things – hence the capacity for abstraction; it is the ability to apply knowledge to situations that one faces.

There is a line that divides intelligence and wisdom. Wisdom entails a deeper capacity to assess a situation from a deeper or wider aspect – that of values or basic principles. Herein lies the awakening of intuition, the seat of true wisdom.

True education entails therefore the following:

- knowledge
- development of intelligence
- awakening of intuition

The development of intelligence and intuition is highly dependent upon the human environment, whether at home or in school. The habits and attitudes of common society are usually not conducive towards the development of these faculties, because they are concerned about the preservation of established orders, customs, traditions, social values, etc. The truly intelligent and creative individual is often disruptive of such customs and traditions, and hence poses as a threat to society.

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For ordinary society, therefore, a truly good school may not be perceived as a welcome thing. The school threatens or disrupts the familiar. The standard ways of doing things are questioned. The standard values are questioned. Ordinary people are not prepared for such changes. They feel insecure.

The administrators and teachers must therefore have the clarity of philosophy and self-confidence to be able to face such sincere questionings without feeling threatened. They themselves must have thought about these issues deeply, and even if they do not know the answers to the questions, they should feel ready to explore the questions with students as fellow-seekers.

The Core Curriculum

Every educational system must decide on what constitutes the core of its curriculum. Human knowledge is so vast that it does not make sense to try to cover everything in the school curriculum. Some are of vital importance, such as language proficiency, others are secondary, such as trigonometry.

The core curriculum must enable the student to have the needed foundation for the essential aspects of living. The subject to be learned should be helpful in life and will find relevance in whatever career the student later chooses. What is relevant and what is not will depend upon the subject and the age level. For example, knowledge of accounting may be helpful to high school students, for this may be used for personal and family finances. But cost accounting is a specialized field that should be offered only if the student chooses accountancy or management as a career. Art appreciation is useful to students of any age, but special skills such as charcoal drawing or oil painting should be optional and hence non-essential in the sense that a student may become good in watercolor but not know charcoal drawing. Such lack of skill will not crucially affect one's effectiveness in later life because they can later be learned as specialized skills once the capacity to appreciate art is established.

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In considering the core curriculum therefore, the following may be considered essential:

- Life Competencies
- Language
- Mathematics
- Science
- Humanities
- Social Sciences

1. Life Competencies

Life competencies are a necessary complement to academic learning. But while language and sciences are taught systematically, life competencies are often

done in a sporadic, hit-and-miss approach. A good school must be able to systematically prepare an environment and an exposure program that will nurture these competencies, which should include the following:

- Intelligence
- Effective Relationships
- Self-awareness
- Self-Mastery
- Physical Health
- Interest in Learning
- Enthusiasm
- Character
- Social responsibility

2. Language

Language competency is an important foundation of life skills. It is the basis of human communication and relationship.

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Individuals who fare low in this aspect often have low self-confidence. Language skills, particularly vocabulary, also have correlations with levels of conceptual intelligence.

Language skill development must start from the earliest schooling years, namely, nursery and kindergarten. The key is constant exposure, drilling and repetition. Children learn to speak languages correctly even without knowing the rules of grammar. They just need to constantly hear correct spoken language, and to regularly repeat phrases and sentences that they have previously learned. This needs teachers who speak the language proficiently, and who actively engage the children in conversation – a two-way interaction, not just teacher to student.

A second important facet to language competency is love of reading. This not only deepens one's grasp of the language, but also

broadens the vocabulary.

When effectively taught, language skills are lodged deep in the subconscious and are hard to correct. Hence, it is important that they are learned correctly at the youngest age.

A second language can be introduced early, but in a living and dynamic way, and not in a dry academic manner. The purpose of learning a second language is to be able primarily to engage in practical conversation, to read and write. The school must provide an environment where this language can be practiced often.

Knowledge of grammar, which comes later, is secondary to actual proficiency in speaking and using the language.

3. Mathematics

Mathematical competency is both a necessary skill in life, as well as an excellent foundation for accurate and logical thinking. Algebra, for example, introduces a student to a higher level of abstraction, while geometry hones the logical abilities of the mind. Trigonometry and calculus can be given in high school as introductory subjects, but must not be taught with the same rigor as those who are taking up collegiate subjects in engineering or physics.

4. Sciences

The sciences are meant to introduce students to the acquisition of knowledge through scientific means. It also introduces them to a general knowledge of the main branches, such as biology, physics or chemistry. The study of these subjects should be as practical as possible, such that students appreciate the usefulness of such knowledge. They should be encouraged to do actual experimentation, or to make devices that demonstrate the principles they learned, or to make expositions or exhibits of researches they have made. The subjects should be made interesting, hands-on, and relevant.

5. Humanities

This includes history, arts, literature, and study of comparative religion. Humanities is about human values, things worthwhile pursuing in life. It is important therefore that when students learn these, it is not simply to know or memorize facts, but to develop appreciation as well as an understanding of why these values are important.

6. Social Sciences

Social sciences are those that deal with human society, its dynamics and the relationships of individuals in such a society. For secondary levels, these are more optional, such as economics, political science and sociology. For optional subjects, the object is appreciation and the awakening of interest.

Language competency is an important foundation of life skills. It is the basis of human communication and relationship. Individuals who fare low in this aspect often have low self-confidence. Language skills, particularly vocabulary, also have correlations with levels of conceptual intelligence.

On Religious Education

Many parents are concerned about the religious education of their children. But often times they do not realize that religious education is different from moral and spiritual education. Moral education refers to the nurturing of students to appreciate the validity of core values and to help them integrate these values with daily behavior until they become second nature. Spiritual education is the appreciation of the transcendent aspects of life, without necessarily conditioning the mind with dogmas and belief systems that they may need to unlearn later.

Moral and spiritual education are wholesome and are to be encouraged. But schools must be careful with what ordinarily goes as “religious education.” The latter usually means praying in a certain way, or learning biblical stories, or believing in certain ideas of God or sin or salvation. These are forms of indoctrination that usually are not well thought out, and which eventually confuse the young minds.

In one kindergarten school I was involved in, I overheard the religion teacher asking the kids loudly: “Who woke you up this morning?” Then I heard the children answer in unison, “Jesus!” Evidently, that’s how they were taught to answer by this teacher.

After the class I approached the teacher and told her that it seems better that children are not told things that are evidently not true, and I mentioned what I heard from her that morning. I said that it is highly probable that some of them were forced to wake up by their parents or their nannies, and they may have resented such waking up very much. Now they are told that it was Jesus who woke them up. Obviously it is not true, and second, the children may unconsciously transfer their resentment of being forced to wake up to this unknown man called Jesus. The teacher tried to justify it but obviously religious education cannot be taught with well-meaning lies.

Another teacher tells the story of Adam and Eve as our first parents. When these children grow up, their biology teacher will tell them that human beings evolved for millions of years from more primitive species. Which one will they

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now believe: science or tradition? Usually they accept science and reject the Adam and Eve story, which only makes them doubt their religion more.

In religious education, we must avoid teaching children about things they will eventually need to unlearn. If we need to tell stories from the Bible, tell the children about stories of goodness, like the Good Samaritan. But tell them also about moral tales from other cultures and religions. This will prevent the unconscious development of prejudice against religions outside of one's immediate environment.

In religious education, we must avoid teaching children about things they will eventually need to unlearn.

One well-meaning social worker showed me her plans for children's education in her community. One of the main components of her program was Bible-study. I asked her, "What do you plan to teach in these sessions?"

"Well, the stories from the Bible."

"Which ones do you have in mind?"

She was hesitant and was silent for a while.

I asked: "I was wondering whether you have read the Bible?"

"Not really . . ."

"Then why are you going to teach it?"

There was a look of confusion in her face. Perhaps she was thinking that it should be obvious that it is good to teach the Bible. Why then am I asking these questions?

I asked: "Would you teach that our first parents were Adam and Eve?"

She was unsure what to say, for she was aware of the conflict between this view and those of archaeology, paleontology and evolutionary theory.

"Would you teach," I continued, "that God is a jealous God, or one who is full of wrath? Would you tell them that Noah actually put all the land and air creatures into one ark in a matter of seven days? Would you tell them that they will go to hell forever if they commit what is known as a 'moral sin'?"

She understood the point. So I said: "We need to be extra careful in giving religious instructions, particularly when based on the Bible. The Old Testament is a book full of cruelty, injustice and inconsistencies that if you read it, I am not sure whether you would advocate the teaching of it. Teach instead character building. Take wholesome stories from the Bible if you wish, but be very selective such that they are stories that children will not need to unlearn later."

Apply the same discriminative faculty when confronted with the need to teach other scriptures or writings, such as the Qur'an, Book of Mormons, Tripitaka, Jataka tales, etc.

Some teachers ask: How about fairy tales and nursery rhymes? Does it mean that we don't tell children these stories because they are fictitious? No. Fairy tales

are told as fairy tales, not historical facts. As the child grows up, there is no conflict or contradiction involved because they were never told that these were historical facts. But religious stories are a different matter. Even after they have grown up, people are told that these are factual, when in fact they are simultaneously being taught through science and history that some of these things could not have happened.

Many religious beliefs are controversial that theologians themselves debate about their truths for centuries. Let us not feed young children's mind with things that even theologians are not sure about. Besides there is no need to clutter their young minds with these, such as whether Jesus is God or man, or even who God is. By telling them stories about the acts of the Lord as recounted in the Old Testament, children often develop weird and frightful images of God.

Tell them about goodness, kindness, considerateness, or compassion. If they grow up with these, then they will tend to live the true religious or spiritual life, regardless of whether they grow up Catholics, Baptists, Muslims or Buddhists.

Moral and spiritual teachings should be nonsectarian. It should draw out the natural goodness in children, not indoctrinate them with concepts and beliefs. When a certain age is reached, they are now ready to consider the more conceptual aspects of beliefs. Let them explore these with openness and understanding, rather than be indoctrinated.

The school world-view should be rooted in what is known as the perennial philosophy, or ageless wisdom. They are essentially compatible with the deepest principles of all the great religions, without getting confused by theological dogmas.

What World-View Shall Be Taught?

Should teachers be completely neutral about beliefs and world-views? This is not possible. Any education or system of teaching is necessarily based on a view of the world. Rather than avoid this issue, we must face it with clarity and wisdom.

It is essential for a school to try to integrate knowledge based on time-tested insights or wisdom, and see specific life-skills in their proper perspectives. This in effect will constitute the philosophy or worldview of the school itself.

In doing so, the school must take care that it does not become dogmatic in a narrow sense. A Roman Catholic school will tend to impose a worldview based on the official teachings of the church, while an Islamic school will base it on the Koran. With due respect to the world religions, a sectarian education has its disadvantages, even harmfulness, because it tends to give priority to dogma rather than Truth. A good school must give allegiance to what is true, based on reasonable epistemological norms, above any sectarian doctrines.

The perennial philosophy should not be taken as another world-view that competes with other religious views. Rather it is a synthesis of the essentials of wise living.

To my mind, the school world-view should be rooted in what is known as the perennial philosophy, or ageless wisdom. They are essentially compatible with the deepest principles of all the great religions, without getting confused by theological dogmas. The tenets of such a wisdom include such principles as:

- The unity of life and universal brotherhood – all life is one, and hence the suffering of the world is also our concern. Human beings must avoid causing suffering to other people and creatures.
- The higher and lower nature of the human being – all the great spiritual traditions affirm this dual nature; the higher must be awakened, and the lower purified and integrated with the higher. This is essentially character building in the highest sense.
- The law of cause and effect – our thoughts and actions produce either benefic or malefic results. Each person must be conscious of this law of life and must take care to choose thoughts and behaviors that will not injure others or oneself.
- Responsibility for one's life – this concerns self-reliance and self-mastery. Human beings must learn to take charge of their own life rather than allow themselves to become unconscious pawns of society as well as the forces of the environment.
- The perfectibility of human life – this concerns the age-old view that from our imperfect state, human beings can grow to levels of maturity variously called self-actualization, self-realization, or perfection.
- The pathway towards perfection – the perennial philosophy affirms the existence of time-tested ways in which such perfection can be attained. It is not secret, nor is it exclusive to any single religion.
- The central role of character – the development of character is an important foundation in education and in life. This is the basis for inner peace, spirituality, social harmony and human happiness.
- Non-violence – the conflicts in life and in the world cannot be solved with violence. Violence is the way of the animal which has not learned reason and higher values.
- Responsible global citizenship – we are all responsible for what happens to the world: wars, crimes, environmental destruction, etc. We must collectively help in making this world a better place to live in.

The perennial philosophy should not be taken as another world-view that competes with other religious views. Rather it is a synthesis of the essentials of wise living. It has withstood the test of time and has found resonance in the minds of the wisest people in history, whether East or West. The educator must have reflected deeply on these issues so that the principles of the wisdom are not simply borrowed but rather have become part of one's own personal insights and wisdom.

On Parents

Parents play a major part in education. More than anybody else, they mold the worldview of the children. It is therefore essential for an educational institution to have regular interaction with parents so that the home and the school do not espouse conflicting teachings.

In preschool and grade school, the character and habits of the children are mainly formed at home. It is not uncommon that children of these ages develop dependence, fear, resentment or disrespect towards their parents. They may also see violence between their parents when the latter quarrel. The wholesome growth of these children would be difficult when the home environments are conducive towards the development of neurosis, fear, insecurity, violence, etc.

Each educational institution therefore must also involve parents in its activities. In fact, in many cases, the school must educate the parents on parenting. The parents must be exposed to ideas and approaches that contribute to enlightened parenting.

It is essential for an educational institution to have regular interaction with parents so that the home and the school do not espouse conflicting teachings.

Most parents grew up learning life-coping mechanisms that are not very effective, such as anger, aggressiveness, timidity, lying or suppression. This has two effects:

- Because these mechanisms are not effective, they develop tension and stress due to external pressure, which in turn worsen these tendencies towards anger and emotional distress.
- Their children see how they cope with conflicts and problems, and they become the models of their children; thus the children grow up conditioned with these unwise approaches to problem-solving.

It is helpful therefore for schools to hold parenting sessions where parents will learn how to

- deal with their own emotional distresses and push buttons
- be clear about their hierarchy of values
- nurture self-discipline in children
- behaviorally express their love and care towards their children
- handle marital conflicts
- provide an environment that will nurture the intelligence of the children

The school must educate the parents on parenting. The parents must be exposed to ideas and approaches that contribute to enlightened parenting.

In our experience, parents appreciate learning about these things because they themselves are at a loss on how to handle their family problems. When they see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, they feel relieved. Many of them actually take the effort to try to transform their own lives for the sake of their families.

The following are suggested areas that parents should be familiar with. A school should encourage parents to attend sessions on these topics.

- *Self-Mastery.* Many parents discipline their children out of anger and frustration, rather than out of wisdom. They should be introduced to time-tested approaches in dealing with tension, stress, irritation, hurt, etc.¹
- *Cause-and-Effect Principle in Parenting.* Parents are often unaware that specific actions produce specific results or consequences in children. For example, constant deprecatory statements will produce low esteem, rebelliousness or disrespect. Affirming statements will tend to result in the opposite.
- *Communication Skills.* This includes the ability to genuinely listen and to make assertive statements (not aggressive or timid). Most parents never learned these basic skills in school. They must be made familiar with these.²
- *Languages of Love.* How to express love and care to children (or spouse and others) such that the children will feel and appreciate the love. Many children do not feel the love of their parents because the parents speak a love “language” that children don’t understand (such as working hard to earn money for the family and hence often not at home). The languages should match before the children can appreciate and respond to such love. Dr. Gary Chapman’s books on this topic are most helpful. He found that the following five ways of expressing love as the most important:
 - a. Affirming statements – saying appreciate words to the other
 - b. Quality time – spending one-on-one conversations and activities with the other in a mutually enjoyable manner
 - c. Touching – this is particularly important for younger children (and for spouses)
 - d. Acts of service – going out of one’s way to do something for another
 - e. Gift-giving – being thoughtful by bringing something significant to the other (not necessarily expensive).

¹ *The Process of Self-Transformation*, Chapter 8-14.

² *Ibid.*, Chapter 16.

- *Teaching Children Values, Self-Discipline and other Life-Skills.* This is a duty that parents cannot relegate to other people. The school is but a complementary institution that supports this effort of the parents.

Learning Skills

We have so far discussed about the underlying philosophy and principles in education but little about skills in learning. By this I mean certain approaches and methods that will make learning easier, faster and more efficient.

For example, in many schools there are things to memorize. This type of work is often resented by students, and they often develop a distaste for the subject when what they disliked is the memorization. But there are times when memorization cannot be avoided, such as the multiplication table. In such a case, the school must teach students how to minimize the agony of memorizing and maximize the capacity for retention.

Another example is effective and efficient reading, that is, reading intelligently and speedily with comprehension. From secondary school onwards, students are often asked to read so much, and yet they are often not taught how to read books speedily.

Another aspect is the learning of effective study techniques and habits. I have seen students trying to memorize their lessons by verbally repeating sentences, and spending miserable hours doing so until they drop to sleep with their poor heads lying on top of the study table.

Effective education must incorporate time-tested approaches to learning skills.

Effective education must incorporate time-tested approaches to learning skills. Below are some skills that should be taught in schools.

Efficient and Fun Memorization

I grew up with an educational system that required so much memorization that I used to flunk not only examinations but also grade levels because I disliked memorizing without understanding. The real tragedy was that many of my teachers knew that we did not understand what we were memorizing. What they wanted was for us to simply pass the test by memorizing set answers to set questions. The best memorizers were the ones who always get the highest honors at the end of the year. It did not make sense at all. And yet the teachers were taking all these things very seriously.

Schools should minimize rote learning and memorization, and instead spend time letting students understand and appreciate what they are learning. Still, there are things which need to be memorized, such as the multiplication tables, the

There are times when memorization cannot be avoided, such as the multiplication table. In such a case, the school must teach students how to minimize the agony of memorizing and maximize the capacity for retention.

symbols of chemical elements and their valences, the axioms of geometry, etc. Students must learn how to do so with a minimum of suffering.

There are many known methods that will take out the pain in memory work. The teachers should be familiar with them and try them, and then teach the students how to use them. Here are examples:

- *Use songs and rhymes.* This is very helpful in preschool and elementary levels. We notice how easily children learn to sing songs, even if they don't understand the words yet. This insight can be used for many basic things to memorize. The multiplication table can be repeatedly recited with a sing-song rhythm, and later it will come back like a song in the head when we repeat the numbers to be multiplied. The alphabet is similarly learned when we recite it to the tune of "Twinkle, twinkle, little star." Even languages can be learned first by listening to foreign songs and singing them. Besides, it's fun to do it this way.
- *Make it into a game.* Teachers can devise creative games that will put fun into memory work. Suppose the students need to memorize the symbols of the chemical elements (Pb for lead, Ag for silver, Na for sodium, etc.). The teacher can suggest a card game patterned after the Memory Game that are sold commercially. Every chemical element will have two cards, one containing the symbol, and the other is the full name of the element. Fifty cards, for example, will therefore have the symbols and names of 25 elements. Then they are laid out on a table faced down, and each student will have the chance to turn up and look at two cards each time, which will also be seen by everybody. If the cards match (symbol and name), he keeps the cards and opens two again. If there are no matching cards, they will be put back on the table faced down again and it will be the turn of another student. The other students will need to remember these cards because the moment they find a card whose corresponding symbol or name has been seen, then they have to remember where it was. But they first have to recognize which symbol matches which name. The one who has the most cards wins the game.
- *Use story sequences.* When my children were in elementary and high school, they were asked by their teachers to memorize many things which they felt bored about, such as the economic products of a certain region in the Philippines. I did not know why kids had to memorize them, but anyway they had to. So we made it into a learning game by using story sequences. Suppose the products of the central provinces of the Philippines

(Region 3) are rice, coconut, fish, and iron. What we did was to create a story such as the following: In Region 3, there are only three coconut trees. When they bore fruit, it was not coconut that came out but huge fishes with scales that have the color of metal. In time they harden and turn to iron, and they become so heavy that when they fall, they sink deep into the ground and become seeds that eventually sprout as rice stalks. While inventing these stories, we have a lot of fun. By the end of just one such story, the products are perfectly remembered without effort.

- *Memory pegs.* Students can be taught ingenious systems of remembering numbers that will help them for the rest of their lives. One such method is memory pegs, developed by Harry Lorayne and Jerry Lucas.
- *Association.* Another is to associate a fact to be memorized with something familiar and graphic. For example, who was the leader of the Mongolian conquerors who invaded Europe? Genghis Khan. Think of him as a genius with a can on his head to fill his overflowing knowledge. Eventually these associative stories will no longer be needed if we remember the name easily.
- *Mnemonics.* When one needs to remember a sequence of names or items, then link their initial letters to something familiar, or make the first words into a story.

Another skill that students should be taught is to speed read. The average rate of reading of an ordinary adult is about 300 words per minute. This can be increased to three times or more by teaching the students certain methods of reading and comprehending.

The above are but some of the many known ways of taking the agony out of memorizing. Let the teacher or the school systematize the teaching of memory in a fun way.

Speed Reading

Another skill that students should be taught is to speed read. The average rate of reading of an ordinary adult is about 300 words per minute. This can be increased to three times or more by teaching the students certain methods of reading and comprehending. President John Kennedy is said to read at 5,000 words per minute. The fastest readers in the world are said to be able to read 30-50,000 words a minute.

Speedreading is not simply about reading faster. It actually helps the reader to attain better comprehension of the material. The reader is able to see the larger picture of the chapter or paragraph, and hence in fact be able to recognize which details to just skim through and which ones to focus on. It is intelligent reading.

Vocabulary building

The extent of one's vocabulary also determines how fast one can learn in that language. Poor vocabulary limits or slows down learning. Vocabulary levels also

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have been found to have correspondences with intelligence and capability. It is therefore helpful for the school to have a continuing program of increasing the vocabulary of all the students. Encourage them too to have a good dictionary as their bosom friend.

Explore and Experiment

Explore and experiment with various other known insights about efficient learning. For example, it has been known that when students are learning a language, they are able to learn and remember more new words when they are doing it with *largo* type of music at the

background. Largo music have one beat per second and do not have the rhythm similar to a $\frac{3}{4}$ beat of a waltz. There is a monotony to it that appears to occupy or pacify a part of our brain or mind, and which prevents that part from chattering and causing distraction.

Special Children

Schools will always encounter children who have special problems, such as attention deficit, hyperactivity, autism, violent tendencies, bullies, or physically disabled, as well as those who are specially gifted, either in general intelligence or in a particular field such as math or music. Teachers will need to give individual attention to each case.

In dealing with such cases, there are already many studies and references that teachers can study and learn from, and hence I will not repeat what is already available elsewhere. What I would like to touch on here as aspects or principles which are seldom given attention in standard approaches.

Resolving the Root Cause and Not Suppressing the Symptom. Children are not “naughty” or “bad.” These labels are usually given by elders whose patience have been exhausted and who would now want to simply stop the children from their behavior, usually through fear, threat, or physical punishment.

When children are recurrently violent, for example, there is always a reason behind it. It can usually be traced to the home environment. When they are unloved at home, they may try to assert themselves in school through bullying behavior. It will be noticed that when they feel the love of the teacher, they begin to behave responsibly, and will follow the rules of the classroom without resentment or suppression.

Energy level and balance. In trying to understand the root cause, it is helpful to understand the *energy* element of behavior. This is the actual energy being felt in the body which is the immediate cause of the behavior, whether restlessness, violence, or fear. For young children, the normalization of the energy imbalance is often sufficient to calm them. The drive towards the abnormal behavior will diminish naturally.

This energy imbalance should be distinguished from a more complex cause that arise from perception problems in the children. Such perception problems eventually lead to what Sigmund Freud referred to as *psychoneurosis* as opposed to *actual neurosis*, which is the damming of the energy in the physico-psychic system.

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Knowledge of how to help children deal with such energy congestion will often resolve recurrent behavior problems of children, such as hyperactivity. Activeness in children is normal, and should not be suppressed. Hyperactivity is the damming of energy in the system such that it accumulates and creates pressure that need to be released. Such energy congestion should be prevented, and when it has accumulated, the teacher must help the children to allow it to flow naturally.

The best motivator for wholesome behavior is a loving relationship. When a child feels loved by a teacher, the child is motivated to listen to, and cooperative with, what the teacher is suggesting. This is of course true with parents. Many well-meaning parents however fail to let the children feel their love.

Such phenomena are true not only for kindergarten kids, but also for teenagers and adults. I have often observed teenagers tapping their feet while in class or listening to the teacher. Or they may be restlessly shifting their feet, moving their hands, looking at one thing and then another, etc. They are distracted by energies within the body that are supposed to flow smoothly but are not. They are not even aware of what is happening to them. They are victims rather than culprits. They should be understood and helped rather than condemned and punished.

Love and Discipline. The best motivator for wholesome behavior is a loving relationship. When a child feels loved by a teacher, the child is motivated to listen to, and cooperative with, what the teacher is suggesting. This is of course true

with parents. Many well-meaning parents however fail to let the children feel their love. And when the children do not “behave” according to their wishes, they all the more become authoritarian and impose themselves upon the children. This creates a cycle of discipline and resistance which can lead to disastrous results when, as young adults, the children begin to rebel against their parents.

When bullies in school feel loved by the teachers, they cease to be bullies. The unconscious psychological drive to assert themselves have disappeared safely. When rowdy children are given responsibilities — that is, they are shown that they are trusted — they try to live up to such expectations and will naturally desist from disappointing the teachers who have shown faith in them. This is common observation and we don’t need to be psychologists to see the truth behind this.

But to do all the above, it is essential that the teachers themselves are not high-strung and inwardly distracted by their own energy imbalance. In the latter case, they will not have the energy to observe students. They themselves need help.

The Regular Practice of Silence

Why is the practice of periodic silence essential for young students? People who are not in touch with their inner individuality get carried away by the conditionings and pressures of the environment. As a result, they fail to achieve their highest destiny for this life, which is the unfolding of their inner potentials; instead, they unconsciously follow the impulses of their acquired habits and tendencies, many of which may not be wholesome at all. Being a slave to such acquired outer tendencies is a real tragedy in the life of any individual. One becomes but an automaton, reacting according to the incidental conditionings of one's environment.

These conditionings are lodged in one's *outer personality*, consisting of bodily habits, emotional and mental reaction patterns. Most of these patterns are etched in one's subconscious and hence are automatic, that is, they act without decision or deliberation.

In contrast to this, we have deeper layers of consciousness in our psyche which we can call our *inner individuality*, for they represent the more authentic inclinations of an individual – authentic in the sense that they are more permanent compared to the fleeting and sometimes shallow preferences of the personality¹. For example, the preference for soft drinks may be fleeting, but the preference for health is far more permanent compared to the desire for certain types of food or drink.

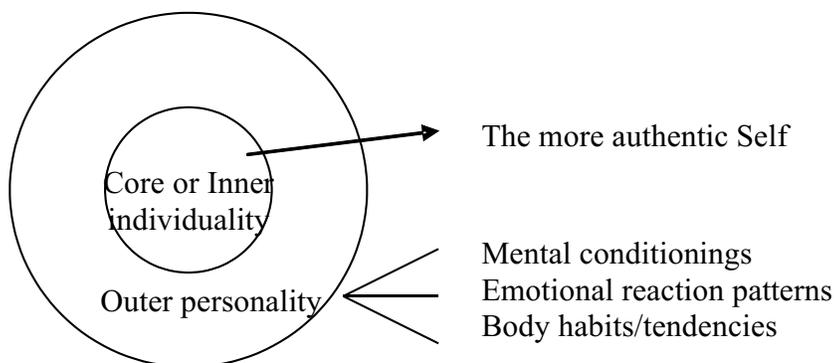
The capacity to be in touch with one's inner nature must start at a young age, before thick layers of conditioning pile up. This is done by periodically entering into short periods of silence, with the teacher giving appropriate guidelines that will make the children more and more aware of an inward reality.

Children get *unconsciously* pressured or conditioned by the outer social environment. When a child sees other children get excited about a game or a toy, there is a tendency for the child to also *want* to play the game or have the toy – even if the game is simply jumping with one foot or the toy is just “owning”

¹ The word personality comes from Greek word *persona*, which means a mask. It refers to the mask that an actor wears when impersonating a character. The mask or *persona*, then, is but a temporary and inauthentic layer of ourselves. What is genuine is what is *behind* the mask – the true individual. This is the same meaning that Carl Jung adopted when he used the word *persona* to refer to one of the aspects of the human psyche.

broken plates. By repetition, children begin to subconsciously impute permanent values on things that actually have just fleeting worth. Most of these hardening values are rooted in emotional insecurity, the need to belong or be accepted or the fear of rejection, in addition to the natural tendency to avoid pain or inconvenience.

Entering into periodic silence enables a child to detach temporarily from the identifications with emotional, mental and bodily inclinations. This prevents the “hard-wiring” of one’s identification with the fleeting values implanted by the environment, that is, it loosens such identification such that an individual can have better objectivity about one’s likes and dislikes, desires and repulsions. Such capacity for detachment enables one to be more receptive to the true inclinations of the inner individuality. Responding to such inner inclinations is the foundation of a fulfilled life. It is not pleasure or satisfaction that brings about true happiness in life. It is the fulfillment of one’s inner impetus, originating from one’s inner individuality, not just the outer personality.



Inner silence or meditation is the regular practice of calming the three layers of the outer personality. It is during this quiet period that self-awareness is nurtured in the child. The teacher must guide the students such that this silence is not simply the controlling of impulses, but an awareness of such tension or impulses, and then consciously allowing them to calm down.

For children, this practice of inner silence is not yet the formal meditation that is practiced by yogis or contemplatives. Such spiritual meditation must await a certain degree of maturity before it can be done. The practice of inner silence for students is for the purpose of nurturing the capacity of self-awareness that forms the basis of the mature and fulfilled life.

The teacher himself or herself must be familiar with the advantages of practicing inner silence in one’s life, otherwise asking children to do so would be but an imposition that has very little meaning.

First Stage: Body and Feelings

The first phase of the practice of inner silence is teaching children how to calm their bodily tensions. The teacher must guide the students by asking whether they feel any heaviness, force or movement in the hands, legs, head, neck, chest, stomach, or back. If there is, then the students should be encouraged to feel them while breathing in and out. The teacher must take notice of any restlessness or any sign of tension in each child. With proper questions, the students can be helped to become aware of bodily tensions.

“Who feels anything in your arms and hands, such as heaviness, current, wanting to move them, and other sensations? If you feel anything, raise your hand.”

When anyone raises his or her hand, then approach the child and ask where it is being felt. Just let the child describe what is being felt. The teacher will usually note a calming down of any restlessness just by letting the student become aware of it while doing slow but deep breathing.

When the teacher guides the children in this kind of awareness for the first time, he or she may need to spend some time in acquainting each child on how to allow the whole body to be relaxed and calm. Later, when they get the knack of it, then they will know how to enter into relaxation on their own.

The length of the silence period is five to fifteen minutes depending upon the age. As a rough rule of thumb, the number of minutes can be equal to the years of age, that is, five minutes for five-year-olds or thereabouts, ten minutes for ten-year-olds.

The class should not enter into the silence period immediately after some vigorous activities like games or play. There should be a period of lull to allow any excitement to settle down, otherwise there will be a tendency for the child to suppress excitement instead of going into a natural calmness.

Second Stage: Thoughts

The second stage is to encourage the student to become aware of one's thoughts and reactions. This is a more difficult practice, and can be done only for the higher grades. Discuss with the students about their experiences, and see whether they are becoming more aware of images, memories, perceptions and reactions. Explain to them that they are not supposed to stop or encourage these thoughts but just to be aware of them until the thoughts just settle down naturally.

Third Stage: Explorations

When they have learned to be aware of their sensations, feelings and thoughts, the teacher can occasionally explore with them various situations that will heighten their awareness in daily life. Examples:

1. After five minutes of silence, tell them to imagine that somebody shouts at them and says insulting things to them. Ask them to describe what feelings arise within them as they imagine this situation. Where do they feel this in the body? Chest? Stomach? Head? Is it tightness? Heat? Thumping of the heart?

Then let them just be aware of these reactions while doing long deep breaths until they calm down again.

2. After a period of silence, ask them to write whatever they wish to write about about themselves, their values, their principles, their future, their relationships, etc. Let them write for five or ten minutes in silence.

Encourage some of them to volunteer to share what they have written. Do not pressure them to share because some of them may have written something deeply personal.

(This exercise can make them aware of their deeper values in life and make wiser decisions.)

Ask them about other possible situations that are relevant to them. Let them think of the scenario and then let them describe again what they feel.

Again it is important for the teachers to understand the reason for this activity otherwise they will be unable to guide the students appropriately.

Reflections

The world is in such a mess now that one wonders whether we are really more civilized than before. When but in the twentieth century could one find the most bizarre holocausts perpetrated by the human hand and brain, where populations are exterminated by the millions, where weapons of mass destruction include bacteriological and chemical materials that could indiscriminately murder men, women, children and animals? When but in the twentieth century could one find terrorism where the targets are not military or government sites but markets, subways, commercial buildings, or tourist spots? When but in the twentieth century could one hear of children and adults massacring innocent children in schools? The list could go on. There is a matrix of crises building up on our planet. It is a slow process and we are getting benumbed while repeatedly hearing from the Cassandras of today. Do we have to wait till an apocalyptic catastrophe befalls us all before we act? What do we do now?

I believe that one of the most important actions that we must do is to revolutionize education. Perhaps such a call would again fall on deaf ears because people are too busy with their mortgages, careers, family squabbles, or ill health, in addition to the din of the radio and television and newspapers barraging our senses with the anxieties of society. Most people no longer have the time and serenity to reflect on the need to go to the basics of human development, maturity, relationships, equanimity and the purpose of living, which is the heart of true education.

The ideas outlined in the previous pages are not new. Not only have they been taught by the sages of the past, but deep within each one of us, we realize that there are fundamentally valid principles in enlightened education. It is just that most people think of them as impractical or no longer realistic in the midst of the “realities” of the modern world – that is, “we have no other choice.”

But we do. Every individual truly concerned about human happiness, harmony and the survival of mankind has the choice to do something to alter the trend of human thinking and culture. We must not allow the feeling of helplessness to let us just be carried by the torrents going the other way. When more people combine their hearts and hands to create a momentum in the other direction, then we are building hope – a hope for a peaceful world, a world of harmony amidst diversity, a world of unity.

Reading List

There are plenty of good books on education and parenting. Below are some titles that are suggested:

Chapman, Gary, *The Five Love Languages*. Northfield Publishing, 1995.

Eyre, Linda and Richard, *Teaching Children Values*. Fireside, 1993.

_____, *Three Steps to a Strong Family*. Fireside, 1995.

Hao Chin, Vicente, Jr., *The Process of Self-Transformation*. Theosophical Publishing House Manila, 2003.

Krishnamurti, J. *Education and the Significance of Life*. HarperOne, 1981.

Krishnamurti, J. *Life Ahead*. New World Library, 2005.

Neil, A. S., *Summerhill*. Hart Publishing, 1984.

Stipek, D., and Seal, K., *Motivated Minds*. Holt Paperbacks, 2001.