Approaches to Value Education

By Jyoti Kumta  |  Mar 13, 2013

There are different ways to bring value education into our school and classroom. This article shares with you approaches on how to go about doing so...

If you believe that Value Education is a must in today’s world but don’t know how to go about it then here are three major approaches to Value Education/ Character Education/ Moral Education which are used globally, and could give you some ideas.

The Direct Approach- To teach values during planned VE classes

In this method, values are taught through planned structured lessons, like any other subject. The lessons may be organized around specific values such as honesty, respect, trust, and responsibility or could be organized to deal with a particular problem that the school is facing. The latter is generally more satisfying. If children are using abusive language or there is too much bullying amongst them, then the lessons could be planned so as to address the problem at hand. Various activities like discussions, role plays, art, writing, debates, school-wide activities like surveys, dramas etc., could all be used to deal with the same issue. This approach is likely to be more satisfying because results are seen much faster and it gives the teachers a sense of achievement and the motivation to keep going.

The Integrated Approach-To integrate teaching of values with other subjects

The curriculum that is currently being taught provides numerous opportunities to involve students in thinking about character and values. For instance, when reading a story in English, instead of asking only factual questions about the protagonist you could always ask questions like what were his strengths and weaknesses? How did he deal with his dilemma? What do you think of his choices? What bothers you about the choices he made and why? What would you have done if you were in his shoes? Have you ever had to deal with a very difficult situation like his, in your life? What did you do? How did it feel?

In history classes, students should not only learn about what happened but should be given an opportunity to make ethical judgments about it. History should not be just about dates and rote memory, but about real people, the choices they made and how it affected other people and the way of living. The ethical perspective could be discussed by talking about the different choices that historical figures might have had, the possible reasons for their behaviour and the action taken and what they could have done differently. Integration with Maths and Science may be considered more difficult by most teachers but even that is possible.

The Holistic Approach- To make it a whole school approach

There is no doubt that the best way to implement a Value Education program is through the holistic approach that integrates teaching of values into each and every aspect of school life. For this to happen all the teachers and staff should be committed to the teaching of values and consider it as important as academics. Everything in the school should be centered on the development of good relationships between students, staff, parents, and the community at large. Social and emotional development should get as much importance as pure academics. Co-operation and personal excellence should have precedence over competition. Values such as honesty, respect, and compassion should be a part and parcel of daily lessons and children should have ample opportunity to practice good and helpful behavior through activities like social service. Discipline should be democratic and teachers and students should hold class meetings to establish norms of behavior, solve problems and build unity.

Each of these globally accepted approaches has its pros and cons. One could even start with a combination of these. Some exceptional teachers intuitively use the Integrated Approach and visionary Principals instinctively adopt the Holistic Approach. However, it is my contention that if you start with the Direct Approach, proceed towards the Integrated Approach and strive for the Holistic Approach it is possible for each and every school to ensure that VE becomes an integral part of education finally changing the very ethos of the school.

Though it is impractical to expect that such a colossal task be accomplished in a few days, weeks or months we must make a beginning and work towards a goal that we hope to accomplish in the future. To do that, we could start off by using the one period a week, which we already have in hand, and ensure that the time is used as effectively as possible (the direct approach). Soon teachers will start using the same methods in their own subject classes (integrated approach) and finally the whole school would adopt the holistic approach.

The process can easily be set into motion by following a few simple steps which are given below. The first 3 steps can be completed in a few days. The next 3 in a few months, but for the last two no time frame can be predicted, since a lot will depend on individual teachers and the importance given to such a program by the school management.
Step 1- Orient all teachers towards Value Education

During the orientation the teachers should be allowed to share and discuss their reservations about VE, be convinced about the need for VE, become aware about the global scene in character education/value education and understand the possibility of making a difference by changing their approach to education.

Step 2- Select teachers interested in teaching values from amongst existing staff

Teaching values is not an easy task, nor is it like teaching any other academic subject. Hence there are some very fundamental differences in how we should approach it. The value education teacher has to be chosen for his or her interests and attitude not educational qualifications, age, or number of years of teaching experience - the usual criteria used for selection of teachers in our country. In my experience, in every school, you will find at least 10% of teachers who will fit the bill, and it is with these teachers that a VE program can take off in any school.

Step 3- The selected teachers should be trained to prepare lesson plans for VE classes.

Some ready lesson plans can be provided, as samples, to help the teachers start off, but in the long term they should be trained to prepare their own, based on the requirements of the school.

To ensure that VE lessons are not boring and preachy but fun, and an opportunity to talk and learn about behaviours that are held in high esteem, there is a format and rationale that can be used. These are elaborated later but it is essential to know that at the heart of the lesson plan is the discussion which is based on questioning. Learning to conduct the discussion will be the most challenging part of a VE class.

Step 4- Involve parents

Parents should be involved even before teachers actually start taking classes. They could be informed about the school’s decision to start structured and planned VE classes and their cooperation solicited by requesting them to keep track of the VE homework in which their involvement would be essential.

Step 5- Starting the classes

Each class will be a learning experience for the teacher since he or she will be faced with a variety of responses from the students which may well be unexpected. Her/his ability to handle the questions and answers during these discussions will help single out the exceptional from the average VE teacher. The reactions from students, regarding VE classes, will also be an excellent indicator of the success of the VE teacher.

Step 6- Review and upgrade lessons based on the experience in class.

It is essential to review and upgrade lesson plans on a regular basis since it will take some time for the teacher to become adept at conducting the discussions. Some retrospection would go a long way in enhancing his or her facilitation skills.

Step 7- Integrate teaching of values with all subjects.

As teachers start taking VE classes they will find innumerable opportunities during their subject periods when they can amalgamate the teaching of values with academics. It will be a natural progression to the next stage of integration.

Step 8- Integrate Value Education into every aspect of regular school activities.

This is the ideal that we should aim for when VE becomes an integral part of every activity in school and is ingrained in the very ethos of schooling.

The advantages of following this process are that your school can start off on this journey immediately, your teachers will not be burdened any further, no additional resources will be required, your students will enjoy it and a more holistic form of education will take root in your school.

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