

Key Messages for Education in and Beyond School

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Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the human species is that inherently it is neither particularly constructive nor particularly destructive. How human beings actually behave and live depends to a large extent on the ideas, information, and understandings to which they are exposed, particularly in the formative years of their life but also later.

So for all those who are committed to the creation of a better world, a key concern should be the extent to which people and particular children and teenagers are being exposed in interesting and creative ways to ideas and understanding of justice, equality, peace, social harmony and protection of environment and biodiversity. Unfortunately, the situation just now in this context is not at all encouraging. Although people are exposed to mountains of information and news, mostly this is of a frivolous kind. Reading habit is fast diminishing, particularly in terms of serious study.

Secondly, even when ideas of justice, environment protection and peace are taken up, often there are serious distortions in these. To give an example, some action of a big power which is promoted as an action of peace may actually turn out to be provocation of violence. Or something promoted by a big multinational company as being taken up for environment protection may ultimately be revealed to be a cover-up for wider destruction of environment.

Hence at a time when there is great urgency of promoting sincere ideas of justice, peace and environment protection rooted in truth, this task is actually suffering from shocking neglect, apathy and inadequacy.

As remedial action, perhaps the first step in this direction is to select certain key messages based on secular ethics around which the social change role of education should be carried forward. These messages need to reach all groups so certainly such an educational effort should not remain confined to just schools and colleges. Of course when different age-

groups are covered, the same messages are discussed and debated in very different ways that are appropriate for different age groups.

Some of the key messages relate to important aspects of social relationships and behavior. One key message can be that as far as possible one should avoid trying to cause any distress to anyone in daily life. One has to discipline oneself accordingly and train oneself for this, for this does not come naturally. This may appear to be a very simple message, but look at the implications of this, how the world will change or how a single village will change in very important ways if all the people are consciously trying not to cause any distress to anyone.

Another key message is that we should not discriminate between any fellow human beings, whether on the basis of religion, ethnicity, caste, color or in any other way. This opens up our hearts and minds and we can be receptive to the friendship of all people and wish for the welfare of all people.

Thirdly, whenever we are interacting with anyone poorer to us, or less advantaged than us, our effort should be to be kind and generous, while entirely avoiding being exploitative or taking undue advantage of the weaker state of the other person or persons.

Another important message is to have a firm commitment to one's family and its welfare, and be very respectful towards women. This includes avoiding all forms of domestic violence—physical and emotional—which is one of the biggest causes of human distress.

All these key messages involving social distress are of course related to each other, but nevertheless it is useful to state these separately.

Then there can be some key messages relating to personal behavior. Here perhaps the most important message can be to entirely avoid all intoxicants including alcohol, tobacco, smokeless tobacco and gutka, opium as well various other kinds of intoxicating drugs. These are the cause of not just too many health problems but in addition increase human distress in many other ways as well. A wider message along the same lines can be to avoid all harmful and wasteful consumption.

In terms of community actions certain key messages should emphasize that we all should all contribute to maintaining public hygiene and sanitation. We should contribute to protection of environment as a part of community efforts and also try as far as possible to keep our life pattern and life style in keeping with the needs of environment protection. We should contribute whenever we can to the early resolution of any disputes around us and contribute to maintaining social harmony in our surroundings.

If most people behave in accordance with these messages, then we would have a world much better than it is and our community and surroundings would also be much better than these are. We ourselves would be much more creative and happier persons if we tried to live according to these messages and tried to spread them in our social relationships.

However there is a much bigger reason why these messages are important. Our world is faced with very serious environmental problems, highly destructive wars and arms race. There is much injustice and the resulting distress. To create a different world, we need support for an agenda of peace, justice and environment protection from a very large number of people. Education for social change based on important key messages can help

to create a very wide and strong base of people, including the upcoming generation, who believe more firmly in peace, justice and environment protection and therefore will be more active for these causes.

Education for social change is a very creative process in which poems, songs, stories, essays are created around certain key messages all the time and ordinary people including children also contribute with their real life experiences. It is an effort which starts contributing some good results from the very initial stages and keeps contributing more and more for a better world the longer it continues and the more creative it becomes over a period of time with all its valuable experiences.

Hence this concept of education for social change which continues beyond school and college for all age-groups should get wider attention.

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