

# We must inculcate sound values for education to be meaningful

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The National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 (NCF) articulates five 'Aims of Education': rational thought and independent thinking, health and well-being, democratic and community participation, economic participation, and cultural participation. These guide the choice of knowledge, capacities, and values and dispositions that the curriculum must develop in students. Let us explore these values and dispositions.

Attaining the five aims requires the development of a range of consonant and inter-related values. For practical purposes, these are placed in three categories. First, ethical and moral values, which include empathy, sensitivity, integrity and courage, among others. Second, democratic values, including a commitment to liberty, equality and embracing diversity, a fraternal spirit and social responsibility, among others. Third, values that we hold about knowledge and truth, called epistemic values. These include scientific temper and recognizing sources of knowledge in different domains, among others.

The NCF also guides curricula to develop a few dispositions in students: a positive work ethic, curiosity and wonder and rootedness in India while being an engaged citizen of the world.

Its approach is for schools and the education system in general to work coherently on multiple key aspects.

The development of values and dispositions has been made an integral part of the learning standards and processes across all school stages and subjects—in terms of content, pedagogy and assessment.

Values are most effectively learnt when experienced and observed by students in real life. So, sustaining a school culture and practices that bring to life these values is crucial. For example, the treatment of parents by the school administration, behaviour with students who

are not so good at some sports and relationship between the principal and other teachers must all support ideals of democracy, justice, equality, sharing and fraternity. School culture and classroom processes have differentiated effects as children grow, and must be planned appropriately. Very young children tend to behave as they see role models behave, for example, while older children speculate about reasons, and so on.

Curricula must also account for the fact that each of these processes and subjects can affect different values differently. Regular classroom discussions can help develop democratic values, rational thinking and sensitivity. Similarly, sports can develop virtues such as endurance, honesty and courage. And social science, science and mathematics develop epistemic values.

Content, or the material of study, influences values both implicitly and explicitly. Stories or historical episodes celebrating pluralism, equality and justice foster these values. And these very values are equally influenced in the implicit choices of content, be it the names of people, illustrations in a book, or suchlike. Discussions on the Indian Constitution, ranging from equality, liberty and fraternity to fundamental duties, must be a part of the process.

In Grade 9, a course on 'Moral and Ethical Reasoning' has been introduced for all students. Schools are also required to consider which specific values need to be addressed directly with students. For example, classes in social science may focus on the complementarity of rights and duties, or on the link of language and empathy. Teachers are likely to require training and also interesting, non-pedantic, teaching-learning material for such topics (which would have to be developed).

Conflict in values is a reality, and the NCF addresses it directly. Some values encouraged at school in the curriculum may not be practised outside—some may even be discouraged. For example, equality is one of the key values in school, but communities may discriminate along gender, caste or other lines. The NCF eschews simple solutions because there are none. Instead, it suggests processes of dialogue and empathetic behaviour for dealing with such conflict as an inevitable aspect of human societies. Such processes need to be deliberate and methodical for the curriculum to achieve its ends.

The onus of developing values and dispositions is squarely on the school and community. Nevertheless, the development of values in individual students must be assessed in a non-judgmental manner through observation of behaviour to enable constructive action. For example, 'she helps other students' is more useful educationally than stating that the student has developed 'empathy' or 'sensitivity.'

The values of teachers, principals and the boarder education system have a fundamental influence on students. Thus, the overall culture of the Indian education system must support the development of the same values and dispositions that are expected of students. Most

importantly, irrespective of inner convictions, the behaviour of all involved in education must manifest the values that we want developed.

Right at the outset, the NCF explicitly acknowledges that developing values is one of the biggest challenges for the education system, and so we must try our best. What's the point of education without sound values?