



Establishing a New Benchmark for SSE Teaching for the Twenty First Century

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Introduction

The term “Benchmarking” is sometimes used to mean identifying best practice in a particular activity or function and analysing against that standard. Here, it is simply meant as a way of defining improvement goals and measuring progress against those goals.

Progress is based on materialism and financial status. Global events, advances in technology and consumerism have largely affected societies, families, businesses and even educational institutions. We are faced with riots, terrorism, poverty, family crises, to name a few consequences of scientific advancement. Stress with coping with the present and fear and uncertainty of the future lead man to display his animalistic tendencies. Man resorts to anger, greed, ego and selfishness which degrade humanity. So, how do we improve this situation?

To quote Tickner’s precautionary principle, (2003)

‘When an activity raises threats to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken, even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.’

The Issues

We need to understand the issues that surround consumerism to bring about any changes in our lifestyle. We consume a variety of resources and products today having moved beyond basic needs to include luxury items and technological innovations to try to improve efficiency. We are creative, thinking human beings who are capable of decision making and yet the media easily influences our choices of consumption. Fashion pressures people to buy for style and not because of need. We do not realise that as demand increases, the requirements placed upon the environment and our planet are also affected.

The market for children’s products and food is enormous. Buying fashionable clothes, expensive toys, fast foods and giving them special tuition to be eligible for selective schools will not make model children. Providing children with their own television set and encouraging them to watch television at all hours only invites negative influences into their lives. This has led to unhealthy eating habits as seen by today’s statistics on obesity. **From 1985 to 1995 the number of overweight 7–15 year olds almost doubled. The numbers of**

obese children has more than tripled. Over the same period, there has been a huge increase in children's consumption of energy-dense foods. According to "Disability Online", it is predicted that, at the current rate, 65 per cent of young Australians will be overweight or obese by 2020

My Philosophy

My philosophy on these issues is that an education system based on academic achievement is too confining. It prepares one for acquiring a job but the absence of moral values and lessons on character building encourages immoral behaviour. Education should promote concern and love for all living creatures. It must come from the heart. It should teach children to expand their love and open their hearts to the suffering of others. It should broaden their outlook and encourage them to find ways to change their thinking and be useful to society and the world at large.

The children in Sathya Sai School Choir illustrated their hope for the future in their song, "That someone, somewhere will make a change," and that "someone cares" They tell us very clearly that "We are the world; we are the children; we are the ones to make a brighter future."

My Objective is to advocate a set of values that will equip the children to handle their issues? A new benchmark needs to be established and changes must be made not for convenience, financial reasons or pressure from national and global societies but because they are value based.

Although character development is important, students need to acquire worldly knowledge as well. They should be able to combine human values together with the skills of technology and the sciences. An education based on human values with aspects of the "Nine Point Code of Conduct" will enable students to show humility and compassion. This knowledge cannot be taught from any text book but leads to righteous living.

What Methods need to be implemented?

Parents, teachers and political leaders are all responsible for creating the problems that exist and it is their responsibility to now make changes and find solutions. Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba says that, "Either the government must have the capacity to educate and reform the people or the people must have the capacity to educate the government." If actions are not analysed and spending habits are not curbed, the consequences will go well beyond the 21st century. Children, for generations to come will accept their actions as normal and not question the harmful effects to the planet and the environment.

Parents, teachers and political leaders are all responsible for creating the problems that exist and it is their responsibility to now make changes and find solutions. Parents need to be educated as well on health issues and on good parenting skills so that the child is in a loving, caring environment that encourages risk taking and challenges.

Both parents and teachers should foster an enquiring spirit in the child so that he/she is allowed to make decisions and act upon them.

The Experience

How do we start making changes and find solutions? The education of the younger generation is of major importance to all concerned. The issues mentioned earlier are commonly spoken of by concerned parents and teachers. This does not mean that changes are being made by individuals if there is dissatisfaction concerning any situation. If such changes are made they may not be value based but more for convenience, financial reasons or because of pressure from national and global societies.

What have we in the Sai Organisation done so far? Attempts have been made to include the issues mentioned, such as natural disasters and global warming, in the current syllabuses of the SSE students. Teachers have been encouraged to research and produce resources for specific topics based on a value to be taught each week. In June, this year, a Human Values Program on Leadership was successfully implemented in a public high school in Sydney. More opportunities have now been presented to us to continue this initiative.

What else could we do? The focus needs to be shifted to the value aspects in songs, movies etc that promote awareness in our children's lives such as the movie 'An Inconvenient Truth' which offers a passionate and inspirational look at one man's commitment to expose the myths and misconceptions that surround global warming and inspire actions to prevent it.

The Outcomes

What are the outcomes to date?

SSE students are more aware of the importance of natural resources and the impact of our actions on the environment and how they could change their habits to help the environment. Their personal values and the values encouraged by their parents are challenged by the concept of a "ceiling on desires" Community service is promoted in classes and students are encouraged to participate in activities planned by the Organisation.

Significance in the wider context

Parents, as the child's first educator, will become role models for their children since children copy and follow the habits of their parents. Adults should not force their beliefs and customs on children without teaching them the character building lessons that can be learnt from this. For example, vegetarianism is not the same as devotion or spirituality as these are based on the mind. Food habits depend upon traditions, beliefs, geographical conditions, resources and other factors. Children need to know that in any one abattoir in a state approximately 7000 sheep are slaughtered per day. How does this benefit humanity? What is the purpose of such actions? Are we recognising the divinity in all beings? This type of questioning and other thinking skills can be reinforced by SSE teachers and will shape the learning and the character of their students. They will begin to seek answers and look for the values in consumer items such food items, shampoos, cosmetics, designer clothing toothpaste, brushes

and the list goes on. Was an animal sacrificed or a tree destroyed to manufacture these items? Students and the Sai Youth will become pace setters in the Organisation and in the community promoting the human values and following the Code of Conduct. They will have the urge to pass on their knowledge to the generations that follow and become teachers under the direction of the ISSE.

The wider implications of my work

Parents, teachers and other adults who influence the lives of children will encourage them to have an enquiring mind. Researching information and not merely accepting what they are faced with will bring about a change in their outlook. They will then make decisions, arrive at a conclusion and finally act upon it. Children will also become teachers. Their questions and passion will make adults think twice before purchasing cage laid eggs or animal tested cosmetics. Adults will have to keep up with the changing times and be aware of circumstances surrounding what is happening in the world.

Conclusion

We have created this world we live in. It is beset with problems because of our ignorance and lack of knowledge of what really matters in life. All our actions seemed insignificant at first but like a pebble thrown into a pond, the ripples have spread further than imagined and these actions have far reaching effects that are proving detrimental to society. Is this going to be our children's legacy? We need to do something about this situation and it has to be done NOW.

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