



Abstract

Sathya Sai Education in the Philippines is a starting point of transformation of head, heart and hand toward excellence in life by living human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Love, Peace and Non-Violence.

Given today's global conditions of war, poverty, economic-slow-down if not depression, threatening weather conditions and spiritual decline – our world is expecting changes or solutions that neither policy, legislation nor force of law can provide. Through ages of experience, man has not been able to promulgate morality nor create inner change in man, which would lead to lasting peace, harmony and contentment.

Man cannot change another man but that same man can change himself. In spiritual quarters this is called transformation. This same person can inspire those around him, thus creating a nucleus of inner chrysalis, which given time spreads to each one's immediate circle of influence in an ever-growing circumference to include a society.

It is said that it takes 2 to 3 months for children to form a habit and 20 to 30 years for adults. Thus encouraging human values as part of every day life for children is the best starting point.

However it is not enough. Parents and those who assume the role of parents are the first teachers. They have to practice what child learns in school in the sanctity of their home, because children pattern their behavior after those around them. Thus a second level of change is introduced to mother, father, guardians and extended relatives.

Thus the role of Sathya Sai Education in the Philippines is to draw out, nurture and reinforce human values in children and foster partnership with parents to live the same values consistently at home. It completes a cycle of learning that goes around children, parents and teachers.

We draw largely on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, our inspiration and our guide. We convey his lessons in Philippine cultural context. Because we are creating future role models, we too have to be models by making great effort to live Swami's message.

Behind every successful child is a parent, a teacher or mentor, a hero – or one who serves as inspiration. Our job is to provide that kind of motivating environment for the children – our future leaders.

The Role of Sathya Sai Education in the Philippines

By Al Macasaet & Rocel Vidanes

The School

Sathya Sai Baba, our Chancellor En Memoriam, if I may address him as such; He once said, start early, go slow, arrive safely.

The Sathya Sai School in the Philippines started humbly as a day-care center over a decade ago. Local Sai Devotees organized to raise a building with a Worship Room, 4 classrooms and a combination office and teacher's lounge. A few years later a second building followed adding 5 more rooms.

Now after five graduations and eleven moving on ceremonies this primary school has just fewer than 160 students, ranging from Preparatory to Grade 6.

However we have not arrived yet. Maintaining a school is ever an on-going process plus our sights are on higher-grade levels or secondary education. The journey goes on.

The Community

The school is located within 50 kilometers outside of Metro Manila, in a rural town of Pililia. It is a small community of a little over 50,000 residents made up largely of fishermen and farmers. In addition, like many small towns around an urban center, residents seek opportunities in the big city effectively making Pililia, a bedroom community, where men and women either commute daily or come home on weekends.

The school is open to everybody but proximity is a major factor. The students come from local neighborhoods, making up a mix of families with means and those who may be challenged. The screening and acceptance process goes around parents' commitment to children's education, willingness to participate in school and their child's development. Enrollment is totally free of tuition.

Town folks have taken notice of this relatively new school, citing how well behaved the children are, even if like all others, they are full of energy. It is a favorite venue for national examinations, sponsored by the Department of Education.

In addition a process called "Brigada," is common practice in our school. In this, parents take on the role of caring for school facilities. This process has caught people's attention and has gained popularity in public schools.

Furthermore the school is a center for community service, providing free medical screening and medication for children and dental care for both young and old. In addition children prepare food items for distribution to those in need, particularly on the birthday of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Perhaps the most profound yet subtle message to the people is a new paradigm actively happening in this small town. People, who remain nameless, have offered time, talent and resources to provide education. It is free of charge, because those who support the school want nothing in return. It is education available to everyone, an example of selfless service.

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The Students

We often hear that our children do well in other schools, after they graduate. We feel blessed to hear this but do wonder at times if people are being polite when they talk about our sons and daughters.

However last year during a festival, when the community honors its patron, Saint Mary of Magdalene, the town organized a street dance contest. Students were to march around town in a parade, to exhibit their dance, and later perform for the judges, at the final stage of the event.

We were mildly apprehensive to learn, contestants are from upper schools, including a college. However the teachers took the opportunity to be part of the community.

The children learned the choreography and rehearsed tirelessly. Parents rallied around their excited children and made the costumes and props. Volunteers came to train and coach. In the end, the children won in the best dance category and the much-coveted 1st Place in dance performance – this in spite of the fact they are the smallest and youngest in the competition.

Were they lucky? Were the judges patronizing? We may never know, however this year, our children won, once again for having the best dance and 1st Place in performance.

Choreography, costumes and props certainly play a part in these things. However it is the unity of teachers, coaches, parents and children that make up a major factor. Patience and hard work in rehearsals play a big role. Determination, persistence and strong will formulates success. Added to this the joy of the children in performance sparked their smiles and energized every step. This wins over the hearts of people.

Perhaps we should not be surprised, because we have been talking to both children and parents the values of unity, focus, patience, perseverance and dedication; sub-values of Truth, Right-Action, Peace, Love and Non-Violence.

Who is Sai Baba

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is a world-renowned spiritual teacher from South India, whose main principles are to love all, serve all and help ever, hurt never. He is restoring basic human ethics without prejudice to existing religious beliefs.

He has shown the world a new paradigm that medical care, education and even water supply can be provided to the people free of charge by people who wish to serve and seek nothing in return.

Indeed he has established Super Specialty Hospitals, a University and other schools around the world where all services are free to the public. He has also provided drinking water in areas, where even the government has not been able to do so.

The Role of Sathya Sai Education in the Philippines By Al Macasaet & Rocel Vidanes

We draw on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He is the teacher of teachers – our model. Our students start the day with prayer and meditation. Human values are embedded in lesson plans. Questions on what is the right way to think, speak and act are built into the curriculum. Once a week, lessons are supplemented with a study circle and spiritual singing or Bhajans.

Our children differ from other Sathya Sai students in that they do not recognize Sathya Sai Baba as Bhagavan. He is the Chancellor who fosters wisdom. So signs of respect toward him are sincere but distant and not personal. However, once in a while, we find children quietly standing before Swami's chair, palms together in prayer. The recognition is perhaps internal and yet sublime.

Today's world

In the news, we are besieged with pestilence of war, irreverence, waste, religious intolerance, spiritual decline, racial animosity, poverty, social inequality, medical and educational deprivation, threatening weather conditions and economic melt down.

The pessimist sees an end to life as we know and optimists are hopeful for change. Man is in search of a solution. Invariably every solution brought forward requires change - a change in our attitude, concepts, and technology. We seek a change in the way we live and engage with each other. Almost always we seek something or someone to invoke these changes.

The flaw in this approach is it calls for one to make a change on another. It has never been done. No one has been able to change another person. World history is full of examples of laws, edicts, policies and even guidelines and yet not one of these have brought about lasting change, because each issue goes around a right or wrong action. It is a question of morality.

Morality cannot be promulgated, legislated or invoked by rules of law. The human mind is crafty, particularly in working around rules and regulations.

Transformation

Regarding equitable distribution of wealth being enforced by legislative decrees: "This can only be done by transforming the giver and the recipient. No political system can transform the receiver and thrill the giver, however much it tries to equalize. The appeal isn't there, nor the power to sustain. The equality established will be haunted by a shadow, the shadow of ego. The change must evolve from the heart. All materialistic attempts to equalize society have failed. Only spiritual transformation can bring about the revolution in human consciousness, from which alone the desired changes can accrue."

TEOL P 211

Man cannot cause another to change. However the same man can change himself. In spiritual circles, this is called transformation. Man can transform himself. He in turn

The Role of Sathya Sai Education in the Philippines
By Al Macasaet & Rocel Vidanes

influences others who he is in direct contact with. They in turn influence others, in a growing and enlarging circle of influence, to include a society.

In a discussion on forming habits, I heard it takes children two to three months to form a habit but 20 to 30 years for adults to form one. The precise duration is not nearly as important than the fact that it is easier to shape good habits when you are young.

That is why it makes sense to draw out children's inner values of Truth, Right Action, Love, Peace and Non-violence and make it part of their young lives, something they can carry into adulthood. Childhood is a natural starting point.

Even today, each child is a leader; to the extent, younger students emulate older ones. It is a process they carry by being themselves or in the official capacity of their careers or vocation.

Role of Parents

However parents, as the first teachers, need to be involved. The values of nurturing and discipline naturally start at home.

The school provides a natural place to discuss parenting and sharing experiences along with this. It is a place where parents are re-introduced to human values, as it applies to their natural circumstance. It provides a forum or study circle where these ideas can be fostered and shared. To most this presents thoughts of change in a way of living, so these ideas need to be nurtured, fostered on an ongoing basis.

At times we would hold seminars due to the large number of attendance. Children's lessons are reiterated, especially human values and its sub-values. We discuss impact of television, video games, peer pressure and the need for good company. We cover the importance of meditation and unity of thought, word and deed; and how good thoughts follow good words and deeds.

They discuss human values in cultural context and customs, in day-to-day application, in simple street language. They identify practices that are contradictory and where conflict exists, we look for solutions at the individual level.

Parents long for the best for their children and in many a discussion; they recognize that materiality is not necessarily the best thing to bequeath our children. It is often noted, you cannot take it with you, but character goes with you.

Religious involvement and practices are encouraged and supported. Community service is considered as the sincerest form of worship.

We all understand, both parents and teachers, that educate is a drawing out of latent values already in children. We also understand that our own behavior, the choices

The Role of Sathya Sai Education in the Philippines
By Al Macasaet & Rocel Vidanes

of what is wrong and what is right, shape our children. What they see in us determine their own character. Only about 10% of what children learn is from what they hear but 90% is from what they see and observe. Our examples are silent yet effective teachers. Therefore practice of what we say is of ultimate importance.

It is also noted that treating others with loving-kindness is just as important as success in school or sports.

Some points on Parenting

Part of effective parenting is a paraphrase of Swami's tenet:

- Start the day with prayer
- Fill the day with practice (of human values)
- End the day with patience
- This is the way to good parenting

Train the children to:

- See what is good
- Listen only to what is good
- Speak truthfully and softly
- Do only what is good
- Go only to places that are good

Selected points on parenting:

- Nurture by praising more rather than discouraging criticism.
- Enforce consistent discipline. Display disappointment rather than violence of corporal punishment.
- Love and law go together
- Know the difference between too much and too little discipline
- Show how it is done by ones own examples.
- Discipline, duty and devotion is for all time, every time
- Spend quality time
- Teach the value of ceiling on desires
- Enforce responsibilities
- Take time to explain rules
- Know who friends are and where and what children do
- "Happiness is not doing what you like but liking what you have to do"
- Help children develop good study habits
- Focus on fixing oneself rather than blaming others
- Most of all be a good role model

Why Education on Human Values (EHV)

When emphasis is on right action, it implies a method of gauging its merits under any situations. The basic human values of: Truth, Love, Peace, Right Action and

The Role of Sathya Sai Education in the Philippines
By Al Macasaet & Rocel Vidanes

Non-Violence are the highest of ideals, which can be used in problem solving or decision-making. It serves to discriminate between right and wrong.

It draws on the underlying goodness in everyone. The child learns to think and analyze – draw from within as it were, before taking action. Thus the values become a tactile experience through head, heart and hand.

The child is also on his way to self-discovery. This along with meditation allows him or her to introspect and learn in the inner silence of the self.

Thus the goal is human excellence through transformation of head, heart and hand toward excellence in life by living human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Love, Peace and Non-Violence.

It is the blossoming of human excellence through moral, spiritual and academic excellence, as Bhagavan Baba teaches:

- **The end of education is character**
- **Education is for life, not merely for living**