

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN IMPLANTING RELIGIOUS VALUES

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Introduction: The Need for Value Integration

There is a difference between literacy and education. Literacy refers to knowledge and skills of a particular profession, while education is a comprehensive term in which moral values constitute an essential ingredient of the complete whole. The mere knowledge and art of computing may be termed as computer literacy, but the person concerned may be termed as an educated personality only when he behaves like an educated person with essential moral values. If he is an expert of stealing by computer hacking or trouble-making by spreading viruses, he would not be considered an educated man.

Literacy involves positivism, and education involves positivism plus normativism. Positivism deals with what was, what is and what will be; it does not consider what ought to be. An atom bomb can kill thousands of innocent people, and this is a part of positive atom literacy, since it does not give any value judgment on whether the action is right or wrong. Normative judgments will say that killing innocent people is a punishable offence. The desirability or otherwise of anything falls under the purview of normative judgment, which may be implanted in a person through values. Education is not complete without values and there is a need for education in values.²

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² Halstead, J. Mark; Jaylor, MJ, eds. *Values in education and education in values*. London: Falmer Press, 1996.

A man devoid of values and virtues falls below the rank of an animal³, causing mischief in the society. Immoral and destructive lifestyle consisting of, among other things, sexual scandals, rape and harassment, pornography, nightclub culture, broken families, single motherhood and abandoned children, alcoholism, unlimited greed leading to economic and financial corruption, political turmoil, unhealthy and anti-consumer business environment, fighting and bloodshed among nations are creating havoc and polluting the environment of this beautiful world, which mankind is supposed to maintain as the *khalifah* of Allah. Agents supposedly of peace, harmony and love have become agents of destruction. This is purely because they are deprived of moral values, neither receiving them from their education systems nor being able to acquire them on their own.

On the other hand, a person of high moral standard will lead a disciplined life, free from vices; this person has positive implications for the family, society, nation, and also the international community, improving national and international law and order.⁴ A world full of this kind of person would turn it into a peaceful living place for mankind. Thus, the people of the world need to go back to the moral values befitting the vicegerents of Allah.

Which Moral Values and at What Age?

If human values⁵ are based on social tradition, human wisdom and history, the set of values will depend on time and space. Behaviors such as consensual extra-marital relationship were not socially acceptable in some societies but are now acceptable there without hesitation. Similarly, a behavior may not be socially acceptable in one place but be acceptable elsewhere in the contemporary world. Thus morality varies in time and space.

³ Al-Qur'an 7:179; 98:6.

⁴ Institute for Catholic Education. *Religious education*. Rev. ed. Toronto: Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2006.

⁵ University of London. *The teaching of social and ethical issues in the school curriculum, arising from biomedical research: a research study of teachers*. 2001.

In contrast, religious values originating from divine revelations are not subject to change, since they come from a super-wise Entity Whose wisdom does not need to change through time, since He can see what is good for mankind through time and space. The Eternal Being can give eternal moral values. The Creator of mankind can fully perceive without any error what is good for them and what is bad and hence undesirable for them, just as the maker of equipment is the person best qualified to provide its instructional manual. These divine values are known as religious values, and these are the ones with which that mankind should be equipped. Therefore, if any values should be integrated into the education system, religious values have the most right.

Now the question arises: at what level of education should religious values begin to be integrated? Importantly, the issue here is to implant religious values through the education system, and not to teach students theoretical norms and values. If ‘implanting’ rather than ‘teaching’ is desired, a student’s age has a great impact on whether the student is receptive to the values. A mature student may be introduced to the desired set of values and he may be convinced of their importance, but it is difficult for the mature mind and behavior at that age to absorb these values. Implanting of values is much more likely when one is at a younger age at which he can be molded with beneficial values. This age is the school age and, therefore, this age should be chosen for integration of religious values. Hence the school curriculum should be integrated with the desirable values.⁶

Religious Values Integration in the School Curriculum

So far, it has been argued that value-orientation and integration are important, and that religious values rather than other social values should be chosen for the

⁶ Lovat, Terence; Schofield, Neville. Values education for all schools and systems: justification and experimental update. *New Horizon in Education*. Vol 111: 4 - 13, 2003.

purpose, and that the school age is the relevant age for value implanting. All of the above require that the school curriculum should be integrated with religious values.⁷

It should be emphasized that what is important is the integration of religious values in the school curriculum, and not religious education. There is no denying that religious education is important for in-depth knowledge in religion, but that is more specific to religious schools, or religion-based subjects in more general educational institutions. What is at issue here is education of values and not religious practices, to be integrated into general school education.⁸

Thus integration of religious values would require a transcendent and holistic approach, instead of a piecemeal approach. That is, it is not enough to teach one or two separate papers or courses on religion leaving all other courses as value neutral, but the entire curriculum should be value laden. This is the reason why the first divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad (saws) or even the first word in the first divine revelation has been connected with seeking knowledge: “Read in the name of Allah who has created”.⁹ Thus, the first command from God is to read, study, and acquire knowledge, but these activities have to be connected with the Creator, Sustainer and Provider of norms and values for all walks of life. Relating knowledge acquisition with this comprehensive set of divine values requires value integration across the board.¹⁰

It should be emphasized that the whole Islamic code of life is meant for creating positive norms and values in a man, and to make him a good servant of Allah and

⁷ Anderson, Ronald D. *Religion and spirituality in the public school curriculum*. New York: Die Deutsche Bibliothek, 2004.

⁸ Haynes, Charles C; Thomas, Oliver. *Finding common ground: a guide to religious liberty in public schools*. First Amendment Center, 2007.

⁹ Al-Qur'an 96:1.

¹⁰ University of London. *The teaching of social and ethical issues in the school curriculum, arising from biomedical research: a research study of teachers*. 2001.

His *khalifah* in this world in order to make it a peaceful place for not only mankind but also for animals and nature. The Islamic rituals have been designed so that they contribute to this objective. For example, the ritual of *solah* (prayer) is not merely a mechanical *ibadah* (worship), but its objective, among other things, is to inculcate moral values which would keep the person on the right track: “Indeed, *solah* (prayer) restrains from immorality and wrongdoing”.¹¹ A person who presents himself in front of Allah five times a day and makes commitment and promise to obey Him cannot disobey Him by violating divine values in life. Similarly, the purpose of *siyam* (fasting) is to create *taqwa* (consciousness, self-control, and God-fearing) in the mind of the person, which is a necessary condition for getting *hidayah* (guidance) from the divine book.¹² Thus, the purpose of fasting is to create a human quality that is necessary for being able to adhere to divine values of life provided in the Qur’an. All the rituals of Islam that are often considered mistakenly as simple acts of worships have definite implications for implanting divine values.

Along with *iman*, the rituals provide five pillars of Islam. Naturally, the five pillars alone will not make a complete house that can serve the purpose of a shelter. It would need many other things including a roof, four walls, doors, windows, and so on. Similarly, the Islamic code of life requires one to lead his entire life in adherence to the divine norms and values, without trespass of the boundaries given in the normative framework, including truthfulness¹³, honesty¹⁴, sincerity, justice¹⁵, tolerance¹⁶, helping others¹⁷, serving the mankind and nature, refraining from all wrongdoings¹⁸, and so on.

¹¹ Al-Qur’an 29:45.

¹² Al-Qur’an 2:2.

¹³ Al-Qur’an 3:17; 33:35; 23:8.

¹⁴ Al-Qur’an 19:51.

¹⁵ Al-Qur’an 16:90.

¹⁶ Al-Qur’an 2:256.

¹⁷ Al-Qur’an 22:28; 76:8; 51:19.

¹⁸ Al-Qur’an 7:56; 2:27; 13:25; 3:104; 16:90.

Shaping and forming the mindset for implanting such divine values, along with other professional and neutral knowledge, should start with the nature, meaning and purpose of life in this world. This would involve the entire Islamic worldview in a manner, style and language that is suitable for school age children. This would include the concept of creation, creator, divine sustenance, the divine code of life and the relevant values in all branches, the divine book containing the values and the Prophetic *sunnah*, accountability to God for adhering to the divine values and court proceedings for this accountability on the Day of Judgment¹⁹, rewards for positive divine verdict²⁰ and punishment for the opposite verdict²¹ in the eternal life, and so on. If the mindset of the children can be shaped in this manner, the basic foundation is laid. This can be included in the school curriculum in the form of one or two foundation courses.²²

These courses will only lay down the foundation of the knowledge structure. Then the important task of value integration into the school curriculum begins. The basic philosophy of value integration is the *tawhidic* paradigm. Oneness of divinity (Allah) essentially requires oneness of the value system in all walks of life and hence in all branches of knowledge. Commitment to honesty, as required in the basic value system of Islam, will be fruitless if dishonesty and corruption is practiced in economic and financial affairs. Therefore, relevant values should be integrated in the courses concerned. The principle of tolerance becomes a joke if harm is caused and people are killed and massacred just because they belong to another faith. The norm of justice becomes meaningless if people are dealt with unjustly in the family, in the society, or if justice can be influenced by greed or fear.

¹⁹ Al-Qur'an 2:284.

²⁰ Al-Qur'an 101:6-7; 9:72.

²¹ Al-Qur'an 101:8-11; 13-18.

²² The number of such value laden foundation courses will depend on the duration of the courses and other factors.

The integration of religious values in the school curriculum will involve application of religious and divine values in the school and, more specifically, inclusion and integration of relevant values in all the courses taught in the school. This has at least two implications.

Firstly, there is a need for preparation and writing of textbooks that integrate religious values. In doing this, authors should be very careful on several grounds: (i) only the relevant norms and values should be integrated so as not to burden the children with excess; (ii) integration should be in the right place and context; (iii) examples should be cited; and (iv) the language should be easily understandable by children.

Secondly, there is a need for training of the trainers. Most of the existing teachers in the schools are expected to be unfamiliar with such value integration in the school curriculum and textbooks. There should be arrangements for such exposure through training, even if it is for a short duration.

Interfaith Value Integration in Multi-faith Societies

The foregoing discussion on the value integration of school curriculum is meant for the public schools in Muslim societies and for Islamic schools in multi-faith societies. Now we need to consider the issue of value integration in the public schools of predominantly multi-faith societies, where the children of different faiths go for schooling. It will not be proper to integrate values of one particular religion in the school curriculum in this environment. In this scenario, common values of different faiths should be identified and agreed upon for value integration. Fortunately, fundamental values are common in all the religions, such as truthfulness, tolerance, coexistence, justice, honesty, sincerity, non-violence,

and so on. Leading personalities of different faiths may meet, discuss and agree upon some common norms and values. The resulting outcome will be an agreed upon set of school syllabi and curricula. .²³

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The foregoing discussion leads to the following concluding remarks.

1. Literacy alone cannot produce human recourses of high moral standards; it requires integration of moral values, which are inseparable ingredients of education.
2. Integration of values in the curriculum will lead to a disciplined human life, free from immorality, wrongdoing and vices, and will have positive implications for family, society, nation, and also for the international community, improving national and international law and order. This would turn the entire undisciplined world into a peaceful living place.
3. Social and human values depend on time and space. On the other hand, divine and religious values are universal and not time-bound. Hence, it is religious values that should be integrated into the curriculum. Besides, religious values can touch the heart since they are a part of faith, which helps in value enforcement, so that requirement of government intervention for law enforcement will be less.
4. The proper age for value integration in the educational curriculum is the school age, since children can be molded easily at this age. At a higher level, mature students may be taught moral values but the possibility of absorption of these values is much less.

²³ The Learning Trust. *Religious education: The Hackney Agreed Syllabus*. Hackney: 2006.

5. Value integration should imply integration of religious values across the board, instead of some random courses on piecemeal basis. Thus the question is of integration of religious values rather than religious education.
6. Integration of religious values will require preparing and writing books suitable for students of school age.
7. Teaching of schoolchildren in an integrated value-laden perspective also calls for appropriate training of the school teachers.