

A Proposal for Instruction of Global Ethics in Primary and Secondary Education

The turmoil of our time, the instability, the horrors, the violence and the threats, all these things that form the dark clouds of the present and the future should finally challenge us to take action in a more determined way concerning moral education. As adults we have a responsibility to provide the current and future generations with a hope and a guideline for living life and building a world where hope, confidence and security can once again capture the minds of people. This could be accomplished effectively by putting a global ethic into practice. One way to put it into practice is by introducing it into the curriculum of schools all over the world. So far, the nations of the world have not agreed on such a great task, which is certainly in some aspects quite difficult and controversial. However most nations have signed the *Declaration of Human Rights*, which offers the essential guiding principles for a global ethic.

Some of the problems which are common to schools all over the world besides the general decrease in the standard of knowledge, consist of lack of respect for teachers and fellow students, inadequate motivation for learning and a general environment of bullying. At some schools antagonism and xenophobia between students with different cultural and religious backgrounds is also a common and troublesome dilemma, which seems hard to eradicate.

By studying diverse cultures and religions greater understanding will come about among students if teachers make a sincere effort to teach in an impartial way. To study the lives of the founders of the great religions can provide inspiration and a deeper understanding for the significance of their mission. The words of wisdom found in the original sources of religion concerning virtues and values have had – and will always have a profound influence upon all categories of people for ages to come. Reportedly, there is a revival of interest in world religion and ethics among students.

Ethics is closely connected with "life skills", which in some schools have developed into a subject of its own, including many important issues and aspects of life. Education in life skills could well be focused upon virtues. Reflection upon and discussion of these touch upon some of the most essential aspects of life. This strategy will also fulfil another purpose, which is to educate *world citizens*, prepared to shoulder their responsibilities in a global society. Educators in many countries are already working hard to establish a curriculum that incorporate these ideas.

In my article *Virtues - the True Foundation of Democratic Values* I have tried to illustrate how virtues are needed in all kinds of social and human interaction and constitute the bases of our highest values. Virtues provide a source of energy that keep these values alive. The following paragraph is a summary of one of the themes in the article mentioned above.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948 emanates from the belief that

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

This belief or standpoint, declared in a purely secular document, is basically spiritual in nature and confirms the message of the founders of the world's great religions. Whether scientifically proved or not, it is the very axiom upon which we can build a world order of justice and peace. Hopefully there are few who would deny its accuracy. Through the agreement of the first article it became possible to draw up the following 29 articles in the Declaration.

Despite the inclusion of a decree made by the General Assembly stating that Member countries should publicize the text of the Declaration and "cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories" most countries have sadly failed to do so. This strange neglect has resulted in tremendous difficulties all over the world in fulfilling the practical implication of the Declaration and we are now in a situation where human rights of all forms and on all levels are being violated. Ethics in education, based on a universally accepted belief, must therefore become a compulsory and well-structured school subject all over the world in order to restore the dignity, welfare and progress of the human race.

To see similarities in cultures and religions instead of differences is one way to start a dialogue between people who usually look at each other as strangers or foes. As an aid in this process towards understanding and a peaceful co-existence, virtues can be seen as a common trait of all world religions and cultures and also as a uniting power.

My own small contribution to this "spiritual education" which I am sure will come about with increasing speed, is a modest teaching aid that contains a detailed lesson plan of virtues for children between the ages of 10-13. Certain portions could also be used for

younger and older children. It focuses on virtues such as responsibility, tolerance, honesty, respect, compassion, peacefulness, justice, friendliness, friendship etc.

Sources of inspiration are among others, books by Linda Kavelin Popov and the ideas of the Canadian-based character training project called the *Virtues Project*, which has already been applied in some hundred countries around the world. A page about the *Virtues Project* is included in my article mentioned above. More detailed information can be found at www.virtuesproject.com.

Similar projects launched by a great variety of associations, institutions and religious communities focusing on moral education certainly exist in most parts of the world, but unfortunately they do not always succeed at reaching large numbers of youth.

Finally, some verses from the Chinese philosopher *Lao Tsu* summarize the practical spiritual aim of the world religions:

Cultivate Virtue in your self, and Virtue will be real.

Cultivate Virtue in the family, and Virtue will flourish.

Cultivate Virtue in the village, and Virtue will spread.

Cultivate Virtue in the nation, and Virtue will be abundant.

Cultivate Virtue in the world and Virtue will triumph everywhere.

If you have any comments, questions or ideas, I would appreciate hearing from you.

Feel free to contact me by e-mail: info@livskunskap.net

Yours sincerely,

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