

Life-wide formation of students

Reconciling duties and rights through
education

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Realities underlying our education system:

- Educators face a student population totally different from that of previous generations.
- There is increasing dependence on social media.
- Social media are slowly replacing concrete relationships.
- This gives rise to a growing pattern of individualism.

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- The above describes a new mode of life.
- This new mode of life does not recognize the importance of societal values, the concept of citizenship.
- Individualist positions suggest a move away from sustainable development.

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- Educators are expected to fill the gap left by parents/families and the state and produce knowledgeable students.
- However, can educators be held responsible for the basic education that parents fail to give to their children?
- Educators need support, from both Government and the student population.

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- Every citizen has a right to appropriate access to a good education.
- The recognition of specific rights necessitates the acceptance of corresponding duties.
- We need ethics in the form of a moral law of duty.
- Notions of duty are founded on pragmatism.

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- The current trend of individualism reflects the state of rapidly developing nation states and relates to Milton Friedman's model of humanity.
- The latter model displays the individual as a self-interested egoistic being.
- An act is considered as ethical as long as it promotes the individual's long-term interests.

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- However, Friedman overlooks more positive dimensions of human activity like commitment, caring, hospitality and other values that virtue theorists would categorize as important.
- When an individual is expected to fulfill the expectations of his stakeholders, he cannot afford to act on the basis of his self-interests.
- This particularly applies to educators who are answerable to the community.

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- Debates on duty, responsibility and accountability are often located primarily at personal, communal and societal levels, mainly because of political interference in social and moral matters.
- An educator must consider the rights of students and his duties to them, beyond restrictions set by the state.
- If societies start fighting for greater autonomy and self-determination and make decisions that constrain national agendas, the state will face difficulty maintaining its narrow definition of social and ethical reality.

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- Ethical standards are well-established by developed nations interacting globally, implying that less developed and industrialized economies need to accept them as they are and raise their standards of ethics, to make a good impression at global level.
- Duty, like democracy, is difficult to situate.

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- A healthy community should be founded on a proper balance between rights and duties.
- Both rights and duties need to be taken care of, in any community.
- Established principles of duty must be strong enough to sustain a community.
- These must be balanced by a set of principles that preserve the values of individual rights.

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- Duty is a core dimension in the conceptualization of a healthy community, where citizens believe in and respect contractual notions of rights and duties.
- The concept of duty operates at different levels of concern and community, eventually pointing to global notions of ethics.
- There is wide consensus on the key role of education at imparting values.

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The main duties facing an educator include:

- Communicating appropriate messages clearly and on a timely basis to relevant audiences.
- Imparting knowledge to students.
- Operating as a learning facilitator.
- Contributing to the personal development of students through a flexible approach.
- Transmitting a cultural heritage that is necessary to equip the young people to handle the challenges they are likely to encounter in life.

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- All stakeholders concerned, educators, students and parents, should participate in the schooling process.
- If they do, they can bring a significant contribution to the learning process and to the personal development of school children.
- A proper synergy among the key parties would help educators accomplish their objective i.e. the life-wide formation of students.
- Efforts must be geared towards promoting socialization and real relationships.
- This would reduce the over-reliance on social media and the extent of individualism.

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To replace individualism:

- Educators must focus on proper interactions and relationships.
- Virtues and communitarianism are essential attributes that should be nurtured.

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This relates to Aristotle's assumptions:

- Human beings are essentially social beings.
- All people are inherently good.
- Human beings are already programmed with the moral software of justice, fairness, temperance, courage, and other virtues.

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- The above makes sense if relationships are the outcome of a shared vision and understanding.
- The virtues adopted by a particular society tend to guide people in decision-making.
- While parents pass on these values to their children, educators inculcate these to their students.

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- Virtue philosopher MacIntyre (1981) believes that the community contributes considerably to the moral development of the individual.
- Society should be viewed as a contextualized narrative within a moral tradition.
- MacIntyre's views relate to those of contemporary ethicists who view societal norms as a key determinant of behaviour.
- In MacIntyre's philosophical foundation for the importance of society in moral life, duty is a core concept.

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Kymlicka (1990) proposes three assumptions.

- First, the conception of duty is defined by the core values established by the community.
- Second, duties for the common good should have priority over individually chosen goods and duties.
- Third, the state should have an active role in implementing such prioritization.
- However, should the state be trusted in developing a concept of duty?

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- Virtue theory and communitarianism have important implications for education.
- While MacIntyre highlights the importance of education at imparting values, educators have a significant input in ensuring that the process works.
- Sociologist Etzioni (1993) builds on MacIntyre's model, and reflects on the specific values that educators should transmit to students.
- Aristotle, MacIntyre and Etzioni all emphasise the importance of virtues for a good communitarian life.

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- Logic should then be used to apply these values to particular contexts to fit specific situations.
- If educators get training in ethics, they will be able to determine what values to inculcate to students, to equip them for life.
- By tradition, educators limit moral education to teaching students to think autonomously.

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- Bottery (2000) recommends character education, based on instilling character virtues in students.
- The emphasis is on the promotion and practice of desirable virtues to help prepare students for life.

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Important principles to be taught include:

- Learning to say 'no.;
- Showing respect towards people one disagrees with.
- Empathy development.
- Applying wisdom when making choices.
- Moral problem solving.

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- The above gives priority to values like honesty, trust, integrity, self-respect and respect for others, self-discipline, moderation, diligence, respect for the law, a positive work ethic, to name but a few.
- Other useful values accepted universally include justice, freedom, truth, rationality, respect for the environment and hospitality.

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Other potential solutions:

- Schools can potentially learn from the army that is, from a hierarchical, authoritarian and undemocratic institution that has the specific objective of promoting its mission and imposing appropriate training programmes on its people.
- Need to provide educators with guidance to enable them to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- There should be a reasonable level of flexibility to give schools the opportunity to adapt the guidelines to fit their needs.

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- Guidance should encourage rigour, a formal approach and collaboration between schools, parents and the local community.
- Proper guidance adds credibility to measures targeting the life-wide development of students.
- Good behaviour should be modelled in schools.
- This highlights the need for a balanced concept of duty.

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- We must acknowledge the synergy between duty and rights.
- A society that provides rights will not survive if duties are given no recognition.
- The assertion of particular rights inevitably entails the acceptance of specific duties.

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Validating a right requires fulfilling 3 levels of duty:

1. The duty to avoid depriving someone of that right, i.e. the right to education.
2. The duty to protect an individual from being deprived of that right by someone else or societal forces.
3. The duty to provide aid to individuals who are deprived of access to that right.

(Shue, 1980)

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Therefore, the role of educators is to:

- Ensure that they provide students under their responsibility with a good education.
- Try their best to protect their students from anyone attempting to deprive them of a good education.
- Engage in support initiatives to improve the quality of education.

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- Devise strategies to provide alternative teaching and learning processes, if confronted with poor education practices.
- Protect students from guardians who might deny them chances of having good education.
- Take necessary action, legal, professional or otherwise, to help those deprived of the right to education.

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Conclusion

- Duty cannot be dissociated from rights.
- Duty and virtues are complementary in an education system where the objective is to equip students for life.
- The argument that every citizen has a right to proper access to a good education makes provision for an interdependent society where the recognition of specific rights necessitates the acceptance of duties in parallel.

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Conclusion

- The acceptance of duties to others implies a duty to exercise one's own rights.
- Educators should have the right to participate in decision making pertaining to education policies.
- Educators are best placed to make meaningful suggestions to management, the ultimate objective being to better attend to their students' immediate needs & improve the existing system.
- Along with educators' rights go participatory duties derived from students' rights.

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Conclusion

- Securing the rights of students implies a minimum of personal involvement on the part of educators.
- An educator's involvement may entail negotiating with relevant institutions and government bodies, so it might take a political perspective.
- Educators may find themselves burdened by specific obligations of care as these crop up unexpectedly.

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Conclusion

- If educators are to prepare students for life, they need to adopt a flexible approach that would best contribute to the development of their trainees.
- Attention must be paid to the needs of the global market.
- Students should be exposed to real-life issues to train them to resolve ethical dilemmas likely to be encountered in a professional setting.