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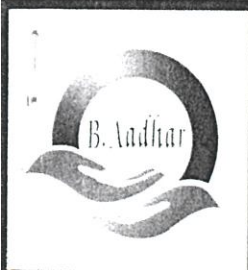
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Responding to Modern Times: A Constructive Model for the Teaching of Literature

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Our education system must appreciate that there is a possibility that the innate goodness of the education process may not percolate to every person through a bland study of subjects in the academia. Certain essential learning must take place alongside formal learning. For instance, formal education should make it possible for sensitivity to be developed to areas that are relevant to all social contexts and to every human being like sensitivity to human rights or to environmental concerns. This paper also provides with a constructive model that would enable the teaching of such issues through curricular subjects. An integrated approach has been suggested involving an improvised model of VDM & CAM for the teaching of literature. Besides, literature teachers can create one-act plays or conduct original games or provide and ask for analogies. All subjects offer ample scope for the integration of such issues and these tools should therefore be appropriated for our justified ends.

Keywords

Formal learning, Sensitivity, Human Rights, Environmental Concerns, VDM model, CAM model

Introduction:

Today the world is beset with new challenges in the form of new subjects, new fields and new outlooks. It is encouraging to learn that we don't have educational problems in a big way. But, our educational system certainly requires some innovations in order to overcome the negative environmental and learning difficulties that it is beset with as a consequence of the way we have organized society from a cultural, social, economic and technological perspective. We can say that we are facing a huge design failure, resulting in a curricular crisis.

Most of our challenges are unintended consequences of the way we have organized our curriculum. We have systemic challenges that cannot be addressed by working on only one or two of the multiple, interdependent problems. As Einstein said, 'We can't solve the world's problems at the level of thinking at which they were created.' Psychologists quip that 'one definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result'. We need 'out-of-the-box' thinking - transformative change in thinking, values and action.

An Overview of the Present Situation:

Traditionally, the inclusion of aspects of curriculum in academic programmes has been very much culturally defined, closely tied to the academic history and curricular tradition of the institution concerned. But present needs point towards incorporation of cross or interdisciplinary courses or multidisciplinary courses or perhaps even multiple or concurrent degrees. So it is essential to innovate



and experiment to transform teaching and learning in to a fascinating and rewarding experience for both the educators as well as the students. One task of higher education is to engage students in this process of overcoming the resistance to change, within and outside of academia. If our universities and colleges do not facilitate this then they basically fail to involve them in one of the biggest political challenges of our time. Moreover, if new thinking is to be encouraged, and if students are to develop in to worthy human beings, then we must resist temptations to exclude a wide suit of emerging ideas in favour of any other higher education development agenda. We also want them to be exposed to a diversity of ideas.

Arguments in Favour of a New Curriculum:

The criterion for an ideal curriculum would involve a politically correct curriculum according to student objectives, away from a sectarian and narrow vision of education, an ideal curriculum with the child at the centre of education having reduced emphasis on public examinations and drawing material from the child's surroundings in the form of local knowledge. Moreover, it is necessary to bridge the gulf between high culture and the lives of ordinary people as a primary need of a good curriculum.

Courses should be drawn up according to local needs while fulfilling the state and national goals. Besides, change in curriculum ought to be continuous and ongoing, affording revision every two or three years in order to incorporate the latest developments in the subject area. This would also require a simplification of the revision process. Questions basic in constructing a curriculum at any level of learning are: For whom is the curriculum? What curriculum is suitable for that age and for that country? What steps to follow in curriculum framing? There is every possibility of there being no consensus among educators themselves, as also between the educators and the politicians or government in these matters. Hence, the dual conflict: internal and external.

While education continues to provide many such conflicting ideas, it is a fact that the field of education, today, moves beyond formal school education to include adult education, continuing education and vocational education and is definitely zoomed towards lifelong learning. However, it is the need of the hour to replenish our system of formal education with much needed oxygen— Inculcation of sensitivity to areas that are relevant to all social contexts and to every human being. To cite an instance of this, pupils could be sensitized to human rights or to environmental concerns. While it is true, there will always be people who will violate the sanctity of human rights, animal rights, or the environment, at the same time, there will also be those who will accept the message, judge and find themselves responding positively. We must try and create an intelligentsia of adequate size and competence which comes from all strata of society and whose loyalties and aspirations are rooted in humane soil.

For this purpose, our educational system needs to be flexible enough to take in to consideration the changed dimensions of human life including the increased influence of extraneous factors like the media or westernized culture. Syllabus needs to be reconstrued to incorporate Human Right and Environmental issues in order to form balanced perception in the learner. They most certainly need to feel for others and not just be preoccupied with themselves. May be we can make a beginning in this direction by first and foremost inviting them to take stands on various issues through the platform of debates. We also need to join hands to rekindle angst against wrongs in society. However, in this context, I must warn against the other danger of turning the issues in to a skit, parodying interest in



these hapless lives while doing nothing to change them. This would create a gap between theory and practice. Such an irresponsible attitude would jeopardize the very backbone of the nation.

A Constructive Teaching Model:

Now how can such issues be taught through curricular subjects? Let us consider examples where such core issues can be brought in during the teaching of Literature. An integrated approach, that is an improvised model of VDM & CAM is suggested here. A flowchart of the same is as follows:

1. Present a situation where a Human Right or Environment issue is depicted, either being upheld or being compromised.
→ For instance while teaching Scarlet Letter, the issue of exhibiting a woman wearing the letter 'A' in the public square to punish her for being an adulteress may be taken up as a Human Right issue.
2. Prepare a questionnaire or alternatively generate a discussion in which questions are designed to lead systematically from a literary assessment of the nature of the problem to an assessment of the exact nature of conflict it brings about.
→ For instance in the above mentioned case, ask questions such as:
 - Is the character active or inactive? What makes you think so?
 - How do you feel the character is?
 - Which incident makes you feel like this?
 - Which dialogue reveals something about the character and personality of the speaker? Give two examples.
 - Is the character a product of society?
 - How does she/he appear to other characters?
 - Which dialogue shows conversational give and take?
 - Is he/she aware of his/her portrayal? Yes/ No Explain your answer.
 - How does he/she respond to society?
 - What type of person is the author in your opinion, based upon the story?
 - What do you think is the author's view?
 - Is this view realistic? Yes/No Explain your answer.
 - Would a person behave in real life like the character does in the story? Yes/ No
 - Give an example from real life where you have seen something similar.
3. Generate culture specific discussion about the problem.
→ This can be done by asking questions as follows:
 - Is the society reflected in this story unlike yours?
 - What dialogue points at the nature of work carried out by the character?
 - Similarly, is the character's nationality revealed? If so, how?
 - Are there any indications pertaining to a character's social position or social class? If so, which are they?
4. Drive home the idea about the existence of two perspectives sometimes in seemingly straight cases by providing analogies.
5. Ask them to take a stand.
6. Ask questions generalizing the stand taken by them and asking them the consequence of such an eventuality.
→ For instance, higher order questions such as "what will happen to this world if everyone were to think in this way?" can be asked.



This model of focusing on relevant issues can be used in literature even while teaching non-fiction. Here the questions asked could be as follows:

1. To which genre: biography/autobiography/essay/journal/children's writing/travelogue etc does this non-fiction article belong?
2. What is the nature of this article: Descriptive/ narrative or expository?
3. Which are the humorous or emotionally touching events recounted here?
4. Are there any indications of the time period involved?
5. Do you think the article is didactic in nature?
6. Identify the message being imparted through the article.
7. Are there any other issue that the author discusses? Elaborate.
8. Which part, if any, of this "non-fiction" article, appeared to be strikingly improbable to you?
9. Explain your response to this article?
10. In real life, what would you do in a similar situation?

Conclusion:


Literature, thus, offers ample scope for the integration of such issues. Moreover, one other thing that literature teachers can do is to create one-act plays in which a script can be drawn up describing our encounter with great literary persona. While doing so, we can touch upon grey areas which may be troubling the students. At the same time we can propagate various philosophies based on these issues to them. Often, they may get acquainted with various culture specific truths and responses. One more way through which awareness and understanding of such issues can be incorporated is through games. The games can be original. But to give an instance, at the end of a literature class, students may be provided with different Human Right or environmental issues and be asked to write about them from the view point of various characters. It is also possible to provide and ask for analogies. For example, one can present a quote or saying and expound its meaning by providing an analogy. Then the teacher could seek more analogies from the students. This may provide educators a natural platform for discussing the pros and cons of such issues.

Just as literature offers ample scope for the integration of such issues, other subjects too are sure to afford many such means. These tools should therefore be appropriated for our justified ends.

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