

Significance of personality development for a student



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Recently, a student approached me seeking help to resolve his personal problems. He was finding it difficult to concentrate during classes and scoring even pass marks in the exams had become a herculean task. A casual enquiry revealed that he was almost starving and severely malnourished because of his dislike for the hostel mess food. He would skip breakfast, eat sparingly at night and satisfy his appetite instead at the night canteen with coffee and noodles. This case is not very different from the stories of hundreds of students I have had the opportunity to counsel in the past six years.

I have always noticed that most of the students' academic problems can be traced to imbalances in the personal lifestyle which is often taken for granted. Many parents and teachers fail to make this simple connection and also to impress upon students the need for a balanced lifestyle. Indian society and the education system must veer away from the obsessive focus on marks & ranks, if we want to unleash the full potential of our youth and allow them to grow in a more natural way, pursuing their inborn talents and interests.

A host of common behavioural problems noticed in kids and adolescents can be prevented or cured if a foundation is laid at an early age towards holistic personality development. Multiple Intelligence In this article, I will make use of the concept of Multiple Intelligence developed by Dr. Howard Gardner[i], Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Dr. Gardner talks of different aspects of intelligence possessed by every human being and why it is important to develop each one of them to achieve a balanced personality.

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I will also attempt to illustrate how Indian tradition has always emphasized on such all round growth of the human being through the knowledge systems like yoga, ayurveda; through schools of philosophy & spirituality like the darsanas or vedangas and even through classical art forms like music or dance. Physical Intelligence Lack of regular physical activity and regime is perhaps the biggest epidemic afflicting the students in India today. The rat race for marks and ranks leaves little time or motivation for the average student to go out and spend some time at the gymnasium or in the playground.

The university campus where I reside has a massive playground, a well-equipped gym, a basketball court, a tennis court and to top it all, one of the biggest swimming pools in South India. And yet, hardly 500 students come out to play or exercise every day, out of the 5, 000 strong student community on this campus. No wonder then that a majority of the students who approach me with problems of poor concentration, motivation in studies are those who belong to the couch potato category.

Had Swami Vivekananda been with us today, he would have declared again what he told that group of emasculated youngsters who approached him with a request to learn the Bhagavad Gita under his guidance: " You will be nearer to heaven through football than by reading the Gita. " But there is a significant positive trend happening in schools and colleges across India. Just as the number of obese and overweight kids is on the rise, so is there a growing interest in systems of yoga.

What better proof of this than the fact that the mainstream political class in Tamilnadu which takes pride usually in hating everything that is rooted in Hindu tradition, has been instrumental in making yoga compulsory across all schools in the state! Or consider for example the experience of the Vivekananda Kendra in popularizing Surya Namaskara amongst schools all over India, particularly in Madhya Pradesh. Students who have attended the Yoga Vargas or the Samskara Vargas conducted by the Kendra vouch for the marked transformation in personality that the regular practice Surya Namaskara has effected in them.

There is palpable strengthening of will power and confidence in these students. Parents and Schools should therefore reconsider the unhealthy trade off which they ask students to make between the time given to physical activities and studies. Linguistic Intelligence Even a cursory look at the placement scenario in professional colleges makes it amply clear that all corporations today emphasize the need for good communications skills and they prefer recruits with better communication skills in English.

Communication skill has a great impact on our interpersonal relationships.

A person who can communicate effectively and clearly is less likely to create communication gaps which lead to serious misunderstandings. Good communication skills and proficiency in many languages improves one's reach amongst peers and enhances one's social acceptance and prestige. It is an interesting fact that great spiritual leaders like Swami Vivekananda were masters of the art of communication. India's rich literary and oral heritage is yet another illustration of this point; our forefathers understood the significance of developing linguistic intelligence.

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Musical Intelligence The study and practice of music was considered as a sacred form of worship in Indian tradition - Naadopasana. Perhaps, music is the most beautiful facet of human civilization. Sri Ramakrishna was particularly fond of Swami Vivekananda's melodious voice and his soulful singing. Sri Ramakrishna would attain Samadhi on listening to devotional music. I often come across students who are addicted to music. Many of them turn out to be class toppers! They listen to their favourite music even the night before their semester exams!

We do not need an expert in music therapy to tell us this obvious fact that music not only relaxes the mind but also brings about far reaching physiological and neurological changes in the body-mind complex over a period of time. **Interpersonal Intelligence** How do you measure a person's level of emotional maturity and growth? Primarily by the way he conducts himself in civilized society and the treatment he accords to others.

Corporations today emphasize again on relationship skills which are considered critically important for an individual to rise in the hierarchy of the organization.

A CEO with poor relationship skills is either a non-existent oxymoron or a disaster for the organization. All religious values are centred on building relationship skills on the basis of a spiritual understanding of what connects one human being to another. " The essence of religion is to be good and do good to others," said Swami Vivekananda. The Mahabharata declares Ahimsa to be the greatest dharma because the rishis perceived that all life is interconnected. You cannot harm others without harming yourself.

If this profound truth is impressed upon our students from a young age, there will not be much need for all the fuss we hear about value education today. Many social or national evils like corruption or caste discrimination are results of a lifestyle that seeks personal aggrandisement at the cost of and complete indifference to the plight of our fellow human beings. If only our education gives greater weightage to building relationship skills amongst students, the India of our dreams would not have to wait for the year 2020.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

Conventional psychology would look down upon an introvert as a person with poor relationship skills. Not today. Howard Gardner and new schools of thought have begun to understand the reason why Indians give such respect to Munis and Yogis who withdraw from the world. An introvert who spends much time trying to understand his deeper self will also become capable of understanding others from a compassionate viewpoint.

Intrapersonal Intelligence is the new marker developed to give due weightage to this important aspect of our personality development and grooming.

A person who runs away from his own self all the while trying to substitute his inner vacuum with external pursuits or superficial relationships is heading for a crisis. The extrovert's sense of identity and esteem is highly dependent on others' views of his personality. An introvert is a person who is striving to arrive at a state where he can feel good or be content without having to seek an external confirmation of his well-being. Logical Mathematical Intelligence

(IQ) Development of Logical Mathematical Intelligence is often given

disproportional weightage in the development of a student's personality.
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While IQ does play a significant role in the life of every human being, what was perhaps overlooked till recently was that IQ alone does not make a person complete nor is it the only parameter for measuring a person's potential for success or happiness in life. A person with a poor IQ may be more than compensated by a high emotional intelligence. This is the reason why we see many school dropouts becoming highly successful entrepreneurs in India whereas many IIM graduates disappear into oblivion after getting an MBA degree!

Conclusion We know through Swami Vivekananda's writings that he considered two things to be of great importance in personality development: a) Preference to the 'Heart' over the 'Head' b) The role of the Guru in shaping a student's personality and the importance of living in the proximity of the Guru or Gurugrihvasa. Swamiji's views based on Vedantic wisdom have stood the test of time. All that is destructive in human civilization is a result of a sharp brain with an undeveloped heart.

Human civilization suffers from an excess of materialistic IQ devoid of EQ and SQ. And the only place where a student can be systematically trained to nurture his EQ & SQ is at the gurukula under the supervision of a wise master. As a teacher, perhaps it would be self-righteous on my part to claim that a teacher plays the most vital role in a student's personal growth. But, as a student of the school of life, I cannot but reiterate this eternal law - only a spark can ignite another spark, only life can inspire another life.

Modern schools of thought like the Multiple Intelligence model discussed here further validate the wisdom that Vedantic knowledge and tradition have

bequeathed to us through Atmavidya and the Guru parampara. (The author is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Cultural Education Programme at Amrita University in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. He is a Trustee of the International Forum for India's Heritage and Resource Person for the Human Excellence Project of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Coimbatore Kendra. He is also a students' counsellor for the Samvedna Helpline, a project of the corporate socialresponsibilitywing of Tata Teleservices.)