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Understanding Spirituality and Values in Whole Child Development

Building Back Education Better Initiative Learning Hub Knowledge Submission for Theme 1

**Jaslika, Jet Education Services,
and KCCB**

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Introduction

JET Education Services facilitated an online working space, referred to as a Learning Hub, for the purposes of capturing insights into whole child development (WCD) to complement the Building Education Back Better (BEEB) Post Covid-19 initiative spearheaded by Porticus Africa. The members of the Learning Hub, Akili Television Network, Jaslika and the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) were Porticus grantees who identified learning themes in WCD to explore collaboratively over a ten-week period.

The first group from Jaslika and KCCB handled Theme one, *Understanding spirituality and values in education and its connection to whole child development*, which is introduced here. The team agreed to develop a paper and blog pieces to create awareness and to stimulate conversations among readers on the role of values and spirituality in WCD in the best interests of the child.

This document combines the different blogs that were produced.

BLOG 1. The conundrum of values-based education

a. Sustaining values in society

The world has made tremendous progress in connecting people and businesses; individuals are able to interact, exchange knowledge and cultures, among other things. In line with this, in the post COVID-19 era, most African countries have not transformed economically, putting improved human wellbeing at risk. This means that the countries and those living in adversity are not able to withstand shocks and recover when impacted by a disaster such as a pandemic, leading to a reversal in economic progress and human wellbeing ([Roberto, 2022](#)). In Kenya, for instance, there are no strong conditions such as strong entrepreneurial ecosystems that support innovation and firms entering the market or scaling up. Massive job losses occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic - 740,000 Kenyans lost their jobs in 2021 ([Wasike, 2021](#)), and the losses have not been reversed. Along with this, there is a rising demand for labour intensive, low level skills, but skills taught in the schools, especially technical and vocational skills, are not matching skills needed in the job market. Young people make up 37% of the working-age population in Africa, but 60% of the unemployed ([Ezekwesili, 2009](#)). The ancient 17th century proverb, 'a hungry man is an angry man' should be kept in mind: someone deprived of basic necessities will not be easily placated.

b. The big question

It is with this economic and wellbeing context in mind that I pose the questions: **Are values and spirituality important? And does the status of vulnerable households affect how we fight for our survival as human beings and how we reason and make decisions?**

The Oxford Dictionary defines spirituality as the “quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul, as opposed to material or physical things.” Spirituality can be said to mean being dedicated to something that you strongly believe in, like faith or religion, or even values and principles. With the challenges that people in adversity are facing, is it possible to be spiritual or maintain values? If yes, is one still able to practise values, for example, be honest, empathetic, compassionate, loving etc? Most people confuse religion with spirituality; some say they go together, some say they are independent. According to me, that's not an issue. When we talk about whole child development, keeping in mind the social status and economies of countries and households, is this something that we can truly sustain, or we must bring other actors into the conversation? The main aim of value-based education is to raise a well-rounded child who can be a responsible citizen –someone presentable, honest, trustworthy, dedicated to making change in the country and loving. Can a section of people practise nationally accepted values and other half 'sin'? What is the feeling when we see people who have killed or stolen money through corruption walk free? Yet we all want good lives where we can comfortably afford to satisfy our needs and wants.

According to the Cultural Atlas, in 2018, **the majority of Kenyans identified as Christian** (82.1% of the population), 47.7% as Protestant, 23.4% as Catholic and 11.9% as other branches of Christianity. Of the remaining population, 11.2% were Muslim, 1.7% traditionalists, 1.6% 'other' and religious affiliation of 0.2% was not specified ([Scroope, 2018](#)). In spite of being a Christian and religious country, in 2017, Kenya was ranked 143 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's (TI) corruption index. The high corruption levels in every sector of the economy and politics hinder development and endanger democracy and equality.

Is the corruption perpetrated by the majority Christians and/or minority Muslims and other religious affiliations or is it a computer error in reporting?

We all know how we like to merge religion and values and spirituality. For me, I believe in doing good because I want to, and because it is the right thing to do. The fight for people to live with values cannot be won unless everyone practises better behaviours guided by good and decent values. I think an economically unequal society spurs on unethical behaviour because of the survival temptations it comes with.

Conclusion

My conclusion on this is we need spirituality and religion to develop fully rounded children who are responsible citizens and have sound values; but it's not necessarily the only way. Of course, people have the right to choose their religion and all the affiliations they want, but for a people and a nation or community to grow, have businesses and sustain livelihoods, we must all have and practice values that are nationally accepted. We can have values without religion or any affiliations. All resources in the world are enough for each and every one, but because of lack of values, for example empathy, respect, love and compassion, we have inequalities in the world, more so economically. Therefore, I believe that values have to be practised, but for people to toe the line they must see equality in life chances and distribution of resources. This entails being included in decision making and having equal opportunities for schooling, jobs and other social amenities including health provided by the established government and private institutions, a place where no one sees themselves as being 'the others'. Ethical behaviour is expected from government authorities and politicians, businessmen and companies in the private sector. If we do not have equality and equity, then we'll have a situation where people have to choose to sleep hungry or sin; one can grow up in a society that is based on values, but when people mature and find themselves in an environment that is not conducive for survival or does not provide for basic human needs, then they are forced to forget and ignore what is good or bad because they want to survive.

As we advocate for children to grow up in an all-inclusive and child-friendly environment, we should also ask ourselves, after being a child why are people changing course as they enter adulthood? Is religion the answer? Spirituality? Or acting on values and having an equal environment? Or all? Phew!!

By Ernest

BLOG 2. The importance of inculcating values in students

Behind every successful child, is the learning of moral values

We are living in a 21st-century world or society where every sphere of life has been transformed. The values that were once tightly upheld in society have been strongly eroded and polluted. We live in a society where abnormal things like corruption, theft, and murder are being normalised, whilst the values like love, goodwill and empathy are strongly disregarded! The rain started beating down on us somewhere. In the past, everyone was charged with the responsibility of instilling moral values in society; parents and adults generally acted as parents to all children. But life has changed tremendously as the village has transformed to the extent that social media is taking deeper root in the lives of everyone. Cultures and beliefs have been eroded through acculturation and acquisition of new values and skills we are exposed to through social media.

Most students are focused largely on academic performance and mental ability. They barely understand the complexity of the social context and the moral values required to live their lives. Parents who are supposed to be the first custodians of moral values barely get time with their children as they are so busy at work. The learners, on the other hand, are so busy with school work to the extent that students leave for school in the wee hours of the morning and return very late, with intense takeaway assignments that overwhelm both parents and students alike.

We are raising students that believe too much in 'passing' and getting As, to the extent that skills are not learned but rather better grades are desired. We have seen fake doctors tending to patients who eventually die in their hands because of a lack of skills; we have seen buildings collapsing as a result of engineers who are not able to apply their skills and practical experience; and we have witnessed preachers exhibiting immoral and questionable behaviours. But what could be the cause of all these fiascos? According to the research done by the Education Task Force (2001)¹ On formulation of school rules, there is lack of ownership of rules, resulting in resentment and ultimately open defiance. Some school rules were undemocratic, vague and oppressive and at times applied selectively. In some cases, these rules were not documented and schools were operating on existing traditions.

According to research undertaken by the research working group (2022), The current curriculum being implemented in Kenya, known as the competency based curriculum (CBC), champions the inclusion of values in the education system. Further, it has been noted that the key people in reinforcing and championing the inculcation of values includes parents, teachers, church leaders and the society at large. When the same values are being taught at home, at church, and also at school, children and adults alike will see the value of having good and decent values as they will be reflected in the behaviour of all concerned. Values help learners to make morally informed choices for work and life. They also help them to exist and coexist in a complex society with community members with unique characters. A child who is raised with strong moral values should be able to display the same values at work and even in their character.

In conclusion, teaching values in school will help students to develop their skills and their overall personality. They will get to know about their obligations, different cultures, and what is right and what is wrong. Values

¹ GOK. (2001). Report of the Task Force on Student Discipline and Unrest in Secondary Schools. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

help to have an understanding of what is morally and ethically right and wrong and define a proper way to behave in society.

By Olivia

BLOG 3. Values teaching in schools

c. We need to set an example

Values build character and are fundamental in helping young people develop into responsible adults and citizens. Teachers and the community therefore must practise values in their day-to-day endeavours because children watch, and they learn from what they see from the adults. The current curriculum is packed with subjects and activities that are exam-oriented. This leaves almost no room for values, teaching and practice. When a school brings children together to work towards a common goal, they will grow to be the best that they can be. Children like to copy what their friends and adults do. I remember when I was younger, I thought smoking was so 'cool' because 'men' did it, as I saw it; so one day, I followed a man who was smoking, waiting for him to throw the almost finished cigarette away for me to try it out. My friends and I went to the extent of smoking the dried stems of maize as cigarettes.

d. Teaching values and putting them into practice

As much as values and character are in the hidden curriculum, they need to be overtly and explicitly taught. They need to be spread through all the subjects to teach our children how to be resilient, tolerant, and have respect. Schools need to involve the parents in the movement toward their ethical goals. Different schools have different modes of conveying values. For example, some schools select values ambassadors in different classes who then champion values and keep a check on their classmates as peers. Some teachers use stories and even go to the extent of having a value of the week and a value of the month. These help the children to start practising, knowing and understanding what is good and what is wrong.

e. Understanding that children learn through various modalities such seeing (visual), touching (kinaesthetic), and hearing (auditory)

b. Being visual

Surroundings are important to children, and their surroundings can help them develop good attitudes and positivity toward learning. The use of visuals will help children learn and expand their knowledge and skills. Schools can use 'talking walls' to convey messages on values and character.

c. Being auditory

The way in which children are spoken to is a great indicator of how they will interact with and speak to others. Children mimic adults all the time and their use of tone, pitch and vocabulary correlates directly to the language and tone used around them.

a. Being kinaesthetic

Children respond to the senses of feel and touch and are very likely to act out what they see, hear and feel in their environments. So it is important that the behaviour of the adults around them is as it is expected to be by society.

a. Conclusion

I think it is possible to have a whole rounded child who grows up to be a responsible citizen and practices universally accepted values. However, from the examples given above, I think for

values teaching to be effective resources are needed and a change of mindset. We need to shift from being exam-oriented and we must also invest in our schools in terms of space for learning including playgrounds, safe spaces and surroundings around schools, provision and equitable distribution of books teachers, and all schooling necessities, especially to schools in the non-formal settlements and ASAL areas and those in adversity. When resources are distributed equally then goals can be achieved easily, and we will have a level 'playing ground' in terms of life chances and opportunities; as I believe lack of equity and equality in education and resources is a critical contributor to the corrosion of values in this country.

–By Ernest

BLOG 4. Inculcation of moral values in learners

Human beings are social beings who need to exist and coexist in the ecosystem. For them to co-exist, every one of them has to wear a hat of values acceptable in that particular society so that weird/deviant characters are trimmed and accepted standards of behaviour upheld. Human values are learned and taught in different ways and places within society. Some institutions stand out as the major spaces for moral authority. The church and the schools are examples of distinctive authorities that we can quickly think of.

The meaning of and how to impart values have changed a great deal in modern days. The school is the number one space where values can be imparted as children spend most of their time there. They learn a lot of things, whether directly or indirectly, from teachers, other students and stakeholders or through the curriculum.

Introducing value-based education can have a great impact on a society as most children spend their entire days at school. The learners are benefiting academically while still acquiring the best values that guide and help their social life. This has a significant impact on children's personalities, character and morale.

The church, on the other hand, plays a great role in the inculcation of values; it has an important role to play in society and its institutions. Most schools are still sponsored by the church and they follow the values and principles prescribed by the various churches.

According to the research that was conducted by the working group research team (2022), values can be imparted in two main ways: informal and formal. Some of the ways to inculcate moral values include:

a. Modelling good behaviour

The teachers and parents should be role models that learners can emulate in all that they do. Exhibit desirable behaviours that give meaning to society and life.

b. Practicing consequence management for bad behaviour

Teachers and parents should ensure that children are taking responsibility for their actions. Equally, parents and teachers should be responsible for ensuring that children are brought up with the right values.

b. Develop a guideline on basic morals and values

There should be guiding principles on both morals and values acceptable in society. This guides the standard behaviours and helps to monitor and identify what works and what does not work.

c. Share moral experience

The experiences shared by people should also provide an opportunity for teaching of values as individuals will be able to see how the moral values people display have helped them to succeed. .

d. Bedtime stories

Adults can read or tell children bedtime stories with moral lessons at the end. The bad characters in the story should be punished while the good characters are rewarded.

e. Communicate clearly and effectively

In communication, moral values can be identified and noticed. Someone who upholds moral values will exhibit it even in their speech. Teachers and parents should teach their children to always speak with piety and respect.

f. Integrating values in the course of study

For teachers teaching different subjects, it is always good to throw in a few value-based lines when delivering content.

g. Integrating values in extracurricular activities

While children are taking part in extracurricular activities, the teacher should be sure to teach them certain relevant values – for instance, when one of them gets injured, the teacher can involve the rest of the learners in taking care of the injured one by showing sympathy, love and caring etc. They can help with the cleaning of the wound and bandaging.

h. Build up a values-consciousness through age-appropriate narratives

While teaching narratives or stories, the teacher can highlight values from the story or narration. –

By Olivia

BLOG 5. Spirituality and whole child development

Our societal structures are held by the tight fabric that informs our behaviour and reasoning. These are known as societal values. Some values are almost universal though their usage varies from culture to culture and from society to society. Values inform our behaviours and influence our character and perspective towards life and our neighbours. Society prescribes values that guide the standard and moral behaviours of its members. These values vary from person to person; for instance, what is deemed as unfit in the Kenyan context may be seen as fit in Nigerian culture or Western culture. In most African societies, being gay and lesbian is still seen as obscene behaviour, thus going against the acceptable societal laws, while in some Western cultures, it is even allowed by the law. One's judgement and principles guide what is important.

Spirituality on the other hand can be referred to as the belief in the supernatural realm, something beyond the ordinary. When we say someone is spiritual, we mean that they are acting in ways that conform to their beliefs, either religious magisterium or supernatural standards of beliefs. Spirituality is the belief in the powers beyond human understanding. For instance, we believe in God whom we consider our creator and whose powers are beyond human understanding.

Notwithstanding, spirituality is affected by context because different people have different spiritual beliefs. For instance, Muslims believe in their God and values based on what is prescribed in their holy books and culture.

b. How then do children acquire the values and who is involved?

Acquisition or inculcation of values has no exact timing and formula. We start from the very basic unit in the society where a child is born and presented to the world which already has prescribed values and standards of living. The child, therefore, is expected to adjust to the world and learn the accepted codes of conduct. Home is where values and spirituality are nurtured first because that is where the child finds himself/herself. For example, love is considered a value, and humility is a desirable value. Killing, on the other hand, is categorised as an absolute no-no and adultery is an unacceptable vice. According to the Bible, killing deprives the other person of the life freely given to them by God. When Cain killed Abel out of jealousy, God was angry with him and even cursed him. From this story, we find values that are drawn directly from the holy book that the Christians use. Indeed, even for the atheist and the Islamic faith, murder has no place and the punishment for murder is dire.

From home, a child finds themselves interacting with other children and institutions as they grow up. The most immediate are their neighbours and peers and religious institutions. Children learn a myriad of values both good and bad from their parents and the people they are interacting with. Spirituality then sets in when the child goes to church and is exposed to societal values and learns about supernatural beings and the dogmas established for the participants. The values learned at home are reinforced at the church and even more values and spirituality are learned there. Most of the values are extracted from the holy books. For instance, the holy Bible talks about love and forgiveness, and when the child is taught how love manifests itself in Christian life, he/she can easily implement this in society.

The child is then presented to the learning institution where he/she meets different sets of people – teachers, workers, students and parents. Here, the child learns to conform to the values prescribed by the school which resonate with societal values. This is where the child can learn, relearn or unlearn values or vices instilled earlier on because meeting new sets of people means some values or vices may be diluted or extinguished. Teachers are central and key players in the inculcation of the values as they are the drivers of learning and

the key people to whom the child is entrusted throughout the day. Many learners will tell you “the teacher said, or the teacher is right”; hence, teachers play key roles in the success of what a child becomes.

c. What are we therefore saying?

Spirituality and values are intertwined because we derive values from our spirituality and religion. Teachers, parents and society at large therefore, need to agree on what values inform the kinds of desired behaviours best suited to the prosperity and growth of Kenya?

-By Olivia

d. Credits

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