

Nas. Ond.-raad,
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THE NORM IN EDUCATION (RESUMÉ)

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The importance of the norm in education has increased in direct proportion to the growth of a spirit of permissiveness in society.

Norms questioned by many.

There are various norms which apply in our system of education, and it is worthwhile noting that two of these are specifically laid down in the act according to which we operate, Act No. 39 of 1967, as amended: our education shall have a Christian character, and our education shall have a broad national character.

It is, however, necessary to get a clear perspective before entering into details.

In the course of time experts have devoted attention to the aims and objects of education. This has given rise to an enormous amount of literature, and to a number of philosophies of education, e.g. the naturalistic philosophy, the idealistic, the pragmatic and the phenomeno-logic. Each of these has its own definitions and interpretations.

In any philosophy of education it is essential to have clarity about its main point/points of departure. The question is: What does it aim at? And how does it propose to achieve its aims? In this connection the idea of the norm is of fundamental significance.

Assuming that the teacher/pupil relationship is sound, one may ask: What does the teacher aim to achieve with reference to the pupil? (The teacher/pupil relationship in this case being tantamount to the accepted idea of the subject/object relationship).

The teacher may subscribe to one, or more, of a variety of views.

He may wish e.g. to apply the analytical approach. He may subscribe to the theory that, in order to understand properly a problem or a given piece of work, one must first of all analyse it into its parts so that, from a knowledge of the parts, an understanding of the whole will be derived. Although a good deal may be said in favour of this approach, it will probably be found lacking in real educational content.

Or the teacher may subscribe to the view that education will achieve the best results when the necessity of proper, clear description of objects or ideas is stressed, - the pupil to be taught to observe accurately, to think clearly and to describe correctly. This approach (so the theory goes) when applied to the fields of material and spiritual things, will best further the ideals of education. Also this view has its merits, but it is, no doubt, somewhat one-sided and does not provide sufficiently for the shaping of the mind and the building of character in the pupil.

Or the teacher may prefer the critical approach. The pupil must be taught to view his material in a critical light, to probe deeply with a critical eye and to establish weaknesses. This will then help to sharpen the mind and to produce intelligent citizens who will be real assets to society. One must agree that also this concept has its merits, but it does run the risk of producing young men and women with a rather negative attitude to society.

It is essential, above all other things, in education to apply the idea of the norm. Analysis, description and criticism, excellent though they are, will not suffice. Educationists must have clarity about their norms, norms which are regarded as proper and correct for South Africa - and these norms must also be applied, and applied consistently.

A good education not only analyses into component parts, not only describes processes, establishes weaknesses; it states above all how things should be; it stresses what is normative and helps young people to distinguish between right and wrong, between good and evil. The good teacher sacrifices a good deal of time and energy to do this; the really great teacher becomes in himself norma (the rule), because his colleagues and those that follow after him, are inclined to rate and test views and practices using him as their yardstick.

The presence of clear and healthy norms in education ensures that young people will not be educated in a spiritual vacuum; on the contrary, they will be educated in a purposeful, positive way, to become strong, spiritually and intellectually, and to stand firm in the service of their people and their country.

What these norms are, or should be, is another matter, but it is clear that they should be rooted in the deeper, spiritual values of Western civilization in general, and South Africa in particular. In the teacher/pupil relationship (the classroom situation or the educational process) these norms emanate mainly from the teacher, so that it follows that the teacher must be equal to the task. It is possible that norms represented by different teachers, with differences in "Weltanschauung", may differ, but it is reasonable to expect that they will be in keeping with our common Western and South African spiritual heritage.

J.T. Adams said: "There are obviously two educations. One should teach us how to make a living, and the other how to live". We obviously prefer the latter; it cannot be carried out without well tested, time honoured norms.

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