Submission Paper for UN EPR Contest Question: “So how to promote the development of these critical skills for a better life in the future?”

Title:

The Inculcation of a Universal Mutual Respect and Appreciation of All Peoples: A Consequent Creation of Critical Skills Learning as a By-Product

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Growing up in Singapore, a tiny city state in Southeast Asia which prides itself on its economic success, it has also resulted in the heavy focus of personal wealth as a main assessment of one’s position and success in life. It is not at all uncommon that when we are young, our teachers and parents teach us things that are not exactly respectful of certain occupations, such as saying “if you do not study hard you may end up being a dirty rubbish cleaner”.

Singapore is also a country which despite priding itself as being a harmonious multi ethnic society, sees strong ethnic segregation, notably seen in how in our identity card we have a section on “race” affiliation, amongst a host of all other tell-tale signs.

You might wonder the reason for all these examples, but they are what exemplify the exact message I am trying to bring across. What lacked in my education system, along with many others around the world, are an inculcation of the values of mutual respect as well as appreciation of all other peoples, regardless of ethnicity, gender, social class and nationality etc.

The next question would probably be how this is related to the development of critical skills for the betterment of life, as this seems to be simply teaching moral values. With regards to such, I will now formally start my explanation.

Critical skills for the betterment of life include a whole array of things, ranging from creativity, entrepreneurial skills, self-motivation to intercultural understanding. In my opinion, these are skills which would itself come about naturally, as a by-product of the inculcation of mutual respect and appreciation in our education systems.

When one learns of mutual respect and appreciation of everyone, it is not just a simple issue of accepting everyone as equal, but also an eventual realization that in reality, not everyone seems “equal”, and question and learn why such is so. In a way, this is a situation of positioning oneself in relation to society, and through there be able to create a meaningful understanding of the situation, with a consequent result of a development of critical life skills in the process.

To illustrate, back to the example of learning to respect all people regardless of occupation, a child can learn how rubbish cleaners are really important to the functioning of our society, such that without them our living conditions would drastically worsen in terms of hygiene. But at the same time, the child will also eventually question why they do not seem to enjoy as much societal esteem as doctors for example. This will help them critically analyse the situation to understand why such is so. From there a meaningful understanding will be developed, and possibly the child may eventually in the future go a step further in trying to improve on the situation of rubbish cleaners, such as creating ways in which they can do their duties more efficiently through proposed upgrading of the skills of rubbish cleaners, where they would learn to use technology to carry out their work more efficiently. From
here on, rubbish cleaners may actually become seen as even more important, as now they are “skilled” workers.

Through this example, we see that through such inculcation, the child develops critical self-reflection skills, and learns to better understand others. The child can also learn to form new ideas from his knowledge, and seek ways to improve the situation. Such is also entrepreneurship thinking in the process. The same can be applied to an inculcation of mutual respect and appreciation of all other types of people.

To achieve such a result however, I would like to emphasize that by inculcating; I do not simply mean orally telling the students. If only such is done, hardly any critical skills would be developed, but rather it would just be part of the mundane syllabus at school. Inculcating such values means interactive discussions on the issue, as well as physically allows the students to immerse in the conditions of other peoples. Such could include homestays in a family of other ethnic background, or job shadowing under a blue collared worker.

Eventually with proper inculcation of mutual appreciation and respect for all peoples, students can then achieve a meaningful understanding and be able to reflect upon it, resulting in the critical skills coming about simply as a by-product.