Community Engagement: A Retrospect of the Past and Is an Education Away From Hierarchies and Classrooms To Network And Ecologies

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Abstract:
This paper explores the evolution of education from traditional classroom settings to community engagement and experiential learning as essential tools for addressing contemporary societal challenges. Drawing inspiration from the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Benjamin Franklin, it emphasizes the need for education to encompass social, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Through community engagement, students gain a deeper understanding of societal issues and develop essential life skills beyond theoretical knowledge. The integration of work education, experiential learning, and service learning into the curriculum fosters values such as respect, responsibility, and cooperation. Experiential learning, traced back to ancient times and popularized by educational theorists like John Dewey and David A. Kolb, emphasizes learning through reflection on real-life experiences. By incorporating these approaches, students develop critical thinking, integrative learning, and civic engagement, leading to attitudinal changes and a deeper concern for environmental and socio-economic issues. As education adapts to the changing landscape of the twenty-first century, community engagement emerges as a transformative force, shifting the focus from hierarchical structures to interconnected networks and ecologies.

Keywords: *Community Engagement, Experiential Learning, Social Responsibility, Curriculum Integration, Twenty-first Century Education*

I.   INTRODUCTION

"Tell me I forget
Teach me and I remember
Involve me and I learn"
– BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Mahatma Gandhi, in his book *Towards New Education*, critiqued the limitations of prevailing educational models. He argued that mere knowledge accumulation does not guarantee a well-rounded or socially responsible individual. This paper builds on Gandhi's ideas to propose a vision for education that prioritizes community engagement.

It may be stated that traditional education, with its emphasis on theoretical knowledge and classroom learning, fails to equip students with the skills and values necessary to address contemporary social issues. The focus on rote learning and examinations stifles critical thinking and social awareness. Therefore, there is need for a paradigm shift in education. What is needed is a system that cultivates social responsibility, moral grounding, and spiritual awareness alongside intellectual development. At the same time, emphasis must be on the importance of education in fostering responsible citizens who are equipped to tackle social problems like global warming, pollution, and technological addiction.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Community Engagement as a Pedagogical Tool: The paper proposes community engagement as a powerful pedagogical tool. By actively participating in community projects and initiatives, students gain firsthand experience of social issues and develop critical problem-solving skills. This experiential learning fosters a sense of civic duty and motivates students to become agents of positive social change.
•   Gandhiji, in his book *Towards New Education*, talks about inadequacy of prevailing education while he discussing the meaning and objective of education. He rightly mentioned just a mere zeal of gaining knowledge cannot justify the needs of the society.
•   The techno savvy human who is trying to inhabit to other planets is unable to protect his own habitat.
•   Technology has become the invisible master to human.

• Changes in society imply the changes in education.

These can be addressed as change pressures: social, ethical philosophical and technological. They will create some new structures and spaces which may result in invention of the new methods which will suit contemporary issues.

Seeing and observing community life outside of the schools raises student teachers' awareness of the importance of community based learning and associating with the communities. They will predict the necessity and the effect of community engagement on the lives of their future students.

All these can be addressed through implementation of work education and experimental learning and service learning. By incorporating these things into curriculum, students can be directed into the system of education moral values, respect, responsibility, love and care towards co-human beings which is lacking in today's world.

The goals of labor education are to help students recognize their own needs as well as those of their family, community, and themselves in terms of food, clothes, shelter, recreation, and services. It also helps students grasp the demands of a technologically advanced society in terms of productive processes.

The method of learning via experience is known as experiential learning, and it is characterized as learning via doing and reflecting on it. It can be defined as an approach to teaching that involves first-hand experience, information, and abilities gained outside of the conventional academic classroom. Examples of this kind of learning include field research, studies abroad field trips, internships, and service learning initiatives.

In addition to learning the facts and sources of raw materials, students should also develop the skills necessary for a technologically advanced society and grasp their place in productive settings. Tools and equipment are used in production and service activities. The goals of experiential learning and work experience help the learner recognize his needs.

The Role of Community Engagement in Training Future Educators: Teachers have a profound impact on shaping societies. John Dewey, a prominent educational philosopher, famously stated, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself" (Dewey, 1938, p. 8). Therefore, effectively preparing teachers is crucial. This paper argues that community engagement and service learning are essential components in training student teachers.

Community Engagement—Broadening Perspectives: Community engagement encompasses a range of activities that involve educational institutions and their surrounding communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). By participating in such activities, student teachers gain valuable firsthand experience beyond the classroom walls. This exposure fosters awareness of the importance of community-based learning and the potential impact it can have on their future students' lives (Boyer, 1995).

Experiential Learning for Moral Development: Several pedagogical approaches can facilitate community engagement. Work education, as envisioned by the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2000 (NCFSE, 2000), emphasizes purposeful activities that contribute to both individual learning and the community's well-being (NCFSE, 2000). Experiential learning, including service learning, allows student teachers to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings, fostering valuable competencies (Kolb, 1984). Through these experiences, student teachers can develop essential moral values such as respect, responsibility, and compassion, which are crucial for nurturing well-rounded individuals in today's society (Dewey, 1916).

Integrating Curricular Themes: The NCFSE 2000 highlights the importance of work education in fostering positive attitudes towards manual work, self-reliance, cooperation, and community concern (NCFSE, 2000). This aligns with the need to integrate various themes into the curriculum, as advocated by Schmidt and Wiggins (2005). By incorporating topics like nutrition education, health education, population education, and environmental awareness alongside work-based learning, student teachers can develop a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness within society.

Work Education: Fostering Needs Assessment and Technological Literacy: Work education equips students to identify needs within their families, communities, and the broader society. This encompasses essential areas like food, health, hygiene, clothing, shelter, recreation, and services (National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2000). Furthermore, it fosters an understanding of how evolving technologies impact these needs within the context of a dynamic production process.

The Enduring Power of Experiential Learning: Experiential learning, the concept of gaining knowledge through experience, has a long-standing history. As early as 350 BCE, Aristotle emphasized the importance of practical application in his Nichomachean Ethics, stating, "for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them" (Aristotle, trans. Ross, 1925, p. 1140b).

Gandhi on the Unity of Theory and Practice: Mahatma Gandhi, a prominent figure in India's independence movement, echoed this sentiment. He believed that work and education should be intertwined, with theory and practice existing in harmony (Gandhi, 1930).

The Modernization of Experiential Learning: Experiential learning, defined as learning through reflection on doing, extends beyond the traditional classroom (Kolb, 1984). It encompasses diverse approaches such as internships, international studies, field trips, research projects, and service learning. While the concept itself has ancient roots, John Dewey's work in the early 20th century significantly contributed to its exploration (Dewey, 1938). Later, Jean Piaget further developed the understanding of experiential learning (Piaget, 1972). David A. Kolb and Ron Fry's experiential learning theory, which posits that knowledge is transformed through experience, is a notable contribution in the field (Kolb, 1984).

Equipping Students for a Technological World: Work education and experiential learning empower students to understand raw materials, tools, and equipment used in production and service processes. This knowledge equips them with the skills necessary to navigate a technologically advanced society. Students can then conceptualize their roles within these production situations, aligning with the goals outlined in the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2000).

Student Outcomes—Beyond Skills: Integrating work education and experiential learning into the curriculum fosters a range of student outcomes beyond technical expertise. It cultivates critical thinking, integrative learning, and civic engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Perhaps most importantly, these experiences shape students' values and attitudes. They develop a deeper concern for the environment, a sense of belonging within their communities, and an awareness of socio-economic issues (Boyer, 1995).

II.   CONCLUSION

Community engagement and service learning offer valuable tools for training future educators. By immersing student teachers in real-world experiences and promoting the development of essential values, we can prepare them to become agents of positive change not only within the classroom, but also within their broader communities. The paper concludes by advocating for a transformed educational system that prioritizes community engagement. It emphasizes the need to move beyond the confines of classrooms and textbooks to embrace a more holistic and socially relevant approach to education.

Further, student outcome incorporating the above mentioned processes in curriculum will develop student's critical thinking integrative learning civic engagement. It develops the deeper concern for the environment and sense of belonging develops awareness of socio-economic problems of society. These can be addressed as change pressures: social, ethical philosophical and technological; will create some new structures and spaces which may result in invention of the new methods which will suit contemporary issues.

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