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Heralding Character Education in Schools: The Role of Integrity Clubs in Kenya

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Abstract:

Confucius once said- to put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order, to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order, we must first cultivate, our personal life; we must first set out hearts right.

Education is of no value to a nation or humanity if it does not identify, expose, clarify and transmit the core of shared values that under grid that society. We enroll our children in school that they may grow and learn in stature, wisdom and conduct. That they may acquire knowledge, skills, values and right attitudes and learn to do things, learn to relate with others and learn to become. We enroll them in school that they may become responsible for their lives, be respectful to themselves and others, that they may become useful members of society and that the society may look up to them tomorrow. Both African indigenous education and missionary education believed in the teaching of good morality, teaching on how to live in order to be accepted and respected members of the society. Accepted values and norms such as honesty, generosity, diligence hospitality and respect for elders and others were part of the civic education.

This paper is premised on the belief that we cannot only teach our children how to read and write, but that we should be bold enough to teach them the difference between right and wrong. The paper discusses the role of integrity clubs in promoting character education in Kenya. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part gives a preview of the purpose African indigenous education and that of modern education, while the second part delves into the philosophical understanding of the purpose of education. The third part of the paper discusses the meaning and purpose of character education, while the fourth part of the paper discourses on the role of integrity club in promoting character education in Kenya.

The paper contends that character education is an antidote to tackling the challenge of declining moral values and the vice of corruption confronting the nation. Character education can no longer be overlooked in modern education hence the need to re-engineer character education in-order to get back to the fundamentals of education.

Keywords: Character, education, corruption, integrity, values, Moral decline integrity club

1. Introduction

Education existed as early as man's history. There was the African Indigenous Education and then came contemporary education brought about by missionaries. African Indigenous Education was for life. It was availed to all, took place anytime and anywhere-and was relevant to everyday living. African indigenous education was holistic: it enabled children to acquire practical skills such as cooking, hunting, fishing, pottery, birthing animals, preparation and administration of herbal medicine, it provided for effective adjustment and adaptation to the environment. Individuals learnt about weather patterns, landscape, plants and animals. It laid emphasis on virtues such as integrity, honesty, hard work, respect, responsibility and truthfulness, humility, tolerance, love, hospitality, compassion and cooperation among others. It left no room for vices to develop. Vices such as stealing, dishonesty, immorality, disrespect and laziness were discouraged through punishment, naming, shaming and ridicule. Those who imparted knowledge did so by personal example. The source of wealth and property for anyone in society was known by all. Traditional African education was concerned about the character of persons; it was concerned with what kinds of persons were being established in society. Unlike, African indigenous education, missionary education was formal, structured and organized; it was often undertaken in a school in a classroom by a trained teacher. The main objective of the missionary education was to teach how to read and write and spread the gospel.

Both indigenous and missionary education aimed at preparing the young generation into a useful adult life, bringing up an individual as a responsible person in the society, equipping individuals with relevant survival skills as per their environment and transmitting culture to the young generation. The teaching of these values was to guard against such vices as jealousy, greed, corruption, telling lies, and uncaring attitudes. Unfortunately, modern educators have placed more emphasis on competence than character. The moral fiber in the African society today seems to have weakened, so weak that human dignity, courtesy, honour, hard work, honesty, trust, decorum, courtesy, and respect even for self-have been thrown through the window. Values have been inverted. Jealousy, corruption, greed, selfishness, promiscuity, and

self-seeking behaviors have become the overall base of life. Love and care for fellow human beings, respect for elders, standing for the truth, role modelling seems to have taken a back seat at home and in school. What could explain the decline in morals? Could the shift be explained by our education system, globalization, technology and the desire to improve the personal amenities? Could the search for material well-being vis a vis relational and spiritual well-being (the issue of the dollar before man) explain? This dent in integrity calls for character education.

To reverse the situation, Kenya has taken far-reaching steps to enact laws that influence the conduct of its citizens. The Constitution of Kenya, 2010 sets the standards of moral and ethical conduct expected of public servants and the general public. Article 10(2) of the Constitution lists the values that all Kenyans should espouse; Public Service Values and Principles (Article 232) spells out the conduct expected of public officers and Chapter six of the Constitution on leadership and integrity enumerates guiding principles that state and public officers should demonstrate. The Public Officers Ethics Act, 2003 provide for a code of conduct and ethics for public officers. But, the question as to whether character can be adequately legislated remains to be answered.

This paper therefore, focuses on the need to re-engineer character education in Kenya in-order to get back to the fundamentals of education. Education is of no value to a nation or humanity if it does not identify, expose, clarify and transmit the core of shared values that under grid Kenyan society. Unfortunately, the pursuit for academic education has dealt a blow to character education.

2. Philosophical Foundation on the Purpose Of Education

Have you ever wondered whether education is fulfilling its purpose? This section espouses on the purpose of education. Universally, there are two fundamental goals of education: acquisition of knowledge and character development. The first goal is to provide learners with the knowledge they need to function well in society. This requires a strong academic program. The second and equally important goal is to help young people develop good character, in other words, help them become good citizens. Education experts agree that one of the purposes of education is to cultivate human minds with values and principles that help to distinguish between wrong and right. It in line with this that Wynne and Walberg (1985) too contended that to serve their rightful role in society, schools need to focus jointly on the educational goals of character development and academic learning. According to Wynne and Walberg, academic competence and character development are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

Many education philosophers and great scholars have been thinking, writing, debating and dialoguing on the purpose of education. Using different words and laying emphasis to different aspects of education, they had this to say. The purpose of education is the transmission of wisdom, knowledge, habits, aspirations and experience of the society from one generation to the next with a view of preparing the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation and its maintenance or development (Plato, Julius Nyerere). Mortimore Adler (1980s), and Arthur W. Foshay, (1991) suggested three objectives of children's schooling: the development of citizenship, personal growth or self-improvement, and Occupational preparation.

According to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1948): Education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: utilitarian (functional) and a moral function. The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. He therefore advanced that "intelligence is not enough. "Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education." —King argued that if we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close minded, unscientific, illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. Be careful, "brethren!" Be careful, teachers!

The debate about the purposes of education never seems to end. Recently Wisconsin Governor, Scott Walker tried to change the mission statement of the University of Wisconsin to focus exclusively on workforce development. He was proposing to remove words in the state code that command the university to "search for truth" and "improve the human condition" and replacing them with "meet the state's workforce needs." It is said that Walker backed off when the issue became public and sparked intense criticism from academics and others, but the issue remains a topic of international debate.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) sums up the purpose of education in four powerful phrases namely: Learning to Know; Learning to Do; Learning to Live Together and Learning to Be. The Commission powerfully re-asserted a fundamental principle: education should contribute to every person's complete development - mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic, appreciation and spirituality. All people should receive in their childhood and youth an education that equips them to develop their own independent, critical way of thinking and judgement so that they can make up their own minds on the best courses of action in the different circumstances in their lives.

3. What Is Character?

Different authors define the word character differently. The word character comes from an ancient Greek verb 'charakter' which means "to engrave" or to 'mark'. The Merriam Webster thesaurus defines character as the mark, attributes or aggregate qualities that makes a person or group of persons different from others or as something that sets an individual from others of the same kind. We can talk of the character of a nation, of a people, a community, a group, a leader or an individual. So our character refers to the distinctive qualities that distinguish us from others.

The following five aspects would help us understand what character is. 1). Character is the inner and outer quality of a person that is made manifest by appearance, actions, mannerism, behavior, speech, tone, values, attitudes, beliefs and

demeanor, reactions and inactions. 2). A person's character can also be defined by how an individual's deals with self and others. 3). According to Rushworth Kidder (1998), character has two components: values and behavior. Persons of character align their values with their actions. The values and behavior ought to come together seamlessly. Individuals of character are those who walk the talk, keep their promises and do what is right and there is no flaw between the standards they profess and the way they act. A failure to align values with action-even when the values are splendid leads to lack of character. 4). Character can also be defined as the 'moral excellence' It is a firm sense of right and wrong – a value system arising from a conviction of ethical absolutes, that commitment to do what is right and ethical regardless of personal cost, risk or discomfort. Character is 'who you are as a person' and what you are in the dark when no one's seeing you.

Baron Thomas wrote, " the measure of a man's character is what he would do if he knew he never would be found out" while Rushworth Kidder (1998) stated, " the test of character...lies in how you behave when public approval and overt reward are stripped away." So, character does get tested and consistency is key in defining a person's character. A person's character can be described as bad or good. Good character is anchored on three pillars namely: knowing the good, desiring the good and doing the good. So this paper emphasizes on the aggregate moral qualities by which a person is judged apart from intelligence, competence or special talent. Persons of good character serve as a role model for others to emulate.

4. What Is Character Education?

Character Education refers to moral teaching or guidance and values clarification. It involves teaching children or learners about basic human values such as honesty, hard work, respect, kindness, truthfulness, self-control, courtesy, generosity, courage, compassion, and diligence among other values. Character education helps foster the development of ethical and responsible individuals by teaching them about the good values that people should have. And since learners spend most of their time at school, it is the perfect place to instill moral values in them. An effective character education program should be embedded in the core curriculum (through carrier subjects such as languages and arts) and the school culture on an ongoing basis. It requires an intentional, proactive, consistent, and comprehensive approach that promotes a common core of personal and social values in all phases of school life.

African indigenous education as earlier stated was through song, dance and play. In my community there was a song that mothers would sing. The song was in question and answers form. The question posed was 'would you desire upright children or clever children? And the mothers would respond; I would love to have good, upright and clever children. Therefore, African indigenous education purposed to raise children of good character - children who were morally responsible, self-disciplined, smart and successful; children who were good, kind heartened and decent. Yes, children who had learnt how to make a living, but even more, how to love, like and relate with other, nature and creator. Even in contemporary times, we want them to learn to uphold qualities such as: honesty, fairness, kindness, courtesy, justice, respect, handwork, responsiveness. We want them to be humane, to be mindful of elders, polite and kind to others, we want them to uphold the rule of law, be patriotic and committed to developing their country and have an understanding of Individual role as envisaged in the constitution. We want them to shun vices such as dishonesty, lying, idleness, carelessness, greed, selfishness and vulgar language. We want them to be persons of integrity.

Kagan (1981), Wynne and Walberg (1985) argue that good character ought to be the more primary focus as it is a goal in reach of more children than high academic achievement and can result in less alienation from the school and community. Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th president of the United States of America advanced that 'to educate a man in mind and not in morals you educate menace in society.

As I was going through my kid's school report forms, I realized one common denominator: that the primary school report is divided into two sections: academics and conduct. The academic section indicated the academic potential of the child while the other section focused the character of the child. This, in my view, points out to the two goals of education mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. The sad thing is that little time is devoted to the second goal of education - character education. This probably may explain the rising moral decadence in our society. This is a peril to our society.

5. The Establishment of Integrity Clubs

In 2005, when I was appointed to the Kenya Anti- Corruption Commission, I was charged with the responsibility of designing, developing and implementing strategic anti-corruption and good governance interventions targeting the youth in schools, higher institutions of learning and training. This translated to reaching out to a population of over 12million Kenyans. I agonized over what I needed to do to effectively re-engineer a positive value system and mainstream ethics and integrity among learners. My teaching experience as a high school teacher came in handy – the need to use curricula and co-curricular interventions within the formal education sector. I also recalled the many students who had confidentially shared with me their moral predicaments, the many bright students who dropped out of school and got wasted and the many others who were clueless of how the past affects the future; who did not seem to realize that choices had consequences and were literally living 'one day at a time'. It is against this background that the idea of an integrity club was borne; to not only add impetus to the national drive against corruption but cultivate a culture of integrity through acquisition and development of positive values, and development of inter and intra personal skills that would provide the framework to build and execute ethical behavior that build self and community.

The establishment of integrity club was based on the premise that 'education is central to preventing corruption; that environments in which children grow up play a decisive role in shaping attitudes and behavior and that the fight for integrity, honesty, transparency, accountability, respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, responsibility, humility and

patriotism among other values has to start early among the youth so that it becomes a way of life. The establishment of Integrity club was also born from the realization that children in the current generation are growing in a diverse society with mixed values that are no longer collective but highly personalized and thus individualistic in nature denying them the opportunity to become responsible members of the society. Establishment of the Integrity clubs in schools was also premised on the belief that the club has the potential of restoring the collective values to our children and imparting a sense of respect and sharing. This has to start early among the youth so that it becomes a way of life. The youth's creativity, energy and enthusiasm could be harnessed to build an equitable, sustainable and peaceful world.

It was against this background that the Commission through its Education for National Integrity Programme, sought to establish Integrity Clubs for Schools and Colleges. Integrity club was officially launched on 17th November 2010 by the then cabinet minister Professor Sam Ogeri. The setting up of integrity club was to be on pilot basis with about ten schools in every county. Integrity clubs were to be initiated in primary, secondary, college and university levels of education.

6. The Role of Integrity Club in Promoting Character Education

Integrity can be defined as principled behaviour that a person is not ready to compromise or "doing the right thing even when no one is seeing them". Integrity Club also referred to as 'Adili' club (in Kiswahili) is made up of a group of like-minded persons who subscribe to the pillars of integrity (honesty, respect, truthfulness, being responsible, accountable, transparent in public dealings) and who model ethical behavior.

The specific objectives of establishing integrity club was six fold: To build citizens of good character by re-engineering social values; promote a culture of hard work, honesty, service, moral conduct and positive thinking in learning institution; foster good intra and interpersonal relationships between students and their peers, teachers, parents/guardians and community; give learners the opportunity to discuss and share experiences on issues of integrity, anticorruption and moral dilemmas which they encounter in the personal and communal lives and how to interact with these moral issues in a structured manner; groom a new set of leaders that can be trusted, leaders with appropriate leadership qualities and decision making skills; and to encourage the youth to be self-directed, focused and responsible by teaching them to safeguard their name, pride and reputation; and empower them to advocate for good governance and promote patriotism.

To achieve its mission, the integrity club took a holistic approach as depicted in the diagram below. An approach that first aimed at the training of school managers or principals so that there was a clear-cut understanding of what the club were all about. The fact that the club was an initiative of an anti-corruption agency, that attracted some fear; - the fear that the club members may be the 'eyes and ears' of the Commission. To arrest such fear, school managers had to be trained and had in turn appoint integrity club patrons who would undertake a one-week training to enable them establish a club in their school. Hundreds of integrity club patrons have been trained. Once established, integrity club members engage in varied activities such as writing of integrity messages and posting them on notice boards, composing of songs with integrity messages, writing of poems and skits, organizing for intra and inter club debates, cleaning exercises, community service and planting of trees to conserve the environment. Creation of Integrity club flower bed and paths and placement of metal plates bearing values that members are expected to espouse has been a great success.

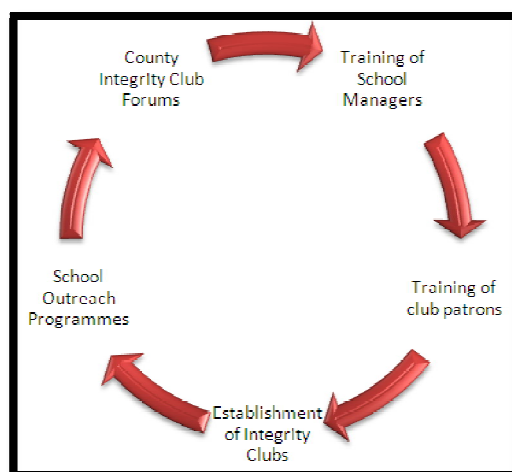


Figure 1

Integrity club has been instrumental in growing a crop of young people with requisite knowledge, right values, skills and attitudes needed for a positively transformed nation. Reports from schools with established integrity club indicate that learners have benefited in three fronts: development of skills, acquisition of values and academics. Learners had become more creative, positive minded and upheld Integrity. There have been reports that learners had on different occasions collected money in school or on their way to school and brought it to the attention of school management. The club served as role models for character and academic performance. Some schools reported that when there were school riots across the country, integrity club members were able to persuade their school mates against the act and that saved the specific schools from joining in the riots. Integrity club members developed and excelled in organizational skills, public speaking and leadership skills. One school reported that in almost all the leadership positions in their school, the prefects were

identified from the integrity club. This was an indication that the members exemplified attributes of trustworthiness, integrity and leadership that were visible and admirable. Overall, some schools reported that the level of discipline and academic performance had greatly improved. Therefore, through integrity clubs learners have been able to acquire knowledge, values and acceptable attitudes and much more the development of creative, public speaking, decision making and problem solving skills.

7. Conclusion

The idea of integrity clubs can be perceived as vaccination of the children and youth against corruption and unethical conduct and in effect improve their immunity against bad influences from the adult world that prevent them from growing up with the bud of corruption. Strong teaching of values of integrity, honesty, citizenship, transparency, civic values, business ethics, moral uprightness and respect for rule of law are some of the ingredients needed to curb moral decadency and unethical practices among the citizenry. The integrity club plays that role.

As Abigael Adams put it "great learning and superior abilities will be of little value unless virtue, truth and integrity are added to them"

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