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Why schools and corporates have a shared interest in social responsibility

NOW IS THE TIME FOR SCHOOLS AND CORPORATES TO WORK TOGETHER ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AS **DIVYA SHARMA** EXPLAINS.

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that schools are responsible not only for the development of students' knowledge and skills, but also for instilling values.

If, once upon a time, this second responsibility of instilling values was assumed by families and religious institutions, industrialisation, modernisation and globalisation have led to the emergence of the notion that schools and the education system generally provide the foundation for the development of socially responsible citizens and the delivery of a value-based education for all.

Despite large strides in economic development in many nations, however, a huge gap persists between rich and the poor; literate and illiterate; developing and undeveloped, and the development of socially responsible people has never been more important.

What is socially responsible education?

Socially responsible education describes the way in which the education is conducted. It aspires to sensitise children to empathise

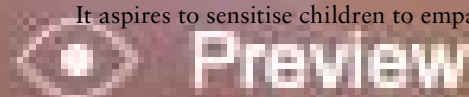
and work for the betterment of the community.

Community-oriented projects and assignments facilitate interaction between students in classrooms and others in society. Such interaction results in tremendous changes in students' perceptions about and empathy for others, and prompts many to volunteer and serve, donate and work for the upward mobility of others in society.

The changing role of community in educational institutions

The 2005 National Curriculum Framework suggests that community work and vocational education should be developed as an integral part of school education. This has necessitated greater community participation in the form of community-oriented courses, industry academia interface and vocational force.

The paradigm shift occurring in our schools can be seen in the implementation of the curriculum but also in the behaviours of students. Today, students tend to volunteer



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independently, regardless of their school volunteering program, and are going well beyond curriculum-mandated hours and minimum requirements.

Schools are now more often advertising their initiatives and outcomes, lobbying for policy initiatives, acquiring patents and sponsoring startups – in a very professional manner – yet the increasing involvement in the community the impact created by the educational institutions seems to be quite meager.

The 2013 Companies Act

Given the track record in corporate social responsibility activity in education, schools are extremely well placed to work with larger companies that are required to comply with section 135 of the 2013 *Companies Act*.

Section 135 of the *Companies Act* requires that India's larger companies spend two per cent of average net profits every financial year on local corporate social responsibility initiatives.

The *Companies Act* requirement clearly offers schools an opportunity to move beyond traditional approaches to and social responsibility harness the professional capabilities and resources of companies charged by the legislation to support corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Why should social responsibility matter in schools?

Social responsibility initiatives are important for community wellbeing and advancement, but also for the development of our students.

Social responsibility projects take students into society, which helps them in building knowledge and skills, and attitudes and values that support community wellbeing and advancement, but also, according to the social learning theory of Albert Bandura, socialisation – that is, observing and modeling the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others – is an important aspect of students' cognitive development.

There is, in other words, a reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences, and if we want our students to grow intellectually, socially and ethically, we need to provide them with opportunities for social learning or learning in society.

Equally, social responsibility programs involve students in acts of ethical ownership which motivate them to take ownership of what they do. This act of investment by students through their schools provides social responsibility initiatives with both energy and sustainability, characteristics that are essential if equity and environmental programs are to become durable.

Building the brand

Social responsibility also matters in schools for more pragmatic reasons. Successful social projects targeted at a specific community create a brand association with the community, which propagates positive awareness of the school, and the philosophy of the school, within the community.

It also stimulates a positive work environment inside schools, enabling socially responsible teachers and students to reach out to their local community essentially as 'brand ambassadors' for their school.

Such activities provide schools with a real opportunity to benefit from sponsorship or other linkages with corporates. Since many big companies are working on education-related projects or on projects with school or education-related philanthropic organisations, schools are very well placed to develop productive school-business linkage and the financial resources, personnel capabilities and ideas, and other resources they can bring to schools.

And of course schools can actually make a difference by initiating projects to resolve prevailing local social problems both directly and as models of solutions that can be scaled up or adopted by other schools or agencies.

Corporate social responsibility and the *Companies Act*

The idea of corporate social responsibility gained currency in the early 1970s and matured by the 1990s. Of course, charitable practices like *zakaat* in Muslim communities, *dharamada* in Hindu communities and *daashaant* in Sikh communities have supported social causes for centuries.

Corporate involvement in social responsibility in education, preventive healthcare, rural development and the like today has been spurred on by the *Companies Act*. Education is an important area where the likes of Tata, Wipro, Indian Tobacco Company, Indian Oil Corporation, Aditya Birla Group, Maruti Suzuki, Reliance Industries, Canon India and Tech Mahindra are now operating.

Corporate social responsibility initiatives are addressing employability and skill development, adult literacy, academic support, computer training, school support, teacher empowerment, educational enrichment programs, technical and science education programs, scholarship programs, support for industrial training institutes, career support and general infrastructure grants to schools.

Aligning corporate and educational priorities

If schools and corporates are to engage productively in social responsibility initiatives, it is vital that they have aligned priorities that enable them to make the most of available resources.

Most corporates are operating through their own social responsibility units or funding a third party, usually a non-government organisation, to implement projects for them.

In education-based social responsibility initiatives, schools are crucial stakeholders with staff who understand educational needs and can identify practical initiatives, and can mobilise to address them. One of the most obvious ways corporates can link with schools is through the provision of funds for such practical initiatives.

It is important that schools understand the value they provide to corporates when agreeing to sponsorships and partnerships, both in terms of corporate compliance with the *Companies Act* and in the endorsement of a corporate's brand that a sponsorship or partnership implies.

Schools are well placed to support the development and delivery of basic education and vocational curriculum to meet the identified needs of corporates.

Schools should recognise that they and corporates share many skills and can benefit from dialogue and forums to investigate educational needs, practical initiatives and ways to address them.

Likewise, schools and corporates can share expertise to address the training of each other, as well as to identify the human, capital and other resources that might best be used to support an initiative.

The good news is that the development of students' values and sense of social responsibility is no longer one of the key responsibilities only of schools; it is now recognised as a key corporate responsibility as well.

Now is the time to find those corporate partners and work with them for the educational growth of your students and the betterment of society.

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