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Anita Rao Mysore

On July 25, 2019, the United Nations passed a resolution to declare April 5 as the International Day of Conscience. The rationale for “promoting the culture of peace with love and conscience,” according to the UN, is: “Conscious of the need for the creation of conditions of stability and well-being and peaceful and friendly relations based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”

That the world craves for peace was evident in the recent viral videos and global following of the

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Value of conscientiousness

What educators and students can learn from the International Day of Conscience (April 5)

Walk for Peace by the Dhammacetiya monks and their dog, Aloka, in the U.S. Juxtaposed, however, are video games, media, and social media, comprising violence in different formats, in different genres, and spread across local to international locations geographically.

In contemporary education, the unethical use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in research and assessment in

higher education and PK-12 schools respectively begs the need for conscientious individuals. When violent and/or dishonest means are normalised and begin to replace basic human values, it becomes imperative to make the International Day of Conscience more relevant and deliberate than ever in educational institutions.

For educators

What can educators do in their spheres of influence to encourage students to become conscientious individuals

and citizens? While the cliched phrase in education states that “Values are to be caught, not just taught”, there is value in both. Educators can teach students about conscience via the three hats they wear: the unique positions that they hold, their subjects, and teaching courses such as value education, service-learning, global perspectives, life skills, and the like. Subjects other than languages or Social Science teach values. Sciences, Maths, and so on possess inherent potential to teach about conscientiousness.

Typically, students look up to teachers who teach, grade, and mentor conscientiously. Experiences have shown that students who want to take it easy, who see a conscientious teacher as “strict to work with”, and who “hang out” with educators who provide fun sans conscientiousness turn around when life and age

teach them hard lessons. There is no doubt that conscientious teachers leave an indelible mark on the minds of their students.

For students

What can students do in their spheres of influence to become conscientious individuals? A student's ability to recognise and respond to the needs of those in the margins is a hallmark of conscientiousness. The act of giving is not confined to monetary donations; it extends to skill and time that students can give in service to society.

Conscientiously using the planet's resources and living in harmony with nature are crucial today. Peace and partnerships are vital to a smoothly functioning society. Engaging with civility in “difficult dialogues” can foster peaceful relations and understanding.

Everyday life happens in the context of language, social and emotional interactions and is necessary even for professional settings.

The lesson from the marshmallow experiment can be extrapolated to leading a conscientious life. In the 1960-70s, Walter Mischel, a professor of psychology at the U.S.' Stanford University, studied how the self-control skills of four year olds could relate to future success. Children were offered a choice of “one marshmallow now or two marshmallows if they waited for 15 minutes”. Follow-up studies found

that children who had waited for the second marshmallow by exercising self-control had obtained higher scores, had fewer health issues, and were better in social skills and stress response.

Taking short cuts seldom leads to permanent solutions and success! Conflict resolution and community engagement ought to go beyond requisites for credits, college admissions, and job CVs.

The art and science of self-reflection is a must for educators, students, and

everyone. Self-reflection can make a person deeply conscientious. Journalling should not become a mere check in the checklist for “Becoming a More Productive Person.” Reflection and journalling must pave the way for greater empathy and conscientiousness.

One day of observing the International Day of Conscience is not a panacea. Conscientiousness, when deeply rooted in individuals, can help transform the collective. This needs application of critical think-

ing and deliberate action.

Conscientious families, neighbourhoods, communities, academics, businesses, and other social institutions are the bases for a healthy world. Educational institutions can use the International Day of Conscience as a springboard to recommit to being more and more conscientious, and to spread the word and deed in the community.

The writer is a retired associate professor, Education and Psychological Sciences, Christ University, Bengaluru.

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