

Vijayadev Yogendra's Contribution to Education

The School of Total Education was founded by Vijayadev Yogendra in 1977 after several years training teachers who would be the initial members of staff responsible for implementing the principles of Total Education.

Vijayadev Yogendra: Background

Vijayadev Yogendra (1930-2005) was born in India and passed his early years there. His father was the widely revered householder yogin, Shri Yogendra, who founded the Yoga Institute in 1918. The Institute is a teaching and research facility which has conducted both inpatient and outpatient treatment programs based on Yoga therapeutics, as well as teaching classical Yoga to students from all walks of life. Because of the openness to scientific study of Yoga, the Institute became a mecca for scientists from Europe, America, and the USSR and other countries behind the Iron Curtain. The Institute was the family home and from an early age, therefore, Vijayadev and his older brother, Jayadev, had a unique opportunity to meet the distinguished visitors who came to learn from their father. Yoga to Shri Yogendra had nothing to do with vague superstition but was a rational path of self-development open to all.

As a young man, Vijayadev gained a scholarship to study medicine in the United States, but was only part-way through his studies when he was recalled to India by his father. At that time India was in a process of rapid change, having gained independence from Britain. Vijayadev took up a position in the Nehru Government, working on plans for national education.

These experiences in his early life were instrumental in giving Vijayadev an appreciation of both Eastern and Western thinking, and an interest in education. He came to Australia in 1964, initially just to meet his fiancé's parents, but found such a dearth of real understanding of Yoga that he decided to stay and work to educate the public about the vast subject which his father had termed "the science of man". Working from the Yoga Education Centre in Melbourne, he quickly attracted the interest of people from all walks of life. They included medical practitioners, academics, researchers, philosophers, therapists as well as teachers, businessmen and students. He conducted classes at the three universities – Melbourne, Monash and La Trobe – with well over 1000 students attending.

During the sixties and seventies, Western countries saw major changes in social mores, with the sexual revolution and drug culture attracting many young people into what Yogendra saw as a wayward and undisciplined life. He established a training group to provide a direction to the energies of the many young people who sought his guidance. There were two areas of particular involvement, namely health and education. As part of the training of these young people, Yogendra established a unique educational program, inviting respected scholars from a variety of faith and health traditions to deliver sessions to the training group – usually morning and evening for three to six weeks. The aim of this was to help them distil the principles necessary for personal growth and to see that these principles are common to a number of different traditions. The education group became a teacher training group and worked towards the establishment of

a school based on these principles. With support from the business community the School of Total Education was opened in February 1977.

His Contribution to Education in Australia

It is perhaps not widely known or acknowledged the tireless work Yogendra did in this country to bring about a discourse on the importance of values in education.

In 1970, he organized and chaired a symposium Education for Living, at Monash University. A consensus amongst the speakers was that education had to go further than vocational training and "awaken in the individual student an appreciation of their humanity" leading to a more just and peaceful world. This was followed in 1972 by a further seminar at Monash University, Towards a Total Education, in which, as one of the speakers, he contrasted education based on values and ethics with current approaches based on competition.

1975 was a year in which Yogendra brought together a wide range of eminent people to discuss the trends in society and ways to assist people to find answers to the pressures being experienced. It commenced with another major symposium, Towards Complete Guidance, attended by four hundred people. The distinguished speakers included Dr Frank Graham, well known for introducing psychoanalysis to Australia, and Professor Max Charlesworth of Melbourne University's Philosophy Department.

To Yogendra, education was never something confined to schools and classrooms, so the topics he addressed through the events he organized were broad in scope and related to life-long learning. In December 1975, he organized another symposium, Guidelines for Living, which was chaired by Dr Bertram McCloskey, Chief Health Officer of Victoria. Further seminars on Education for Living, The Need for a Philosophy of Living and Non-Materialist Values and Education followed.

Over the next two years, planning was undertaken for a school based on principles of 'total education'. To Yogendra, the school was never just for one particular group of students, parents and teachers. It was intended to be a concrete model of the educational ideals and practices he understood as essential for the future development of the individual and the society in which he or she lives. The School was made possible through an astounding community effort with over 20,000 hours in voluntary labour given by those who shared Yogendra's vision.

His work at engaging the wider community in dialogue did not stop. In 1978, he chaired a seminar program on the theme, What can we learn from the aborigine?, recognizing the profound spirituality of Australia's indigenous people. This was followed by a one day symposium, Guidelines for Healthy Living, attended by well over 500 participants.

Whilst the next few years opened a significant dialogue about health, with a major international congress entitled Mind-made Disease, Yogendra continued a public discourse on education that was beginning to attract the attention of government policy makers, many of whom visited the School. In 1979, he published the first book in which he set out his ideas about education, following a two day symposium on The Need for Total Education at Monash University. Many senior educationalists attended, including the State and Regional Directors-General of Education, along with leading academics and teachers. The monograph, Total Education: The Obvious

Solution, urged a re-examination of education in its broadest sense to bring about the rediscovery of values that foster personal development, emotional integration and spiritual growth.

In 1983, Yogendra published *Total Education: The Urgent Need*, in which he expanded and developed the ideas presented in the earlier monograph. In particular, he addressed the need for good teachers who could develop a child's innate potential. In the same year, he brought together more educators in the symposium, *Focus on Education: What Lies Ahead?* He wanted to put forth ideas that could be taken up by policy makers and think tanks both in Australia and overseas.

1985 saw the publication of *Future Education*, in which Yogendra examines the historical context of education and ways to counter the loss of values that contribute to personal growth. He was concerned that education prepare children for a world of ever-increasing change. The book includes a foreword by Dr Robert Muller, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, in which he says, "This book speaks for itself ... my copy of the manuscript is underlined enthusiastically and approvingly in many places...with a good number of comments in the margins ... I have discussed it widely with several people and hope that it will be widely diffused in Australia and other countries."

By 1985, community awareness of problems affecting children was increasing. Yogendra sought to catalyze this concern through a five day international congress, *The Future Child: Its Health and Education*. At the same time, he was addressing the need for parent education and developed training programs for parent educators. The School of Total Education had a history of working with parents, as a Parents Program was part of the School's approach since its inception.

The first activity of the Parent Education Centre established by Yogendra in 1989, was a public symposium, *Good Parenting: The Urgent Need*, chaired by the Queensland Director-General of Education and opened by the Minister of Family Services. The book, *Parenting for Everyone*, in which Yogendra sets out his thoughts on family life and parenting was published the same year. The Foreword was written by Tony Fitzgerald, QC, who said, "Many who read it will, like me, wish they had read it sooner when their children were younger." Mr Justice Jon Elliot of the Family Court notes that, "This examination by Vijayadev Yogendra of the pressures in our later 20th century materialist society gives the parental role a deeper meaning...He clearly indicates what can be done and that the effort is well worthwhile."

In March 1990, Yogendra chaired a symposium on Higher Education in Australia at Monash University. Ten leading educationists addressed the symposium, with Yogendra providing opening and closing comments. A number of leading questions were canvassed including:

Where was current educational thinking taking society?

Was it addressing the real needs of society for the future?

What values should higher education be following?

Yogendra continued publishing books dealing with personal development through the nineties, including *Overcoming Negative Feelings* (1994); *Overcoming Guilt* (1997); *Love as a Way* (1997) and *Overcoming Anger* (2000), as well as a number of small inspirational works.

Yogendra passed away in January 2005, the year in which the outcomes of the Values Education Study, commissioned by the Commonwealth Government in 2002 were published. He would have been heartened by the thought that all Australian schools could adopt practices in values education centred around the nine values identified in this study. After more than thirty-five years contributing to the discourse around values education, commencing at a time when values were deemed personal affairs and not part of educational philosophy or practice, his efforts and those of like-minded individuals have borne fruit.