

'Schools should promote physical and spiritual well-being'

Principal Anna Kizirian, of the Primary Junior School at Emirates International School has been a teacher for the past 24 years. "The Primary School is for children from KG 1 to grade 5," informs Kizirian. The primary division has 950 students representing 76 nationalities.

"A school," she believes, "should initiate individuals into the value system of society and promote physical and spiritual well-being. The ultimate aim would be to develop autonomous critical thinkers."

Emirates International incorporates a wide perspective of education. "It takes education to a broader format which will include the emotional, intellectual and

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physical development of students in a school environment," she says. "Problems arise in deciphering what society considers important for children. It will be different in the UK, the U.S. and UAE.

"Children of different temperaments and discipline ideas come to school. However, we provide consistency in common universal elements, no matter what religion or culture, to enhance those particular traits that we want developed," she says.

Assemblies held every morning serve as a good platform. "I use the opportunity to talk to the kids about, among other things, the virtues of not bullying and taking care of living things," says Kizirian. "Basically, morals

Skills which schools should enhance

The 10 skills which Kizirian considers very important:

1. Awareness of the environment
2. Awareness of other people – showing respect to others
3. The knowledge that there are no limits individually for people – intellectually, spiritually, and creatively
4. Always remembering that you are competing against yourself, and not other people.
5. Ability to think on their own



Photograph by Javed Nawab

Anna Kizirian... giving education a broader format

transcend the curriculum," she stresses.

Kizirian advocates the concept of role-playing as an important learning tool for younger children. "From four years onwards, they have the opportunity to act out different roles. This encourages discussions and leads to a greater moral and spiritual development."

In specific situations, does she think that children are responsible for sorting out differences among themselves? "Because the children are in primary school, the teacher may call both the kids together and ask what started the problem. She may then guide them in a manner she deems appropriate to the situation. She may ask them to leave her presence for a time to resolve the problem, and then return and tell her how they did it."

But the main criteria to keep in mind is that the teacher has to give guidance and some liberty. It is dependent on age and circumstance, and you can't generalise," says Kizirian.

One area Kizirian highlights is positive re-inforcement when teaching anything, especially life skills. "We have a friendship plate that we award every year for a child who has stood apart from the rest for being a good person," she says. "There are other awards also that are not scholastic. "Some children don't blossom in a behavioural situation but may exhibit extraordinary character and poise during playtime, and thus should be rewarded."

6. Knowing there are no limits to your aspirations. Emphasising passion and perseverance.
7. Developing technological skills – because we live in a technological age
8. An awareness that you don't have to know the answer to everything.
9. Problem-solving skills and capacity. The ability to work out the unknown.
10. Tolerance, flexibility and adaptability

► travel," he recalls. "Today, travel usually means by air and reaching your destination in the shortest and most convenient way. But I told them about vacation time when I was young. We used to go by train and sometimes the journey would last two or three days," he goes on. "You would meet some of the most interesting people en route and see some of the most beautiful and interesting scenery before you arrived.

"I tried to stress the point to the children when they are at the airport, on the plane etc... that the journey, like life, is not about reaching the end but about enjoying the journey. In some cases, by the end of the journey, you learn things and, perhaps, even have a better knowledge of yourself, which definitely helps you become a better human being."

Although Modern does not have a



Sharma... taking the kids on a journey of life

formal educational programme strictly geared towards teaching human values, it does have a course titled 'Moral Instruction'. "This is a set of lessons devoted to teaching decision-making and analysing different situations," explains Sharma "And learning about tackling problems as individual members of society and the world at large."

What are his views on giving children the opportunity to resolve their differences on their own? "Kids do devise a system of their own. They know someone is monitoring, and if they step out of line, they are going to be disciplined," he continues. "Once correct attitudes are instilled in children, life skills, such as responsibility, respect for others (which is an important part of life today) as well as respect for yourself, fall into place."

Sharma cites an example: "One morning last year, Dubai was hit by an unusual storm. The next day, the entire school area was in a shambles, and many areas were knee-deep in water. The senior kids' reaction to the crisis was very important. Even without anyone having suggested 'chipping in', on their own they felt like helping. That reaction came from within." ■