

KRISHNA IN THE CURRICULUM OR THE CURRICULUM IN KRISHNA?

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This article gives an example of a curriculum planning process that focused on first situating an academic unit in Krishna consciousness, before then proceeding to cover the government Board of Studies' syllabus outcomes. This led to better outcomes for the students, more inspiration for the devotee teacher and appreciation from the Board's inspectors.

Introduction

Our Bhaktivedanta Swami Gurukula school in Murwillumbah, Australia, is a government registered and funded school. Therefore we periodically have inspections by the Board of Studies to ensure that we are achieving the outcomes set out in the Board's syllabuses. During the initial meetings with staff, in the year prior to our recent inspection, the Board's inspector made the comment that he could see how the planning documents had the philosophy of Krishna consciousness sprinkled throughout, but he didn't really see how the whole curriculum was being presented through the cultural vision of Krishna consciousness, as distinct from other non-Krishna conscious schools.

In planning the curriculum for this year (when the actual inspection would take place), we were consciously trying to find ways to present the Board of Studies curriculum through the eyes of Krishna consciousness, rather than adding elements of Krishna consciousness into planning documents which were made in the standard way.

Discussion

In planning units at a government registered Gurukula, teachers may begin with the outcomes required for the government registration, and then try to add as much Krishna consciousness as possible to the planning when they feel they have sufficiently covered the government requirements.

This can subtly give students the impression that the mainstream, mechanistic scientific world view is the foundational world view, with Krishna consciousness being a secondary consideration. It also serves to implicitly communicate the underlying materialistic conceptions of the mechanistic world view to these young devotees, especially in the teaching of science and social studies.

Further, if Krishna consciousness *is* mentioned later in the unit, it gives the impression that the philosophy of Krishna consciousness exists within the framework of academic knowledge, rather than the other way around. The Vaisnava acharyas explain that empirical or directly perceived knowledge is just a small fraction of the wealth of knowledge offered by the Vedic literature, and the empirical, mechanistic world view, characterized by a belief in the theory of evolution, is a view held by only a tiny fraction of souls in Krishna's infinite creation.

In contrast, by placing the unit within a Krishna conscious framework and world view from the beginning, and then branching out to the more mechanistic aspects of the unit, and how it relates to today's world, we subtly, yet powerfully show how Krishna consciousness sits at the top of the tree

of knowledge, and that everything exists within Krishna and His philosophy.

It is said that a learned scholar should see everything through the eyes of sastra, and by beginning a unit from the perspective of Krishna, we instill in the students, from a young age, the ability to place all their experience within the context of the Krishna conscious philosophy.

An example

In our science and technology unit for years 5-6 entitled *Introducing Energy*, one of the Board outcomes was as follows:

PP S3.4

Identifies and applies processes involved in manipulating, using and changing the form of energy.

Some of the indicators for this outcome were:

- Identifies various forms of energy – movement energy, stored energy, wind, solar, fossil fuels
- Is able to identify the various forms of energy
- ***Identifies levers and gears in simple machines and can describe the way the energy is transformed.***

Rather than beginning the unit in the standard way of introducing the sun as an impersonal source of energy in the solar system, we began by looking at the Vedic view of energy by discussing:

- Krsna as the source of all energies
- The Vedic concept of energetic source/controller (purusha) and energy (prakrti)
- Krsna's three forms of energy: spiritual, material and marginal

After this introduction, we then continued with the standard Board content of how the energy of the sun (by now understood as Krishna's energy) is then transformed into stored energy by trees, then transformed as food, coal and oil; as well as the relative merits of solar, wind and fossil fuel energy sources.

The students then created a poster showing Krishna with His three kinds of energy, showing how the material energy transforms from the sun to plants etc. In this way, all of the Board outcomes were achieved, but the whole unit became a spiritual experience for all concerned, because we had put Krishna first, and then expanded out, linking all of the energy back to Him.

When we finally had the inspection some weeks later, we displayed the students' energy posters as part of our class work display for the inspectors, and were pleasantly surprised to see the genuine enthusiasm of the Board inspectors for the posters, who several times mentioned how they really appreciated how we had taught the unit from our own Krishna conscious cultural perspective, while simultaneously covering all of the Board's outcomes.