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Application of Moral Character Development Theory in Teaching Prose to Science Undergraduates

Abstract

Teaching English to Science Undergraduates is different from that of the other streams like Arts and Commerce. Here teaching English is a routine course completion task rather than an opportunity to develop the critical appreciation of any work. Thus is observed that the essential goal of teaching Language or Literature is often ignored. In real sense learning language makes an individual confident and expressive in order to achieve his/her academic as well as professional pursuits and studying literature prepares him/her to accomplish these pursuits with courage and integrity. The primary aim of the study was to develop the sense of critical thinking among the learners of B Sc- I year through the prescribe prose that has strong moralistic components. To accomplish this approach of teaching and learning, the method of SWOT analysis was adopted that not only gave the learners an opportunity to understand the characters but also themselves through the process of introspection.

Key words: Moral character development, prose, SWOT analysis.

Introduction

Money does not pay, nor name; fame does not pay, nor learning. It is love that pays; it is character that cleaves its way through adamantine walls of difficulties". Swami Vivekananda quoted the said lines in order to realize the importance of a good character which imbibes qualities such as purity, patience and perseverance. His teachings unlocked the secrets of a successful life in a universal way. However character formation is not a simple task. It needs

a process of introspection which leads to self –realisation which he says, is the supreme good of human beings. It can be accomplished by that individual only who concurrently undergoes the introspective process in order to achieve a good character. Thus the secret of character building lies in training the mind. To achieve this one of the finest approach is to involve the individuals in the process of critical thinking thereby promoting them to question, analyse or interpret a situation and put up a view. This method would certainly evoke their thinking about issues and also encourage them to participate in 'accountable talk' that a healthy classroom environment is offering them.

In the context of formal education "Students today experience a "constant stream of ideas and information – online, in print and through electronic games and mass media. They need skills to determine where to direct their attention and how to interpret messages and use them appropriately" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p.9). It is the foremost responsibility of the teachers to teach the students the right way to comprehend such messages that also often come in the form of prose. For an English teacher teaching English Language to the undergraduates is not a primary concern as most of them comes from English medium background. Or even if they are from vernacular background teaching 'Language' is as important as teaching 'Life' to the learners. A valuable prose when taught in an appropriate manner can create extremely fearless and compassionate individuals who are ready to face any difficulty with strength and courage.

Application of Moral Character Development Theory: Use of SWOT analysis

Character building is a universal concern and much has been researched and written about it. Where on one side India has philosophers like Swami Vivekananda, Chanakya, Gautam Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi, the western world is in debt to the teachings of Aristotle, Plato and Fracis Bacon. Philosophers, Psychologists, and Educators as diverse as John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, and John Dewey, and as ancient as Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle have viewed the development of moral character as the primary purpose of schooling (Purpel & Ryan, 1976).

The process of understanding a good character and development of a moral character is a universal process. The development of moral character can be accomplished by involving individuals in various kinds of programmes such as extracurricular activities, collaborative learning, experiential learning, service learning students government, literature and community youth programmes and many more. However Gordon Vessels and William Huitt

suggested that "the planning of programs should be guided by developmental characteristics of children and youth". They recommended that in order to achieve the programme planners (teachers or parents) must study the major developmental milestones which are framed according to different ages, different domains and different developmental standards. The moral developmental milestone as set by the above researchers for adolescence (age 13-18) is mentioned   in   the   table below:

Cognitive -- Knowledge	Cognitive -- Reasoning	Affective	Conative	Social
•Potential to develop competency as disciplined thinker.	•Potential for developing abstract principles govern thinking of right and wrong.	•to show mature levels of empathy, emotional behaviour, and emotional self-regulation.	•the frontal lobe maturity to begin making complex decisions	•Development of moral identity, first in relation to others, then self-defined.

With the view of the suggested theory, it is clear that the individuals who are aged 13-18 have the ability to think critically, set up their own principles, understand others through empathy, and develop their decision making that ultimately develops their moral identities. Taking into consideration the above aspects of mental conditioning of the learners of this age , the facilitator (teacher) have tapped the opportunity and brought up an innovative idea of teaching the text through the implementation of SWOT analysis of the text. Students of B Sc-I year are fortunate to have the opportunity to study the prescribed texts those are brimming with moralistic aspects of life. These texts have proved an authentic source of learning for the adolescences that provides and supports their deep and independent thinking.

Research Design

Aims:
- To construct a healthy classroom environment of courageous and confident individuals by integrating innovative techniques of teaching and learning.
- To impart the significance of Life skills among students in order create a strong character for a successful life by developing the moralistic understanding of the prescribed text.

Objectives:

- To make students aware of their strengths and weakness through the process of SWOT analysis.
- To identify students' threats and opportunities to overcome them to adapt a holistic approach to life.

Experiment:

The experiment was in the form of project which was based on:

Step 1: Introduction of SWOT analysis by the teacher.

Step 2: Study the SWOT parameters of the characters of short stories.

Step 3: Study of Students' SWOT parameters.

Step 4: Feedback through personal Interviews

- The students chosen for this project work was of B Sc-I students (age 16-17 years).

Result Analysis: SWOT Analysis of the characters

Prose I : Jacopo and Nicola from "The Two Gentlemen of Verona"

98 students positively responded to the project making activity. 67% were of the opinion that the characters Nicola and Jocopo were extremely hard working and honest.89% of them agreed that it was their courage that made them survive amidst exceptionally difficult situations like war and poverty. It was their will power because of which they were able to take care of their diseased sister, 97% of the students affirmed. 88% of them viewed the two young men as highly optimistic characters. However 65% of them found out that the brothers were shy to ask for help. The students in general identified the threats the two gentlemen of Verona faced which were insecurity, poverty and lack of parental support. At the same time the students also realised how Jacopo and Nicola successfully converted their threats into opportunities. And it is their life skills that they developed over the years that made them fearless and confident in the face of struggle for existence.

Prose II: The Verger from "The Verger"

88%of the students were surprised to see the calmness of the Verger against the sudden odds he faced in his life.95% of them appreciated his patience and tranquillity which helped him

make important decisions. It was his self-realisation that he was an illiterate man and thus he was discontinued from his job, agreed 92% of the students. 83% of them spotted his pragmatic approach when he decided to set up a business of cigarette much opposed to his early job as a Verger. His strong will and perseverance made him a successful businessman, 93% of them consented. Vergers self –reliant quality which is a strong component of a good character was noticed by 84% of the students.

SWOT Analysis of the Self

88% of the students agreed that their most important strength is their helping nature.94% of them was of the opinion that their anger is their weakest point. 12% of them concurred that economic problems are their threats and 67% of them believed that family is their biggest strength. 95% of them stated that they are less confident.

Conclusions

Literature since ages has been a powerful tool and literary characters are the powerful influences for students for developing and shaping their moral code. The actions of the characters make a powerful impact on the minds of the readers. A good literature is that which helps a person grow mentally and spiritually strong. Stories of Arjuna, Maharanapratap, Joan of Arc, Achilles and many more like them have inspired the young ones to deal with the difficult situations in a positive way. The experiment to study the characters through SWOT gave the students as opportunity to learn indirectly from the characters they were reading. Those fictional characters taught the readers to see life through different perspectives. Emotional intelligence of the readers was improved when they were able to understand and respect those around them. In a way their Emotional Quotient was raised and they were able to identify, assess and mange the emotions of one's self, and of others too. It further widened their moral horizons, not only of the characters but also of others. By reading stories of great characters they got an indirect experience of various intricate situations, without actually getting into it. This process made the reader's mind enhanced with the ability to handle the situation in matured way.

Recommendations

The world is an ocean of literature where some of them only entertain while some are able to make a strong impact on the mind the readers. Simply reading the text is a dull process. It is

highly recommended one should read the text through different perspectives and make analysis of each reading. Only reflection, discussion and analysis will make one understand values in a positive way. Post reading activity such as discussions, question –answer sessions should be incorporated in teaching learning process which can further develop critical thinking among students. It is this critical thinking which will help them to rehearse moral decisions. Let the readers read and reflect on good literature, which will ultimately make his character. As Vivekananda (1984, p.25) said ―the character of any man is the aggregate of his tendencies, but the sum of the total bent of his mind. As pleasure and pain pass before his soul, they leave upon it different pictures and the result of these combined impressions is what is called a man's character‖.

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