

Fostering Reflective Thinking; Pathways to Self Development

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Abstract

“Open your arms to challenge, but don’t let go of your values.” Dalai Lama

With changing times, the needs, values and aspirations of people have changed. In the hunt to meet the challenges of the fast moving world and the aggressive rush for self fulfillment, one seems to have forgotten to imbibe and instill values that will help us attain the ultimate goals of life. Ancient goals of education in contrast to our present educational system, prepared man for self actualization and liberation.

The present study was a best practice designed towards Student Support & Progression. The main objective was to instill values subtly through a range of activities. For the present study the researcher adopted Qualitative Study, studied and observed over a period of 18 months. Students had in due course of time become more sensitive to the challenges and issues that prevail in our society and were more aware about their self and the world around them. They inculcated values in all spheres of life that brought about changes in their attitudes, behavior and beliefs.

KEYWORDS: Values, self awareness, attitudes, behavior and beliefs.

Introduction

“If we actually want to make the world a better place and give joy and fulfillment to our students, and empower them to give the same for others, we have to build the foundation of our education on human values”.

Radha Swami

The 21st century ushered in with loads of challenges and opportunities that brought about drastic changes in the field of Education. The focus now is to produce a tech- savvy generation for the digital era. With such demands, there has been a paradigm shift in the values of the youth today.

Today, the idea of self actualization has been replaced with self obsession and selfishness. We are moving towards a self obsessed world where one is no more concerned about the people and the world around. There is immense stress and anguish around these days among the youth, much of it owns to their life style, the religious fanaticism around them, media hype, peer pressure and much more adding to the state of

confusion amongst them. With information overload and chaos, there is more of a negative impact, especially in the young minds and hence it is of utmost importance to nurture values that help them with something robust to anchor upon. Everybody seems to be in a sprint to fulfill their wants irrespective of the fact whether the means to procure are ethical or not.

Values are nurtured by family and school at large. Hence it is not incorrect to say that a lot of what we are reflects where we come from. With the changing patterns in family structure, the value system has also changed. It is observed that in the present times, the entire focus of education has shifted from being a value oriented one to that of a knowledge bank.

Teacher plays an important role in shaping the nation. Countries across the globe have now recognized and emphasized on the role and importance of values to strengthen the nation. It is important to sow the seeds of values among the student teachers who are going to be the prospective teachers of tomorrow before we allow it to trickle down the young ones. We need to train our student teachers to revive these old traditions and culture so that we can instill in them values of fraternity, patriotism, love, faith, empathy, sustainability etc.

One of the activities that played a major role in instilling values among student teachers was conducting Theme based Assembly that involved several activities to nurture values and enable students' reflection.

Need for the Study:

While reviewing research literature, the researcher observed that not much has been studied and researched on nurturing values among student teachers. There have been researches on teachers' perspectives on value education. Most researches done were mostly confined to the curriculum. There were not many researches done on developing reflective thinking while nurturing values and developing the self.

With personal observations and experiences as a teacher educator, the researcher felt that the adage as rightly said, "Values are often caught and not taught", holds true, especially when it comes to instilling values in adults. Hence, the researcher felt that best way to nurture values among students is to infuse it subtly through a range of activities that would help them reflect and crystallize it rather than serving it to them in ways that might not appeal to them always.

Humanity is facing great threat and distress vandalizing the youth with drug and alcohol abuse, terrorism, racism and so on which have an adverse effect on its youth. Thus it is of utmost importance to design a curriculum that weaves in it intricately a model to impart values that help youth combat evils of the society.

Home and schools play a pivotal role in instilling such values and ingrain it in young minds at an early age. The researcher thus felt the need to design a practice that would help student teachers to revive and rewire on those positive values that underlie a moral society. The model was a best practice designed by the researcher as a part of assembly based on special themes, daily for 30 minutes through a range of activities. While

creating the model the researcher kept in mind the needs of present times and that it would consider a holistic approach to self development with emphasis on nurturing values and reflective practices.

Theoretical Support:

The present study was supported by the theoretical framework of '**Gibbs Cycle of Reflective thinking**' and included core values like **Personal, Social, Cultural and Global** values.

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle:

Often people find learning from experience is the best way of learning. If we don't provide opportunities to reflect on their experience, and if they don't consciously think of how they could be more effective next time, it is meaningless learning. This is where Gibbs' Reflective cycle works in making sense of the situation at hand, so that we develop better understanding of what went well or wrong and how it can be further improved.

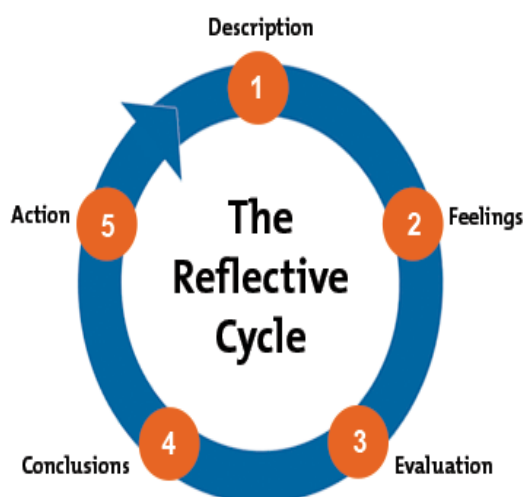


Fig (i) showing Gibb's Reflective Cycle

The present study aims at exploring the effectiveness of the practice designed to nurture values among student teachers while engaging them through a range of activities. The activities focused on two main aspects;

1. Fostering reflective thinking among student teachers and
2. Nurture values that equip students to face challenges in life ethically, cultivate positive regard towards others and have an attitude that broadens horizons of thinking and develop a belief system that lays a strong foundation to better living.

Personal	Social	Cultural	Global
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience • Love • Honesty • Humility • confidence • self preservation • mindfulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect • Appreciation • Equality • Togetherness • righteousness • dignity of labour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance • Gratitude • Compassion • Positive Regard for others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fraternity • Brotherhood • Empathy • Peace • Responsibility • conservation

Fig (ii) showing values considered for the present study

Objective of the Study:

- To provide through a range of activities, opportunity for self development of student teachers
- To foster reflective thinking among student teachers
- To nurture core values among student teachers that equip them to be effective citizens

Research Questions:

RQ1. Is reflective thinking an essential facet for self development of student teachers?

RQ2. Do personal experiences of student teachers foster values in them?

RQ3. Does assembly as a practice support instilling values among student teachers'?

Methodology:

The paradigm of research chosen for the present study was **Qualitative**. Modified form of **Ethnography** was used for the present study, since the research was conducted over a period of 2 years and everyday for 30 minutes at the beginning of the day as a part of the assembly. Several activities were conducted that revolved around monthly themes and students were asked to reflect on them. The researcher took field notes personally and feedback in terms of verbal and written expressions of students and noted them down. Hence modified ethnography was adopted as a qualitative paradigm.

Sample: 100 student teachers were taken as sample for the present study

Tool: for the present study the tools were as follows;

- Open ended questionnaire consisting of questions based on Gibbs Reflective Cycle for expressing their reflections after every theme.
- Preparation of collage/scrap books for every theme
- Field notes gathered by the researcher for every theme

Procedure:

The practice was conducted as a part of Assembly daily for half an hour in the beginning of the day, based on the monthly themes. Themes revolved around different Personal, Social, Cultural and Global values. All the activities were steered towards the theme such that values were infused subtly.

Month wise Themes were incorporated as follow:

Sr no	Month	Theme	Activities
1	June	Unity in diversity	Newspaper clippings, videos, stories, skits, role play, discussions, mock parliamentary session, If I were...activities
2	July	Multiculturalism	Short films and Videos, discussions, stories, share your thoughts,
3	August	Patriotism	Stories, role play, speech, debates, discussion on news paper clippings, video clippings, extempore, 'This day that year',
4	September	Role of teacher	Stories, personalities, discussions, role plays, videos and short films, movie reviews
5	October	Pluralism & Gandhian Philosophy	Inter faith dialogue, speaking tree discussions, Gallery walk on Gandhian philosophy, skit, JAM sessions,
6	November	Environmental awareness	One minute ecologist, video, role play, best out of waste, discussions, poster making, photo captions
7	December	Joy of Giving	Share time, thank you notes, stories, skits, discussions, speaking tree, videos, 'Joy of Giving' week
8	January	Spirituality	Inter faith dialogue, debates, discussions, videos, meditation, knowing the self activities, games, self awareness talks, book reviews
9	February	Stress management	Discussions, Stress busters, videos, newspaper clippings, poster making, creative your jingles
10	March	Women empowerment	Street play, gallery walk, fashion show, case discussions, skits, newspaper clippings, videos, book reviews, posters,

			movie reviews and discussions
11	April	Power of Education	Discussions, debates, eminent personalities success stories, book reviews

Table (i) showing month wise themes incorporated

Data collection & Analysis:

Data was collected in the form of student reflections, collage/scrap books, verbal expressions, field notes (researcher and teacher observations) over a period of 18 months (2 academic years of B.Ed course 2015-17).

Students were asked to write down about their experiences and reflections monthly, based on the themes and also present their narratives, verbal discussions, collage/scrap books at the end of every theme. Collage/Scrap books helped them express their emotions and experiences. Teacher observations were discussed after every theme and a feedback was taken on the activities, themes and the impact on student behavior, attitude and values. Feedback was taken at the end of each theme based on Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle.

Data was analyzed for the following:

1. The questions in the questionnaire that were based on the following aspects;
 - a. The appropriateness of the activities conducted
 - b. Sensitization or awareness of Values in one’s life
 - c. Implementation of values in life situations
 - d. Understanding of the self
2. Narratives of field notes of the researcher that included;
 - a. Researcher’s observations, notes etc
 - b. Teacher educators’ (colleagues of the researcher) observations, reports, verbal expressions etc

The questions in the questionnaire based on **Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle** were analyzed studying the student responses.

- The students found the activities inspiring and were motivated to conduct and organize them as a part of their assembly.
- On reflection, they admitted to be more selfish and insensitive to the world around them. The **‘Theme based Assembly’** facilitated rewiring themselves and consciously foster values developing the self.
- Students expressed that they were now more aware of their thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences and were able to make a conscious effort to apply these values to daily life situations like in classroom transactions, practice teaching schools during internship, while at community service etc.
- They expressed to have deeper sense of understanding of themselves and have been able to better reason out and gauge their thoughts and feelings.

Field notes of the researcher that included the researcher's observations, notes etc and the teacher educators' (colleagues of the researcher) observations, reports, verbal expressions etc were analyzed.

Few highlights:

- Values were interwoven intricately. Students showed remarkable difference in their attitude, behavior and belief system through the time of the course.
- During the **internship** initially, students were not very punctual and disciplined. They did not take much responsibility and accountability of their work and had frequent conflicts. Slowly they became more responsible and accountable of not only their work but also of their behavior and attitude. They started being more punctual and developed self discipline. They demonstrated greater sense of empathy towards their fellow colleagues and students. They developed qualities of leadership that had a positive impact on their personality.
- **Community service** is spread over a time span of 30 hours. At the beginning some students were reluctant to take part in community service .However, with time got more involved with better commitment and an attitude of empathy towards the underprivileged. They demonstrated greater responsibility and extended their services whole heartedly in serving the needy. They had now observed more feelings and concerns for others and had deeper awareness of themselves and appreciation for life. Their attitude exhibited optimism and one of gratitude. A student mentioned that she relished the value of sharing and the joy that it brings to life in giving.
- **Classroom transactions:** students observed better discipline, developed values like punctuality, honesty in their classroom transactions. Assembly activities paved way for greater confidence, optimism, feeling of oneness and more responsibility with accountability.
- Assembly helped students develop academic diligence, develop concentration and helped them in better planning and organizing.
- Students developed better understanding of themselves. They were able to reflect on their experiences and draw association to their experiences and life.
- Since students came from diverse backgrounds, there were huge differences amongst them initially that often lead to conflicts. However assembly brought them closer, helped them build better relations, develop team spirit and enhanced their interpersonal skills.
- They felt more connected and gained a greater capacity for self reflection and self appraisal. They fostered a relational trust among themselves.

“Assembly provided training in social and personal behavior. It brought about sensitivity among them on various issues like regionalism, religion, women empowerment and instilled in them values that brought about greater awareness of the self. It brought about an observable change in their behavior and belief system from what is was when they had joined the course. Students became more open minded and had broadened their thinking horizons. Another important outcome of assembly was it provided them a great platform to speak up and share their ideas, build skills in networking. This built confidence and fostered an attitude of optimism in them.”

Teacher Educator

Findings:

RQ1. Is reflective thinking an essential facet for self development of student teachers?

RQ2. Do personal experiences of student teachers foster values in them?

RQ3. Does assembly as a practice support instilling values among student teachers'?

RQ1. Is reflective thinking emphasized in the development of the self among student teachers'?

Students were encouraged to reflect after every activity conducted during the assembly, based on several themes that enabled them to gain insights into various aspects relating to the personal, social and cultural context of life experiences and values that underlie basic principles of life. Students had now become more mindful of their thoughts, attitudes, values and beliefs. What was most astounding is that these activities not only benefitted them in developing values but slowly and steadily paved way for self analysis which had now become a part of their conscience and helped them deal with the self on a daily basis. They were able to reflect on their thoughts, actions and ideas deeply. In her reflection a student mentioned:

“During my two years of B.Ed, I got an opportunity to learn and work with diverse set of individuals. This also exposed me to the different value systems people hold and that reflects in their beliefs and working structure. As we performed the different activities, each activity opened my eyes to see the unseen, only to widen my horizons of thinking and reflecting. Like during the assemblies I saw people working in groups showing cooperation and coordination with each other, this taught me to have understanding and acceptability of other's perspectives. Similarly, during practice teaching I got to experience team spirit, commitment and efficiency in delivering my lessons. Also when we did our community service, I learnt to be more empathetic and compassionate towards others who might be less fortunate. In fact the classroom transactions eventually got very inspiring and motivating. I learnt to wait for my turn, developed more tolerance and patience. I began understanding others' perspectives better, learnt to respect their ideas and feelings. The determination and consistency of some of my classmates in doing their tasks also motivated me to do my best. I think the activities in assembly are a great platform that exposed to varied mind sets and thought processes which I feel have made me more open minded and appreciative as a person. Over all it was a journey of tremendous learning especially in terms of developing my core values as an individual.”

Supriya Shinde

RQ2. Do personal experiences of student teachers help foster values?

When a practice is continued over a period 18 months it becomes an integral part of one's system. Students cultivated values that were not only observed by the teachers but it came from the reflections in their reports, scrap books, verbal discussions and narratives. They found it very rewarding to be part of such a practice, which beyond their prescribed curriculum gave them deeper insights to challenges of life and added value to their

personal and professional front. A student mentioned in the narratives that ‘the assembly paved way not only in developing values but also brought about more preparedness in dealing with adversities of life perspectives and experiences. It brought motivation to life and enabled him to stand up and complete the race, every time he felt dejected’. They were able to gain deeper insights to the issues and challenges of the self and dealings with their environment. It brought about development of values from personal, social, cultural, global and environmental arena that was intricately woven into a fabric of humanness.

Student reflection:

“One small positive thought in the morning can change your whole day”

The zeal and refinement of an assembly can be summed up wonderfully by this quote. Assemblies have always been just an immensely crucial part of life. They did more things than one. To begin with, they helped calm the morning rush I came with, the baggage that needed to be left in order to align thoughts for the day. They have been eye openers that have instilled certain traits in me that I can cherish for life. It helped me realize that the larger good comes from the understanding that the world can be a better place to live if we make it worthwhile. One such activity was “THE INTER FAITH DIALOGUE.” It was a remarkable and awe inspiring activity. The knowledge of diverse religions made me realize that in the end we are all one. What we practice may be divergent but what we preach isn’t much. There are some universal truths and axioms that transgress the portals created so fondly by man. This activity helped me get a step closer to not only understanding and instilling these values but also in understanding my own religion to a greater extent. It also instilled in me the beautiful qualities of tolerance, fortitude, appreciation and veneration.”

Sabrina Mukadam

RQ3. Does assembly as a practice support instilling values among student teachers?

Students had been exposed to an array of activities that brought about development in attitude and behavior to some extent. At the outset it helped them overcome fears, developed confidence, helped them get over stage fear and provided skills of planning and organizing activities. It was also observed by the students and the faculty that a practice like this helped a great deal in developing their personality. The scrap books and verbal descriptions were filled with reflections from the students that highlighted on the benefits they have attained from this practice. It was quite evident from their behavioural changes, attitudinal shifts and strengthened beliefs and personal development that the practice indeed took the students a long way in nurturing values. The observations have also reflected that the practice has been useful to a large extent in meeting the objectives towards being a better human before being an effective teacher. In their narratives and scrap books they summed up as:

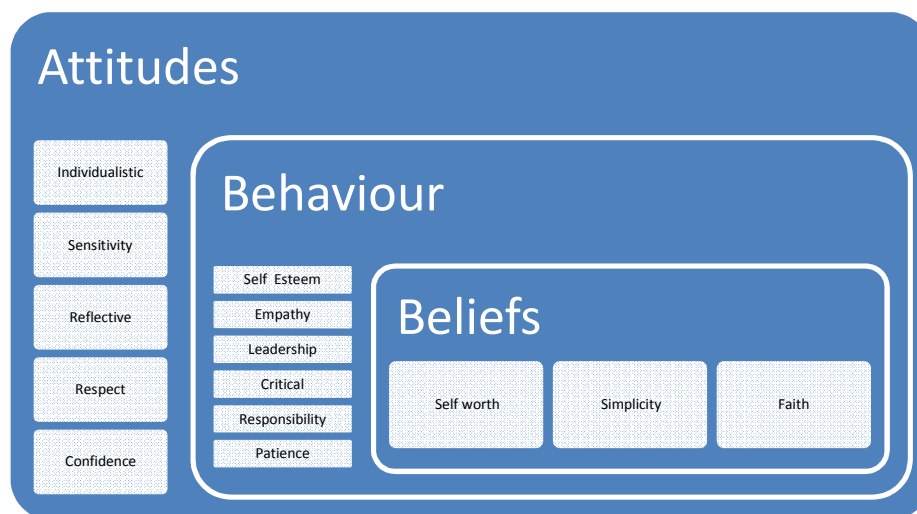


Fig (iii) showing values as observed

Conclusion:

**“Only our deep moral values and our strong social institutions can hold back that jungle and restrain the darker impulses of human nature.”
Ronald Reagan**

In this world of limited resources, conflicting values, and competing individuals and groups, values can help the way human beings learn to co-operate with each other and live in harmony with the rest of the world and nature. Advent of technology has shifted the focus now on producing knowledge personnel rather than good human beings. There is a tremendous pressure to pass examinations and secure qualifications for further excellence which is drifting the students and teachers away from the reality of having productive members in the society based on strong foundations of personal, social, moral, ethical and cultural values.

Assembly marks the beginning of a fresh day; hence it is the best time to begin the day with activities that engrave value among students. As teachers it is important that we furnish opportunities for students to infuse these values subtly while they enjoy taking part in the activities. The practice helped students examine other people’s values as well as their own. Values have a deep impact on one’s behavior and outlook towards life. An important outcome of the practice is enhanced awareness of the self with greater scope for reflection. It also paves way for better academic diligence, better relationships, and student well being and better engagement.

Thus values have to be nurtured consciously among students to equip them to live in this world.

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