

Beyond the Text: Values in Language Classes

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Education and Values

Education in its totality refers to development of individuals. Therefore, it should nourish and awaken the noble qualities in human nature. It should nurture and assimilate values in education. It has been observed in the National Policy on Education (N.P.E 1986), “The growing concern over the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society has brought to focus the need for re-adjustment in order to make education a forceful tool of cultivation of social and moral values.”

Thus, value education refers to a positive effort to bring about synthesis of physical, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, moral and spiritual values in the students. A good teacher plays the role of a spiritual guide, mentor and foster father or mother to inculcate the positive values in his students to make them better human beings. As John. W.Schlatter has written about a teacher—“I am also one of those whose names and faces have long been forgotten but whose lessons and character will always be remembered in the accomplishment of their students.” Inculcation of values through language teaching is a great challenge for a language teacher. Generally, people learn a language for communication. They learn a second language especially English for upward social mobility, to get a better job and for higher socio-economic status. The second language, which is an additional accomplishment, is related with their mind, intellect and understanding and not with their spirit, heart and feelings. But it is a language, which connects one person with others and helps him know about others’ views, ideas and outlook. Thus, it broadens one’s mind, alleviates prejudices, widens outlook and brings people closer. Our values and heritage are preserved only in a language.

Language and Value Inculcation

Language teachers can successfully inculcate various values through their sessions. Language teaching has an infinite capacity for assimilating value education. Language cannot be taught in isolation, away from social situation, nor can values be imbibed sans practice. Mingling good meaningful value-based text with language learning can invariably make the learners sensitive human beings and conscientious citizens.

Value Inculcation through Poetry Recitation

One way of inculcating values in students is through ‘Recitation’ of good poems. Poems entertain the readers, refine their feelings, and develop their sensitivity, which ultimately make them better human beings. While reading the poems of- ‘Wordsworth’,

the readers should feel union with the spirit of Nature, which kindled the spirit of the poet, and he became one with Nature. Wordsworth has written-

“And I have felt a presence,
That disturbs me with the joy,
Of elevated thoughts and a sense sublime.”

‘My heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with daffodils.’

The sweet and melodious voice of the bird nightingale, which made the poet ‘Keats’ forget “the weariness, the fever and the fret” of this mundane world, can be appreciated by the learners also when they are properly motivated and inspired. The learners can also learn from the sweet-voiced bird Skylark: -

“Type of the wise who soar but never roam,
True to the kindred point of heaven and home.”

The learners can realize with Keats: -

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,
That is all ye know on earth,
And all ye need to know.”

These feelings refine the hearts, elevate sensitivity and develop love for one and all. Thus over-flowing love, sympathy and kindness replace hatred, jealousy, animosity and violence. These lines of Robert Frost motivate the learners to work incessantly—

The woods are lovely dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

With proper recitation, the poems of Tennyson and Browning can create appropriate atmosphere and motivate the learners to be active and optimistic—

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished not to shine in use. (Tennyson)

I was ever a fighter so one fight more --- (Browning)

In the same way, these lines of a famous poet can evoke the feelings of patriotism—

Breathes there a man with soul so dead;
Who never to himself hath said;
This is my own, my native land!

Whereas these beautiful lines of Tagore’s poem inspire a person to come out of narrow boundaries-

Where the world has not been
Broken into domestic walls;

The poet again prays to God—

Where the mind is led forward by Thee
Into ever widening horizons;

Literature of all languages presents of glorious examples of universal values. Sanskrit language is replete with such values that can guide a person to live life in a proper way. Wonderful epigrams like ‘Vidya dadati vinayam,’ ‘Paropkaray satam vibhutyahh’, ‘Satyam, Shivam Sundaram’, present universal values. In Hindi literature there are poems like Haldighati, Jhansi Ki Rani, Kamayani, Panchwati which can entertain a person as well as refine his heart making him a better human –being. ‘Vah khoon kaho kis matlab ka jisme swades ko pyar nahin’, ‘Khub ladi mardani vah to Jhansi vali Rani thi’ ‘Mujhe tod vanmali us path par dena fenk, matrabhoomi per sheesh chadhane jis path jate veer anek-’ these inspiring and ennobling lines can help a teacher to imbibe the sentiments of nationalism and self-sacrifice. Even ‘Madhushala’ of Dr Harivansh Rai Bachhan presents the value of living in peace and harmony. Jay Shankar Prasad’s Kamayani presents struggle of a human spirit against all odds. Rashtra Kavi Maithali Sharan Gupta inculcated sentiments of true nationalism through his poetry. Poems of Nirala, Sumitranandan Pant, Sohan Lal Diwedi and Dinkar are highly inspiring.

Value Inculcation through examples of Great and Noble Persons

Autobiographies, biographies and experiences of great and noble persons also provide ennobling and inspiring values to the learners. Spirit of self-respect of Shri Jagdish Chandra Bose, who refused to accept less salary than the British employees for the same kind of work, can inspire a lot to our young generation. The indomitable spirit and patriotic fervour of Hockey Wizard Major Dhyan Chand who refused to be a coach of a foreign team in spite of financial hardships, may instill the value of love for our nation. His words, “If I become a coach of a foreign team and that team defeats India then how will I show my face to others,” may inspire all Indians. These examples of courage and fearlessness remind us famous lines of the great poet R.N. Tagore, ‘Where the mind is without fear; And the head is held high’. A lesson on Gandhi presents his vow to speak always truth and to serve his parents. Nehru’s wish to scatter his ashes in the field of his beloved country after his death may give birth to the same nationalistic feelings. Dr. Abdul Kalam’s advice to young generation to ‘Dream always’ may inspire children to be dreamers as well as doers to realize their dreams. Our youngsters can learn from the life experiences of these great and noble people that they achieved heights of greatness through sheer hard work, devotion, perseverance and determination. Lives of all great men remind us that we can also make our lives sublime. Abraham Lincoln’s letter to the teacher of his son may make a person learn value of self-respect. He writes—

“Teach him to sell his brawn and mind to the highest bidders but never to put a price on his heart and soul.”

Value Inculcation through Stories

Language is also a great treasure house of good stories. These stories often provide good moral values. Through these delightful, entertaining and purposeful stories, great moral values can be inculcated. Stories of 'Hitopdesa' and 'Panchtantra' always provide some values. Stories like Midas' Touch make the learner think that money or gold is not everything in life. The story 'Love Across The Salt Desert' a love story of an Indian boy Najab and a Pakistani girl Fatimah shows triumph of love over narrow geographical and national boundaries. The story 'The Background' presents a tragic story of a commercial traveller Henry Deplis who ultimately becomes insane as he is treated as a mobile painting because of a marvelous painting tattooed on his back. This tragic story inspires to consider human life as the most precious on this earth. A famous story 'The Drought' by Sharat Chandra Bose unravels the inequitable social order where the poor, underprivileged and downtrodden are mercilessly trampled upon and lead their wretched lives without any hope of social upliftment. This heart-rending story makes us sympathetic and kind to the plight of the poor and unfortunate who suffer much in our social system. His other heart-rending story 'Abhagini ka Swarg' presents the same theme. A very interesting story 'Maternity' presents the moral that human feelings transcend all boundaries. In this beautiful story Mikali's famished infant brother is saved due to the kindness of a Chinese woman when Mikali was driven by his own countrymen. Learners can easily perceive that noble qualities like kindness, caring and sharing know no caste, creed or race. In Hindi literature there are highly inspiring stories of Prem Chandra, Jai Shankar Prasad, Bhagwati Charan Verma, Amrit Lal Nagar, Jainendra and Ageya. Prem Chandra's great stories 'Punch Parmeshwar, Budhi Kaki, Kafan, Gilli Danda, Bade Bhai Saheb, Poos Ki Ek Rat, Dhai Ser Atta' besides presenting a realistic picture of our country also evoke feelings of sympathy and compassion for the poor and down-trodden, who have been always suppressed in our country. Even Jai Shankar Prasad's story 'Chhota Jadugar' presents a child's innocent joy and his love for his mother. Whereas his 'Aakashdeep' presents supreme values of love and sacrifice. In pre-independence period, Indian writers succeeded in evoking values of nationalism and patriotism through their inspiring writings. In Bengal Sharat Chandra, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, R.N. Tagore, Mahashweta Devi, Ashapurna influenced lives of millions through their ennobling works.

Value Inculcation through topics on Festivals

Even simple topics like celebration of festivals such as Id, Diwali, Christmas and Baishakhi can be used by a language teacher to illustrate how social customs and celebrations bring delight and fun in our lives and make us more tolerant, humane and broad-minded.

Value Inculcation through description of Nature

It is the solemn duty of a language teacher to involve the learners in such a way that they can feel joy, solace and tranquility while reading about multi-coloured rainbow,

calm and quiet river, dancing daffodils and moon clouded in mystery. All these beautiful, lovely and natural objects will heal the spirit of the young generation, elevate their sensitivity, refine their hearts and develop their love for whole universe.

Value Inculcation through different Characters

Through language, the learners get the glimpse of the innermost depths of complex human heart. Shakespeare's, Hamlet and Othello; Thackeray's Becky; Dickens' David Copperfield; Hardy's Henchard and Tess all present timeless and universal characteristics of human nature. Proper understanding of these complex characters can make a person more kind, sympathetic and tolerant. In India Ashapura Devi's 'Pratham Pratishruti', Mahaweta Devi's 'Hazar Chaurasi ki Ma', Tagore's 'Kabuliwala', Prem chandra's Godan, Gaban, Seva Sadan, R.K Narayan's The Guide, Fanishwar Nath Renu's, Maila Anchal, Amrit Lal Nagar's Manas Ka Hans, Jai Shankar Prasad's Titali present a wide range of characters which make the readers aware of the subtleties and inner depths of human hearts and influence the readers to be more humane.

A teacher who is an immediate and most important role model must use recitation, story telling, role-play and dramatization to instill these values in the students. He can also use techniques of discussion, questioning and analysis and brainstorming to inculcate these values. A good teacher can go even beyond classroom and include community to instill fine values through practical examples, and demonstrations. He can use extracts of good literary works and by using different techniques make, them appreciate and imbibe these values.