
Teaching English: Going beyond Imparting Values in an ELT Classroom

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Abstract

Today success is gauged in terms of money, power and position, but if they are not accompanied by positive values that give meaning and strength to a person's character, can a nation be built? It is in this context that value education, which aims at molding, transforming and elevating the mind, becomes relevant. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "We need a man-making and nation building education." Knowledge cannot be confined to text books to prepare the youth for a career, however the values that are instilled at an early stage, influence a person's thoughts feelings, actions and become guiding principles to make the right choices in life. An English teacher can do much by going beyond his/her role of imparting language competence by integrating it with the much needed value education.

Key words: Value education, English Language Teaching, English Language Lab

"The aim of education," in the words of William S. Burroughs, "is the knowledge, not of facts, but of values." Education widens one's horizons; it is not restricted within narrow confines of a syllabus. A dynamic teacher often looks for possibilities of going the extra mile. An English teacher while putting first things first i.e. laying emphasis on imparting language skills, can also endeavour to go beyond this by making the extra effort to impart much needed life skills and human values for the holistic development of learners.

Values are beliefs about what is right or wrong, important or proper. They refer to "a person's idea of what is desirable, what he actually wants." Hindzay (1966). These ideals and convictions are the guiding principles and standards of life, affecting a person's behavior, outlook, attitude, influencing decision making as well as physical, mental and social health.

However, due to the erosion of moral standards in today's world there is a need to impart values for individual and social development. Instead of merely complaining about deteriorating values, a teacher, by imparting value education, can positively influence learners and help them be the change they want to see in society, shape the future and thus find true meaning in life.

Value education encompasses inculcation of appropriate behaviour and habits, respect for others, honesty, hard work, sincerity, truthfulness, non-violence, gratitude, sense of duty and responsibility, fostering positive relationships, developing a sense human brotherhood, of making moral judgments based on sound reasoning and so on. G. Rodriguez and Jose L. Rodriguez point out: "As a global society continues to expand, we have the choice to co-create a better future for our children by ensuring equity, access and excellence in education as core values that will help transform our world. That choice allows us to become all that we can be as people, through the celebration of our diversity of language, history and culture."

In this context, an English teacher can use a wide array of resources and opportunities to instill values in the course of language teaching in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom. For instance, the first year engineering students in Osmania University affiliated colleges have essays on eminent personalities like APJ

Abdul Kalam and Sachin Tendulkar. Learners are encouraged to focus attention not only on their achievements in their respective fields but also on the values that they lived by. For instance they can learn from Kalam, the eagerness to learn more, to widen one's horizons, unconditional love and respect for parents; from Sachin, they can learn perseverance and courage and above all their commitment to contribute to the betterment of society.

It is not only great and famous personalities that can serve as role models for the young. They can be encouraged to identify, appreciate and emulate people in their own homes and surroundings, the unknown, unsung heroes, who have influenced them. 'My Role Model' can be a topic for JAM (speaking for just a minute) or for Public Speaking.

In addition, learners' fondness for social media can be used to advantage by the teacher. Various social networking platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook, Pintrest and You tube have a rich collection of content that is inspirational and thought provoking. Certain specific items can be selected and learners can be asked to share their own observations about them. Examples of such audio visuals which the authors used in the Lab include: social psychologist, Amy Cuddy on Body language which shows how one can feel more positive by working on one's nonverbal communication and Anthony Robbins, who teaches one to engineer and design oneself to become the person one wants to be. Based on their observations, the learners can make poster presentations or short films of their own and present them in the Language Lab.

On the other hand, English newspapers and magazines, which can never cease to lose their importance, can serve as easily available resources of language learning. A judicious selection of articles from Readers Digest, Competition Success Review or any reputed English Newspaper can not only improve reading skills like skimming and scanning but also impart value education. For instance in the article "Watch Out for Each Other", Usha Raman, in the Hindu 21 August, 2017, while reflecting on the increasing numbers of suicides in society, suggests that "instead of losing ourselves in our smart devices, we could take time to look and listen and possibly offer a response instead of being silent when we sense that need for connection in someone in our circle." She also says that "it is important to watch ourselves and note what keeps us going and what brings us down to recognize pressure points and find constructive ways to relieve tensions." Above all "we need to watch out for each other and for ourselves. And that, most certainly, is a skill worth learning – for living."

In the effort of going beyond, the teacher needs to take time and effort to choose relevant content which will serve the purpose of not only focusing on a particular language item (e.g. vocabulary, grammar) but also highlight certain values he/she wishes the learners to contemplate about, learn from and imbibe. These materials could include excerpts from speeches. One example of brevity and oratory could be the Gettysburg Speech, comprising only 10 sentences, during which Abraham Lincoln reminds the audience that their country was founded on the values of liberty and equality. Other examples of speeches that could be used include: "I have a Dream" by Martin Luther King Jr. to highlight the concept of equality, the opening lines of the "Tryst with Destiny" speech by Jawaharlal Nehru to inspire learners with a love for the nation. Inspiring lyrics too can be very uplifting and encouraging e.g. A Hero Lies in You, by Mariah Carey to learn about our inner strength:

...when you feel like hope is gone
Look inside you and be strong
And you'll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you

Similarly the lyrics of the song "What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong helps to sensitize learners to the beauty of the world which we perhaps take for granted:

I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself what a wonderful world

After listening to these lyrics, learners could share their thoughts about what appealed to them the most and why.

Besides the above, a few lines can be selected from poems since they express ideas succinctly, eloquently and provide food for thought. For instance, these lines from the poem IF by Rudyard Kipling speak of perseverance and a never give up attitude:

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on'...

The importance of making progress in life is well captured in a stanza from 'Psalm of Life' by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

Not enjoyment and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way:
Abut to act that each tomorrow
Finds us farther than today.

Learners can also read, ponder and talk about what the famous lines of Rabindranath Tagore mean to them:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free...
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Besides all the above, a teacher can select just a few, concise, relevant quotes which have the benefit of being brief, pointed and impactful. These quotes help us in our endeavours to be better human beings. In the words of Socrates, "We cannot live better than in seeking to become better." These encapsulated nuggets of wisdom can deeply affect, inspire and motivate. Here are a few examples:

-) Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference. *Winston Churchill*
-) Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth. *Mahatma Gandhi*
-) When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed. *Maya Angelou*
-) Happiness depends upon ourselves. *Aristotle*
-) Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. *Nelson Mandela*
-) "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles." *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
-) "True strength lies in submission which permits one to dedicate his life, through devotion, to something beyond himself." *Henry Miller*

Such short and pithy quotes can be used for oral as well as written tasks. For instance learners can present their thoughts on the given quote in a three minutes talk or they could use it for an 'expansion' exercise in which they write a paragraph on the given topic. They can make their own collection of quotes and share with their peers, since as William B Sprague puts it, "a collection of rare thoughts is nothing less than a cabinet of intellectual gems."

The English Language Lab offers ample opportunity for teaching values through well planned group discussions, debates, role plays, power point presentations on issues that will not only help in teaching communication skills but also in training learners to respect other's opinions, to listen completely and attentively to what the other is saying, to agree to disagree, to counter an argument but not attack the speaker personally. Above all, they will be provided with an opportunity to ponder and talk about issues that require their attention instead of merely focusing on marks to be scored in their exams.

In addition to the above, the Language Lab makes it possible to use audio visual clippings to enable learners' listening comprehension skills to be sharpened and also instill values. One fine example is the Commencement Address by Admiral McRaven at the University of Texas at Austin 2014 where he urges the graduates to 'Find Courage to Change the World'; he tells them that life is not fair and that they will fail often. But if they take some risks, "step up when the times are toughest, face down the bullies, lift up the downtrodden and never, ever give up. He says that if they do these things, then "the next generation and the generations that follow will live in a world far better than the one we have today."

As John Parankimalil points out, "Value Education is an important aspect of education affecting the learners and the society as a whole." Hence it should be taken seriously since "negligence will be detrimental to the well being of our society on the whole." This paper looked at how an English teacher can integrate value education and language learning by using various methods to create an enriching, learning experiences for students. Such teachers can act as mentors, agents of change, as they inspire, inform and sensitize learners to inculcate values of love, brotherhood, peace, joy, compassion, tolerance through active participation in discussions, dialogues, reading, listening, and reflecting about various aspects of life in an atmosphere that encourages the development of ideals and values. In the words of Bill Johnston, "The essence of language teaching, like the essence of all teachings, lies in values."

In conclusion, it can be observed that an English teacher's judicious use of a variety of resources can not only improve learners' communicative competence but also act as an efficient tool to impart moral values in ELT classrooms. Such practice will make it possible to meet the objectives of education viz. drawing out the best in the learner by inculcating teaching critical thinking and helping learners to become responsible citizens who will use their values to guide their attitudes and behaviour. It is true that we guide our students to be professionally competent but is that enough? Is it not essential to emphasize that true success cannot be achieved at the cost of compromising one's principles and values. The relevance of intertwining value education with English language learning calls to mind the words of Swami Vivekananda, "We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet."

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