Instilling Moral Values in Report Writing Course

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Abstract

This topic may raise eyebrows of its relevance, significance and approaches. Very often than not several soft skills initiatives have been put forward by the top leaders of the country, of which are very commonly known as, for example, *Rukun Negara*, *Pelan Integriti Negara* (PIN) , and the recent one – *Kemahiran Insaniah*. All these are targeted to the working population of the country. However, these are noble values that need to be instilled at much tender age of our youths. Being teachers at tertiary level, do we play a part in this work of nurturing the nature. If we are not obligated to, is our teaching merely facts dissemination and completing the syllabus? If we have the sense of responsibility being citizens with these noble values, do we impart them to our students? And just how do we do that? In a small area of focus, teaching Report Writing entails much trust in the choice of topic, data collection, researching for literature, drafting and writing. These are the tasks that need to be carried out by the students. They are the process owner of their project and in conducting so, the trustworthiness sometimes may swerve to plagiarized work, cut-paste practice or copying from others in carrying out their assignment. Can we inculcate values in every juncture of progress that they make? This paper attempts to address so by providing pertinent teaching-learning strategies.

Keywords: Moral values, Report writing, Soft skills, Teaching-learning strategies

1. Introduction

The original title of this paper was intended to read "In Paper We Write, In Values We Rely". Being a language educator in an institution of higher education, much has been experienced in imparting knowledge and information via reading, writing, listening and speaking. Also, much has been seen in the types of students that are admitted into the university. These are the raw resources that need to be nurtured and refined to provide for the country in terms of economic returns. Many of them that come for further studies are intellectually ready. They are the products of various levels of the national examinations that are held throughout their lives within the education system. However, being equipped with intellectual capital may not necessarily deem them fit to create a holistic society. It is not sufficient for a total person to become, with only intellectual capital, as two other elements are necessary to make one a total person and these are social and spiritual capitals. (Agustian , 2005).

Thus, in the attempt to create a healthy society, every educational curriculum lauds to be effective. In Malaysia, from the beginning of the schooling age, the education system has placed emphasis on creating a holistic person in preparation to be a desirable citizen.   This is clearly stated in the National Education Philosophy:

 "Education in Malaysia is an ongoing process towards further effort in developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner; so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well being as well as being able to contribute to the betterment of the society and the nation at large"

in which much emphasis is placed on character building of every learning individual. The education system has not failed to provide learning experiences in moulding the character of the young people.   As part of the philosophy, there is a place for value education that every young learner has to undertake in the system.   Values which have been widely defined in literature encompass all things from eternal concepts to behavioral actions. They are criteria that determine the levels of goodness, worth and beauty.   These important elements which include responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, integrity and honesty are important to ensure that they act as filter for the selection of inputs involving the choices of right-and-wrong,   ethical-and-non ethical and desirable-and-undesirable.

Nevertheless, many initiatives are planned, accepted, launched and recorded on paper. These sets of values, after being found appropriate, are ready for inclusion in the curriculum via various relevant subjects. The next issue is the imparting process so that this values education takes place in the learning process. The next important issue proposed in this paper is how do language educators play their role in contributing to nurturing the resources, in particular the students. Needless to say, these are the raw resources that need to be instilled with those values propagated in the initiatives. Thus, the writer intends to share some highlighted national soft skills initiatives and suggest ways in which values inculcation can be incorporated in one of the language courses offered by an academy of language studies of a local university and that is   Report Writing Course.

2. Soft skills initiatives

In support of the already existing educational curriculum, other initiatives supplement the inculcation of values not only among the young learners in institutions of learning, but also for working community in the society. Several attempts have been made by the authority to put forth the requirements of churning desirable citizens. These initiatives carry noblest aims as they intend to nurture the ambition of a developing nation as perfected in the National Education Philosophy. In this paper only three commonly highlighted ones : the *Rukun Negara, Pelan Integriti Negara* and *Kemahiran Insaniah* are cited for discussion purposes*.*

2.1 Rukun negara

In 1969, May 13, a serious race riot took place in the country. This incident has evident the fragility of a multi-racial Malaysia which in turn will endanger the country stability. In its reaction a Malaysian Pledge of Alliance was instituted and thus Rukun Negara (. It is not necessarily a soft skill initiative but a philosophy and national ideology. The objectives of the allegiance include:

(1) Achieving a more perfect unity amongst the whole of the Malaysian society

(2) Preserving a democratic way of life

(3) Creating a just society where the prosperity of the country can be enjoyed together in a fair and equitable manner

(4) Guaranteeing a liberal approach towards her rich and varied cultural tradition and

(5) Building a progressive society that will make use of science and modern technology

However, to achieve these ambitions there are mission statements that need to be pulled up in order to meet the ends. These are the five principles that entail the philosophy and they warrant every citizen to embrace:

(1) Believe in God

(2) Loyalty to king and country

(3) Upholding the Constitution

(4) Rule of law

(5) Good behavior and morality

In providing the intellectual input and equipping them with the knowledge to these young people, more often than not, teachers may notice that there is an absence or lack of effort in   imparting   the desirable social elements   when they display social misconduct. Some of these behaviors warrant the provision for input from the teachers through inculcation and action learning in which these students by chance or choice may commit academic misconduct in their learning process.

For this paper the focus is on the Report Writing Course as there are   strategies adopted by students which may amount to academic dishonesty such as plagiarizing, cut-paste strategy and editing exercise by content expert, just to name a few. Nonetheless, these coupled with undesirable social behaviors like absenteeism, unpunctuality and defiance may cause ripple of undesirable characters among the young people. These are some of the observed behaviours in the classes taught at the university.

2.2 Pelan integriti neggara (National Integrity Plan)

The National Integrity Plan is another noble strategy to create a holistic society.   In upholding the aspiration of the country's leader, Malaysia is forging ahead to become a developed nation in its own mould (Badawi, 2005). To achieve this, the nation has to address the shortcomings amongst its citizens and thus the need to strengthen ethics and integrity. In the Prime Minister's words, he states that   "The government has implemented the PM Directive No. 1 of 1998 which aims to enhance the integrity of the government administration. There is also the needs to involve other sectors too, such as the private sector, political parties, non-government organizations, mass media, women, youth and students. The formulation of the National integrity Plan has been based on the spirit and principles of the Federal Constitution, the philosophy of the *Rukun Negara* and the aspiration of Vision 2020. With its objective "to establish a fully moral and ethical society whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual capitals imbued with the highest ethical standards",

this initiative will only remain on paper if efforts to develop desirable character amongst the citizens, particularly the young ones are not implemented.

This initiative should not remain so if it were to be successfully manifested in the society commitment for a healthy nation. The cooperation and coordination programmes have to start from the grass roots right up to the highest level of the society. These include the family, community civil society and socio-culture including the education sector. Thus, being in one of the comprehensive sectors, teachers have a definite role to play. In the objective, this presentation attempts to share the teaching experiences where ethics and integrity can be part of the mechanism not only to produce academic work that goes through ethical process, but also to nurture future leaders to achieve national aspiration.

2.3 Kemahiran insaniah

As proposed in the paper, the author attempts to present another noble initiative launched by the authority, with the effort of developing the young people with skills that make them fit for the society. These soft skills are requirements that every student must possess. This particular initiative is targeted to the young people, especially to those studying in the university. These skills are integrated into the teaching-and-learning system. The students need to conduct self-evaluation and self-improvement to find out the level they have achieved in the development of these important skills that they need in life.

The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia has made the acquisition and mastery of these soft skills mandatory for every university student when they graduate. These skills include communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, entrepreneurial skills, team working skills, lifelong learning and information management, professional ethics and moral and leadership skills.

Thus, for these skills to be acquired, inculcation should proceed on even at tertiary level as students are exposed to the learning process that they may not have gone through at primary and secondary levels. In the multitude of duties, a teacher can play his role through his lessons,   to infuse these skills during the class hours. To teach these skills per se is possible, but that requires supplementary programmes like those organized by Universiti Teknologi MARA Department of Student Affairs in which a systematic curriculum exists in these programmes and they are separated from the normal teaching hours. This indicates extra commitment is required by the teacher and learner associated with these programmes.

3. Teacher's role in incorporating values in report writing

3.1 Academic challenges

An earlier task undertaken by the students during the Report Writing Course is the choice of report topic for approval by the lecturers.   For this first step, lecturers suggest themes of areas for students to report so that students are not given the liberty to pick up a topic which may have been worked on in previous semesters by other students. As an example, teaching students from the Faculty of Business and Management, topic scope involves investigation on business entities.   With the advent of technology, there are wide chances of undesirable academic activities such as plagiarizing, cut-and-paste practices (read malpractice) and using unauthorized content editor in carrying out the assignment.

It is during this class session that students are made aware of various practices of academic dishonesty with the intention that they know what they are and how to inculcate the awareness of the repercussion of committing so.   One of the acts is plagiarizing. The question as to whether plagiarism is on the rise, at Yale University and perhaps elsewhere, the answer is   "maybe". However, the administration is not taking any chances (Yale Alumni Magazine January/February 2007). Plagiarizing involves the practice of directly quoting published or unpublished work of another person without clearly stating the author with footnote, citations or bibliographical reference and this act can be addressed through examples from previous students'   work.

During the recent marking of an examinable project, a student's report has displayed a case of cut-and-paste malpractice. In doing so, the acknowledgement page of the report carries not the name of his own lecturer but another who is not teaching him. This typical case has been reported in previous semesters.

3.2 Teaching-learning strategies

In every teacher's attempt to complete the Report Writing syllabus which is a mandatory English Language course at first degree level, some teaching strategies that assist in the inculcation of values helps to train students to observe rules and procedures in order to keep them in check from committing academic dishonesty. In terms of language proficiency level, students are taught different techniques of editing strategies. These techniques like paraphrasing, different approaches in the technique of acknowledging, making use of collocations in report writing and editing may help the students handle the writing process well during the course.

Therefore, teachers do have a role to play and perhaps they need to 'cooperate and coordinate' their teaching duties during lecture and tutorials to make these initiatives not only to remain on paper, but also to be embraced by the

students under their tutelage. The provision for the effort is there and is readily available. In teaching a language course, students are exposed to some strategies that can assist them in the development process. This is interrelated with the demand of higher education in which young people got admitted to the university are then exposed to the needs far beyond their self-expectation as to what entails in higher education, particularly in the subjects that they may not be too familiar with.

The following teaching-learning strategy in Table 1 is adapted from the typology proposed by Huitt (2004). The value laden elements are laced with the methods used in carrying out the report writing assignments. Huitt (2004) includes five basic approaches to values education: inculcation, moral (ethics) development, analysis, value clarification and action learning. Using these elements, this presentation attempts to incorporate the tasks involved in carrying out the report writing exercise using both knowledge input as well as value laden elements that intend to keep students in check of any malpractices. (See Table 1)

4. Summary

Teaching involves disseminating information both of knowledge as well as values. When students are clearly informed of the different types of academic dishonesty, lecturers are providing favors for these young people not to commit those practices. Having been in the university for almost two decades, the author is aware of the wide diversity of social and cultural background these students come from. Being a university student requires one to ideally uphold righteousness to be successful both on paper and simultaneously in 'spirituality' too.

From the above picture, the author throughout her years of teaching experience has always believed that apart from teaching and completing the syllabus, inculcation of good behaviour and moral values to strengthen ethics and integrity and developing the young people's soft skills should be incorporated during teaching, no matter how tight class time is. This is not a research paper but a teaching experience which intends to be shared with other aspiring teachers/lecturers who believe that they play a small, if not, significant role to help students develop holistically.

And finally as a reminder to all Malaysians, if not all humankind, these words of Father of the Indian Nation, M.K. Gandhi, should act as the bastion of survival in the journey of life towards excellence, glory and distinction:

If wealth is lost, nothing is lost

If health is lost something is lost

If character is lost, everything is lost.

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Table 1. Overview of Values Education Approaches in Report Writing Class

Approach	Purpose	Methods
Inculcation	To introduce to the students the kinds of topics relevant within the scope of research.	To discuss the different issues that students encounter on and outside campus campus.
	To introduce the use of individual portfolio (final grade given)	Guidance is provided so that topics chosen are not taken from previous students' report.
	To teach students that comments, feedback , problems or complaints are best addressed though writing	Topics are recorded in the portfolio for continuity of discussion throughout the semester.
Analysis	To help students pick up relevant issue to design questionnaire/interview protocol	Discussion on the topic scope and pertinent, relevant issues that need to be asked during data collection process.
	To help students use objective and analytical process in relating questions with the problems that may be observed or found	
Values clarification	To practice writing of acknowledgements	Students are directed in group to collect 3 – 5 published books to scrutinize the language use in writing sections of report e.g. Acknowledgement
	To assist student in writing conclusion and recommendation remarks for the report assignment	The students learn to incorporate phrases, clauses and collocations that are relevant in writing acknowledgements, statements for conclusion and recommendation.
Action Learning	To train students in writing	In writing component, students are taught the technique of paraphrasing. It is writing in own words what someone else has said or written.
		The ability to paraphrase helps students to recognize when another writer has restated his ideas.
		When writing reports,
		paraphrasing helps to avoid using direct quotes.

Ethics Development	To help students develop regularity and reliability in time management	Students keep an individual portfolio that requires them to present to lecturer on regular meeting appointments outside class hours.
		Time management skill is applied where students keep to their appointments and meetings.
		Written tasks are presented to the lecturer. Early drafts are checked and filed. Using the amended draft, the next portfolio presentation is conducted on another meeting.