Asraful Mustafa Kamal
M.A. in Education
(I.G.N.O.U.), B.Ed (A.N.U.)
Ex-Scholar, Acharya
Nagarjuna University,
Namburu, Guntur, Andhra
Pradesh, India, India

Education for social well-being: Redefining values

Asraful Mustafa Kamal

Abstract
The paper explores the concept of values from psychological as well as sociological perspective. Based on a research study, the paper describes five values identified through the analysis of biographies and autobiographies of personalities who have constructively contributed for the society in their own ways coming from different fields. Various anecdotes and excerpts from the lives of these personalities demonstrate the significance of each 'value' in their lives and the interaction between various values and other abilities. The study also describes a set of activities embedded within the school processes for encouraging values amongst children. Taking the instance of science as one of the school subjects, the tryout of these activities with school children is discussed.

Keywords: Values, socially contributing individuals, social boldness, empathy, foresightedness, authenticity, optimism

Introduction

The school has always been the most important means of transferring the wealth of tradition from one generation to the next. This applies today in an even higher degree than informer times for, through modern development of the economic life. The family as bearer of tradition and education has been weakened. The continuance and health of human society is therefore in a still higher degree dependent on the school formerly. Sometimes one sees in the school the instrument for transferring a certain maximum quantity of knowledge to the growing generation. But, that is not right. Knowledge is dead; the school, however, serves the living. It should develop in the young individuals those qualities and capabilities which are of value for the welfare of the commonwealth.

The backdrop

The nation is best represented by its youth who form the promising group embodying its hopes and carrying out its dreams. Hence the wellbeing of the young people is a leading indicator of the long-term health of our communities. As our young people go, so goes our nation. We look upon them as having a role of community rebuilding work and creating a better community. But how many of our youngsters actually volunteer for community work or even think of or respond to problems within their communities? How many of our students did think of the recent Tsunami problem? The picture is not very encouraging and hardly any of our youngsters come forward take initiatives. There may be other reasons for their apathy, but we cannot ignore the fact that young people are a reflection of who we are as a society and a portent of where we are headed. Many learn from their family and school to only take care of them and are embracing individualism. This is because we are developing competition amongst them instead of cooperation. Also, they may be lacking sense of direction and value personal success and prosperity over social endeavors. Thus it becomes important for us to envision their development in the light of current need of the society. A pertinent question therefore is what we want our future generation to be?' What values do we want to see in them? The National Curricular Framework of India (2005) recommends building of commitment towards social values such as concern for others' well Being and respect for human dignity and rights amongst children as one of the aims of education (p. 10). The present paper focuses on the significance of values in one's life and discusses values identified through the analysis of biographies and autobiographies of personalities coming from different fields who have constructively contributed for the society in their own ways for well being of others.

Correspondence
Asraful Mustafa Kamal
M.A. in Education
(I.G.N.O.U.), B.Ed (A.N.U.)
Ex-Scholar, Acharya
Nagarjuna University,
Namburu, Guntur, Andhra
Pradesh, India, India

Various anecdotes and excerpts from the lives of these personalities demonstrate the significance of each 'value' in their lives and the interaction between various values as well as with other abilities in an individual.

The value of 'values'

'Value' as the term itself says means whatever is liked, prized, desired or enjoyed by anyone at any time. As has been stated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1998) [18] "Value indicates the regard for a thing, situation or attitude which for some reason is esteemed or prized by the value-holder". Values are considered as potent determinants of behavior and are not under the direct control of reason. They are attitudes and preferences that are also products of feelings. As Sanyal (1962) [14] brings forth, "value is partly feeling and partly reason...the feeling part is hedonic or material in character, the reason part is regulative both formally and finally." According to the psychological point of view, value influences our behavior and conduct in different situations as it determines one's attitudes, judgments, choices, and actions (Rokeach, 1979) [13]. It guides our actions and motivates for achieving certain desired and noble ends. Whereas from a sociological perspective values are certain norms, ideals, or beliefs that members of a society hold (Kane, 1962) [9] and are internalized through the process of conditioning learning or socialization. This perspective emphasizes that values have a role in integrating the different parts of an entity together. The above perspectives of the concept of value bring threefold dimension to it that are significant in the present context. One, that values have a major influence on the behavior and actions of a person as well as its goals can be developed through the processes of learning within various instructions of the society. The last but not the least that the values are important directly have a role in integrating the society by directing the goals of its individuals.

The process of identification of values

The values were identified using grounded theory method'. In this method verbatim scripts are collected by reading through a small sample of text (usually line by line) the autobiographies and biographies of some path breaking leaders from carious fields such as Albert Einstein, Louis Braille, Mother Teresa, Madam Curie. Benjamin Franklin, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Thomas Edison were explored and analyzed though the above given method.

Social boldness

Gray, (1994) [7] mentions about Mother Teresa's intelligence and boldness in dealing with people that helped her to collect money and medicines for treating the sick people by quoting the following incident of her life. "...one of the greatest needs was for medicines to treat the sick people. Michael Gomes will go with her to all the pharmacists, asking the owners to donate the medicines that the poor people could not afford. One pharmacist in Calcutta said he couldn't' help and carried on with his work. But Sister Teresa and Gomes sat there so quietly and patiently that he ended up feeling ashamed of himself and gave her a big box of useful things" (p. 21).

Thus, the description of social boldness taken for the present study is that it is an adventurous fearless quality in dealing with others and pursuing independent goals. It provides motivation to move towards others to seek adventure, stimulation and attention. It also contributes to independence.

Social boldness and tolerance are also interrelated to persistence as the creative individuals continue working with their set of ideas only because they are able to face the resistance and tolerate the lack of acceptance from the field that are also identified as important factors in Sternberg and Lubart's investment theory of creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999) [17].

Empathy and compassion for others

"Once Bouthakrun (sister in law) took a fancy for keeping pet squirrels in cages. I said it wasn't right and she told me not to set myself up to be her teacher. That could hardly be called a reasoned reply, and consequently, instead of wasting time in bickering, I privately set two of the little creatures free. After that too I had to listen to a certain amount of scolding, but I made no retort."(Tagore, 1940. p.61) This shows Tagore's boldness as well as empathy and compassion towards the creatures of his environment and also the interaction between the two values. As aptly defined by Mead, (1934) [11] "Empathy is the capacity to take the role of the others and to adopt alternative perspectives vis-à-vis oneself" (p.27). Empathy is seen both as a cognitive as well as affective trait as it's an ability to think and imagine on one hand and feel for the other person on the other hand. It is thought to contribute to individual's abilities to understand, predict, experience and relate to others' behaviors, feelings, attitudes and intention and thus interacts with the cognitive trait of a person. (Losoya & Eisenberg, 2001) [10]. According to Benard (2004) [2] "Empathy not only helps facilitate relationship development, it also helps the basis of morality, forgiveness, compassion and caring for others" (p.15). Compassion is the will to help and care for others i.e. in a way it is empathy in nation (Benard, 2004) [2]. Empathy is also found to be associated with prosocial behavior,

Behavior altruism and various indices of interpersonal competence, sociability and cooperative behavior (Eisenberg & Miller. 1987) [5]. The social competence is the ability to integrate thinking. Feeling and behavior to achieve social tasks and outcome valued in various contexts and cultures (Topping, Bremner & Holmes, 2000) [20]. Thus for the present study, Empathy is the ability to think by placing oneself in other's situation and compassion is bringing empathy to action. As was also mentioned during the International Whitehead Conference, 2006 that. "Compassion and empathy are essential attributes to nurture for there can be no genuine advance merely by technological invention. The advance education seeks must be grounded in a fusion of intellectual wonder and human compassion if human civilization is to advance from lower to higher levels of knowledge and authenticity." (The Theory of Creative Synthetic Learning and its Implementation in China, International Whitehead Conference 2006).

Foresightedness

Meadowcroft (1911) [12] in Edison's biography quoted the following incident to show his foresightedness, "Mr. Edison realized at the beginning that previous experimenters had failed because they had been following the wrong track. He knew that electric lighting could not be a success unless it

could be sold to the public at a reasonable price and pay a profit to those who supplied it. With such lamps as had been proposed, requiring such an enormous outlay for copper. This would have been impossible. Besides, there would not have been enough copper in the world to supply conductors for one large city. Edison did what he has so often done before and since. He turned about and went in the opposite direction He reasoned that in order to develop a successful system of electric lighting the cost of conductors must come within very reasonable limits. To insure this. he must invent a lamp of comparatively high resistance. requiring only a small quantity of current. and with a burner having a small radiating surface" (p. 187). This shows that Edison had the ability to see the outcome of one's actions and accordingly plan for the future. Bandura (2006) [1] seeing it as a fundamental human capability (as part of social cognitive theory) quotes, "Another distinctive human characteristic is the capacity for forethought. The ability to bring anticipated outcomes to bear on current activities promotes for insightful behavior" (p. 174). This description of foresightedness is taken for the present study. It helps the person to shape their present according to a desired future. Foresightedness contributes by enabling people to self-direct themselves, motivate themselves and guide their own actions. In the long run it provides direction meaning and coherence to one's life. It is essential for the students to be foresighted, as it will enable them to think about their future and regulate their present accordingly.

Authenticity
In the biography of Louis Braille, the authenticity of his personality is discussed by describing his kindness. Cheerfulness and faithfulness to his friends despite continual ill health. despite the ill will of others which delayed the recognition of his work. in the face of adversity and of accumulated disappointment. Gandhiji also mentions in his autobiography the importance of being faithful to one's action by stating that. "One of the proposals was to plant trees- 1 saw that many did it merely for show and for pleasing the officials. / tried to plead with them that tree planting was not compulsory, hut merely a suggestion. It should be done seriously or not at all_ / have an impression that they laughed at my ideas. I remember that I was in earnest when / planted the tree allotted to me and that I carefully watered and tended if' (1940, p. 124). Thus, the description of authenticity for the present study is from being authentic towards others as well as towards one's action. It means that to be consistent in one's behavior with others and faithful to one's action or doing what one believes in.

Optimism
A P J Abdul Kalam (1999) [8] mentions in his autobiography how his mentor helped encourage him to think optimistically by quoting, "Jallaluddin used to speak to me about the power of positive thinking and I often recalled his words when I felt homesick or dejected. I tried hard to do as he said, which was to strive to control my thoughts and my mind and, through these, to influence my destiny' (p. I l). Optimism is conceptualized as a broad personality trait that is characterized by general optimistic expectations (Scheier and Carver, 1985) [15]. It is an expectation that favorable things will have in future. According to Scheier and colleagues the optimistic people in the face of obstacles

continue to pursue their goals and are able to regulate themselves using effective coping strategies such that they are able to achieve their goals (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2000) [16]. This shows that optimism is positively correlated to perseverance and self-control. It is associated with good physical as well as mental health. Optimistic people can delay gratification to achieve long-term goals as; they believe that long-term goals are achievable (Carr, 2004) [4].

Development of values: A try out with school children
A set of activities embedded within the regular school processes were developed. These were based on the premises that children already have values innately present in them and that there is a need to create experiences and opportunities that could encourage children to put them into practice. The interaction with the started with mixed group interactions that involved students from different together and sharing as well as listening to each other's' views. This helped them to know each other as well as understand how different they were from each other and the diversity that existed within their experiences. Such interactions stimulated them to think about others and their life situations which were evident from the kind of questions they started asking from the researcher. As the next set of activities was class-wise, thus one class (class IX) was randomly selected for activities related to their science curriculum. They were given projects related to issues within their school that they identified themselves and worked on it by collecting data from school staff and children. Such as one group identified the issue of hygiene within the primary students and took concrete steps to address this with the school staff. The students shared that this not only stimulated them to think empathetically but also gave them an opportunity to approach the school staff and discuss the issues with them. They were also given hypothetical situations in which they were made to think about the various health hazards related to the use of certain substances and how they can be prevented in future. This encouraged them to think positively and by foreseeing the demands in the future. These interactions with students through the above described activities showed that the values can be developed by guiding their thinking using appropriate experiences that help them to apply their theoretical knowledge in various disciplines constructively.

Conclusion
The common presence of the five values identified and described amongst the eminent personalities that have contributed to their societies establishes that the personality development of children in schools should focus beyond the cognitive traits. The values identified can serve as a potentiality for developing socially contributing individuals in the contemporary times. The responses of students during the try out of the activities is indicative of the fact that the students can be oriented, motivated and nurtured through various experiences in the school towards these values.

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