

TEAMWORK AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE THE VALUE OF TOLERANCE

Dr. Ruqaiya Alalwani*

1. Problem

This research focuses on teaching the value of tolerance to undergraduate students of the University of Bahrain through teamwork. Each university student is predisposed towards behaving in a certain way as a result of the social attitudes, beliefs and general upbringing of their own groups and clans. Even students from the same nation have different dimensions of culture. Intolerance could be due to differences in groups, ethnicities and nations.

Although some students realize the fact that we live in an increasingly diverse society, others may feel more hesitant, especially if they haven't had much exposure to students different from themselves. They don't know how to bridge cultural gaps, or discovering common ground, nor create new bonds, to the extent that the semester may end without them knowing the names of their fellow class mates. Some might not even have dealt with their classmate nor gotten involved with them to produce a single piece of work.

In this study, the effect of teamwork on the students' enthusiasm for learning the value of tolerance was investigated. Pre- and post-student's comments, and my observations were used to record changes in the student's behavior for learning tolerance during a six-week study period. I investigated how the integration of teamwork into my Islamic Culture curriculum would impact students' enthusiasm for learning the value of tolerance.

My motivation for focusing on teaching tolerance was twofold. First, I've always had an interest in integrating the positive values into my students' studies of Islam and this seemed the perfect opportunity to do just that. Secondly, teaching tolerance as the construction of mental models is inseparable from building better mental models which is the goal of my role as an educator.

* **Associate Professor, College of Arts, University of Bahrain**

2. Aims and question

The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of teamwork on teaching the value of tolerance in the context of action research, in which practices of students are reflected. The core question of this study is; how effectively can teamwork teach the students the value of tolerance?.

3. Literature review

Early in my Action Research I conducted a Literature Review to better understand the issues surrounding teaching values in general. My experience working on my project over the past five months gave me insight into some of the most important things that need to be examined.

Action research involves utilizing a systematic cyclical method of planning, taking action, observing, evaluating (including self-evaluation) and critical reflecting prior to planning the next cycle (McNiff, 2002). It is a way to increase understanding of how change in one's actions or practices (O'Brien, 1998, pp11) can mutually benefit a community of practitioners.

Perhaps worth noting is the fact that the current period is witnessing an unprecedented interest in values. Many writings have confirmed the need for a common framework for twenty-first century ethics. Many more believe that the modern society is no longer adequate in dealing with the many problems that face humanity. The crisis is in ideas, beliefs and values that founded the modern society in the era of globalization (Kim, 2003).

There is growing demand for ethical values in the various disciplines of knowledge. The topic of Values Education is reaching a larger number of countries. It has already been adopted by many governments. However, some authors (like Kohlberg) reject the traditional approach of teaching values, such as honesty, kindness, patience, strength, tolerance, etc (Walsh, 2000, p.37).

According to the traditional approach, teachers have to teach these virtues through example and direct communication. This approach provides no guiding principle for defining what virtues are worthy of espousal, and wrongly assumes a community consensus on what are considered "positive values" – which is not the case. In fact, in reality, teachers often end up arbitrarily imposing certain values - depending on their societal, cultural, and personal beliefs (Kohlberg, 1989).

A better alternative approach to teaching values should focus on the stages of moral development. These stages are critical, and should not be neglected, as they consider the way a person organizes their understanding of virtues, rules, and norms, and integrates these into a moral choice (Kohlberg, 1989). Therefore, by discussing these understandings among themselves, students would be better equipped to have a more meaningful exchange on the topic of values.

By extension, teachers can thereby encourage tolerance in their students' practice by demonstrating teamwork in all activities in the class; teamwork being the ability to work together toward a common vision. Teamwork is powerful vehicle that provides constant and persistent messages about tolerance and respecting the opinions of others, even when these opinions are different. Students in particular can be inspired if the teacher asks them to assist others through different projects and assignments.

By applying teamwork to all subjects, students' can strengthen the value of tolerance as it transcends all aspects of their academic and social lives.

The concept of teamwork is self-explanatory; a group of people working towards a common goal, where each individual brings forth his/her skills in a concentrated manner and coordinates it with others skills, to produce a desirable end (Bruce, 2000, pp. 25-27).

According to (Harlen, 2005), the objectives of learning are various and so should be the approaches to teaching. A combination of approaches is often the most effective form of values education. Research tells us that students learn best from tasks that involve doing tasks and involve social interactions. Collaborative learning should be included in almost every classroom. In order to create a collaborative climate, trust should be produced by honest, open, consistent and respectful behavior. All these components are relevant to encourage the adoption of tolerance among team members.

My literature review has clarified many issues for me while also raising new questions. With an understanding of the existing literature, I sought to apply the knowledge that I acquired through my Literature Review as I worked through my Action Research in order to add to the community of knowledge.

4. Method

This study goes through different phases; identification of problem area, collection and organization of the data, interpretation of data, action based on data and reflection (Ferrance, 2000, p. 9). I started gathering qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, observation notes, video recordings, and written documents. The aim of qualitative data analysis is to organize the information into categories and then attempt to identify relationships among these categories in order to better facilitate understanding.

In the next step I looked at the data for themes and categories. I already had codes in my mind that I was looking for in the data. When I was thinking about tolerance, I put down some categories *before* starting to look at the data; some examples include self-discipline, lack of respect, and background.

I also leveraged another tool to draw the relationships among these categories. To that end, as part of data collection process I interviewed some teachers about their views on action research. I also made weekly evaluations of my observations and recorded these.

During my eleven years of teaching, I have used many strategies to enhance student learning of values in general. However, I am still not convinced that I thoroughly understand how students learn values. I strongly believe students learn values through practicing them and through other mediums such as teamwork that serve as catalysts to the learning process. I teach the Islamic Culture course ISLM 101. This is a compulsory course for all the students in the university. The class is made up of thirty-six students, 28 female and 7 male students. I spent the first two weeks of the semester reviewing the terminology of tolerance, teamwork and its importance within the classroom environment. I also mentioned how Knowledge of religions and beliefs of others can help promote respectful behavior and enhance social cohesion.

I started to emphasize the meaning of “tolerance” shows that if one wants to develop his/her tolerance to reach a certain morality level, he/she has to be open-minded without any conditions and deeply sincere. Tolerance enhancement is the start of learning how to live in harmony commencing from the classroom led by teachers. Students experienced how to live and coexist

with others in the classroom where the real world is modeled for them in a miniature setting. It is in the classroom that they started to practice the critical review of ideas, support of opinions with evidence and openness to alternative viewpoints (de Oliveira , 2012).

I started to observe the budding of established norms for respectful dialogue which lay the foundation for students to have constructive arguments. The room itself was rearranged and redecorated to reinforce the message of peace.

Some hands-on activities were used at this time. The students worked on both individual assignments as well as group assignments as a measure to determine each student's level of enthusiasm for learning and practicing tolerance.

I think one of my responsibilities as an educator is facilitating the learning process to create a positive learning environment. Teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, play a big role in influencing the amount of freedom that students have to respond to questions or statements (Amidon & Flanders, 1971).

I started to rearrange tables in patterns to allow grouping discussions; as today's instructors are encouraged to spend less time lecturing and more time leading students in discussion and problem solving

(http://www.ndt.ed.org/TeachingResources/ClassroomTips/Coaching_for_Success.htm).

5. First cycle

My Cycle One questions focused on explaining the concept of tolerance and its validity not only in education but within the broader society as a whole. I started to define the concept of teamwork as well, finally settling on the following: "a respect, acceptance and appreciation of

the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance is harmony in difference" (<http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/teaching-tolerance>).

For reference, teamwork is defined in Webster's New World Dictionary as "a joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his or her individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group." (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>). This does not mean that the individual is no longer important; however, it does mean that effective and efficient

teamwork goes beyond individual accomplishments. The most effective teamwork is produced when all the individuals involved harmonize their contributions and work towards a common goal.

During this time I administered a survey which contained the following questions:

- Do you like learning the value of tolerance?
- Do you like learning within teams so far?
- How enthusiastic are you about practicing tolerance outside the class?

Students were asked to rate their answers to each question using a scale of 1 to 5. The scale was represented by (1) which was considered a very unenthusiastic response, (2) an unenthusiastic response, (3) indifference, (4) an enthusiastic response, and (5) a very enthusiastic response.

Additionally, I made it clear to them if they had anything to say, they would be able to come over to my office after class to discuss it.

It was during this week that I began to integrate teamwork into my teaching methods. As the chapter was introduced I asked my students to look through it in their textbooks. Students were grouped according to their choice as much as possible and were assigned to work in groups of three or four to develop a summary that would be presented to the rest of the class.

I explained to them in the class that “No Muslim, no Jew, no Christian, no Hindu, no Buddhist—no one who is true to the principles of any of the world’s faiths, no one who claims a cultural, national or religious identity based on values such as truth, decency and justice—can be neutral in the fight against intolerance” (United Nations Information Service 2004).

Throughout the study I observed and made notes as to how the students were working and their reactions in class. These observations were guided by this question: What problems are the students encountering as they work together? These observations and notes were useful in making sense of any difficulty I found in the end-of-study student surveys. I was able to discern the source of problems so that content difficulties or friction within groups was not confused with a loss of enthusiasm for practicing tolerance.

At the end of the cycle, I had each group of students share their summaries with the rest of the class. Following this, each group was asked to share with the rest of the class their opinion on how they felt about working in a group towards a common result.

I noted these student comments as they were presented to the class. I also asked each student to make written, individual comments to me, responding to the following questions:

- What problems did you encounter while you were developing your summary?
- What did you learn about your topic while you were developing this summary?
- Did you learn from the other students in your group? Did you enjoy working with them?

6. Data Analysis

In the ISLM101 class, my goal for this semester was to create a tolerant environment where students could better communicate and produce a better end result through teamwork. Teamwork would be the primary tool to develop the students' tolerance towards each other and towards society as a whole.

I explained to them the concept of tolerance and how it is important to form their teams from students whom they hadn't known before.

It was then that I started to notice the adverse body language cues like rolling eyes or frowning, dismissive comments, undermining others' ideas and attempts at communication.

I reiterated the message that we are all people, despite our differences, and that we all deserved respect. It was time to break down our own reservations and prejudices to promote a happy and productive learning place by getting to know each other. It is sometimes said that students learn first from their instructors' actions, before they learn from their words. Therefore, in order for the learning process to be effective, I had to ensure that my actions during – and even after class – were consistent with the message I was trying to deliver. I had to live the values to

be able to convey them. Hence, if I demonstrated respect for my students and open-mindedness toward their alternative points of view.

This had to be reflected in my daily behavior as I noticed that students learn through observation much more than through formal lectures.

As I watched and listened to my students during these two weeks it was apparent, very early on, that they were not enjoying working together. Some of them rushed to my office, eager to finish the assignment or requesting their groups be changed in order to get in with some other students similar to them in one way or the other. I reinforced the same message; your respect of others who hold differing beliefs will enhance the quality of dialogue in the classroom.

During the study period I noted that some of them complained to me and tried to justify their negative attitudes towards other students by blaming others for their failure in working as one team. Two members of the class withdrew from the course during the study period, and two others did not return their surveys.

The pre- and post-study attitudinal surveys show negative attitude in my class for working together. Their responses showed a decrease in enthusiasm for learning tolerance or even teamwork as compared to pre-study observation

Learning from experience does not occur without reflection (Komives, 2001, p 11). The learning that occurs in the application of knowledge is both practical and result oriented. It is important for students to know that they do not need to know everything about tolerance before they can begin to apply its skills and concepts in the class. Based on this, I asked them to write their reflection on their attempts to work in teams. I insured them not to write their names.

Despite the great lengths I went to explain to them the importance of tolerance to them, the students missed my point. Their responses were mostly descriptive. On the one hand they acknowledged the significance of tolerance in their responses but when it came to practice, they kept silent.

At this stage I decided to start the second cycle and get them involved in groups with other members of my choosing.

7. Second Cycle

I decided to give them a group project assignment on tolerance, and to come up with a model; either physical models or designed posters. I told the students that their work would be displayed in an exhibition at the college of Arts.

The dean, professors, their colleagues and the press will observe their work.

At this stage, I divided the students into groups and selected the members of each group, making sure that they were from different races and speak different languages (the multicultural students of Muslim-Arabs-Non arabs, Buddhist-Thai and Chinese) so that the practice of tolerance among them can be achieved. Most of them complained and some of them came to me to my office. I observed the decrease of respectful engagement among most of the students.

I assured them that it is time to apply what we have learned in the class and that teaching is not limited to the transfer of information from books to them only.

I always believed that it was necessary to make adjustments based on the current situation.

The learning atmosphere emphasized on the realization, acceptance and value awareness of the different social cultures of students and enhanced the value of tolerance. To guard against losing sight of any changes, all groups were asked to present their progress every 2 or 3 days.

Group meetings were chosen as the target of my observation since the bulk of group project work is accomplished during the group meetings, although I was not able to attend all group meetings due to time constraints. Giving the feedback after reading the literature was encouraged.

At this stage, some students began to create youth groups on Facebook designed to promote tolerance. It was formed by young individuals across the globe all of whom share a common belief: that true beauty comes from within. Regardless of their age or gender, or where they come

from, or what belief or religion they subscribe to, they believe that they can make a difference not only in themselves, but also in the attitudes and practices of those around them.

Much of their attention is focused on promoting universal values such as compassion, love, kindness, honesty, humility, respect and peace. Through various community projects, they aim to spread these values in practical creative ways. The project was long-term and required collaboration with a diverse group of students. Some students emerged as leaders during this project, directing social activities and organizing students to realize their thoughts. This project built on the skills the students learned during their work on the previous projects.

I did not try to guide every action this time and acted as a facilitator rather than an instructor. The students responded by leading the projects and working together to build relationships. Finally, I began to feel the fruit emerge among a number of students who have continued outside the classroom and even after the end of the semester to practice tolerance and to work as a team to promote positive values.

8. Data Analysis

My work this semester utilized Action Research showed that when students were directing the projects and outcomes they were more committed. The shift from instructor to facilitator was an important action I took this time.

The results of this study support the notion that learning tolerance was increased through teamwork. The integration of teamwork will be an ongoing pursuit in my teaching strategies. Teachers throughout the college have also become interested in integrating teamwork into their curriculum. Fifteen of my study group students volunteered to establish the Facebook group based on practicing tolerance.

I believe that teamwork could enhance all of the core curricula in our department. The difficulties encountered in this study (all of which involved the logistics of accessing the equipment needed) were far outweighed by the academic benefit to my students. This active research study not only increased my students' ability for learning tolerance, but it also rekindled my excitement for teaching new positive values.

Teaching tolerance made me reflect on my personal morals and values as well as how I can use this new understanding to teach my students to be a moral individual. I tried to consider how other's would be feeling in each situation, but I think my stubbornness puts me back, fighting for what I believe is right.

I think the steps which I have taken in both cycles, will help my students critically reflect on their actions and hopefully help them to practice tolerance.

Future Work

To promote teaching values, professors should understand culture, language, beliefs and the values of each society. The application of the teaching tolerance using teamwork was effective. The result of this research leads to the question; what other positive values can be enhanced and encouraged using teamwork?

I believed the students learned how to feel more confident as learners after this strategy was implemented. I strongly encourage all teachers to put this strategy into practice, especially with struggling learners. The time taken to grade the Knowledge Folder assessments is more than for multiple-choice tests, but it is worth the time when the students are successful.

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