

A Brief Look at Attitudes-Based Learning (ABL)

By Dr. Alvin Chan Kok Chuen The greatest discovery of my generation (about 1900) is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

William James

'Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.'

Attitudes-Based Learning (or ABL, for short) is a program initiated in the year 2000 to inculcate positive attitudes and characters in children and teens in Singapore.

During that period of time, there were many incidents around the world that deserved our utmost attention. The rise of terrorism around the world was televised around the world and the increasing number of children and teens suffering due to drugs, physical and sexual abuse was alarming. The increase in school-related violence and incidents were reported widely, from America to Japan. Not to mention, several incidents involving teens going on a school killing spree in America.

One of the most bizarre incidents involved a seven-year-old boy who pulled out a gun and shot dead a girl in class (in front of his Grade 1 teacher and classmates near Flint, Michigan). Associated Press, Mar 1, 2000

With so much violence and terror in our world involving children (directly or indirectly), there was a pressing need to encourage more character building education in our societies, to bring forth positive attitudes and moral values for our young.

Hence, the development of the program, Attitudes-Based Learning (ABL) was given birth in Singapore to play a positive role in remedying the ills of our society.

In its infancy, ABL was perceived as a credible cornerstone to foster a conscious character building education in Singapore schools. But unfortunately, there was not much done to push the idea forward due to lack of interest and financial backing in year 2000. Though for a brief period, ABL made its print debut in the first Asia's children's creative thinking magazine, ONE, in Singapore and Malaysia through stories that emphasized positive attitudes like kindness, determination and how one can make a difference in people's lives.

It was only until the year 2003 that ABL was resuscitated into its full glory and intentions. With encouragement and involvement of like-minded individuals who were fervent to build a mentally and emotionally stronger Singapore, ABL was re-engineered to serve as a holistic attitudes- transformation education program for all (though emphasis is still on young children and teens).

In the year 2003, the new and improved Attitudes-Based Learning program is not just another character building program. ABL was further dissected and analyzed by a small team of researchers. With added refinements to the teaching philosophy and methodology, ABL program became more adaptive and holistic. This has greatly increased the effectiveness of achieving the mission and the desired outcomes of the ABL program.

It was also realized that ABL should cater for pre-schoolers, as there was insufficient providers of character building education programs for this particular age group in Singapore and Asia. With ABL being a program that infuses the dimension of self-reflection to build better self-esteem and awareness, we were confident that through interesting and thought-provoking activities (based on Harvard's Professor Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences concept), ABL would be immensely successful in encouraging positive attitudes amongst our pre-schoolers.

So, how is ABL unique from other character building education programs available?

?ABL adopts a 7-steps framework, which ensure that each child is correctly exposed, explained and experienced to the right attitude

?ABL emphasis is on self-discovery rather than forced inculcation

?ABL uses 4 easy-to-remember animal characters to help each child relate a specially devised set of values and attitudes.

The process of nurturing positive attitudes in your students using Attitudes-Based Learning program is not complex. They are simple but effective steps to ensure that your students will slowly but steadily transform the way they behave and feel about themselves. More importantly, family and friends will notice the difference in them in the most positive manner if done right.

The 7-Steps of the Attitudes-Based Learning Process developed by Dr. Alvin Chan

There is a sequence of 7-steps that you need to follow in order for ABL to be effective in achieving your desired outcomes.

1. EXPLANATION AND UNDERSTANDING I. Explain the attitude to be taught to your charges

II. Increase their understanding by giving a few examples about the attitude. Better still, tell a story with the related attitude to be taught and discuss with them

III. Ask them whether they have experiences about the attitude taught to check on their understanding.

2. SHARING EXPERIENCES I. Get them to share their experiences about the attitude and the related positive behavior

3. SITUATIONS and REFLECTIONS I. Give them a few situations whereby such attitude can be applied in their lives

II. Ask them what they will do in this variety of situations

III. Get them to reflect upon their actions-are they appropriate or not?

IV. Share your thoughts with them about their actions

V. Tell them what you think is the more appropriate action for each situation

VI. Ask them to reflect on what you have told them-do they agree with you?

4. ROLE-PLAY I. Create an environment for them to role-play the few situations that are being discussed.

II. Ask them to point out whether the 'actors' have acted in an appropriate manner.

5. ACTIVITY (TO REMIND AND REINFORCE THE LEARNING) I. Give them an activity (could be listening to a story, drawing or singing a song) to reinforce what they have learnt about the attitude. This is to help them remember better the attitude learnt in class.

II. Encourage them to 'practice' what they have learnt in class by giving specific situations and appropriate actions they can do in their home, with their family and friends.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY I. Get them to be accountable for practicing what they have learnt by providing them a checklist of positive actions (usually using pictures to show) for them to remind themselves (or even for their parents to sign the checklist)

II. After a few days, ask them whether they have practiced the positive actions based on the checklist that were given in class.

7. EVALUATION I. Teacher must periodically keep track that students continue to practice the positive actions taught to ensure internalization of attitudes.

II. The checklist also acts as a measurement to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process.

About the Author

Dr. Alvin Chan is a Senior Research Consultant at First Quatermain, and also acts as an Advisor for several education organizations internationally. You can contact him at alvinchan@firstquatermain.com.

Source: <http://www.edarticle.com>