

1. Title of the Practice

Cultivating Empathy for the Underprivileged: An Annual Initiative by the Students and Alumni of Gushkara Mahavidyalaya

2. Objectives of the Practice

Through this practice our students learn to undertake socially relevant initiatives for the benefit of fellow citizens such as people who are differently abled or people who are homeless. The key objective of this practice is to enable our students to cultivate and express empathy for individuals and groups belonging to underprivileged sections of their immediate social environment. Based on humanitarian values and the basic principles of philanthropy, this practice will enable our students to become socially aware and responsible citizens by encouraging them to engage with contemporary social issues in a constructive manner.

3. The Context

Our social milieu includes several sections or groups of people who are less privileged than others. They include, for instance, the differently abled people and the people belonging to economically backward segments. The recent pandemic has aggravated the harsh realities they have to deal with.

The presence of homeless people is clearly visible in public places like railway station platforms. Despite their visible presence, ordinary individuals, engrossed in their daily activities, often fail to pay attention to the predicament and needs of these marginalized people. It is, however, ethically important for us to respond to problems like poverty, disability and disease. This ethical imperative based on the harsh realities of our social context has been foundational to the humanitarian initiative undertaken by our students. As young citizens, our students need to cultivate a sense of social responsibility and compassion for those who need help. They should learn to organize and participate in welfare activities that aim to improve the lives of impoverished and underprivileged people.

4. The Practice

The students of our college enthusiastically organize a special annual charity event that focuses on helping the people who live on the margins of our society. It is organized and conducted primarily by student volunteers from the Department of English, Gushkara Mahavidyalaya. The initiative is funded by monetary contributions from the teachers, students and alumni belonging to various departments including the Department of English.

On 25th of December, 2018 a group of student volunteers organized a Winter Donation Programme for the people, for whom the railway station floor is the bed and the sky is the roof. In early morning our student volunteers gathered at Gushkara railway station with all arrangements in order to serve the needy. There they distributed blankets. There is no better gift than providing warmth to the needy in winter. Moreover, they distributed chocolates and cakes among those children who live in the station surroundings and slums. Afterwards, they left Gushkara to reach their next destination at Bardhaman and continued the rest of the program there.

At Bardhaman railway station they distributed cakes, biscuits and chocolates among children who live there. These children belong to impoverished homeless families who permanently live on the railway platforms. Needless to say, the gifts made them immensely happy. Because of poverty, some of these children are forced to beg or work. For them, empathy is a rare gift. Our students then visited a nearby slum where they again distributed cakes, biscuits and chocolates among children.

Our students befriended the platform dwellers and spent the entire morning with them. Not surprisingly, the children immensely enjoyed their friendly presence. They absolutely loved the delicious cakes and chocolates they served.

One of the central purposes of higher education in our country is to create ideal citizens by disseminating certain moral values including altruism. The annual philanthropic event organized by our students reflects and upholds those ethical values.

5. Evidence of Success

The activities organized by our students at Gushkara and Bardhaman railway station and at the slum substantially contributed to the emotional well-being of the poor children. This is evidenced by the manner in which the children responded. Besides,

these efforts have enriched our students morally. They have proved that they have the desire and the ability to organize constructive social welfare activities on their own.

These results indicate that higher educational institutions can play a significant role in stimulating moral values and a vigorous sense of social responsibility among the young citizens of the nation. Clearly, they can create a better world through their energetic and enthusiastic interventions.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

The desire or the ability to help others is not uniformly present in all students. While the majority of the students are enthusiastic about philanthropic efforts, some of them may lack motivation. Through our experiences we have realized that the task of motivating them is a possible one. Through meaningful conversations our teachers have been able to encourage these students to get involved in this initiative. At present the annual philanthropic event organized by our students is entirely funded by contributions from students, teachers and other members of the staff. We intend to broaden the scope of this endeavour by increasing the funds available to our student volunteers

Best Practice 2

Title of the Practice:

Promoting Women Education: Initiative to Encourage Regular Girl Student Users of the College Library

Objectives of the Practice:

Libraries have supported institutional initiatives in widening access, public engagement, academic entrepreneurship, lifelong learning and student well-being. They have become campus champions for open research and decolonising the curriculum. But to secure their future on campus they must switch from a transactional to a relational model of librarianship. In this regard, Gushkara Mahavidyalaya, affiliated to the university of Burdwan and established in 1965 in the semi-urban town Guskara, aims to foster ample access for the girl students to its central library keeping in mind the following issues: gender equality, empowerment of the girl student and the dissemination of a deeper awareness about the requirement of library work.

The Context:

Girls belonging to economically underprivileged sections of society often lack access to quality education. In our college more than 50% of students are female. The number of female students is steadily increasing because of the availability of a number of schemes and scholarships such as Kanyasri Prakalpa initiated by Government of West Bengal. The college has arranged a special initiative to encourage girl student users of the library. The library of this college aims to provide gender sensitization ambience for all its students – female and male. The librarian as well as the college authority are aware of the various challenges during their library visit. That will motivate not only the girl students but also the entire student community across gender lines.

The Practice:

In many parts of India, especially in rural areas, access to quality educational resources may be limited. Libraries in higher education institutions offer a wide range of books, journals, research papers, and digital resources that can significantly enhance a girl student's knowledge base. Our college has a well-equipped library with more than 37 thousand books, access to e-journal and journals like *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Current Science*, *Yojana*, *Socrates*, *Anustup*, *Journal of Contemporary Thought* and so on which positively impacts a girl student's academic performance. The resources and materials available in libraries enable them to excel in examinations, assignments, and projects.

Each year one regular girl student is selected and actively encouraged by the central library of Gushkara Mahavidyalaya. She is identified on the basis of the frequency of her library visits. In near future we will introduce a scheme whereby the best girl student user will be given an award in recognition of her dedication to library work.

Despite the positive impact of library work on a girl student's academic journey, there are several constraints and limitations prevalent in the context of India's higher education system. In some conservative communities, girls may face restrictions or bias against accessing libraries, particularly during certain hours. These cultural barriers can limit their engagement with library work and hinder their academic growth. India still faces gender disparities in access to education. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, girls might encounter societal prejudices that discourage them from engaging in academic activities beyond the classroom. While digital resources are becoming increasingly important, there is a significant digital divide in India, with many students lacking access to computers or the internet. Balancing library work with academic commitments, extracurricular activities, and household responsibilities can be challenging for some girl students, especially in rural areas where gender roles are more traditional.

Evidence of Success:

Active encouragement from the library and college authorities instills a sense of confidence among the girl students who are selected for their dedication to library work. Library work encourages students to develop independent learning habits. As girls often face societal pressures and expectations, having a supportive environment like a library allows them to explore subjects of interest, conduct research, and pursue self-directed studies without external interruptions. Libraries are essential hubs for research activities. Engaging in library work

exposes girl students to research methodologies, information retrieval techniques, and critical thinking skills, which are essential for academic success and future careers.

Problems Encountered and Resource Required:

Because of problems related to transport it often becomes difficult to attract the students to the library after 3pm on a working day. They are in a hurry to go back home. The college is trying its best to encourage the students to visit the library frequently. We intend to enhance the number of girl student users by increasing the college funds intended for this purpose.

