Teacher Efficacy: The Tool that Makes Teachers from 'Teacher-centered' to 'Student-centered'

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Abstract

Teaching is the noblest of professions where the teachers create a friendly environment in the classrooms; motivate students; and initiate the learning process. But with today's demand of standards and government mandated exams, education become a process where the students are counted as products absorbed in the labour market and given input only for the advance of business and industry. Thus, teaching is mostly restricted to an exercise of creating a mindless generation of students who respond to an appropriate 'correct' answer without the development of critical thinking skills and the reflective ability. What is required today is transformation of the traditional teacher-centered approach to student-centered wherein teachers, instead of just lecturing, begin to interact with the students and take active role in the process of students' learning and development. This article focuses about this paradigm shift at length.

Introduction

Education is the basis of any society. Students access knowledge and gain understanding to progress in life as matured persons. Teaching is the core of education. It develops the students' ability to understand the reality through question and critique on issues and thereby helps to gain a wider perspective of the world around.

For centuries, teachers were the centre of a classroom. They were viewed as leaders and performed different roles, such as school administrators, chair persons, leaders and they developed curriculum. The recent trend in education has limited their role as representatives rather than leaders.

Teacher leadership is actually a shared effort with students and other stakeholders to achieve better educational services. The teacher has to set the atmosphere for learning and affirmative interaction to take place; should have the potential to encourage the student to become a humanized and accepted individual within the classroom, and also in the society.

Student-centered education manifests caring the students, believing and striving to bring out the goodness of students, ensuring the conducive atmosphere within the school and classroom to bring out such goodness.

1.   Plight of Conventional Teaching

The plight of current conventional teaching is just scoring good marks and issuing certificates and degrees without least concern about how much knowledge and wisdom the students gained. Predominantly educational institutions are just functioning as factories of producing degrees only. Class room teaching has become only a ritual, which is followed mechanically.[1] This conventional system focuses on scoring high marks with an ultimate motive of securing good job and better pay. The pedagogical researchers emphasize the need for a change.

The society needed people to work in factories, with the basic skills needed for that type of work. Hence, our schools were built with a large emphasis on efficiency and standardization. This approach resulted in a system, similar to the assembly line in product manufacturing units, whereby students are the work-pieces, moved from one level to the

next on a pre-planned timetable. The conventional education approach persistently strives to increase the number of students per teacher, which is quite the opposite of student-centered educational system.

Students are concerned only for getting high marks and they study only for grabbing jobs. There is absence of creativity in them, they are hard-worker but not innovative. There is a great need to bring about a change in education.

Hence the need for promoting effective practices in the education system to realize the expected learning outcomes from the students has been felt. For this, not only the teachers, but also the decision makers, trainers, other support-staffs, and parents are also should be included in the change from the traditional teacher-centered approach.

Student-centered approach is a system, wherein the students play the dominant role and not the teacher. In the student-centered teaching system, classroom activities and mere memorization and repeating just like copy-paste is not encouraged. This brings about significant improvement in the learning outcome and analytical capacity among the students.[2]

Swami Vivekananda was a pioneer in the student-centered teaching. He regarded the students as the epicenter of learning, and the education should be according to the needs of the students. He believed that "the outside teaching will be unproductive and meaningless unless the inner-teacher is opened".[3]

2. Students are Persons with Rights

Though students and teachers are after new trends, developments and competitions, on another side a counter approach to education is emerging emphasizing students as persons with rights. Educators are demanded to become more student-centered. These principles would help in materializing the student-centered teaching approach so that the students are given opportunity and ensured environment to help them to achieve their best.

Teachers should consider and realize that each student is unique in one way or other. Teachers should examine themselves by checking whether they extend their fullest support for the growth and development of their students across all spheres, viz. "social, emotional, physical, linguistic, and intellectual".[4]

Hence, each student must be recognized, respected, and addressed to their individual uniqueness of age, gender, culture, temperament, and learning style. Students should be made to realize that they are the key role-players in their own education and development. So, they should be mentally involved and physically active in learning what they should and like to know and do.[5]

Educationists insist that the "ideas, preferences, learning styles, and interests" of the students should be given highest priority and consideration during the planning and implementation of teaching practices. Recently, the "students' need" and not the "academic needs" are the felt needs for effective student-centered education approach, which necessitates to promote health and healthy lifestyles among the student community. Recently, there is significant awareness on the importance of the welfare of the students, their holistic growth, and their basic rights.[6]

3. Quality Education - The Right of the Students

The International Commission on Education in the 21st Century of UNESCO emphasized four pillars of education, they are: "Learning to know; Learning to do; Learning to live together; and Learning to be".[7]

UNICEF emphasizes these guidelines for ensuring quality education:

"Learners who are healthy, well-nourished, and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities; Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and

facilities; Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace; Processes through which trained teachers use student-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; Outcomes that embrace knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive engagement in the society".[8]

Given the current educational scenario, which puts great emphasis in addition, stress to teachers in forging a harmonious relationship with the students and a conducive learning environment in the classroom, this study becomes significant in exploring how servant leadership fits best for the teaching community to achieve the best results.[9]

4. Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy is significantly associated with more practical and philosophical orientation toward teaching among the teachers.[10] Since long back, the relationship between students' academic performance, outcome and the teachers' sense of efficacy has been well-established.[11] Teacher efficacy, with regard to the students, improves students' learning ability, classroom management and their academic achievement. Then again, teacher efficacy beliefs increase teacher job satisfaction, teaching aptitude, job motivation and organizational commitment/climate.

5. Essentials for Teachers to be Student-centered

Traditionally, teaching required intellectual competence, integrity, independence, and a spirit of scholarly inquiry. But now, the superior prerequisite for becoming a virtuous teacher include a great passion for teaching, encouraging, and working with students, and above all improves the capability to stimulate student interest and enthusiasm.[12]

Traditionally teachers' role was not flexible and was confined only to a lengthy ongoing commitment to time and coverage of syllabus, whereas currently, teachers are expected to function and display skills more than their commitment to lessons and syllabuses - teachers have to demonstrate and extend their sphere of role and authority apart from their regular classroom responsibilities.[13]

Good teaching is not just of information and knowledge.[14] Fiedler contended that leaders should select a style of leadership depending on the situation. Choice of leadership style by teachers and educators would determine the success or failure of a teacher in a classroom setting.[15]

6. Teachers are Leaders

'Leadership' is a composite and complicated role that involves and demands many important communal as well as individual progressions. Not the position as a teacher, but the vast knowledge and experience of the teachers makes them the intellectual leaders of the community.[16]

Teachers with leadership skills demonstrate awareness and concern on the personal aspects of teachers; safeguard the students' focus, concentration, and learning; react to the requirements of the students which eventually make the students feel supported and results in better student-outcomes; and students responding more positively. Teacher leaders promote trust and develop good relationship with colleagues and peers toward positive change, build confidence in others, diagnose organizational conditions, manage the work, deal with processes by becoming proactive and make their school a better place.[17]

7. Teachers as Servant Leaders

Traditionally, the teacher is the ultimate authority in the classroom; the teacher determines what to teach and how to teach; the students cannot determine what learning methods should be used; and lack motivation and the students are solely dependent and

follow the teachers without questions.

Whereas a servant leader is a catalyst, in the process of learning, let the students play major roles in determining the methods of teaching and selecting the teaching materials and guides the students. Encompassing service and stewardship by the teachers not only lays the initial groundwork for a positive learning environment, but it also sets the stage for a more productive community of learners, each supporting one another as a choice rather than manipulation or control.[18]

If teachers adopt the servant leader role and accept new role as facilitators, students certainly would be ready to engage themselves in more active role during their learning, empower and prepare them for the future, and would establish highest levels of trust, respect and honesty.[19]

Bass asserted that servant leadership is a theory that promises a great future.[20] The main aim of the teacher education program is the progress of teacher-efficacy, including the vital components of promoting motivation, should develop inspiration crucial for successful classroom performance, among the teachers.[21]

Conclusion

The very purpose and choice of teachers and academic institutions is to serve the student community and ultimately the society. Naturally educators exhibit servant leadership traits in their profession. This implies that servant leadership is crucial for the success of academic institutions and the student community, which they serve; because, an ideal servant leader teacher would be able to practice and transform the ideals of servant leadership towards creating a conducive classroom environment where students are empowered to formulate their best future.

Currently, more emphasis is for the "student-centered" approach, which is viewed as superior to the earlier and conventional "teacher-centered" approach in the classroom.

A paradigm shift is felt in the education system to achieve student-centered curriculum rather than teacher-centered, which has to be concept-based and not content-based. A policy has to accept individual progress as the measure of success. Measuring the success of the students for the purpose of promoting to the next level results deviation from student-centered education approach.

The student-centredness came from working with each student's needs to progress from where they had been to a new level. As in any system of assessment, teacher decisions can result in mistakes, but it is found that the students were predominantly, more ready to engage with the work and continue to learn compared to other systems.

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