

The Role of the Teacher in Modern Education

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Abstract: Students and parents have high expectations of educators, and vice versa. Teachers have to be able to adapt their teaching to the complex relationships with the recipients of knowledge and instruction. Thereafter, their roles get changed in accordance with the demands of different contexts.

Keywords: Teachers, Students, Roles.

1. Introduction

Education changes with time, which can be seen by comparing the classroom of the past with modern classrooms, which are equipped with the newest technology, such as the computer and projectors or even the interactive whiteboard. These are changes that we can notice immediately when we come into the classroom. We can figure out more changes when we observe some lessons, especially when we compare them with the classes we had ten or twenty years ago. In terms of English education, we may find the materials are newer and more authentic, which means the expressions we are learning and teaching are up to date. Also, the change of the role of the teacher will be discussed next.

2. The Old-times, Traditional Education and Education Systems

Firstly, the role of the teacher has been discussed in an ancient Chinese passage called Discourse on teacher since Tang and Song Dynasties. “In ancient times, those who wanted to learn would surely have a teacher. A teacher, is [a person] who passes down the Dao, imparts professional knowledge and resolves doubt. Human beings are not born cognizant, who can have no doubt? Having doubt but neglect learning from teacher, one’s doubt will never be resolved”, translated by Thomas (2018). Everyone may have doubts, and teachers played a significant role in resolving those doubts students encountered.

Secondly, Confucius said, “[Within the] three people that walk together, [there will] surely be someone[who can serve as] my teacher” (Thomas, 2018). In other words, teachers can be everyone who is around us as long as they set good examples and have specialities that we can learn from. “Born before me, one’s acquisition of the Dao is, of course, earlier than me, [with this], I will follow [him] and make him my teacher; born after me, [but] one’s acquisition of the Dao is also earlier than me, [with this], I will follow [him] and make him my teacher. Dao is what I [want to] learn, why should I care about one’s age, [whether] one was born before or after me? Therefore, [there is] neither noble nor lowly, neither elder nor young [that one should concern when it comes to learning], where Dao exists, teacher exists” (Thomas, 2018). Whether someone can be considered a teacher or not, age cannot be taken as a decisive factor. Nowadays, technology is advancing fast. The elderly may not take advantage of the projector in the classroom as flexible as the younger

generation. Therefore, the students become teachers in this aspect.

Lastly, different countries have diverse education systems. The education system in China is totally different nowadays. However, the only thing that has not been changed is the highly centralised system. Teachers do not have the flexibilities to make changes in the system. However, they are authoritarian in front of students so most of the time, students are afraid of teachers. They cannot be free to express their opinions in class, which, I believe, may also be related to the Chinese rhetoric. People are influenced by ancient philosophies, such as Taoism. Students are affected by “Silence is golden” and “Illness enters by the mouth; trouble comes out by the mouth”. All these factors form an authoritative teacher role in China.

3. The Changes in The Modern World Affecting Education

Most importantly, the teacher has multiple roles in education and their roles change according to different students’ needs. Every student is a unique individual and teachers must adjust themselves to the student’s needs in order to teach effectively and motivate students. Meanwhile, modern teaching involves a complicated relationship between learners and educators (Gurakuqi et al., 2015). And the role of the teacher is different from what it was many years ago because the emphasis has been transferred from “teacher-centred” teaching to “learner-centred” teaching (Harmer, 2015). Hence, I hold the view that teachers should have many faces, which can be altered to be compatible with the needs of learners, and it is also helpful for teachers to achieve “learner-centred” teaching.

Also, seeing from various perspectives, the roles of a teacher can be classified differently. In the TED talk from 2016 Calhoun demonstrates that the teacher is regarded as not only the person who performs all the roles enumerated by Harmer (2015), i.e. a controller, organiser, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, observer, performer and teaching aid, who teaches students or an educator who plans and conducts classes and assesses the students’ work, which is elementary for teachers from my point of view, but also as a counsellor, big brother, mother, role model and champion for students to rely on whenever they require help. Calhoun categorises it mainly from the aspect of the general teacher-student relationship that teachers can form by taking on multiple family and social roles, while Harmer mainly

focuses on the aspects which can be helpful for teachers to achieve the goal of giving an effective learning experience to students in class and motivating them. Therefore, in reality, teachers' roles change when they are seen in dissimilar situations. Nonetheless, one of the special points that Calhoun elaborates on is that teachers are entertainers, which Harmer refers to as the teacher as a performer; he also mentions that teachers describe themselves as "actors" (Harmer, 1995). Teachers often act exaggeratedly, use e.g., dancing and singing in class to grasp students' attention and get them interested in the learning process.

Finally, the policy complemented by the Ministry of Education is updated as well. The double reduction policy, for example, has changed the education in China to a great extent. Training schools are not allowed to operate on weekends and holidays. Those teachers have to consider if they are going to change their careers. However, teachers in public schools have to improve their teaching and help students get good grades under the circumstance that students have less possibility to get extra help outside of the school and with fewer exercises to do because they are banned by the ministry to study in advance resorting to other people and tools. Students can study with less pressure; however, teachers are under more stress, hence they need to pay more attention to students. For instance, they are required to offer extra help after school to company students until they finish their homework and are picked up by their parents.

4. The Requirements of Modern Education

First and foremost, teachers' roles and responsibilities are always needed to be changed flexibly. Their roles vary according to different purposes and students' needs. For instance, even in "student-centred" teaching, teachers should act as a controller occasionally as they need to instruct their students, especially when their students do not know what they are expected to do. Thus, the teacher is a facilitator or a resource for students in this case. On the other hand, in "teacher-centred" teaching, teachers mainly perform as controllers. Though teachers can be controllers in both methods, the proportion of presence is not the same because in the "student-centred" teaching, teachers let students solve problems on their own and show up when needed, and in the "teacher-centred" teaching, teachers work as the giver of knowledge and the authority. Although some individuals may believe that the "learner-centred" teaching is superior to the "student-centred" teaching, Harmer (2015) claims "it is not an 'either...or' situation", which I completely agree with.

Lastly, the ways of improving students' engagement have been more diverse. Technologies enable students to be attracted to learning. With the help of technology and other techniques, it becomes more approachable for teachers to

personalise students and save a large amount of time. Using modern teaching techniques, such as brainstorming techniques, Wien diagram, five range, cluster, concepts table and insert technique, in modern teaching leads to engaging and attractive teaching (Gurakuqi et al., 2015). Techniques can be used as time-saving tools in teaching, but it also plays an important role in students' learning. The usage of the techniques develops the critical thinking of students and regards learners as central contributors in resolving problems (Gurakuqi et al., 2015). Learners are encouraged to explore the answers to questions themselves in pairs and groups; therefore, mutual learning among students becomes possible. As a result, the joyfulness of teaching and learning is enhanced. The fluent use of advanced technologies also allows teachers to model themselves as lifelong learners, therefore motivating students' learning.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers' roles get changed over time, varying in different countries amongst multiple policies. I believe that "learner-centred" education is a pursuit of educators because then teachers are not only the contributor of knowledge, the controller, and the authority but rather a facilitator and a resource for the learners to refer to (Harmer, 2015). Students should be more empowered to decide their learning hence making their learning process more meaningful. Then, students become the centre of education.

To sum up, teachers' roles are versatile, and they differentiate rapidly in terms of different situations to realise numerous purposes in motivating and encouraging students, so that the best teaching and learning modes may be achieved.

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