REVISING TEACHING SKILLS FOR PROFESSIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Dr.BAIJU.K.NATH
Lecturer in Education
University of Calicut
Kerala, India
drbaijukn@rediffmail.com

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Abstract

In a technology and media dominated era of education the role of teacher and there by the skills required to be mastered by each teacher need redefinition. The paper attempts to identify the list of essential teaching skills for the present age by retaining the significant ones and including those inevitable for present context. The skills discussed in this paper are Set Induction, Stimulus variation, Questioning, Explanation, Communication, Handling of Technology, Collaboration, Managing Distractors, Research guidance, and Closure. Handling of Technology, Collaboration, Managing Distractors, and Research guidance are the newly included ones.

Teacher and Teaching Skills

The role of a teacher is in continuous evolution since its origin in human society. The society itself undergoing to changes regularly. At the beginning the society was learning society. The social roles were determined by social learning. Gradually the society changes to an information society, where information is the pivot. During this change the role of the teacher also changes from the sole custodian of knowledge. Now a days teacher is one among the sources of information. There of course are authentic and easily accessible sources of information to learners. So, it is essential to identify the present day role of a teacher, in a technologically driven era. . Teacher has the role as **information processor** and knowledge **synthesizer**. Teacher should be a **guide** on the methodology to collect and process the relevant information. Teacher should have a plan of action of the learning situations, and should have a clear idea about learning outcomes .Hence; teacher is a **director** of educational events. The active role of a teacher is very much limited in present day classrooms, as s/he will be very active and inspiring behind the curtains. In any type, learning must be on – demand, then only it has some value. Hence, there exists a relationship as demand and supply in between teachers and taught and the role here is, as a **facilitator** in the process of learning. At times teacher needs to suggest various ways and means for realizing the final target; then s/he will act as a guide. Most importantly, a learner always in search for good **Role models** in their life. A good teacher, exploring teaching life as an open book could take up this role better than anybody else, hence s/he is a **Philosopher**. In essence, the present and future of a teacher is not much glorious, but demands *creative thinking and logical reasoning.*

Classroom : Present & Future :

The modes of operations in our classrooms till senior secondary level have undergone several changes in view of curricular changes. The expected nature of the classrooms as *Learner directed and Activity* oriented, constructivist or social/ critical issue based. The Philosophy behind such classrooms is the same as that of the Learning Society, and the Psychology supports the system is Social Constructivism and critical pedagogy. According to Vygotsky, learner construct the required knowledge, on the basis of own experiences in a relevant social context. Hence what is important here is the context in which the learning taking place and the teacher should ensure both linguistic and contextual concerns in learning. Thus, the design of classroom and strategies of learning should be conducive for maximizing learning as envisaged in the theoretical framework.

Essential Teaching Skills at Higher Education Level

From a very elaborate discussion on the roles of a prospective teacher, now we pass on to one of the most specific aspects of teaching, the essential teaching skills, required for every teacher for success in teaching. The term, teaching itself is much controversial, even though we still using it for the matter of convenience. First of all we should identify the required skills for a teacher.

1 Set Induction

2 Stimulus variation

3 Questioning

4 Explanation

5 Communication

6 Handling of Technology

7 Collaboration

8 Managing Distractors

9 Research guidance

10 Closure

1. Set Induction:

Set here is synonymous to set for a play or to shoot scenes of a movie. Such a stage set is highly significant in introducing any new topic. Set is more than a brief introduction. Training in set helps the teacher prepare students for lesson in order to induce the maximum payoff in learning (Allen&Ryan 1969) Skill in managing resources and media for introducing a topic in an interesting, logical and meaningful manner is referred to as set induction. Sets are used before any new activity, from introduction of a new concept to giving homework. It is important in each set both to create *clarity* about what is expected happen and to create *motivation* for this to occur. Set induction can be done by explaining potential benefits to the learner, giving clear instructions, describing what is going to happen.

Perrott (1982) identified four purposes of set induction.

Focusing attention on what is to be learned by gaining the interest of students.

Moving from old to new materials and linking of the two.

Providing a structure for the lesson and setting expectations of what will happen.

Giving meaning to a new concept or principle, similar to that of giving examples.

There is a STEP (sequential procedure) to do set induction. **Start:** Welcome the students settle them down and gain their attention. **Transact:** Understand learners' expectations and explain yours use this to link with previous learning experiences. **Evaluate**: Assess the gap between learners expectations and expected outcomes by clarifying for comprehensiveness. **Progress**: The final stage to proceed to the main body of learning.

The introduction session has dual functions as **motivation** and **bridging the gap with the existing knowledge. Motivation** is a state of mental readiness for learning. So, a brilliantly executed introduction would be helpful to evoke and sustain interest, which in turn motivate the learner. The two components of this skill are

a) Using previous knowledge
b) Using appropriate device

The knowledge of existing experience of learner is very essential for a successful introduction. Before we are introducing a new topic it is inevitable to know that, what the learner knew about it . Other wise we may simply pass over on the assumption that the learner knew this and that. So, a thorough analysis of previous knowledge is essential. Various devices such as, *narrations, illustrations (charts, graphs, film strips, news cuttings, slides, etc.), questions, similarities and analogies, reports and documents,* etc., can be used as appropriate resources for introduction. In this context what is important is that how well or how good you utilize these resources in appropriate media and how far it is purpose specific. Utmost care should be taken that to

establish a direct link between the new topic and previous knowledge. This part of the lesson should be ended by about 5 minutes.

2. Stimulus Variation:

Teachers are coming and going but the students have to sit down and listen continuously for hours is the main feature of the education system of most of the institutions. Here the nature of interaction may be limited to unidirectional from teacher to student. Continuous stimulation to a particular stimulus causes fatigue and leads to boredom. Hence varying stimulus accordingly is the only remedy to relieve boredom and sustain attention. Stimulus variation is an important skill which helps to keep students attentive in the class and to sustain their motivation. This skill involves using various attention producing behavior patterns from the part of the teacher, in order to sustain the interest and attention of the students. An efficient teacher intelligently switches over between different stimuli during the class. The significance of stimulus variation is directly proportional to attention span of students. The change in stimulus is necessary to keep away distractions while learning or in other words, keep the learners on track. The following are the components of stimulus variation.

1 Purposeful movement – Usually teacher movements are planned and purposeful, such as moving to the chalk board, moving to show a chart, to write something, to demonstrate an experiment, to show some pictures/ clippings, move towards students to enable in their work during discussions, etc. Unnecessary, and unwanted movements causes distraction in students, hence must be avoided. Planned and purposeful movements are highly useful for stimulus variation

2 Meaningful gestures – Effective and controlled movements of hands limited and natural facial expressions, etc., can be utilized for stimulus variation. When used at correct time and place it will have fruitful results.

3 Voice modulation – The sound of a teacher is the prime factor which invites attention of students. Use of change in pitch and, modulation between high and low intensity sound will be an interesting art to be used in any type of class. Though voice modulation is a difficult skill, one could practice it by regular use and become an expert in it.

4 Interaction style – The style of interaction between students and teacher , provisions for *student – student interaction , student to whole class , Teacher to a student, teacher to whole class, and interaction with a third person* , etc., proved as very much effective for sustained motivation . There should be a conscious shift of interaction from, teacher to groups, in between group members, representatives of group to whole class and back to teacher. This can be perceived as an interaction cycle. A well managed *interaction cycle* will be highly motivating and productive while learning is concerned.

5 Use of different Media – Selection of suitable media has high significance in learning something new. The use of appropriate media, is essential for meaningful and mastery learning as it help to shift stimulating sense organs intelligently. By the advent of technology the number and variety of media is enriched manifold. There are various devices for playing audio, visual, audio – visual, and activity stimuli. Skill is required for selecting and using the best suited one to which the

situation demands .The Medium stimulates more than one sense organ is beneficial over others.

6 Body posture – Teacher can change his posture accordingly with the necessity of the class. Necessary changes in body posture from *standing to sitting, leaning bending,* etc. are beneficial in this regard. However over action causes confusion in students

3. Questioning:

Questioning is an art, because it is a skillful act, which can be used for various purposes in different dimensions. Questions of different types are used for different purposes. Answer to questions provides *feedback, elicit ideas, conclude discussions, clarifying doubts, generate interest, review of the portions already covered, demand suggestions from students, evaluate the performance of students* etc. Questioning is a very traditional method of teaching employed even from the time immemorial in the form of 'Tharkka' (inquisitive chain of questions) by great ancient Indian teachers.

Questions can be of three different categories depending on complexity such as lower order, middle order and higher order questions. The lower order ones are used at the beginning of a class to elicit previous knowledge, most of the time. Questions of similar nature can be asked during the commencement of the lesson as developmental questions. Here questions act as ligaments, which attach different ideas in a particular lesson intact.

The middle order questions are still higher type of questions which enable a teacher to ascertain students' performance, and students themselves to assess their own understanding of a particular topic.

Higher order questions usually demand creative and critical thinking from the part of respondents. The questions in this category generally demand answer for Why or How of an aspect.

There are 3 types of questions as being *factual, conceptual, and provocative* (Erickson 2007). Erickson's factual are still the ones that are easily answered with definitive and comparatively simple answers which are too common in schools and on tests. Conceptual questions might be ones that are convergent, divergent, or evaluative in construction -- ones that delve deeper and require more sophisticated levels of cognitive processing and thinking. Provocative ones are that ones cannot be answered with easy answers. They are questions can be used to motivate and frame content or are essential questions. In the initial categorization above they would be either complex divergent questions or more sophisticated combination questions like divergent/evaluative ones.

There are five basic types of questions: Factual; Convergent; Divergent; Evaluative; and Combination (Lindley, D. 1993). *Factual* - Soliciting reasonably simple, straight forward answers based on obvious facts or awareness. *Convergent* - These type of questions are usually within a very finite range of acceptable accuracy. These may be at several different levels of cognition such as comprehension, application, analysis, or ones where the answerer makes inferences or conjectures based on personal experiences, or on materials read, presented or known. *Divergent* – Answers to these questions allow students to explore different avenues and create many different variations and alternative answers. Correctness may be based on logical projections, contextual, or arrived at

through various dimensions such as basic knowledge, conjecture, inference, projection, creation, intuition, or imagination. *Evaluative* - These types of questions usually require sophisticated levels of cognitive and/or emotional judgment. In attempting to answer evaluative questions, students may be combining multiple logical and/or affective thinking process, or comparative frameworks. Often an answer should be analyzed at multiple levels and from different perspectives before the answerer arrives at newly synthesized information or conclusions. *Combinations* - These are questions that blend any combination of the questions given above.

Six question categories according to Bloom et al.,(1956) Knowledge, Understanding, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. As teachers we tend to ask questions in the "knowledge" category 80% to 90% of the time. Try to utilize higher order level of questions which require much more "brain power" and a more extensive comprehensive and elaborate answer.

Whatever be the type of question, the style of questioning is important in the success of teaching. Questioning is a highly skillful act, which require so many considerations. Questions should be stated in simple clear and audible manner presented to the whole class and allow time to comprehend your question. Ask a single question at a time based on a single aspect only will be helpful to students to comprehend well. Questions in the form of prolonged statements may be avoided, since it may be confusing. There should be clues in your question which direct students towards the answer. *Restatement* and sometimes *rephrasing* of questions may be necessary at times according to the level of students and complexity of questions. The most important part

with regard to questioning is how you receive students' response to questions. Remember the fact that in every answer there should be some degree of correctness , so that should be encouraged first and then only comment on answers in constructive way as far as possible, because it fosters the confidence level of students.

4. Explanation:

Explanation skill is the one required for every person who engages in formal communication with others. Explanation in a class doesn't confine to mere statement of factual information. But it stands for analyzing an idea and broken up it into meaningful components when presented logically forms that idea. Explanation as skill in questioning has various considerations. The level of learners, difficulty level of the topic, size of the class, required learning outcome, etc. are the influential factors of explanation.

Explanation should have continuity, fluency, Simplicity, and explicitness. Continuity of explanation refers to sequencing of the sub themes of content in a logical manner to develop the main theme. Fluency connotes the subject mastery and comprehendible use of language for comprehensive explanation. Simplicity in explanation is determined by the nature of vocabulary including colloquial terms used by the teacher during delivering a topic. Simple language and explanation of technical terms is very essential for simplicity. Use of concrete and unambiguous language is essential to develop clear assumptions. Use of correct and appropriate examples, both positive and negative ensures the quality of explanation.

5. Communication:

Communication a blend of non verbal and verbal means, one of the essential skills required to be mastered by any teacher. It is estimated that less than ten percent of

interpersonal communication involves verbal through words, the remainder being made up of voice tone, sounds and a variety of devices such as kinetics (movement), haptics (touch), oculesics (eye-contact), proxemics (space) and chronomics (time) as well as posture, sound symbols and silence, which either replace or accompany words(Darn 2005). The three basic functions of nonverbal communication are managing identity, defining relationships, and conveying attitudes and feelings (but not ideas) (Darn 2005) The *body language, gestures, facial expressions, planned pauses,* etc. are powerful means of non verbal communication which are generally classified as cues, Signals and symbols (Durkel). A cue is a type of communication used to know what is expected in a given situation. Cues are a type of receptive communication. Designing and using a consistent routine is the beginning of teaching cues. Touch cues are ways to communicate desired actions. Sensory cue is some sensory input used to help to anticipate an event, smell of chemicals signifies location of chemistry lab. Object cues are some concrete piece of a routine that is used to represent that routine for eg: duster and chalk in a class. When deciding what cues, it is important to select cues that the learner can easily discriminate one from the other. Signals are a form of expressive communication such as movements, gestures etc. Symbols are representations of an event, action, object, person, or place that can be used to communicate about the event, action, object, person, or place. Symbols can be used for both receptive and expressive communication. Symbols can be objects, parts of objects, pictures, print, actions, gestures, signs, and speech. Effective communication contributes greatly towards mastery learning as well as class management. In the case of verbal communication, the language and communicability of the teacher determine the success

The language chosen should be suitable for the level of learners. Though, the medium of instruction at higher education level is English, use of regional language may be necessary during certain situations to reach at meaningful conclusions as communication always implies two – way communication.

In the case of non verbal communication, proper planning and preparation is essential to execute it effectively, otherwise it will lead to confusion and misunderstanding. The body language of a teacher is a cue which decides the degree of approachability and distant feeling among students.

6. Handling of Technology:

Technical skill to handle various instruments, its routine maintenance and to solve minor operational problems makes it as an inevitable precondition for every teacher in this digital age. This necessity to master the techno - pedagogic advancements is not yet properly conceived in teacher training courses. A wide variety of instruments and devices are coming in the market, most of which can be effectively utilizable for optimizing instruction. Many of them are complicated machines. In order to use such devices adequate training is necessary. Proper rehearsal also is required in some cases. Knowledge of newer and newer technology developing day by day need be understood to keep pace with the technology revolution. In higher education level, of course students can be incorporated effectively for utilizing many devices, including computer.

7. Collaboration

Staff development provides teachers and administrators' appropriate knowledge and skills regarding group processes to ensure various teams, committees, and departments within schools achieve their goals and provide satisfying and rewarding

experiences for participants. Because acquisition of this knowledge and skill has not typically been a part of educators' professional preparation and because leaders often underestimate its importance, it is essential that professional learning focused on helping educators work together successfully be given a high priority. Teachers in many institutions plan and prepare their lessons and materials alone, and struggle on their own to solve their instructional, curricular, and management problems. The complexities introduced by a new curriculum or by the need to refine an existing curriculum are challenging. Teacher teamwork makes these complex tasks more manageable, stimulates new ideas, and promotes coherence in a school's curriculum and instruction.

Most of the current major educational reforms call for extensive, meaningful teacher collaboration. In the era of the reforms--tech prep and the integration of vocational and academic education--attempt to dissolve the dichotomy between academic study and preparation for work; in these reforms, teacher collaboration is essential: Academic and vocational teachers are expected to work together to alter the curriculum and pedagogy within subjects, make connections between subjects, and explore new relationships between the school and the world of work (Morton Inger 1993)

One of the most difficult tasks of such groups is constructively managing the conflict that inevitably arises when participants discuss their fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning and seek the best ways to improve student achievement.

Technology will enable teachers and administrators from around the country and world to share ideas, strategies, and tools with one another in ways that will dramatically increase the number of collaborative links among educators. But electronic forms of such

work will also present teachers and administrators with new challenges whose outlines are only becoming dimly visible as larger numbers of educators begin to use these processes to strengthen their teaching and leadership practices.

Networks of teachers offer a new approach to staff development as teachers grow professionally and assume new leadership roles(Lieberman, A. & McLaughlin, M. 1992). Professional development is moving toward a vision of professional communities that support teacher learning through diverse experiences.

One effective way to begin developing interaction skills is through early collaborative-learning experiences. Research reveals that collaborative learning and teaching models that are applied to pre-service special education and other related disciplines have several forms, including those that focus on problem-solving and those with applied team assessment and intervention processes. Positive learning outcomes for students and faculty consist of enhanced critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, team skills, and leadership experience.

In addition to personal development a teacher needs to be proficient in how to collaborate her children effectively in learner directed constructivist climate. Hence, skill in collaboration needs to be mastered by all teachers of the time as a part of professional empowerment

8. Managing Distractors

Distraction can be stated as a person or object or condition or situation or sensations which is powerful to divert attention from the learning material either partially or completely for a given time. Distractions of various forms hinder classroom learning process from attaining its objectives most of the time. Objects**,** persons,

explanations, examples, location of the class, sensory stimuli in and around, learning resources, and sometimes the teacher herself may be a distractor. In modern classrooms media related distraction is more prevalent. Each and every website having an array of distractors, how to manage those will be a major task even in higher classes. In traditional classes, while using computer presentations cause distractions in the form of style, color, size, background, etc. Hence identifying and managing those distractors in daily teaching is a highly significant skill.

8. Research guidance

The true sense of research in its various forms is an inevitable part of learning in activity oriented, constructivist or critical issue based classrooms. Methodology of teaching and methodology of research guidance are extremely different as the former operates in macro level, while the later in micro level but in more comprehensive dimensions. Research methodology demands more individualistic concern in terms of learner and in problems. Guidance to ‘how to do’ is the task of a teacher ranges from locating a problem to dissemination of findings.

9. Skill of Closure:

The skills set induction and closure is complementary to each other. Closure means the official conclusion of the lesson. The conclusion is the end of all learning activities and situations contributed to learning in a given time of the lesson. The closure of a lesson usually reviewed all the key points of the lesson covered and the further extensions of the topic that have already discussed. The forms of review may be of different types. A flow chart form, form of summary, review questions, quiz session,

questioning by students to teacher, Preparation of question, etc can be suggestive for effective closure.

Acquisition of teaching Skills :

We have already discussed about the necessary skills, those to be mastered by every teacher, for successful teaching. Mastering such skills can be realized by practicing each skill in an independent manner through a process called, *Microteaching*. Microteaching a scale down process of actual teaching, where scaling down is done in the case of number of students, time, topic, and skill. The process also has immediate provision of feedback. Practicing and strengthening each skill separately would help us to develop our maximum teaching potential.

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