

Trajectories of Teacher Traits: Professional, Administrative, and Social Roles

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Abstract

Teaching in higher education has undergone numerous paradigm shifts from teacher-centred authoritative to learner-centred critical and culturally responsive/relevant pedagogies. Further, single method-boundedness has been substituted by the integration of pedagogies via eclecticism in the post-method contexts. Further, virtual learning and paperless classroom, which were not dreamed in the past, has become realistic because of the innovative practices in the domain of information and communication technology in education in general and the pandemic situation created by COVID19 specifically. These shifts have sparked tremendous changes in the teaching field. Based on these presumptions, this article aims to envisage teachers' multifarious roles to play and tasks to perform. To achieve this aim, I have adopted a document analysis method that lies within the typology of the qualitative approach. Moreover, I have found three main categories of teachers' roles including professional, administrative, and social. These roles present a portrait of wholistic teacher traits inside and outside the classroom. The study implies that teachers should be capable of negotiating their roles and tasks based on the contexts they encounter.

Keywords: Controller, Prompter, Rapport Builder, Resource, Task Doer

1. Introduction

As the dynamic powers of the entire educational system, teachers need to play diverse roles and exhibit contrastive traits based on the contexts they encounter. Their roles can be labelled in an authoritative-democratic cline. Teachers as authorities play a role of autocrats and commanders of the class who dictate whatever the learners need to do. This is a context of a teacher-fronted classroom (Rose & Kasper, 2010), in which only teachers take agency. Such a situation appears in traditional classes because it is an easy way to lead the learners towards wherever teachers wish the learners to be and to go. The next type of leadership role, as opposed to the autocratic one, is democratic, in which both the teachers and the learners share some leadership roles where necessary. Whether autocratic or democratic, teachers are leaders for the learners. Therefore, the former has the responsibility of opening the latter's door. This view is echoed by Gibran (1991) in these words, "If the teacher is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind" (as cited in Harmer 2008a, p. 107). This echoes the Sanskrit scriptures, in which Guru [teacher] is the one who tears

darkness and leads the learners towards brightness. That is why, teacher metaphors like actors, orchestra players, gardeners, and others (Harmer, 2008b) exhibit that teachers are at the centre of concentric rings of the teaching-learning process.

Teachers are also role models for learners, mainly, of the junior level. In Senior's (2006) words, "Students can pick up much from the way their teacher walks into the room at the start of the first lesson" (as cited in Harmer, 2008b, p.108). It is true for field-dependent learners who follow visual and kinesthetic styles. Nevertheless, field independent (Ellis, 1992 & 1995) learners require and demand some agency as they can build knowledge on their own. Not only learners but also teachers are different due to the variability in their personalities such as extroversion versus introversion, risk-taking versus non-risk taking, along with aptitude, attitude, motivation, affective factors, and so on (Gass & Selinker, 2009). These variables are the parameters to identify the personality traits of the teachers, whose roles are dependent on different contexts inside and outside the classroom. Despite their different personalities, the teachers should be flexible enough to tackle the "magic moments" (unforeseen problems) decisively and instantly (Harmer, 2008a, pp. 24 & 157). For example, when the learners have been developed into "praise junkies" (Harmer, 2008a, p. 27), they may be out of track and the teacher needs to perform the role of a controller. Such a discursive ability is a pre-requisite to be a professional teacher.

The notion of 'professionalism' appears to be vague and elusive. For Pratte and Rury (1991), professionalism "is an ideal to which individuals and occupational groups aspire, to distinguish themselves from other co-workers" (as cited in Creasy, 2015, p. 23). For Brehm, Breen, Brown, Long, Smith, Wall, and Warren (2006), professionalism is a multifarious term that incorporates the three categories like professional parameters, professional behaviours, and professional responsibilities (as cited in Creasy, 2015, p. 24). Specifying the third category, Slippery Rock University Student Teaching Handbook (2015) has mentioned these indicators of professional responsibilities: reflecting on teaching, maintaining accurate records, communicating with families, working in and contributing to the school and district, growing and developing professionally, and showing professionalism.

However, Richardson (2001) has viewed professionalism as a commitment to the occupation and for her, commitment to teaching means "the degree of positive, affective bond between the teacher and the school that reflects the degree of internal motivation, enthusiasm, and job satisfaction teachers derive from teaching and the degree of efficacy and effectiveness they achieve in their jobs" (p. 820). This implies that professionalism in teaching calls for the strong associations of teachers to the institutions they work. This also calls for their commitment to their occupation. Nevertheless, the concept of professionalism is a dynamic and complex phenomenon to define concisely.

Likewise, Cottle (2014) has cited Franklin's (2010) metaphor "a floating, or empty signifier" that implies professionalism as an imprecise concept and "is an idea that has become what it is today through a series of discursive formulations as it has weaved through a variety of meanings and societal structures throughout history" (p. 3). Drawing on Hall's (1908) professional model, Cottle (2014) has incorporated five attitudinal attributes of professionalism such as (a) formal and informal associations which reinforce the values, beliefs, and identity of the profession, (b) belief on public service, (c) belief in self-regulation, (d) personal commitment and dedication, and (e) autonomy. Further, Cottle's (2014) findings reveal these features of professionalism:

- i. Loyalty to the organization is a key attribute;
- ii. Positive associations with peers and administrators strengthen professionalism and foster a culture of unity;
- iii. Observation and feedback are critical elements in developing professionally;
- iv. Content mastery is a prerequisite for teachers seeking to be professional;
- v. Years' experience practising appropriate skills, attitudes, and behaviours deepens the professional attributes; and
- vi. Experience in many different assignments builds confidence, efficacy, and trust in teachers. (p. iv)

These features exhibit that teachers should be loyal to the policies, strategies, programmes, students, and their occupation of the educational institutions they are involved in. Secondly, the teachers should develop an affirmative bond with co-workers and the administrators. They should show their positive associations in both the formal and informal settings. Thirdly, teachers should show their readiness to observe and to be observed in formative and summative contexts. Mainly, formative observations provide teachers with opportunities to strengthen or improve their performances. This provides a chance for continuous assessment and improvement, which are crucial in a teacher's development. Fourthly, teachers need to get mastery over the contents they have to deliver in the class. Then, they can deliver the contents confidently and convincingly. Likewise, they should be well practitioners and be involved in numerous tasks for years for their professional development.

The trajectories of teaching dynamics show that teaching is an art as well as a science (Harmer, 2008a & 2008b). As a science, teachers should be capable of holding some technical skills and follow certain procedures to achieve the goals of teaching. Further, they should be able to design the materials following the innovative practices (like one of the technologies) in society. As an art, teaching is a humanistic ground to establish the teacher's good rapport with the learners not only inside the closet of four walls but also to the fresh air outside. Therefore, teaching is both an art and a science. Accordingly, teachers need to switch their roles and do the tasks.

2. Methods and Procedures

This study aims to explore multifarious teachers' roles in the contexts of paradigm shifts from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness. To achieve the goal, I have followed the document analysis method as a part of the qualitative approach

and the research paradigm of interpretivism. This is also secondary research that “includes any research based on secondary sources, especially other researchers’ books and articles” and “is further divided into library research and literature reviews” (Brown & Rodgers, 2014, p. 10). Thus, secondary research adds to the common body of existing knowledge. As this study is based on the documents, it follows document analysis method, which analyses available documents within the domain/s selected (Bell, 1999, as cited in Al-Jardani, 2012, & Krippendorff, 2013). Accordingly, I have selected the domain of teacher roles, analyzed them, and interpreted the documents within the frameworks of three parameters of the phenomenon such as professional, administrative, and social roles to draw inferences.

3. Results and Discussion

Trajectories of teacher traits demonstrate these labels for teacher roles and tasks: controller, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, rapport builder, task doer, manager and knowledge builder/holder, as the variables to explore and settle (Nagaraj, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Richards & Rodgers, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Tickoo, 2007; Harmer, 2008a & 2008b; Farrell & Jacobs, 2010; Neupane, 2016; & Assaf, n. d.). These roles and tasks fall under these three themes like professional, social, and administrative, which are expounded in the subsequent sections.

3.1. Professional Roles

Teachers need to perform different roles and tasks according to the teaching contexts. Firstly, teachers as controllers (Tickoo, 2007) are classrooms-in-charge, who deliver lectures in the teacher- fronted classroom. They maintain order and hold the authority of the activities conducted in the classroom. They are guides and the learners follow them. Therefore, teachers bear high responsibility whereas learners very low or no agency in the teaching-learning process. This role is effective in explaining grammar and imparting information in large class size. However, for communicative activities, like project work, group/pair work, and strip story, among others, this role of authority is not permissible. Secondly, teachers as prompters (or facilitators) (Harmer, 2008a) play the roles of the catalysts but being involved them in the task as well. They provide feedback for encouraging the learners may be in fluency or role-play activity. Thus, teachers provide scaffolding (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) for the learners. For example, if a learner is incapable of presenting his role, the teachers scaffold and encourage doing the tasks. Yet, teachers can neither too much adamant nor too much indifferent nor merely an observant. To put it in other words, teachers should be sensitive enough to facilitate only when the learners need to keep them in the right track.

Thirdly, teachers can be participants along with the learners because it is encouraging for the latter. However, the teachers can at times take the officious role; otherwise, the learners may take unnecessary advantage of these situations and the class can be uncontrollable (Larsen-Freeman, 2007). Therefore, as participants, teachers can be role models for learners in communicative activities, which can encompass culturally relevant issues, too. At this conjecture, it is customary to note that teachers can be learning from the diverse group of learners and hence the former can be “co-learners” (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010, p. 112). The fourth role, different from the third, is that teachers are resources (Harmer, 2008b) for the learners and hence the former is required to be resourceful and knowledgeable. Yet, teachers should not spoon-feed the learners and should incite them towards the destination by using their own feet. Teachers should not make the learners parasites that are reliant on others but should make bees that look for nectar themselves after having information about where the flower garden lies. The summation of a prompter and a resource yields the teacher roles as tutors (also advisors, counsellors, consultants). Teachers, as tutors, facilitate backward learners may be from differently able one or from marginalized, minority, downtrodden, or frustrated groups. However, this is possible only if the class size is manageable.

3.2. Social Roles

The roles explicated above are not sufficient in the big picture of the good teachers, who can maintain a harmonious relationship with the learners. Teachers, as rapport builders (Harmer, 2008 & 2008b), should play the roles not only inside the constraints of school premises but also outside to the society. It is because learners are not only individual beings but also members of the communities outside. Therefore, different types of diversities (e.g. linguistic, cultural, creative, ethnic, and economic, among many others) are realities of the postmodern classrooms.

Teachers are agents for social change (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) and are responsible to be sensible and sensitive enough to make the learners feel that educational institutions are real places for their betterment and upliftment. Rapport building task, on the part of the teachers, is equally crucial for building and holding knowledge necessary for professionalism. Harmer (2008a & 2008b) has suggested two main ways for building a good rapport with the learners in the classroom: (a) recognizing, listening, and respecting them; and (b) being even-handed. For the first way, teachers need to identify the students by using any of the possible strategies. They may be keeping name cards, or holding badges with names, or managing a fixed seating plan, or giving them some typical identities (for example, the boy with glasses, the girl with red ribbons, etc.). However, these ways can be counter-productive if the learners’ psychology is not understood well. Likewise, teachers should respond to each learner impartially. They should also respect the students by providing corrections mildly. Nevertheless, teachers should not be too critical; neither can they be too admirer that makes the learners “praise junkies”

(Harmer, 2008a, p. 27). For the second way, the teachers should not only focus their attention to the talkative, more abled or extrovert learners but also show due regard to those who are less talkative, less abled, shy, or introvert ones. This is necessary to develop learner autonomy, which is a cry of the day. This kind of teacher behaviour goes in perfect harmony with the teacher maxims and principles that, in turn, results in due respect to the teachers, too.

Beyond these ways to deal with diverse students inside the classroom, the teachers should be capable of building rapport to the learners as community members (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). For this, the teachers can visit individual learners' residencies and take notes of their backgrounds so that the former can deal with the latter well in and out of the classroom. The alternative way is to call the guardians in the institutions and get knowledge about them. Maybe field trip for the accomplishment of project work (for example) can be the next strategy to build rapport with the society. Concisely, teachers can either take the school to the society or take society to the school. Only then, the bragging of 'education for all' can be materialized. Therefore, teachers, as rapport builders, can play the role of agents for change.

3.3. Administrative Roles

Only bearing professional and social roles are not enough to be efficient teachers. For being reliable persons, the teachers should perform some exemplary tasks that are the roles of teachers as administrators. Teachers, needless to say, should be well prepared for their presentation before they enter the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 2007) because otherwise, they might fall in the condition of a warrior who enters into the battlefield without checking his weapons and available tools. There are different types of plans, such as annual work plan, annual instructional plan, week plan, and daily lesson plan, which play the role of a compass for a captain in the ship while sailing on the sea.

Teachers' preparation draws heavily on their knowledge and skill. Their knowledge encompasses contents, materials, resources, instructional materials, innovative techniques and novel ideas and ways for presenting teaching items to meet the learning outcomes (Neupane, 2016). Contents subsume language as a network of grammar, vocabulary, functions and structures. Similarly, materials and resources comprise references, textbooks, teacher's guides, workbooks, readers, among others. Instructional materials consist of display devices like a whiteboard, pocket chart, flannel board, and smartboard; visual aids like flashcards, word or sentence cards, cut-outs; and audio-visual aids like cassette players, televisions, video recorders, to mention but a few (Nagaraj, 1997). Besides, knowledge, on the part of the teachers, is necessary to use language laboratory, multi-media projectors, interactive whiteboards, the Internet and the websites for the sake of language development (Richards & Rodgers, 2003). Teaching is discursive. Accordingly, teachers should know different times-different techniques (Harmer, 2008a & 2008b) to bring variety in their teaching to meet the goals of a lesson. For example, teachers can use group work, simulation, role-play, dramatization, strip story, drilling, project work, think-pair-share, gallery walk, one stay-others stray, and so on. However, as stated earlier, they should be flexible enough to switch their technique for the effective presentation and practice of the lessons. Their use of innovative and novel ideas should be goal-oriented.

Teachers' preparation also depends on their skills (Harmer, 2008b), which call for managing classes well to cater for the diverse group of learners. Classroom management depends on its size, nature of the learners and their backgrounds, and teachers' skills. For example, if the learners are from diverse groups, they can be asked to make groups from different cultural backgrounds (for example) so that there can be good sharing to each other. To put it in other words, learner groups and tasks should be matching. Yet, the variety in group formation and the task is necessary for motivating the learners. Based on their skills and knowledge, teachers should prepare their lessons for effective and efficient presentation and practice. It is to be noted that teachers should be reliable in the learners' eyes, which is possible by practising what they preach. To put it differently, teachers should also be the learners to convince the latter for doing tasks.

Further, teachers as administrators should keep diaries (journals), and records of their learners. They can do this by keeping anecdotes, rating scales, cumulative records, diaries and the like. They can also keep records of evaluation scores, maybe for the sake of self-judgment and for the conduction of remedial teaching. Furthermore, teachers are managers and knowledge holders and builders (Harmer, 2008a & 2008b). They should manage learners in the classroom and hold the spirit of teacher ideals. Besides, teachers should be ready for constructing knowledge from a diverse group of learners as post-modern classrooms are miniatures of multilingual and multicultural societies. For example, a teacher from one ethnic group can learn cultures from the multicultural group of learners. In this sense, teachers are "co-learners" (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010, p. 2), and "co-constructors of knowledge" (Assaf, n. d., p.5) and hence, they should be "critical educators" (Assaf, n. d., p. 8), who is capable of reviewing/commenting the existing education system and developing learners to be so. These are the distinctive traits of postmodern teachers.

4. Conclusion

Numerous paradigm shifts from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness, teachers to learners, a methodology to post-methodology, and the like have placed the teachers at stake. They are to adapt themselves to be congruent to the contexts of crosswords. Thus, teachers can be controllers, prompters, resources, tutors, participants, mentors, managers, rapport builders, knowledge holders/builders, and the agents for social change. For these volatile roles, the teachers should be adaptable, flexible, and open-ended enough to suit the available context. These roles exhibit teachers' professional, administrative, and social features. To be specific, teachers now are at the crosswords of multifarious roles to play and tasks to perform.

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