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EDUCATION 5.0

PERSPECTIVES

AND

REV. DR. S. AMALADOSS XAVIER
DIRECTOR, J.R. BONHOMME CENTRE FOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Principal
St. Xavier's College of Education
(Autonomous)
Palayamkottai - 627 002

DR D. THOMAS ALEXANDER

DR S. AMALADOSS XAVIER

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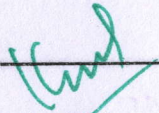
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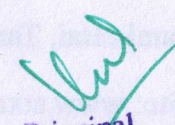
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St. Xavier's College of Education
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ESSENTIALS OF CLASSROOM ECOLOGY IN MAKING A PERSONALITY

**Dr. D. Thomas Alexander, Principal, St. Xavier's College of Education (Autonomous), Palayamkottai.*

Introduction:

It is the longing of a good citizen of any country that the quality education should aim at teaching the learner how to make a living along with how to live; in other words, the education should make a person employable and livable (John Adams, 1807). In the context of mushrooming and commercialization of educational institutions that promise in the papers the right training of graduates for successful life, how do we realize the above mentioned objectives?

Aristotle was once asked, "How much better educated men were than those who were uneducated?" he responded saying, "as much as the living are than the dead". Education is an investment on human resources and contributes in socio-economic change; it is instrument of development and strengthening of democratic values. Gandhi would say, "What is really needed to make democracy function is not knowledge of facts but right education". Tagore would say, "I do not put my faith in any new institution but in the individuals all over the world, who think clearly, feel nobly and act rightly, thus becoming channels of moral truth; education must build a harmonious and self-confident personality, namely the whole man" (Goel & Goel. 2010).

Education does not mean passing on to students what they do not know nor teaching the shapes of letters and the tricks of numbers, rather a painful and continual effort of the teachers and students undertaken to have a complete understanding on human existence that is defined with life values and relationships. The only platform that could help us in achieving the above objectives is the classroom and the ecology of the classroom needs to be contemplated thoroughly. In the following pages, we shall see the factors influencing the ecology of the classroom and the expectations of the society in the future.

Developments and Needs of 21st Century:

After the advent of LPG, we have the innumerable unemployed youth, the absence of human values in human's life, the digital divide in the human community, minimum tolerance of creed, colour, and social differences, widening gap among family members, neglect of parents, technological innovations leading to easy-going and secluded life, unmotivated youth, anti-social thinking, commercialized education, paucity of principled leaders, concentration of opportunities with one creamy layer of the society leaving the rural in the periphery itself. In short, the 21st century characterized with the elements of knowledge explosion, impact of globalization, presence of ICT in every walks of life, individualism and consumerism, survival of the fastest, instant solution and deviation of moral certitude among the people.

Therefore the society is in need of a new paradigm of thinking and action in the fields of education; a new vision and mission is to be designed so that the deficiencies are weeded out. Education must through its curriculum "aim at the development of balanced personalities who are culturally refined, emotionally stable, ethically sound, intellectually alert, socially efficient, spiritually upright and physically strong" (Coleridge, 1827). Thus we have to develop a new generation, who would transcend beyond the narrow boundaries of man-made social divisions, individualism, madness on materialism, inadequacy of self-respect and awareness etc. so that the youth remain the real torch bearers of deeper human values such as human dignity, justice, equality and friendly with environment. This would form a new human society.


Principal

St. Xavier's College of Education
(Autonomous)
Palayamkottai - 627 002

New Humans with New Paradigm:

“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.”— Chesterton); Education should prepare young people for life, work and citizenship (Bupinder Singh, 2015)

The 21st century being a century of information and communication technology, the immediate task of education is not the creation of science engineers but human engineers who would be able to connect the gap that exists between technology and humanism; Which means a new paradigm has to be envisioned in education through which new outlook, approach, pedagogy, innovation and evaluation of students would occupy the main stream of the teaching-learning process in order to sow the seeds of brotherhood, love, justice and equality. Carter G. Woodson once said “For me, education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better.”(Bupinder Singh, 2015).

As it stands today, paradigm is the window or approach through which we penetrate into problems, needs, status and characteristics of the students so that there would be better guidance made available for further possible growth; we will also recognize the students with new outlooks, along with receptivity for modern thinking process. Hence the new paradigm will receive the individuals with open and positive mindset, recognizing the potentials and enthusiasm, enabling the person to actualize his or her self completely with full respect for other persons. This new paradigm will certainly offer a sense of successful life journey in spite of challenges and hardships that everyone goes through. Thus a new paradigm will not only ennoble the younger generation with better attitude and actions but also create them as the proud handlers of the new human society. But where do we begin to sculpt the student community? It is the classroom which awaits our attention.

Classroom Ecology:

The ecology of the classroom has a great effect on successful academic and social performance of the students. There are elements in the classroom that create a positive and supportive classroom environment, which in turn enhance the daily learning experiences of our students. What is ecology? Ecology is considered to be the interaction between people and environment. For students, the learning and behavior occur in the context of classroom where a lot of interface is transpired among students, staff and classroom infrastructure in the background of other background variables such as the family, the socio-economic background, religion, gender, race, etc.(Kate Sussman, 2012) It is supported by the research findings of Wang, Haertel, Walberg (1994) who reveal that the classroom ecology has the greatest effect on student learning over home environment, parental support, curriculum design, school culture, and school demographics . Thus, the classroom ecology which is the combination of efforts of the person and the prevailing environment maintains its essential role in the making of the personality.

Surprisingly the situation that exists today in the classroom is debatable; is there a discussion? Is there an interaction between teacher and the student? It is said that the technology has begun to dominate the teacher and consequently it has replaced the teacher – student face to face human formation with the online communication and hence the absence of human formation. To revive and reestablish the quality classroom ecology, what do we have to do? How do we steer the elements or components of classroom ecology into a dynamic process?

Essentials of Classroom Ecology:

Classroom ecology encompasses a number of components including teacher, student and his backgrounds, content, pedagogy, infrastructure, and teaching aids. An experimental study conducted by Robert Sommer in 1967 has confirmed that classroom participation was

related to seating arrangements; in the seminar-style arrangement, it was found that students seated directly opposite the instructor participated more than students at the sides. In classrooms with straight rows, students in front participated more than students in the rear, and students in the center of each row participated more than students at the sides. However we will be discussing in this article about the key three components, namely teacher, student and pedagogy which conquer vital importance.

Teacher: New Profile Expected:

The 21st century is characterized with the elements of knowledge explosion, impact of globalization, presence of ICT in every walks of life, individualism and consumerism, survival of the fastest, instant solution and deviation of moral certitude among the people. Therefore the teacher has to adopt himself to the characteristics of classrooms of 21st century where he or she becomes fellow traveler. Basics of a teacher would include being the holder of a complete knowledge of the content, the length and breadth of disciplinary actions, the growing expectations of the adolescents and young adults within the ambit of psychology and a man of responsibilities.

The expectations of the society today is that the classroom must become student-centered, possessing the modern Computing devices, designed for active learning, should allow freedom to learn at our own pace, ensure mutual respect for students and staff, train students to take responsibilities for their learning, educate students to understand the rules and procedures of the institution and encourage an active pursuit of knowledge. No more the teacher is expected to play the role of deliverer of the content in the classroom rather a co-learner along with students and fellow staff. The teacher needs to be a well-informed member, having access to all the developments of the society in terms of politics, economics, culture, religion, social customs and expectation, technology and self-taught or personally-convinced philosophy about human life in the world; in short he must be an awakened personality to converse with students.

A professional educator would certainly know the students, focus on the viewpoints of students and interpret them in positive manner so that students may be provoked to think further; here comes the role of dialogue and co-learning where both students and teacher share their experiences which would enrich the learning process. A teacher should be a person of five C's, namely creativity, competence, consciousness, commitment, and compassion. Tony Wagner (2008) in his book 'The Global Achievement Gap' says aptly, "Do the work out of passion and not out of pressure; need to create a positive mindset about boys; Teachers are enablers and connectors". Today, the advent of LPG demands that the teacher's mind is opened to have a broad and global thinking; it is believed that the sense of belonging to a global society and global citizenship would certainly influence the students' community to expand the horizons of thinking and acting.

Tony Wagner (2008) would point out seven survival skills needed for students in the society. They are: Critical thinking and problem solving, Collaboration and leadership, Agility and adaptability, Initiative and entrepreneurialism, Effective oral and written communication, Accessing and analyzing information and Curiosity and imagination. If we take pro-student approach, then the entire qualities mentioned above are possible only in and through the conscious planning and initiatives of teacher and management. Needless to say, all the above qualities are rarely thought about or minimum efforts are undertaken now by the teachers to achieve them in the classroom. The teacher should shed away his or her prejudices, biased thinking and revengefulness for better classroom ecology.

Learner: a Human to be carved:

The second element in the classroom ecology is the student. While we think about the qualities of today's learners, we observe the following: they demonstrate independence and

ready to do anything what they want and there is less worried about the consequences. They seem to have built a strong content knowledge in the area chosen by them which is to be appreciated. They seem to be multi-tasking personalities, willing to operate at any platform for the sake of achieving the target. They have the ability to comprehend and critique but with biasedness; a personal conviction or deeper thinking is lacking. Always they insist on evidences, witnesses or concrete examples to believe in any idea or concept. Of course, the younger generation is techno-savvy; they come to understand the cultures and perspectives to certain extent but very much prejudiced. Teachers according to them should to be facilitators and not lecturers.

While we are in appreciation of their modern outlook and readiness for technology, there arises a question about their social relationship; the quotient of emotional intelligence is at stake. As the behaviour of the students add strength to the climate of the classroom, the emotional expression through his or her thoughts, words and actions have to be paid attention. A strong sense of individualism blocks the broader thinking and inclusiveness; there is a wall created due to deviated thinking around oneself which barricades the others to enter in. Global thinking evades his or her way and lands oneself in a restricted relationship; it may be due to prejudices built by family or per group. What is needed is a complete awareness about self and the gift of empathy. This would make the person to freely relate with other peers in the classroom without any divisions, inhibitions, and judgements. Secondly the element of intrinsic motivation has to be cultivated; this will be the result of self-awareness, which leads to social awareness. Ultimately the human aspect of the person has to be carved out of each student in the classroom so that there prevails a conducive atmosphere for deeper relationship and wider perspective. Which means, it is the responsibility of students to contribute towards the sound classroom ecology. But how do we make our students involved in the classroom learning and peer relationship? The role of pedagogy here cannot be neglected.

Pedagogy: Effective Ingredient of Classroom Ecology

In its original term, pedagogy is basically is an art of teaching; it covers its methods and techniques so that the process of learning becomes more effective. Pedagogy is a process, beginning with codifying the objectives, presentation of content, personalization of the concept, critiquing and accommodating the same and ending with evaluating the process. The pedagogy must help in breaking the content into small pieces in order to enable the learner grasp the concept in a simple way. The matter to be learnt is made easy with the use of right technique whereby the group or individual is enabled to understand it.

Secondly the pedagogy must create the opportunities to build the student community in the classroom; the teacher must design right methods and employ sharp techniques to bring the group together on one job so that each member is accommodated and recognized. Thirdly the method of instruction should have life examples and events to illuminate the students who will be enthusiastic and alert in the classroom; the teacher needs to maintain vibrancy in the classroom so that active listening occurs on the part of students and thus ecology of the classroom is enhanced.

Fourthly, the classroom ecology must pave way for the development of academic, social and vocational skills such as communication, creativity, critical thinking and sense of belonging; therefore the designed methods and execution of planned techniques and methods should be meticulously looked into. The practice and training of soft skills including intra and interpersonal relationship adds more weightage in the establishment of conducive classroom ecology.

Active learning is yet another fruit of a right pedagogy; the emphasis is laid on promoting student engagement in their own learning, with the support of ICT and lots of

teamwork. The pedagogy must also lead to cognitive activation, where students are challenged into a process that develops higher order thinking skills, especially problem solving and critical thinking. The teacher-centered instruction that relies on the teacher ability to deliver good classes must be minimized. The instructor must be ready for a constant change in roles, to adjust to the kind of instruction being implemented. (Claudia Costin, 2017).

The pedagogy indirectly prepares the ecology of the classroom and consequently minds of the students to be attentive, related with each other and remains motivated throughout the teaching-learning process.

Resolving the Impasse:

In summary how do we say? The student has to present him/herself fully with openness and honest search for wisdom must be expressed; at the side of teacher, he or she has to be aware of the expectations of the student, society and other stake holders and thus prepare the suitable pedagogy which will ignite the minds of the students and draw out the best from them. The classroom ecology therefore mainly depends on the teacher personality and the employed pedagogy, followed by the student who has to offer as the clay in the hands of the teacher.

Conclusion:

The urgent attention I think, is needed towards creating a true classroom ecology whereby the student, the prime stakeholder benefits out of the long process of interaction in the classroom; into this process the teacher has to commit him/herself so that the art of teaching is expressed in terms of a well-conceived pedagogy that will ensure the making of a successful personality in the classroom.

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