

TEACHERS' ENGAGEMENT IN BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English is one of the complex and demanding matters because the teachers have to deal with the students of diverse nature, various circumstances and expectations. Like in other professions, teaching cannot be performed within the specified time. It needs much more time to be engaged in for the pre-planning, classroom delivery and post delivery reflections. In this article, the engagement of an English teacher of secondary level to bring out the best in students has been discussed in terms of his planning preparation, delivery, reflection as well as evaluation, training and collaboration with the administration and other colleagues. After the analysis of the data it has been found that English teachers in the Kathmandu valley are over busy; they do not have enough time to make planning, preparation and collaboration with the colleagues.

Key Words: Teachers' engaged time, pre-delivering, classroom delivery, post delivery reflection, collaboration and interaction

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a very complex and demanding matter for the teachers who want to bring out the best in students. In Callingford's (1995: 1) view the complexity of teaching is not always understood. One of the important aspects of teaching is facilitating students to learn by setting up a situation in which the students can learn effectively. Setting up a situation is not an easy task because the teachers have to perform various functions simultaneously. The teachers have to deal with diverse students at the same time analyzing what is going on in their minds. They have to deal with even those students who do not want to be cooperative. For that very reason, Day (1999: ix) claims that teachers' teaching is a complex process involving a range of activities and that its quality depends on appropriate adaption of teacher capabilities to particular pupils and context.

Teaching is demanding in that all learners have not only a family, friends and a place to live in but also study, play and responsibilities along with all the joys and sorrows that come with those things. They bring into the classroom not only their knowledge, experience and skills but also intelligences, emotions and expectations. They also possess creativity, a sense of humor and dreams. They have their own hopes and aspirations.

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Their fears, blind spots and prejudices along with every likes, dislikes and preferences are with them. So every learner is individually different even if they have the same knowledge, skills or expectations. As in the claim of Edge and Garton (2010: 3) almost all teachers in their teaching careers experience difficulty in managing their classes because of some students who create difficulties even for the most experienced staffs (Robertson, 1992: viii). Therefore, teachers willing to bring out the best in students are concerned with how to reduce the unwanted behavior and how to deal effectively with it when it occurs. Furthermore, teachers in this digital age are expected to work as guides, councilors, group leaders, consultants, facilitators, a bridge between the school and community, etc. Of all these roles, the classrooms teaching is most important one in making the system work (Chaurasia, 2000: 85).

Tomlison (2001: 10) says, "Teaching is an activity designed to promote learning." This is an act consisting of elements which include a teacher, a learner, a set of intended learning outcomes, a teaching learning process, a context along with resources. These elements interact and influence each other. So, teaching is a social interaction within a setting driven by purpose and expert. Teachers have to be active in creating the work conditions, the opportunities and the spaces in which competence, creativity, risk taking and learning may thrive (Day, Fernandez, Hauge and Moller, 2003: 8). That is why, Day (1999: 2) states that teachers are the schools' greatest asset. They stand at the interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills and values.

Teachers are the backbones of education system. The main functions of the teachers include teaching of their assigned subjects in the classrooms, checking up the students' home assignments, providing students with the counseling service, interacting with the colleagues and the parents of the students, bearing other administrative responsibilities given by the school, collecting and designing instructional materials, visiting to the libraries for study at the leisure time, browsing internet, planning programs for the days to come, checking students' answer books, setting question items and checking the answer papers of various tests for formative and summative evaluation and taking part in workshops and seminars as well as some conferences. This indicates that teachers have to spend their time not only in doing different tasks in the classrooms but they also have to be engaged in some other tasks before as well as after the school time. The time every teacher is engaged in for the preparation, classroom delivery and the reflective work is called teachers' engaged time.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Chaurasia (2000) says "teaching has its own ethics which is very much interrelated with the ethics of an individual teacher" (p. 85).

Teachers can bring out the best in students if they treat all students with love and affection and be just and impartial to all irrespective of caste, creed, sex, status, religion, language, place of birth, etc. they have to create the environment to promote in learning for their all-round development. Chaurasia (2000) further says that “teachers have to be particular to encourage students to formulate and work for individual goals in the development of their physical, intellectual, creative and spiritual endowments (p. 85)

However, there are some grumbles that some teachers are not so ethical in their assigned duties and tasks. They go to the classes unprepared, are irregular and unpunctual in attending to teaching assignments in the school. They cannot maintain impartiality permitting self reasons to influence one’s action towards students. Their habits of gossiping and beating about the bush in the class, criticizing colleagues and tendency to miss class on some reasons also make them unethical. In such a circumstance, the questions could be raised as: How do the teachers get prepared for the classroom delivery and reflect their classroom tasks? How do the teachers spend their time in the classroom and before and after this? How do they update themselves? How do they bring out the best in students?

METHODOLOGY

For answering these questions, a case study research design has been adopted. McKay (2006) says, “It is a single instance of some bound system which can range from one individual to a class, a school or an entire community” (p. 71). In this study the data has been utilized from a case of a teacher who has written a narrative account about his pre-delivery work, classroom delivery and post delivery reflection. Though the data in a case study can be generated through classroom observation, interviews, verbal accounts etc. it has used a narrative account which was gathered to be used in the research carried out by a team of Molung foundation and submitted to the Department of Education with the permission of authority.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE UNIT

The teacher was Ishan Shrestha (name changed) a secondary level English language teacher. He has been teaching English in this school for about 15 years after he received master degree in English literature and one year B.Ed. with major English. His school is one of the best community schools of Kathmandu valley. He usually gets up at half past four o’clock and get freshen up. After taking tea with his family, he sets off for his work. He teaches English in +2 level of a private school in the morning shift where he takes four periods there from 6:15 to 9:15 am.

When the full classes of +2 level are running, he does not have enough time to go home to have his meal, so, he goes to his school straight. It takes nearly half-an-hour on his bike to go there from his workplace of the morning time. So he takes his morning meal in the canteen of the school.

ANALYSIS OF THE CASE

Teachers have to get ready by making some kinds of planning and preparing the lessons which they are to present during the delivery time. To make their delivery effective, they must plan their lessons implicitly or explicitly, written or unwritten along with collecting, designing and managing appropriate instructional materials and going through the reference materials. The teacher states,

I do not prepare my lesson plan writing in a notebook in detail but read the chapter that is being taught and take some points only for my convenience. Usually, I read the chapters at the leisure time. *We* use the instructional materials like textbooks, teachers' guide, cassettes, etc. provided by the school. We do not make them much and we cannot spend the money on buying them from our own pocket.

This information given by the teacher shows that English teachers in Kathmandu valley are very busy. They do not prepare any materials at their homes. They are found preparing their lesson plans at their leisure time. It also shows that collaboration and students homework checking and giving feedback are also lacking in the community school.

Teachers can bring out the best in students when they are able to organize their classes with clear explanation, make the difficult topics easy to understand. They have to use examples, details, analogies, metaphors and varieties in modes of explanation to make materials not only understandable but memorable as well. For these to happen, they have to engage themselves in rigorous execution of their own actions. In this regard, the teacher says,

we must be present here before 10 am. I have five periods a day. I have 3rd and 6th period off. During the leisure time the students assignments, if there are any, I check them but I feel somehow tiresome in the classes after Tiffin time.

It indicates that for most of the English teachers after their morning shift, teaching becomes somehow tiring and homework checking somehow burdensome.

Unless the teachers know the techniques of classroom delivery, they do not know how to question the students, call on their students' cold, turn classes into only power point shows, fail to provide a variety in instruction, have students work in groups with no accountability, fail to establish relevance, give too long tests, get stock in rut, teach without making clear learning objectives and disrespect their students, they are

always ineffective. This is because of the less effective use of their pre-delivery and post delivery time-on-tasks. Regarding this, the teacher says,

in my view teaching English is making our students able to listen, speak, read and write in the target language, so my focus is on these basic language skills while teaching and establishing the connection of the learning objectives and learning experience.

This saying reveals the fact that the teachers can conduct their lesson in the classroom with some unclear notions of techniques and methods.

To facilitate students' learning, the teachers should have a clear idea of what kind of instructional practices they wish to produce and design a structure to go with it for the effectiveness of the school, the teachers as well as students' performances. The teacher says,

I think our main assigned task is instructing the students to fulfill the objectives set in the curriculum. Using the available materials, I teach my students in the classrooms. For me the main instructional material is the prescribed text books. On the one hand I do not have enough time to make and collect the other materials; on the other hand, I have spent nearly fifteen years teaching English, so I do not feel so much difficult to teach English and need of using visual materials in the classroom teaching.

However, there is no teacher who is perfect that improvement is impossible (Callingford, 1995: 170). Careful structuring of students' work, giving them plenty to do and encouraging them to be able to work independently need careful planning and ordering. The learning environment should be attractive and orderly that encourages self-control among the pupils; this is the pre-requisite for positive classroom ethos. However, the teacher is his saying does not design and collect any materials for the creation of attractive learning environment.

After the delivery of the contents in the classrooms, the teachers can reflect what they did during the delivery time as the teacher in the classrooms or what functions they have performed during their while-delivery phases. Now-a-days, the teachers of many schools can maintain their daily diaries including the contexts of the good experience as well as the bad ones while encountering with their own students of various nature, their colleagues, administrators as well as the parents of their students with some problematic behaviors or good behavior for their future progress. In spite of this, the teacher says, "Though sometimes I feel unsatisfied with my own teaching because of various reasons like students' behaviors, their standard etc., I have not done any reflection with written record of it." He further adds:

So far nobody has come into my classroom to observe my classroom teaching but sometimes I could notice the head teacher watching through the window to know whether our classes were running or not.

Similarly, I have not observed any other colleagues' classroom teaching and given feedback or nobody gave me such feedback yet.

This saying indicates that English teaching still has the traditional picture of the teacher working alone and isolated in the classroom, with the door firmly closed. Thus, the teacher has become the victim of control of the curriculum and has not become so collaborative with others.

Schools become more effective when all staffs are deeply involved with each other (Cullingford, 1995: 176). However, the teacher says,

Most of the teachers are busy in their own business of teaching. I do not get a chance to interact with them. Almost all of the teachers are overloaded with their routine. Again the school administration has forced us to check students' homework and carryout weekly and monthly test compulsory. So we have to check our students' exam papers.

Furthermore,

papers have to be checked in our own schools of all tests. Sometimes, I take them to my home as well to complete them in time. The results are also prepared by the subject teachers in their own schools.

This information given by the respondent indicates that the school does not have so conducive environment of collaborative learning culture.

As teaching is the profession which requires the teachers to be up-to-date with not only the current affairs of social phenomenon but also with the current development of the knowledge, skills as well as the experience in their own particular discipline area. So they have to consult the recently published books, journals as well as the internet and the websites. But to this situation, the teacher says, "in the beginning of my teaching career I read the curriculum of secondary level but I do not need to read it now; I know a lot because of my experience of teaching at secondary level students." Though teaching is purposeful, well organized and clear about objectives, well prepared, appropriately paced and structured, and pupil focused questioning, the teacher because of his over business of teaching hours at this and the private school cannot keep himself up-to-date.

Teacher should be involved in setting the evaluation tools and criteria. The emphasis should be given to the formative and collaborative means and the criteria must not be limited to the observation checklist (Cullingford, 1995: 170). It is one of the strongest criteria of effective teachers. To this criterion, the response was "we as the subjects teachers have to set the questions for all tests and exams except for the half-yearly and yearly exams as the questions are set in the resource centre level." It is also necessary to keep careful and meticulous records of pupils' work, including their personal and social development. Assessment is the starting point to change (Cullingford, 1995: 184) maintaining for the diagnosis of learning abilities and style of children. It should be a clear

idea of the complete work profile of the pupil. However, the teacher in this study seems to believe that assessment is the measurement of the knowledge and exams which determine the success and failure of the individual student.

The relation between parents and teachers should be cordial with respect to the promotion of students and to their counseling or guidance, but a more difficult problem has to be encountered with the students who are having serious problems with their school performances as well as with their behaviors. In such a circumstance, the teachers have to function as the school counselors providing such students with therapeutic counseling. But the response is:

Sometimes I have to deal with the guardians of those students who do not obey the rules and code of conduct prepared by the school. Mostly, the guardians do not come to school to talk to the teachers and the head teachers because most of the guardians of the students studying in our school are economically low status. They also are not so aware of the fact that their presence can bring positive effect in their children's learning.

It indicates that there is not close involvement of parents with the school; they are not invited to come to the classroom as well as to attend formal session to discuss pupils' progress. Parents should be encouraged to be involved on students' educational development (Cullingford, 1995: 183). The teachers must make the best use of parents involving them in helping in the classroom, helping at home and supporting their children through their own attitudes to the school, if they want to bring out the best in students.

In Pollard's (2006: 405) view there must be more inspection, more questioning and more appraisal. Better pupil outcomes follow from positive reinforcement, clear feedback, reward and clear rules for behavior. These are more successful than punishment or criticism. It is assumed that this is the responsibility of the school supervisors and resource persons. But this response speaks "I have not seen any resource persons or school supervisors observing the classroom teaching and interacting with any teachers on the issues of teaching and learning and promoting them in our school." This shows that their visits are limited for the administrative purposes as well as for some formal programs as the guests. The response further reveals "I do not remember any event in which they have collected suggestions to reform curriculum and text books." Pollard (2006: 405) says that monitoring progress: keeps track of whether the school is meeting its targets and goals; maintain awareness of targets and goals among the staff pupils and parents; inform planning and teaching; sends clear message to pupils that teachers are interested in their progress, this seems lacking here.

Teacher induction is one of the effective means of supporting and advising newly appointed teachers. Through the structured mentoring during this period, they can develop their proficiency for handling classes effectively. However, the response speaks

when I was given the appointment as the new English teacher and came to the school to teach, the assistant head teacher took me to the first class and introduced with the students of class eight. At that time, I was given five periods. It was a bit difficult for me because I was new in my job. The other teachers were also busy teaching their own assigned subjects, so I had to find the measures of how to survive in the classroom satisfying the students. The first year was very difficult and stressful for me.

Cullingford (1995) also maintains that individual teachers can feel isolated in the school; can feel they have no influence on others (p. 176). He further says that a good teacher needs support where the whole of school community is engaged in talk, in open discussion, and in agreed policies, there is the basis for effective school (p. 185).

When there is a staff development program in which all teachers have a place, when there is a clear idea what kinds of developments a school wants to achieve, then it becomes clear what kind of external advice is worth seeking. Every teacher does need to be closely in touch with others, to avoid being isolated (Callingford, 1995: 182). The purpose of teacher evaluation is to support teaching. In this regard, the respondent puts

I have also completed the TPD training provided by the government in four years. I believe it had given me somehow knowledge and skill of classroom techniques. Though the demands are collected through demand collection forms, the real problems were not so satisfactorily addressed in the training. For example, I had filled up the problem of teaching narration and free writing in the secondary grades but in the face-to-face training, the trainers did not address the procedures of teaching them.

Teachers must have the sense of 'ownership' over what they are doing. They have to believe the management, administration, processors and experts but it seems lacking in this case study. Though they get chances to participate in trainings but their genuine problems have not been addressed and the teachers have not felt the ownership of the training. The trainers at the counseling and monitoring phases were not so serious in giving feedback for the work done at the middle phase of exercise and giving certificate. They only completed their formality coming to the school. Theoretically, the discussions were held on project work, action research, and case studies; still they were not practically done. So they are only for knowledge but not in practice yet. However, this training was a bit useful for the teachers in comparison to other trainings organized at earlier times.

Effective head teachers are firm and purposeful, stress in appropriating effective teacher, create consensus and utility of purpose. They share and delegate responsibilities and involve all teachers in decision making; they are leading professionals with an understanding of classroom and how teaching and learning can be improved. They must share vision and goals necessary for lifting aspirations and creating consistency in practice through whole school policies and contracts. In this context the teacher says

In the school we must enter into the classroom immediately after the bell. Most of the teachers have to stay at school up to four, however, those teachers who work for teachers' union and some other who do not have sensitivity and seriousness in their duties do not stay so long in schools and they also do not care so much checking their students' homework.

This information shows that the head teacher's role seems not to be strict because some of the teachers do not obey the school policies and are not so serious in bringing out the best in students through their contribution.

CONCLUSION

The teachers, who have high priority for bringing out the best in students, have high expectations for the student learning, provide clear and focused instruction, closely monitor students' learning, use alternative strategies when the students get into stock, use incentives and rewards to promote learning; have high efficiency in their classroom routines, set high standards for classroom behaviors and possess excellent personal interactions with their students. Furthermore, there is a clear priority focus on teaching and learning as the schools primary purpose. They pay great attention to the time spent on learning, amount of homework, effective learning and learning for other subjects which are the measures indicating practical implementation of their focus. In this study, to fulfill these attributes the teacher has not been so engaged strictly in the implementation of time to bring out the best in students.

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