Roles of the Teacher within the Learning Environment of an IB PYP Classroom

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TESOL Module 3 Question A.2: Discuss the roles adopted by the teacher in a learning environment.

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“A teacher’s job is not to “teach” anymore”; this phrase sums up the shift in the educational paradigm throughout the last few decades, from limiting the role of the teacher to a keeper and a dispenser of knowledge, into broadening the horizon of his reach to become an organizer of learning opportunities.

**Redefining the Teachers’ Job Description:**

A teacher would rather be called “a learning facilitator” or “a thought provoker” than a teacher. The more the teacher teaches, the less the students will learn. The teacher’s role in no more to offer knowledge, because today’s knowledge will be outdated by tomorrow’s morning. The role of the teacher is to equip students with the passion for continued learning together with the skills required to shape decisions and take actions (Kizi, D.B.O. and Ugli, M.K.S., 2020).

**What is a “role’?**

The term “role” means the expected part one plays in the performance of social life. Within the social setting of an IB PYP classroom, a set of roles is expected of the teacher to organize the relationships between the teachers, the learners, the parents, the school administration and the community as a whole. These roles can be categorized into the domains of planning, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities (Danielson, C., 2007).

**Teachers’ Roles in Planning and Preparation:**

Under the umbrella of planning and preparation, the teacher is expected to act as a course and experience organizer who demonstrates knowledge of content and pedagogy through the alignment of learning experiences with the desired learning outcomes. He designs instructional plans by organizing the brainstormed learning experiences in collaborative planning sessions into coherent inquiry-based lesson plans. He is to act as a student assessor who demonstrates knowledge of his students through ongoing assessment of their readiness, interests and learning styles to differentiate instruction accordingly. He designs and executes various assessment for his students: anecdotal notes that reflect academic skills, learner profile attributes and attitudes, assessments of transdisciplinary skills, formal and non-formal formative assessments and summative assessments (ex. GRASPS tasks). He is also a curriculum planner who sets instructional outcomes that are appropriate for age, grade level, national standards and cultural context (Harden, R. M., & Crosby, J. R., 2000).

**Teachers’ Roles in Setting the Classroom Environment:**

Within the domain of classroom environment, the teacher is the primary resource developer. He prepares the learning environment to be the third teacher, besides educators and families (Strong-Wilson, T. and Ellis, J., 2007). He makes the best use of his surroundings to establish a culture of learning in his classroom. Some examples of the resources of an IB classroom are Learner Profile charts and tokens, IB PYP Attitudes weekly certificates, “I wonder…” wall, a classroom library with extra readings related to the unit of inquiry, pre-set classroom centers for reading, writing, math and inquiry and a chart with classroom jobs to help the teacher manage classroom procedures. He manages students’ behavior through laying essential agreements as well as explaining and applying consequences as per the school’s code of conduct. He organizes the available physical space through setting places for supplies, assigning labelled places for students’ classwork, homework and late work, hanging classroom displays like schedules, a clock, job charts, IB PYP charts, sight words and a word wall for new vocabulary. He also serves as an integral part of the classroom environment through assuming his job as a role model who models the targeted attitudes and learner profile attributes for his students. He is the caregiver for his learners as well, through providing them with a safe environment that does not tolerate violence, bullying nor peer pressure. He stands firmly between his students and any form of harassment or discrimination. He allows his classroom to be a safe haven for students suffering from poverty or domestic abuse.

**Teachers’ Roles in the Instructional Process:**

Within the context of the instructional process, the teacher functions as an information and instructions provider, through using various questions and discussion techniques. He provides instructions and asks instruction-checking questions. He develops the write questions that tackle the lines of inquiry. He develops meaning experiences that lead the students to formulate their own questions. He is mainly a learning facilitator who engages students in learning. He develops engaging lessons’ openings or ‘attention phase’ to hook students through tapping on their self-system by building on prior knowledge, activating schemata, allowing them opportunities for success and engaging their emotions and interests. is a motivator who finds way to reach out to each and every one of his learners and encourage them to challenges their own personal best. He gives them reasons for learning and authentic contexts to apply that learning. He is an assessor who uses assessment as an instructional tool by incorporating ongoing formative assessments into the lesson plan’s anatomy, for example: concept-checking questions, KWL charts, exit tickets, 3-2-1 routines, online games such as Cohoot, Frayer models, role plays and think-pair-share routines. He is a mentor who communicates with his learners one-to-one and allows them the chance to express their feelings, ideas and concerns. He conducts surveys and questionnaires to gather information regarding students’ feedback om the learning environment and experiences. He is a role model who models flexibility, cooperation and open-mindedness in his sessions. He sticks to rules without exceptions whilst differentiating instruction and tasks according to each student’s abilities and keeping an open eye for situations or personal cases that may require flexibility.

**The Professional Responsibilities of Teachers:**

Moving onto the teacher’s professional responsibilities, the teacher has to aim to be a teaching role model. He reflects on his own learning and teaching. He models reflection and admitting mistakes to his students and colleagues. His ongoing reflection to improve the learning process is the part of him being a life-long learner. He is a course organizer who maintains accurate records and documentation that provides data to improve and fine tune the planning process. He communicates with the families of his students, as a part of his role as an assessor, with his feedback and concern, carefully compiled through close observation of the students’ behavior and academic skills. He is an on-the-job role model who participates in the professional community who mutually exchanges experience and teacher-to-teacher tips with his colleagues. He attends meetings on time and participates in the collaborative planning of the inquiry cycle. He has a continuous plan for professional growth and development, through courses, workshops, reading about new teaching strategies and observing other professionals in action. He maintains an attitude of professionalism. He follows documentation policies. He keeps meeting minutes for collaborative planning sessions and grade level meetings. He uses official e-mails rather than social media for formal communications. He manages his time and shows punctuality. He shows respect to colleagues and supervisors. He confines the discussions of students’ affairs to confidential staff meetings. He mentors new teachers. He acts a school leader through serving on committees, representing the school’s vision and accomplishments on community level as well as encouraging his students and colleagues to work on developing their community and surrounding, through developing community partnerships with local businesses, cooperating with charity organizations and implementing a culture of recycling and sustainable development.

**Summary:**

In conclusion, what makes a successful session, or what would rather be called a rich learning experience, is not only the teacher’s familiarity with the content or his ability to present information, but rather an engaging introduction, proactive preparation with the desired endpoint in mind, setting clear objectives which can be measured throughout real-life contextualized assessments, elaborative planning, differentiation and using activities to deliver the content, along with offering a supportive learning environment, student-centering the process and reinforcing efforts while always keeping a smile on.

References:

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