

My ideal classroom
with in my ideal
school



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Introduction

Providing a learning environment that contributes to the learner’s needs is the key to their success. The word ‘ learning environment’ brings to my mind the traditional classroom I was in many years back where my learning suffered a lot. We were sitting in rows and allowed to listen only to the teacher’s lecture based instruction. There were no communication between the teachers and the children, peer learning was alien to us and teacher centred education was commonly in place. Teacher- learner relationship was limited and teacher talk time was more than student talk time. Further the teachers mostly tended to emphasize the content of their subjects instead of their importance as ways of experiencing and knowing the real world. There were no teaching resources like maps, overhead projectors, computers, counters or flash cards instead we only had box full of chinks in the classroom. High achievers, challenged children and the reluctant workers all were treated equally in my class and my class teacher always wanted to show us that she was the boss by having her desk and chair in front of the class. For me, curriculum means what exactly happens in classrooms. The curriculum which I had been taught was used as a package of materials or a

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syllabus of ground to be covered and it was based on lot of board work and seat work. Every single child should be given proper education that begins from his or her own classroom. How can we set up an ideal classroom to provide quality education for all?

Educational Values and Ideologies

How can the educational values and ideologies influence creating an effective school? How can they improve failures in schooling? In this chapter I am trying to reflect upon my practice as an experienced teacher considering the current state of education through hidden curriculum in schools. Does the hidden curriculum play an important role in setting up the ideal classroom? For me hidden curriculum in a school is like an 'iceberg' with more open requirements above the water and the rest submerged under water which is visible to a keen eye. As Peter sings in his song that he learnt many things from his teacher but we know that there are many which we know though we are never being taught. Seddon (1983) as cited in Marsh (1997: 34) argues,

“ The hidden curriculum involves the learning of attitudes, norms, beliefs, values and assumption often expressed as rules, rituals and regulations. They are rarely questioned and are just taken for granted” (Seddon 1983)

He is right because most of the time teachers perform ineffectively with certain children because they come from different cultural and educational backgrounds and have different learning styles. Despite of having children like these in class the teachers are forced to educate all which is a challenging task for her. During my own education and my teaching career I

have noticed that many teachers bring the academic standards down to fit all learners' needs, pushing the reluctant workers to the back seats of the class & avoiding them taking part in class activities and avoiding eye contact and interactions between certain children when needed. This type of behaviour of the teachers created discrimination among labelled pupils such as low group, SEN and LD which prohibited these learners to learn like other children. In our school for year-3 children the topic World War-2 should be taught as part of the History lesson. The teacher commented on the objectives of the lesson as they are too hard for the low ability group to understand and the video clip on World War-2 is too hard for them to grasp therefore, she was advised to adapt the unit and choose the objectives according to the abilities as Anyon cited in Hollins (1996) explains,

Anyon's (1990) discussion of the curriculum, differentiated according to social class, reveals the implicit or hidden curriculum. The planned curriculum was similar for all social class groups; however, the hidden curriculum included a relationship to capital that was different for each group. (Hollins, 1996, p. 9)

As we all know all pupils are supposed to be taught what they should learn but, it was really sad to realise those underachievers are kept away from learning the actual lessons which makes them sense biased education in many cases and they think the education they receive is not intended for them. Keeping the low ability group of year-3 class away from watching the video clip decreased their motivation drastically. In the light of this I think the hidden curriculum which affects the pupils' identity should be destroyed As Hollins goes on saying,

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“ The knowledge that the school wants the students to learn and the hidden curriculum of punctuality, individual achievement, and authority relations are both rejected by the students” (Hollins, 1996, p. 284)

Hollins is right because the hidden curriculum in my school sometimes determines limitations to children’s behaviour in the classroom and in the school which may be a hindrance to learning. Certain classroom codes of conduct restrict the children from expressing their point of views so they become disappointed. In my classroom children were not even allowed to whisper during lesson and I never understood the child when he moved around and tried distracting the others had something to add to the instructions. We as educators should ensure that no child is left behind in the classroom, they should be taught in a relevant way and failures and success should be recognised equally if our motto is to set up an ideal classroom. Teaching them in a relevant way is easy to put in writing but how can we achieve it?

Effective learning takes place when the learners are treated according to their learning styles and educators move away from traditional to modern way of teaching. Ivan Illich (1973) says that the children learn more from their day to day experience rather than sitting inside a classroom. By setting standards the problems we face in classrooms will not be solved but, when I provided the learners in my Year-2 class proper resources, ways to learn from each other, experiences outside the classroom like going on field trips, reading books in the library and organising socialising events and equally challenged opportunities they performed effectively as Ivan further explains in his book,

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“ A good educational system should have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known” (Ivan Illich 1973: 76)

John White, a professor of philosophy at London’s Institute of Education too has the same point of view of as Ivan about modern education. He explains,

“ The teachers need to weigh up the qualities society considers important, such as basic literacy, numeracy and information technology, kindness and independence and help inculcate these qualities upon pupils” (John White)

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~ttzelrn/pgcei/pgcei-b/contexts/documents/1.1.4CURRICULUMOUTOFTIME.pdf>—11-04-2010

I fully agree with John White. In our school we follow QCA scheme which aims quality learning but, as John criticises it does not say “ why do we want to learn this subject?” The children in our school have no basic literacy; find difficulties to use their mathematical knowledge in daily life such as not knowing how to buy things in super market & get the change, depending on others help to play computer games or send and receive emails on their own etc. Therefore, the teachers to set up their ideal classroom should be able to adapt what they teach in order to fulfil the basic requirements of the society for example teaching them to read road signs, bus signs, maps, telephone directory, user guides and medicine instructions, involving the learners on more practical based mathematical learning like setting up sale of items,

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shopping for groceries & toys, encouraging them to develop friendships outside the country through e mails and teaching them to be kind with their nannies and pets. Therefore, the school curriculum should be based on children's requirements, create successful learners, promote learning is fun and produce learners in order to cater the country's economy development.

Another devastating issue in my school is most of the learners are unable to read with understanding and write as well as they should by the end of primary school, year-6 boys need adults help to read and understand their homework assignment, many in year-1 find difficult to add two numbers and the staff are not given regular professional development courses. Here I have explained the issues we face and I believe I tried to find solutions to those problems through many useful educational theories but what about the rest of the staff in my team? Therefore, it is important to introduce suitable curriculum may be through following a successful school's curriculum through collaboration, arranging professional development courses for the teaching staff, conduct teacher appraisal regularly, and motivating the learners and educators in the path of success by rewarding the achievements. An ideal school would implement such policies and follow them very strictly to meet these demands and foster good learning practice around the year.

During my teaching I had to deal with lots of behavioural issues among boys in my classroom such as hitting, verbally abusing each other and not respecting the teachers. Effective classroom management is very important when we face problems like these but, I did not want to spend my teaching time on managing them. At times I wondered what could be the reason for

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children to demonstrate extremely challenging behaviour. Later I realised that there should be a proper lesson in plan that emphasizes and motivates positive behaviour among pupils and according to Whitney's point of view I gave importance to PSHE lesson which highlights good behaviour, friendship, citizenship etc. Whitney explains,

“ PSHE, as well as citizenship, can help children and young people to develop responsible attitudes and to gather essential information about family life, relationships, etc.” (Whitney, 2004, p. 108)

He is accurate with his point of view because PSHE education which is complemented by SEAL contributes to the well being of the children. In my classroom I had few passive, aggressive children & some were having attention problems. Dealing with these types of behaviour was a daily issue for me and caused unrest between children in my classroom. Since I believed effective teaching occur through effective management, I tried to manage these kinds of problems by having a proper plan such as protecting them from bullying, building strong relationship with other children, rewarding small success and creating a classroom atmosphere where students feel safe from bullies. It is also crucial to educate them on safety issues like road safety and fire protection, healthy food, drugs and importance of relationships between family and friends to shape them as good citizens of an ideal classroom. The children who have attention problems were taught basic concentration and thinking skills; helped them divide tasks into manageable parts; rewarded their successes; and assigned a peer tutor (TA) for them to provide close attention while learning.

Pedagogy

Observing children during work is a vital part of pedagogy as it gives information on what exactly happening inside the classroom. During my teaching in my classroom I had observed children, who were talking, not listening, fighting with others and showing less concentration on the work. As Hargreaves, L. (2002: 56) explains I always recorded my observation as it helped me to reconstruct, interpret and analyse my plan in order to solve these types of issues. Hargreaves, L. Further explains,

“ The ultimate aim of classroom observation is to improve the opportunities of the children to learn and ensure that they get the best out of those opportunities” (Hargreaves, L. 2002: 56)

What Hargreaves says is correct. Through my observations I was always able to identify able, lazy and reluctant workers and those who exhibit challenging behaviour and I approached them in a different way so as to engage them on task as rest of the class did. From this experience I must say classroom observation helps educators identify the process of education, provide more précised data about the needs of the learners and areas where changes required.

Another important point is cultural heritage transmission which lightened up my discussion further about setting up an ideal classroom. The implementation of the UK National Curriculum in my school showed that there are certain amount of knowledge and ideas which should be passed on to all children if they are to benefit of its full range of educational insights. It was beneficial for all children as this style of teaching includes

differentiation, learning through play, literacy hour in class, shared reading, guided reading and circle time. The Arabic language is taught as one of the core subjects and the parents are not satisfied with the style of teaching Arabic as they see that their children make better progress in English and enjoy the quality work given to them. The schools are compelled to follow the Arabic curriculum as the way it is transmitted from one generation to another and the pupils make no benefit from it and this distorts the eagerness of them because this curriculum is old fashioned which gives importance to lot of board work and seat work. As Bottery explains if the educators in our school, are able to work upon the learners' interests and capabilities and modify the Arabic curriculum according to the needs of the learners I am sure success in all areas will soon be achieved.

The teacher must be aware of each child's developmental possibilities, interests and capabilities. The teacher must then so structure conditions surrounding the child that the best possible use is made of the environment. (Bottery 1990: 11)

As he further says in this way the pupils' interest and spontaneity will be channelled into areas of developments which will be of most benefit to them. The cultural transmission not only affected the curriculum but, also different behavioural issues to the classroom. I had a child in my class who was brought up in a violent family and had learnt violent roles from the members of his family. This boy always was in fights with others when he wanted to achieve what he wanted. Thankfully the Social Worker's support was really a helping hand for me whenever I faced problems with this particular boy. At times we should provide proper guidance to those children who are in

disputes through counselling and instructions; this process of managing behaviour always helped me to maintain silence in my classroom. Another behavioural issue in my school is verbal abuse between young and grown up children. The Social Worker's availability on the scene is a great support for those who face these problems. She always makes sure to address the issues through the behaviour policy of the school which includes writing incident reports, counselling, giving detention in the school and at home and parent teacher meeting for the betterment of the pupils' behaviour. In the same manner the children who develop good habits and manners are always rewarded according to the school policies.

We all believe in catering according to the children's needs in order to achieve success. I achieved my targets through child centred education i. e when I adapted the units to the learners' needs, differentiated my instructions and chose topics according to the pupils' interest which supported by Bottery's arguments - the teacher must be aware of each child's development possibilities, interest and capabilities and promotes child centred education through his arguments but, David Cooper (1987) cited in Bottery (1990: 11) says,

“ One needs to begin the child's education from where the child is, what he or she understands and multi cultural education is nothing more than a cook's tour which leaves the child bewildered and confused simply because education is not located within the child's own cultural experience” (David Cooper 1987)

Bottery further explains child centred education assumes, the child is naturally good but, it is no more true and leaving the child develop naturally or leaving him to do his own thing does not make much sense educationally, too much emphasis would lead the child to disrespect the society's need and other values and opinions in general. Though I fully agree with Bottery's point of views, as I have benefitted from child centred education during my career I would say it is very important to promote child centred education in future too.

The classroom environment plays an important role in setting up the ideal classroom. Children working in collaboration, their perfect involvement in all sorts of activities and a fully resourced classroom are essential in order to produce effective learning which was also made clear through the video clips on WebCT, the differences between the experiences of the teachers who worked in the UK classrooms and in a classroom in Kenya. In the Kenyan classroom whole class teaching is conducted, the children were used to lecture based instruction and they were not given any individual attention. Further in the classroom the children were so quiet, well obedient and listening to their teacher but there was no teacher student talk at all and no classroom resources or teaching aids were included in their learning. The layout of the classroom would never cater the individual needs of the children. It is obvious effective learning will never take place in such kind of a classroom rather the children should be engaged in group activities and learning through play which will enable them to develop their thinking skills and become more independent in thoughts and action. The classroom should be fully stocked with useful resources like games and puzzles, flash cards,

reading books and proper displays on the wall. These resources were very useful for the children in my classroom as this helped them to experience with wider variety of learning, working in groups, socialising with each other, peer learning and reached the children with a variety of learning styles, especially visual learners, and students with a variety of information acquisition styles. More over these resources engaged my boys in problem-solving and investigative activities too. At times these resources helped me to engage those on task who demonstrated extremely challenging behaviour.

A classroom teacher's most important job is managing the classroom effectively. In a poorly managed classroom children cannot learn very well. I failed to manage my class well and turned out to be an unskilful teacher as I started my career. Both students and I suffered in the classroom where there were no proper disciplines or behaviour management or proper classroom ethos. Gradually I improved my skills through knowing my students well, identifying their learning needs, giving them liberty through classroom jobs, respecting their opinion and assigning them in groups to further develop team work. As Sue Cowley advices Baz the teacher should put on a very strong character in front of the children as they become more controllable when they have a teacher who has a very strong personality and is very strict, in the meantime friendly too. The teacher should be able to provide clear and strong guidance regarding both students' academics and behaviour.

The semiotic resources image, speech, movement, gesture, writing, 3Dimensional forms and so on which are interesting points that the ways in <https://assignbuster.com/my-ideal-classroom-with-in-my-ideal-school/>

which teachers structure their communication with students, and organize the events that occur in the space of the classroom.

The arrangements of tables and chairs in my classroom helped me distribute the children and me into particular places which influenced in dramatic student teacher interaction, helped children socialize between each other and moving around in the class without any incidents, students working in teams and teacher approaching individual needs. Attractive displays in my classroom such as hand written posters, students' photographs, the timetable, word wall etc. had a pedagogic force which expresses the social relationship between the students and the teachers. Kress G. et'al (2005) explain in their book,

“ Signs are always multimodal and each modality brings the possibility of expressing and shaping meanings” (Kress G. et' al 2005: 22)

It is true, when a child is about to be punished, the teacher's gesture or gaze shows him the teacher is not pleased with the attitude of the child. The task of the teacher is handled by gaze which we can see the development, unfolding and communicating of the curriculum of sensibility and the teacher's gesture is used to have interactions with the children whilst he may not use gaze or talk to manage the class or to get the work done for which she uses gesture as a mode of receiving information and conducting the interactions in the class. Further the speech of the teacher shows her authority, the source of knowledge and in which we can see that the pedagogy is embodied as well as in her quality of the speech and voice. I was able to better control my boys when the form of my voice showed that

the directness was not the normal mode of operating but, firmness which made them adhere the commands.

Conclusion

If our aim is to create an ideal classroom with in the ideal school we should create a friendly workplace for those who support to achieve our aims, and they should abide by the school policies which are created for the good of the pupils.