

# The role of a teacher



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The role of a teacher is of great importance not only in his/her classroom but in society in general. He/She is responsible to communicate and transfer to the next generation the intellectual traditions and technical skills of his/her generation. In doing so, the teacher ensures the survival of man and its civilisation. In fact, the teacher is the key to quality education, through his training and dedication. He/She is often perceived as the adoptive parent of the child and normally, the latter looks to his teacher not only for knowledge but also for wisdom and moral and ethical values.

The functions of a teacher in the classroom are numerous to ensure the correct development of his/her students. Among these functions are

To ensure students are having the proper education in a safe environment

To ensure teaching and especially learning is efficient

To increase the students' self-esteem and personal confidence

To prepare students with the necessary knowledge, character and skills for higher education and to live in society

In order to successfully achieve the above-mentioned functions, a teacher needs to act as a manager in his/her classroom. In other words, the teacher should possess some important managerial skills. A manager is normally defined as someone who is in charge of his/her organisation and is responsible for the proper functioning the organising in every aspect. Among the ten management roles that Henry Mintzberg (1973) identified in his thesis entitled " The Nature of Managerial Work", he suggested eight set of managerial skills, namely:

Peer Skills

Leadership Skills

Conflict Resolution Skills

Information Processing Skills

Skills in Decision-Making Under Ambiguity

Resource Allocation Skills

Entrepreneurial Skills

Introspection Skills

## Chapter Two – Necessary Managerial Skills for Teachers

According to the Oxford dictionary, a skill is defined to be the ability to do something well or an expertise. In addition, a skill is an aspect of behaviour that can be learnt. In the following lines, the different managerial skills that are essential, in my opinion, for a teacher so as to provide the best learning environment for his/her students will be elaborated.

### 2. 1 Skill One: Leadership Skill

Sharma (2002) believes that the role of the teacher is very important and he/she needs to act as a leader in his/her classroom. Relating to Mintzberg (1973), this skill is concerned with the ability of the teacher to motivate and help his/her students and at the same time, to deal with their problems effectively. For those students who are intrinsically motivated, the teacher

only acts as an initiator and a facilitator. However, for those students who are not motivated (and according to my experience, there is a large majority of them), the teacher's leadership role is vital important to motivate those students. Motivation, according to me, can be defined as a force that awakes a person from his/her sleepy mode to push him/her in an active and dynamic mode. Lavoie (2011) identified eight forces that motivate people, namely, gregariousness, autonomy, status, inquisitiveness, (positive) aggression, power, recognition and affiliation.

Being a Mathematics teacher, in my opinion, the following strategies can be adopted to motivate the students:

The teacher himself/herself must be seen as being motivated

Teacher motivation can be defined as "willingness, drive or desire to engage in good teaching" (Michaelowa, 2002, p. 5). Hence, mathematically speaking, teacher, motivation is equivalent to efficient teaching and consequently, efficient learning.

Find suitable ways to make students love the subject

One of the reasons why some students dislike mathematics and find it boring is the fact that they do not know about its application in real-life. Hence, the teacher needs to instruct the students about the real-life application of mathematics on the first day to make them aware of its importance in the everyday life and how, without mathematics, many things would be unachievable or nearly impossible.

State the aims and objectives of the subject matter

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This should be done on the first day of the course. It is important to make them aware what is expected from them and in turn, what qualities or behaviours they are expected to have at the end of the course year.

Let the students know that the teacher is always available whenever someone is having difficulties in his studies.

Set-up the classroom rules and regulations in collaboration with the students.

Use different teaching styles in order to match the diverse learning styles of the students.

In order to extrinsically motivate the students, the teacher can promise his/her students that the best two among them will be rewarded at the end of each term. Of course, the teacher needs to keep his promise.

## 2. 2 Skill Two: Peer Skill

Peer skill would refer to the ability of the teacher to act, at one time, as a manager of the classroom and at another time, as a friend to his/her students. This friendly relationship should be to some limit and the students should be made aware of it. Otherwise, being too friendly would cause chaos and indiscipline in the class and subsequently, the learning environment of the class would be heavily and badly affected.

In general, a student, like any other person, has a need to feel a sense of belongingness to his/her class, his/her classmates as well as his/her teacher. Research has shown that when a student feels he/she ' belongs' to the class,

he/she has a higher degree of intrinsic motivation and has more confidence academically. Freeman et al. (2007) claimed that, according to students, their sense of belongingness for a class is raised by a teacher that demonstrates warmth and openness, encourages student participation, is enthusiastic, friendly and helpful, and is organised and prepared for class.

### 2. 3 Skill Three: Conflict Resolution Skill

Life in a classroom is not always sweet. On and off, things get sour between the students or even between the student and the teacher for diverse reasons. Classroom conflicts, may it be a minor or a major one, must be dealt with as soon as they arise so as to prevent the situation from getting out of control. Otherwise, they would spoil the teaching and learning environment of the classroom.

For minor cases, the teacher needs to use his/her managerial skills of mediator and negotiator quickly and fairly. The first step is to gather information about the causes of the incident, ensuring that the information obtained is from genuine sources. The second step would be to listen attentively to both students/groups. The last step would be to work collectively with those involved towards a solution. In my opinion, by proceeding in this way, the students would feel closer to their teacher in that they know they can trust their teacher and at the same time, they are learning this very important skill of resolving conflicts, which they may apply it later in their own life. In line with the above, Feldman (1989) argues that students would be more positively disposed to the classroom activities and to the teacher if they think that the teacher cares about them.

However, for major cases of indiscipline, such as sexual abuse, the teacher needs to follow the rules and regulations of the school discipline. The best solution would be to send those involved to the Discipline Master who would deal with them accordingly.

## 2. 4 Skill Four: Information Processing Skill

This skill is about the teacher's ability to extract, collect and share information relevant to the subject matter or topic. In the traditional view of teaching and learning, the teacher was the sole source of knowledge and hence, the class was dominantly teacher-oriented. However, despite the fact that this approach to teaching and learning is regarded as being obsolete, some subjects, like mathematics, are most of the time teacher-centred. But, a good mathematics teacher would find ways to make his/her class an enjoyable and fruitful experience.

Personally, since nearly all topics are inter-related in mathematics, I always start a topic by giving the basic information and from that, other rules are derived with the help of the students. In this way, the teaching style is shifted from the expository one to a more interactive more where each student is able to contribute something in the construction of new knowledge. The constructivist approach leads to effective mathematics teaching and learning (Van de Walle, 1995). In addition, this approach requires the students to be reflective and to work on their old knowledge in order to obtain new knowledge. Moreover, their problem-solving ability is enhanced. Brooks & Brooks (1993) relate that the following is implied in a constructivist classroom:

Student autonomy and initiative are accepted and encouraged.

The teacher asks open-ended questions and allows wait time for responses.

Higher-level thinking is encouraged.

Students are engaged in dialogue with the teacher and with each other.

Students are engaged in experiences that challenge hypotheses and encourage discussion.

The class uses raw data, primary sources, manipulatives, and physical, interactive materials.

A good mathematics teacher should be able to use a variety of teaching styles in order to make the subject appear interesting and easy, and at the same time, cater for the different learning styles of his/her students. For instance, to teach the topic Vectors in 3-Dimension, it is very difficult for students to understand the concepts involved using the traditional approach as the topic is rather an abstract one. But when the problem is modelled using appropriate technological tools, the students are able to visualise the problem and consequently, they learn how to model the problems on their own using paper and pencil. Hence, applying the correct mathematical concepts, they are able to solve any problems on Vectors in 3-Dimension.

## 2. 5 Skill Five: Resource Allocation Skill

This skill deals with the teacher's ability to manage his/her time properly and to reach out to each student's encountered difficulties. The best way to achieve these is through proper lesson planning. It is true that to prepare a



lesson is a cumbersome task but at the end of the day, it helps save a lot of time and more things can be done. In fact, it can be said that lesson planning is a one step backward and two steps forward approach. From past experience, the following should be taken into consideration when preparing a lesson plan:

Carry out one lesson at a time

The aim and objectives of the lesson should be well set and the students should be made aware of it

Since nearly all topics in mathematics is based on some pre-requisites, always recall those previous knowledge in order to get the students in the mood

Based on the difficulty of the topic, take a considerable amount of time to fully explain the topic, taking into consideration the problems students are having and waste no time to clear these misconceptions

Allow students to have sufficient amount of time to practice some problems in class and at the same time, use this ' free' time to deal individually with those having further problems

Summarise the whole lesson

Give a reasonable amount of homework

Reserve the next session for correcting homework and for further practice (remedial works if needed)

A well-prepared lesson plan not only involve the resource allocation skill but also the entrepreneurial skill of the teacher-manager as the latter deals with the ability of the teacher to look for problems and opportunities that may arise during a lesson and thereof, implement the necessary change smoothly. For instance, while explaining a topic, the teacher noticed that the majority of students are not grasping the lesson, then, he/she should be able to change the teaching style accordingly. This is why it is important to always have a Plan B.

## 2. 6 Skill Six: Introspection Skill

This maybe the most important skill needed by a teacher-manager. It deals with the teacher's ability to reflect upon his/her own work and the impact it has on his/her students. In other words, after each lesson, the teacher needs to self-evaluate himself/herself. Successful evaluation would be that teaching and learning has occurred and each student has understood the lesson and all works have been completed. Else, the teacher needs to change his/her teaching strategies and/or behaviour in class.

## Chapter 3 – Conclusion

To be a good and effective teacher, a blend of managerial skills is required by the teacher in order to promote a successful teaching and learning environment. It is important to note that teachers are born with these skills but it takes time as well as lots of practice to acquire and master these skills.