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A STUDENT CENTERED `PROACTIVE APPROACH TO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT WITH FOCUS ON APPLICATION IN SCHOOLS IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

A matrix of issues from the socio-economic to the cognitive, impair the progress of students from each class to the next. These issues are remediable through a programmed approach with proper analysis and use of skills that teachers can be equipped with. This requires efficient management of the classroom. Classroom management aims at encouraging and establishing student self-control through a process of promoting positive student achievement and behavior. Promotion of positive student achievement requires the use of a student centered approach in the classroom. As against the conventional, didactic teaching approach that is generally followed, the emphasis in student centeredness is on the learner responsibility and activity as against the emphasis on instructor control and coverage of content. This calls for the use of ten aspects to promote student centeredness. The framework for the student centeredness is created through a proactive approach to the classroom where ground rules are set for the teacher and the student.. Guidelines for ground rules help the process. A commitment statement for teachers ensures teacher's dependability and trustworthiness. Through individualized attention the whole classroom is addressed and focused towards developing a level of academic proficiency for enhancing potential and exploring capabilities. This paper has been written with the school system in Kerala in mind and considers the particular socio-political ethos of the state while discussing the various nuances of classroom management.

KEYWORDS :*Classroom management, student centered, proactive.*

INTRODUCTION :

In a fast paced and technology driven world teaching has in one sense become very easy due to

the development of new teaching methods. Yet, at the same time if the methodology is not appropriately used it can lead to chaos that defeats the purpose of equitable education to all. Education can only be equitable if the benefits are available to students at all levels (levels being based on socio-economic and cognitive factors). Students come in various hues, from different backgrounds, with diverse cognitive abilities and skills. It is extremely difficult to impossible for a teacher to have a common approach to their needs. In addition there is the danger of 'labeling' based on an incorrect understanding of the student's deficits. The deficits could be due to a social backwardness that is wrongly identified and diagnosed as a learning disorder. At other times a true instance of a learning disorder may be misdiagnosed as a behavioral problem. This danger exists as there is a deficiency of trained personnel to evaluate these areas of concern. In addition, the system of 'all pass' in the schools in Kerala results in the student reaching the higher class levels without grasping the basic foundations of the lower classes. This results in the student reaching the higher classes with extreme deficits in subject knowledge especially in language, science and math. All of these factors create a spectrum that affects academic standards and resultant output from schools. Thus with a matrix of issues that are on the board the issue becomes a problem that requires analysis for appropriate resolution. This analysis and subsequent action calls for the use of managerial skills and techniques that address the diverse aspects of the problem through a programmed approach. A teacher can gain these skills and optimally use them kills in the classroom resulting in all round development based on a realistic understanding of student potential and capacities.

In the western world a system of evaluation and correction is automatically in place due to the conscious effort in the socio-political understanding to make education equitable and meaningful for all. Thus the matrix of issues are addressed at every stage in the education process and this sieving process enables the students to be placed in their optimal potential levels, making it easier for the teacher to address the all round needs of the student. In India, a lot of effort is being put in place by the political system to remove hurdles but the journey is long and tedious. A lot more needs to be done as the issues are multiple and complex. This paper tries to suggest approaches that could be used in classroom management to improve efficiency and quality. Three areas (student centeredness, proactive approach, and classroom management) have been considered for this purpose and have been designed into the title. These have been defined below for thematic clarity.

A. Student centered learning

Roger (1983) describes student centered learning as an approach to learning in which the learners choose not only what to study but also how and why that topic might be of interest. The focus in this approach as against the conventional, didactic teaching approach is on the learner responsibility and activity as against the emphasis on instructor control and coverage of content (Cannon, 2000). In a student centered learning process as stated by McCombs and Whistler (1997) the approach is based on the study of topics that are relevant to the lives, needs and interests of the learner and the students are engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to the knowledge they gain.

B. Proactive approach

In a proactive approach the teacher makes a conscientious effort to, "provide a classroom environment that allows students to be themselves, take risks, learn from mistakes, and understand how to take responsibility for their actions and feelings." The approach involves maintaining a high standard, setting limits, and making a learning environment that is fun and encouraging, and also involves a premeditated active control for a particular event to occur, rather than a reaction after the

occurrence.

C.Classroom management

School and classroom management aims at encouraging and establishing student self-control through a process of promoting positive student achievement and behavior. This involves strong and consistent management using organizational skills that lead to fewer classroom discipline problems (Froyen, & Iverson,1999).

II.A student centered classroom management strategy

This paper suggests that it is possible to incorporate student centered teaching in the aided and non-aided schools of Kerala by using a research-based strategy that combines appropriate levels of dominance and cooperation and an awareness of student needs. A use of these strategies developed by Marzano R.J and Marzano J.S (2003) can enable teachers to build positive classroom dynamics. Each student is unique and so also, each teacher is unique. The concepts suggested in the above paper and concepts and philosophies stated therein are universally applicable with slight variations in adaptability due to the socio-cultural factors. These concepts are adapted below for use in a Kerala classroom.

i.Quality of relationship between student and teacher

It is important for the student/teacher relationship to be genuine, understanding the strengths and weaknesses, as also accepting the person of the student for who he/she is. There also needs to be a collaborative approach to learning. In Kerala where education is given prominence a close collaborative relationship between the teacher and student is possible. Students are tuned to respect the teacher and learn from them. However, those that fall through the cracks are generally going to be left behind and remain unattended. It thus becomes essential for the student/teacher relationship to be strong at each class level so that the student can get consistent care and nurturing throughout the school years. Two important suggestions are: 1. Teacher training for this can be initiated in schools 2. Feedback from students on student/teacher relationship can be implemented for corrective action. It is easier to manage a class where the student/teacher relationship is positive, collaborative and cooperative.

ii.Identify ap¬propriate dominance in relationship

Dominance is not to be understood in the negative context. Wubbels & Levy, (1993) identify ap¬propriate dominance as an important char¬acteristic of effective teacher-student relationships. This involves the teacher's involvement in two areas: 1. Provide clear purpose to the life of the child 2. Provide strong guidance as to how the child can reach optimum potential and help in its implementation. This means that the teacher is a mentor to the student, knowing his/her strengths and weaknesses. The teacher is not a shouting drill master but a calm and composed 'conductor' who spend time with the wards in the process. Mentoring the student is where the teachers in Kerala have shown excellent results in the field of sports and cultural events. These skills can be used in academics too. An approach that is mentoring results in greater cohesion in the classroom as students become focused and their energies directed positively.

iii.Establish clear expectations and consequences

It is important for any relationship to be fruitful and meaningful that clear expectations and rules of behavior are laid down. This is because as the relationship progresses, considering the

emotional factors that are in play, the relationship can lead to possible hurt and suffering. Also, considering the developing minds of the students, they can mistake proximity to mean permissiveness that can lead to indiscipline in the classroom or even unwanted scandals.   In addition the system in Kerala does not allow for proper investigations of events which could be a disadvantage to the teachers. Teachers in Kerala need to be extra careful in dealing with students as there is also the involvement of opportunistic political game plans that can lead to tragic consequences even death. Hence, a clear set of guidelines as to when, where, how much time, for what and what levels of interaction is possible need to be laid down in the minds of the teacher and the student.

iv. Establish clear learning goals

Learning goals need to be established and communicated at the beginning of each unit of instruction, evaluation and feedback on the levels reached and the corrective needed to reach optimum level of achievement is necessary. Some aspects of importance for the students in Kerala would include: 1. Assessment of existing knowledge 2. Action needed to fill the gap 3. Evaluation of the reasons for the non-achievement. This will include diagnosis of learning disorders, social/economic causative reasons and the like. As the system in Kerala has started allowing for special education for students who are below par it is necessary for a proper diagnosis to be made. This has to be done not in a professional manner with experts who are conscious of the long term effects of their diagnosis. This is to prevent students from getting caught up in the web of labels that may define his/her for life.

v. Exhibit assertive behavior

Teachers need to exhibit assertive behavior in their interactions with students. Assertion does not mean stubborn and rigid insistence on one's own opinions and stands. Assertion would involve an attitude of positive involvement based on a knowledge based approach leading to sensible interaction. Teachers can learn the process of assertive interactions through role plays and training programs among peers.

vi. Appropriate cooperation

Cooperation is characterized by a concern for the needs and opinions of others. Cooperation focuses on the students and teacher functioning as a team. The attitude of cooperation is not brought about in a single day. It is a process that begins with the very first interaction that the teacher has with the students. In the social environment of Kerala which allows for a lot of interaction, teachers can start a cooperative attitude in the first week of school itself by doing activities that involve the combined efforts of the students and teachers, thereby setting the tone for future relationship patterns.

vii. Flexible learning goals

An evaluation process at the beginning of the year allows the teacher to know the latent potential, available knowledge base, and capacity of the student to progress. The teacher can format the actual/possible/optimum levels for each student based on the evaluation, and then giving students the opportunity to set their own objectives at the beginning of a unit or asking students what they would like to learn. This also conveys a sense of cooperation that encourages the student to try and attain higher levels than in the past. This process also enables slow learners or students with deficits to seek appropriate guidance and help.

viii.Take personal interest in students

Personal interest in the student can be shown by informal talks with the students, greeting them, taking time out with them during lunch (having lunch together), appreciating extracurricular involvements like sports, drama etc., complementing on important achievements, keeping a very informal profile where the students feel the teacher is approachable. The purpose of developing relations is to enable the student to reach his/her goals in life, not for the emotional fulfillment or ego satisfaction of the teacher.

ix.Use Equitable and Positive Classroom Behaviors

Make eye contact, move freely, so that each student gets equal attention. Credit the students with ideas that they initiated and attribute authorship to students for novel ideas.

x.Be aware of high needs students and use different strategies for different students

Students with special needs and requiring extraordinary interventions and treatments need to be identified. Kerala schools do not have specialized programs for such children though this is slowly gaining ground. However, the teacher could use the resources available on the internet and also provide parents and students appropriate counseling and guidance. A teacher is best placed to address the needs of students who face diverse challenges.

III.A proactive approach in the classroom

Students are in the formative years of their life. Starting with the play school years they have to pass through many hurdles before they are able to reach a stable position. They come from diverse backgrounds with diverse potentials and limitations. Academic and personal development occurs in tandem as a process all through school life and the teacher is a key person in this process. A proactive approach in the classroom is enabling and empowering both for the student and the teacher. The following steps for a proactive approach are adapted from "Proactive classroom management, A practical guide to empower students and teachers" Louis G. Denti, Corwin (2012).

i.Empowering students through providing recognition and encouragement

Recognition provided by teachers in a consistent manner empowers students to try and perform better. This enables students to feel more capable and competent and more willing to learn. Recognition can be personal and tangible or intangible. This can be very reinforcing to the student. In Kerala the possibility of providing tangible reinforcements are limited by budgetary constraints. However, these can be planned into the budgets in advance to deal with the contingency.

Encouragement has to be ongoing, supportive and clear. This can be through giving appropriate feedback at the appropriate time or through consistent interaction with the student. Encouragement provides the student a picture of the teacher's proactive role and improves the trust of the student in the educational system. Providing recognition and encouragement on a consistent basis can be difficult. However, following certain norms could make this easier.

ii.Establish clear ground rules in the classroom

Ground rules are agreements between teachers and students and can be reinforced by restating it and also seeking compliance. Well established ground rules help teachers avoid inappropriate and oftentimes immature responses toward students. The teacher also needs to set procedures with clear and realistic expectations and response strategies. Ground rules need to be done

in tandem with the students and should be explained to them. These could also be posted on a white board. A few norms for ground rules are given below:

1. Develop a few specific ground rules that are clearly defined.
2. Verbally review the ground rules with the students as a whole class.
3. In front of the class, model the ground rules with students by using examples and nonexamples.
4. Reinforce the ground rules continually with positive statements such as, "I like the way you are following the teacher-talking ground rule. It makes my job a lot easier."
5. Periodically, role-play the ground rules with real examples and non-examples from your class.
6. Tweak, change, add, or rewrite your ground rules as needed.
Ground rules need to be there for students and for teachers. In addition, there has to be a commitment statement that the teacher makes to the students.

a. Classroom Ground Rules
• Be ready to learn with your materials on your desk when the bell rings.
• When I am talking, sit up tall and track me with your eyes as I move from place to place.
• Use an inside voice—soft, but loud enough to be heard.
• Raise your hand and ask questions only if it is related to what we are studying, for example, "What page are we supposed to be on?" or "I don't understand how to do problem x." Otherwise, No Hand Raising!
• Put your hand on your shoulder and tap it lightly if you have a personal request, such as needing to use the bathroom.
• No putdowns (making fun of a student, hurting anyone with mean words) will be tolerated.
• Bullying another student in class will not be tolerated and if it occurs, the bully and the victim will meet with the teacher to discuss appropriate consequences.
• Students who see bullying in the class, on the playground, or anywhere else on campus must notify the teacher or another staff member immediately.

b. Student Ground Rules
Ground rules can also be suggested by the students for teachers to abide by. These could be made into a fun activity but need so be monitored. Some ground rules that students might think important for the teacher to follow are given below:

• When I talk to my teacher he or she will really listen to me.
• My teacher will not make me feel stupid or embarrass me.
• Our teacher will frequently acknowledge our effort and good work.

c. Teacher commitment statements
These are simple declarative statements that teachers make to the students to indicate the care and concern that teachers have for the students. It is also an indication of the trustworthiness and dependability of the teacher vis-à-vis the student. These statements could be modified to meet personal limits and capacities and are only meant to be a guideline depending on a teacher's unique situation.
I will be on time each and every day unless something unexpected happens.
I will be prepared with a quality lesson.

I will keep learning so I can challenge myself and all of you.
I will respect and honor you and acknowledge you frequently.
I will be available for extra help every day unless I am called to a special meeting of some kind.
I will always care about you.

CONCLUSION

There is an idiom in English, "Time and tide wait for no man." This is aptly applicable to the lives of students as time once lost can never be regained. A student who has lost the chance to learn the basics at each level and then build on it would suffer its consequences at all other levels. Each class or grade that they pass is critical for the next stage that they are to enter. If they are ill prepared in any way for the move to the next grade they would not be able to deal with the academic requirements that the next stage presents. Classroom management is about the class as a whole, but more importantly the individual student. It is the individual students that make up the whole. Hence, the whole is important but for the whole to be relevant each individual student is to be catered to. The paper visualizes this concept through the two aspects that have been presented. A student centered approach enables the teacher to develop the skills needed for managing the academic ethos of the classroom through addressing the individual student's needs and potentials. The proactive approach lays and strengthens the framework (ground rules) that will enable the skills of the teacher to be useful for the student/s. It is hoped that this paper will enable teachers to refocus their pedagogical skills and fine tune them for efficient functioning.

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