Redoubling Teaching Efficiency in the Classes

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Abstract

"To teach is to touch a life forever."

This is exactly the reason why educators deserve the appreciation they get and why these restless souls long for different and interesting ways of sharing knowledge. There have been innumerable strategies and techniques introduced since the beginnings of the 20th Century, however, a good deal of them failed to survive the initial enthusiasm due to trial and failure. We are dealing with the survivors of these techniques and trying to make them up-to-date in accordance with the needs of contemporary learners and societies, better by combining a few sciences, and more effective with a more thorough understanding of styles, techniques, and approaches. This paper will be based on 4Cs – creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication – in accordance with P21 Research Series and adding two more Cs – choice, caring – to the findings for implementation in Higher Education Institutions. Since there is no "one size fits all" approach when it comes to teaching, different techniques and approaches should be adopted.

How and with which teaching or instruction technique can these Cs be applied the most effectively?

What are the qualities of effective teachers? and

What different styles and strategies can be named and applied? are some of the questions to be explored.
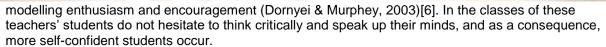
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When we think of preparing students for the future, the first step to take should be to adapt the school systems in order to meet the requirements of the changing world. Education of 20 years ago is no longer enough for career, and personal life. Keith Sawyer mentions the difference of concepts and implementations between two editions of the same article. Between the two versions "technology use in learning" had an enormous leap and placed itself in literature and research (Sawyer, 2014) [1]. In this swift moving era educators have to renew themselves to be able to bring their learners to a degree of consciousness that they can become competent citizens. What are tomorrow's competencies? Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication are agreed to be the most important skills for learners according to P21 Partnership for 21st Century Learning. For higher education students who are trapped in the twilight zone between secondary education and college, there is the need to add 'choice' and 'caring' to the list. Skills and demands for the global workforce have changed drastically. Routine work is on sharp decline whereas jobs necessitating non-routine, analytic, and interactive communication skills are skyrocketing. This is exactly why educators should raise generations armed with these skills because their abilities to read, write, and do mathematical calculations will not be enough if they cannot think critically, solve real life problems, collaborate efficiently, and communicate. (AMA, 2010)[2]

Critical thinking leads the list. It means to think in organized ways to analyze and solve problems in its simplest definition. The seeds of thinking about thinking dates back to John Dewey in the beginnings of the 20th century who argued that "thought without proper reflection is uncritical thinking and that to make better decisions, self-reflection is vital" (Dewey,1910)[3]. The midst of the same century introduced Bloom and the taxonomy, an essential source for educators. The six categories of the cognitive domain; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation serve as a step by step guide to develop critical thinking skills (Bloom, 1956)[4]. Later, in the beginning of the 21st century, Krathwohl changed this taxonomy into 'remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create' (Krathwohl,2002)[5]. In order to activate this cognitive domain, transformational leadership is needed in the classroom. Transformational teachers question old assumptions and create space for thinking to come up with a better new, use mistakes as positive signs of taking risks, motivate those around them by

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modelling enthusiasm and encouragement (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003)[6]. In the classes of these teachers' students do not hesitate to think critically and speak up their minds, and as a consequence, more self-confident students occur.

Creativity which comes with critical thinking is as important as literacy education. The term "creativity" exists for around 150 years but scientific studies on creativity started around 1950s. M.I. Stein described creativity as "a novel work that is accepted as … useful" in his 1953 in article 'Creativity and Culture' [7]. Almost all definitions appeared after this agreed on novelty and usefulness. A widely accepted definition by J.A. Plucker and his colleagues stated that judgement of creativity is up to certain criteria as talent, process and environment and it is not necessarily a solitary activity (Plucker,et al, 2004)[8]. Soon after creativity started being researched as the main theme, we got to know that it can be enhanced and it is for everyone. Interaction between the individual and the environment is the first condition of enhancement. Then comes the individual factor; open-mindedness, confidence, motivation, knowledge, willingness to take sensible risks, and standing strong in the face of criticism. Keeping students in a balanced structure in the learning environment and giving them the opportunity to engage themselves in exploratory learning situations is a remarkable enhancer. To make this happen students should be provided with choice and chance of discovery, motivated by taking personal differences into consideration, and allowed to use their imagination. This is how their self-confidence and achievement levels increase.

Students in higher education are expected to excel in writing and speaking skills because oral and written communication are two of the top four assets employers seek in new hires. Lately, multi-cultural and global work environment has become normal and routine and in such an environment effective communication is imperative. This is the main concern of curriculum developers in higher education when incorporating oral and written competency courses to the system. However, this should not be the main reason. Learners are human beings who need to communicate. The aims of communication can be to transfer ideas and knowledge, to create awareness, to educate, to coordinate, and many more and the main rationale of all these is to be understood. People communicate so that others understand the message given, the information transferred. Only by being understood, chain of knowledge gets longer and stronger. As Leu and his colleagues note in their article in 2011[9], identifying problems, locating, evaluating, and synthesizing information effectively, developing solutions, and communicating these clearly will help humanity succeed in the future. After the problem is identified, necessary research is carried out, acquired information is evaluated, synthesized, and a solution is reached, not being able to communicate this solution explodes all the previous steps.

To carry out all these steps, ability to be a team player is necessary since collaborative effort creates more holistic results than individual effort. Students in collaborative learning groups are responsible for each other's learning as well as their own. Active exchange of ideas within the group triggers creativity and leads to important outcomes as bringing solutions to complex interdisciplinary problems. Diversity and task interdependence within the groups allows students to come across different understandings of the given situation and fosters critical thinking through discussion, clarification, and evaluation of different ideas.

All the Cs mentioned until here, create a ripple effect and form a kind of web of learning. In higher education contexts "choice" and "caring" are the other two Cs to add to this web because they create intrinsic motivation which is what educators need to create for their courses. Intrinsic motivation is the tendency to engage in a behavior for its own sake. The first step to pull learners into the course, is to provide them with choice which, in return, increases student interest, engagement, and learning. Offering them choices helps build skills like self-regulation and autonomy. Choices offered should be relevant to students' interests, learning objectives and goals, and should provide different levels of complexity to address and support diverse abilities. An educator who is able to provide students with alternatives according to their needs and abilities has the qualities of a good listener, effective material designer, creative thinker, and empath. As soon as students understand that they are allowed to make choices, their perceptions about the course and the teacher elevates; they feel more mature because they are given the privilege of making a choice and decision. Allowing students to take an active role in their own education

process creates a supportive environment that magnifies intrinsic motivation and autonomy and gives the message that they are accepted, and cared for.

Who is that teacher or professor that has an unforgettable influence on students and what makes this person so memorable? The effect of affection is undeniably the strongest one in education. Caring combines almost all qualities of effective teaching. This example from RateMyProfessors.com exemplifies this statement clearly;

> "…He had a knack of clarity. I knew exactly what to expect out of the class… he was also approachable. He easily established rapport with his students and worked very hard to build personal relationships with each of us. … didn't sit behind or stand behind a podium … Rather, he walked around the classroom and invited all of his students to comment…He was very enthusiastic … I found his energy to be quite contagious! He collaborated with each student to ensure they chose a topic they were passionate about… What really made this professor stand out was his sincere interest in personally assisting his students…"

This post about this professor states how creative he is, how he collaborates, communicates, provides choices, and cares for his students. There is no doubt that an educator who combines all these attributes in himself is a critical thinker and an instiller of critical thinking, as well. Effective instruction is classified under two main roles according to Abrami and colleagues (1997)[10]. The first one is the "instructional role" which includes knowledge, preparation, and clarity, and the second one is the "personal role" which combines concern for students, availability, respectfulness, and willingness to answer questions and foster interaction. Expressing care can be as easy as maintaining eye contact, having an open posture, smiling, attentive listening, or even knowing students' names. Caring has a great influence on students' attitude towards that particular class, to learning, to academic performance, and reduction of classroom conflicts. There is a duality in how the faculty and students perceive effective teaching in college. Students value ambition, availability, helpfulness, and speaking skills of the faculty the most whereas faculty prioritize encouragement of autonomy, intellectual challenge, and high standards of performance. This means caring for the students is what students care for.

To sum up, leaving marks on the future of young people is a meaningful mission to be accomplished delicately. Upcoming decades necessitates creative critical thinkers who can work collaboratively in diverse, global teams and communicate their ideas clearly. We, educators are the ones to show them how to make sensible choices by providing utmost care because they are the ones to take the flag from us and carry it to the further generations.

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