

As A Life Long Learner and His Role in the 21st Century Class Room

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Abstract— The Legendary India known for its Vedas and Values and Teachers in India have an Esteemed and pious status for the past centuries together and it is no way an exaggeration to say that it has been Continuing and'll be. As Lifelong learning has become the catch-cry of the new millennium we are in dire need for maintenance of skill and knowledge currency. Numerous articles have emerged which involve socio-political analyses of the reasons for, and different approaches to lifelong learning. This paper examines its definition in detail later throws light on the Changes in the Class Room of 21st Century. It also explores the role of Teacher in the 21st Century classroom. Finally the paper ends with a cite of Life Long Learning from the words of our Nation's Scientific Living Legend Dr. Kalam at one of his speeches to the students in the inaugural ceremony of Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Ernad Muslim Educational Association (EMEA) College of Arts and Science.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu
Gurudevo Maheswaraha
Gurusakshat Param Brahma
Tasmaisri Gurave Namaha”

The Legendary India known for its Vedas and Values and it has been constantly chanting the above Sloka which states the Esteemed and pious status of Teachers in India for the past centuries together and it is, no way an exaggeration to say that it has been Continuing and'll be. But the role of Teachers from the conventional age to the Computer age and from 'the chalk and talk' approach has witnessed the Dramatic changes. However, In his paper on the future of education, Lombardo argues for educational approaches that allow for a more holistic understanding of knowledge (as in wisdom): “Where, in the past emphasis was on memorization, drill, and mechanical learning, education today should facilitate the development of interpretative skills and deep understanding” (Lombardo, 2007). However the role of a Teacher changes from a purveyor of knowledge to that of a facilitator and should be an agog of Life Long Learner.

Have you ever wondered what the phrase "lifelong learning" means? As teachers we commonly use the phrase, "We are raising lifelong learners." So what is the definition of lifelong learning and how does it relate to teaching?

II. LIFELONG LEARNER DEFINED

In its general, broadest sense, lifelong learning (LLL) means a continuous, abstract lifelong phenomenon of learning; it cannot be thwarted by age or the passage of time. It is holistic learning, including intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. It is manifest through both formal and informal education and continues from birth through the end of life.

A. Lifelong Learning, Then, Can Be Broken Down By Age

- Birth-24 years, formal instruction; nurture by family is strongest

- 25-65 years, occupational and career instruction; experience and problem solving, and improving job skills
- 65+ years, social and intellectual support to society; learning new pastimes

III. SO HOW DO WE RAISE AS LIFELONG LEARNERS?

In the sense that lifelong learning transcends the four walls of the classroom as outlined above, each teacher influences a small part of the all-round development of the individual child; therefore, teachers are not only solely responsible to "raise lifelong learners." It is also the role of family, religious leaders and societal influences beyond the influence of the teacher. As lifelong learning is an invisible process, it cannot be tangibly measured in its totality either. As teachers, we assess in part.

The question remains then as educators, how do we raise lifelong learners? The answer is, we raise lifelong learners, by being lifelong learners ourselves. In the process we become masters at the craft of teaching. We read, we learn, not at the surface level, but in great depth about the subjects we teach, we have cultural experience and then, the enthusiasm we have about the love of learning will exude from our very being to our students. It is the purposeful, effectual change a teacher can bring to a student's intellectual life. As Teachers, We are only a few, of the many "teachers" who, will pass through the life of the student; therefore, We must utilize each opportunity to exemplify by own examples, that we too, are lifelong learners and let us have the same for our students.

For example, the teacher who will not consider advancing his/ her understanding of a new teaching methodology or even of the use of the Internet and computer, "I don't need to learn that stuff," she justifies. "In my day it was pen and paper, that's it." This teacher is an example of one who is not a lifelong learner. Learning at times, for people of all ages can be difficult and even frustrating. But to justify the reason to not learn is an injustice both to the teacher and her students.

IV. MOVING FURTHER INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

As we move further into the new millennium, it becomes clear that the 21st century classroom needs are very different from the 20th Century classroom needs. In the 21st century classroom, teachers are facilitators of student learning and creators of productive classroom environments in which students can develop the skills they will need in the workplace. The focus of the 21st century classroom is on students experiencing the environment they will enter as 21st century Workers. The collaborative project-based curriculum used in this classroom develops the higher order thinking skills, effective communication skills, and knowledge of technology that student will need in the 21st century workplace. The interdisciplinary nature of the 21st century classroom sets it apart from the 20th century Classroom. Lectures on a single subject at a time were the norm in the

past and today collaboration is the thread for all students learning.

20th century teaching strategies are no longer effective. Teachers must embrace new teaching strategies that are radically different from those employed in the 20th century classroom. The curriculum must become more relevant to what students will experience in the 21st century workplace.

V. CHANGES IN THE CLASSROOM

The 21st century classroom is student centered, not teacher centered. Teachers no longer function as lecturers but as facilitators of learning. The students are learning by doing, and the teacher acts as a coach, helping students as they work on projects. Students learn to use the inquiry method, and to collaborate with others--a microcosm of the real world they will experience once they leave the classroom.

Students no longer study each subject in isolation. Instead, they work on interdisciplinary projects that use information and skills from a variety of subjects and address a number of essential academic standards. For example, books assigned in reading or English, may be set in a country that is also being explored in social studies. The final reading of an English book report may require that specific social studies standards be met as well.

Textbooks are no longer the major source of information. Students use multiple sources, including technology, to find and gather the information they need. They might keep journals, interview experts, explore the Internet, or use computer software programs to apply what they have learned or to find information. Instead of being reserved only for special projects, technology is seamlessly integrated into daily instruction.

In this new classroom, flexible student groupings, based on individual needs, are the norm. The teacher still uses whole group instruction, but it is no longer the primary instructional method used. Teachers assess student instructional needs and learning styles and then draw on a variety of instructional and learning methods to meet the needs of all the students in the Classroom.

The focus of student learning in this classroom is different. The focus is no longer on learning by memorizing and recalling information but on learning how to learn. Now, students use the information they have learned and demonstrate their mastery of the content in the projects they work on. Students learn how to ask the right questions, how to conduct an appropriate investigation, how to find answers, and how to use information. The emphasis in this classroom is on creating lifelong learners. With this goal in mind, students move beyond the student role to learn through real world experiences.

Just as student learning has changed so has assessment of that learning. Teachers use a variety of performance-based assessments to evaluate student learning. Tests that measure a student's ability to memorize and to recall facts are no longer the sole means of assessing student learning. Instead, teachers use student projects, presentations, and other performance-based assessments to determine students' achievement and their individual needs.

The goal of the 21st century classroom is to prepare students to become productive members of the workplace.

VI. CHANGES IN TEACHER BEHAVIOR

Just as the classroom is changing, so must the teacher adapt their roles and responsibilities? Teachers are no longer teaching in isolation. They now co-teach, team teach, and collaborate with other department members. Teachers are not the only ones responsible for student learning. Other stakeholders including administrators, board members, parents, and students all share responsibility with the teacher for educating the student.

Teachers know that they must engage their students in learning and provide effective instruction using a variety of instructional methods as well as technology. To do this, teachers keep abreast of what is happening in the field. As lifelong learners, they are active participants in their own learning. They seek out professional development that helps them to improve both student learning and their own performance.

The new role of the teacher in the 21st century classroom requires changes in teachers' knowledge and classroom behaviours. The teacher must know how to:

- Act as a classroom facilitator. They use appropriate resources and opportunities to create a learning environment that allows each child to construct his or her own knowledge. The teacher is in tune with her students and knows how to pace lessons and provide meaningful work that actively engages students in their learning.
- Establish a safe, supportive, and positive learning environment for all students. This requires planning on the part of the teacher to avoid safety risks, to create room arrangements that support learning, and to provide accessibility to students with special needs. The teacher is skilled in managing multiple learning experiences to create a positive and productive learning environment for all the students in the classroom. Classroom procedures and policies are an important part of creating a positive learning environment. The teacher evaluates and implements effective classroom management techniques in a consistent manner. She uses routines and procedures that maximize instructional time. Students know what is expected of them, and the teacher knows how to effectively handle disruptions so there is no adverse impact on students' instructional time.
- Plan for the long-term and short-term and the teacher provides projects that involve students doing research and assimilating the knowledge themselves. Teachers act as coaches and provide support as needed by students. They take on the role of project manager.
- Foster cooperation among students within the classroom. The teacher models and promotes democratic values and processes that are essential in the real world. Teachers allow students to work collaboratively on projects and network with others in the class, as well as experts outside of school.
- Encourage students' curiosity and intrinsic motivation to learn. The teacher helps students become independent, creative, and critical thinkers by providing experiences that develop his/her students' independent, critical and

creative thinking and problem solving skills. The teacher provides enough time for students to complete tasks, and is clear about her expectations. Students are actively involved in their own learning within a climate that respects their unique developmental needs and fosters positive expectations and mutual respect.

- Make students feel valued. And how to emphasize cooperative group effort rather than individual competitive effort through collaborative projects and a team spirit.
- Communicate effectively with students, parents, colleagues, and other stakeholders. And how to use written, oral, and technological communication to establish a positive learning experience and to involve other stakeholders in student learning.
- Use language to foster self-expression, identity development, and learning in her students.
- Foster cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in her students. The teacher should encourage students to learn about other cultures and instill in her students a respect for others and their differences.

These attributes can best be developed if we give our students learning experiences that deal with real world scenarios. Let us cite a real life incident from Dr. Kalam's Life in his own words only from one of his speeches to the students in the inaugural ceremony of Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Ernad Muslim Educational Association (EMEA) College of Art and Science. Let us have it in his words only... When I think of my childhood days, I am reminded of Shri Sivasubramania Iyer who taught me when I was studying in 5th class at the age of 10. He was one of the very good teachers in our school. All of us loved to attend his class and hear him. One day he was teaching about bird's flight. He drew a diagram of a bird on the blackboard depicting the wings, tail and the body structure with the head. He explained how the birds create the lift and fly. He also explained to us how they change direction while flying. Nearly for 25 minutes he gave the lecture with various information such as lift, drag, how the birds fly in a formation of 10, 20 or 30. At the end of the class, he wanted to know whether we understood how the birds fly. I said I did not understand how the birds fly. When I said this, the teacher asked the other students whether they understood or not. Many students said that they also did not understand. Our response did not upset him, since he was a committed teacher.

Our teacher said that he would take all of us to the seashore.

That evening the whole class was at the sea shore of Rameswaram. We enjoyed the roaring sea waves knocking at the sandy hills in the pleasant evening. Birds were flying with sweet chirping voice. He showed the sea birds in formations of 10 to 20 numbers. We saw the marvelous formations of birds with a purpose and we were all amazed. He showed us the birds and asked us to see that when the birds fly, what they looked like. We saw the wings flapping. He asked us to look at the tail portion with the combination of flapping wings and twisting tail. We noticed closely and found that the birds in that condition flew in the direction they desired. Then he asked us a question, where the engine is and how it is powered. Bird is powered by its own life and the motivation

of what it wants. All these things were explained to us within Fifteen minutes. We all understood the whole bird dynamics from this practical example. How nice it was? Our teacher was a great teacher; he could give us a theoretical lesson coupled with a live practical example available in nature. This is real teaching. I am sure many of the teachers in schools and colleges will follow this example.

If our students would be repeated with these types of experiences through real world projects they will move towards becoming lifelong learners.

VII. CONCLUSION

There appears to be undeniable logic that there is a need for lifelong learning in a world requiring continual adaptation and learning. It also seems logically irrefutable that lifelong learning can only be really effective if Teachers are taught how to learn and process information in truly effective ways. In the past, teachers were the dispenser of information but the rules have changed. To teach the children of 21st century, Teachers should become lifelong learners, and need to show students what to do with the countless pages of information, how to analyze the information, how to critically think about the information, and enable them to use the world of ICT in a practical way.

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