

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AS VISIONARY LEADERS

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Abstract

Who doesn't remember great teachers? To them learners owe their personal or professional inspiration. They are like great coaches or visionary leaders. The present article answers the question "What makes a good teacher great?". We are talking about those teachers who care, who learn for the rest of their lives, who reflect on their performance in order to improve themselves, those who become effective due to their abilities, attitudes and knowledge regarding instruction planning, classroom management, motivation or relationship building, etc.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that there is a link between effective teachers and visionary leaders who set goals and do their best to achieve them and make their students want to be part of their vision.

Keywords: teachers, effective, leader, visionary, attitude

1. Practices of effective teachers

Effective teachers are special persons. They are gifted to create a motivating learning atmosphere where all the students contribute and have a sense of belonging to a group which advance to common goals. Teachers who succeed in their profession are empathic and develop good relationships with their students. Every one of us must remember a teacher in their school life. What impressed us? His/her attitude, his/her talking gift, his/her kindness when we were speaking about our problems, his/her clarity when he/she was talking about what was expected of us, the rigor of his/her teaching, etc.

A good teacher has a philosophy of teaching and cares about his/her students' success. They are motivated by their students' motivation to learn, progress, success and happiness. When you do something with pleasure you don't have to work one day for the rest of your life. This is true for both teachers and students. Teachers who inspire and who make their students' progress and be committed to his/her educational goals are like visionary leaders or team coaches. They create a learning environment which motivate and decrease the stress levels to such a degree that learning becomes a pleasant experience. This experience should be about the content of the lesson but also about life and skills needed to succeed and manage in life. Life skills are those abilities needed to successfully and effectively deal with the demands and challenges of life. In 1999, the World Health Organization identified six key areas of life skills:

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1. Communication and interpersonal skills. This refers to the capacity of transmitting verbal and written messages so that the interlocutor understands them. The first set of skills ensures effective team work and cooperation.
2. Decision-making and problem-solving skills. This set of skills involves the ability to understand problems and come up with solutions alone or in a team, and to take the best decision in order to overcome problems.
3. Creative and critical thinking. This skill refers to the ability to identify new solutions and come up with innovative ideas in various contexts. At the same time, it involves assessing information carefully so that one understands its relevance.
4. Self-awareness and empathy. These two components of emotional intelligence describe the capacity to understand yourself and the others.
5. Assertiveness and self-control. These skills refer to the ability to stand up for yourself and remain calm in provocative contexts.
6. Resilience. This is the ability to cope with problems and recover from setbacks so that you understand that failure was only a step forward in the life learning process.

Involvement is one key word which effective teachers use a lot. Students' involvement in the learning and teaching contributes to the feeling of belonging and of self-fulfillment. These teachers give a voice to each student and help them grow with responsibility. "Teachers can empower and motivate students by giving them more responsibility, providing them with choices, enhancing their self-esteem, and relieving them of stress" (Stix, 2006: 9).

Responsibility means that the students must become aware of their learning strategies and must be motivated so that they acquire progress. Andi Stix (2006: 6) mentions that students must also have a voice in their assessment. "As the assessment process becomes clearly defined and student goals are outlined and realized, cooperative groups will work more effectively with one another to solve problems". Robin Sharma (2003) considers that employees should have a sense of contribution to the company's goals. Similarly, a teacher should motivate his/her students to contribute to their own learning having in mind the teaching goals. One way to do this is to give them responsibility, make them think critically about their own progress, know the milestones of their own assessment objectives. Only by becoming aware of where they are and where they should be can students appreciate their progress.

A visionary leader is a great coach. He/she helps the learners/workers by instructing, guiding, motivating and listening to them. In the coach philosophy the classroom is a playing field and students become team players. The coach has to hold everything together, ensuring that everyone contributes. He/she creates a great unity among the students and there is a bidirectional relationship created – students among students and students with the teacher. Robin Sharma considers that relationship is created by promise-keeping, active listening, compassion and truth telling. Everybody has a deep need to feel understood. We show our students that we care about them and we understand them by asking open questions, asking for opinions, showing respect and concern, or showing kindness.

The coach teacher motivates the students towards common objectives and makes them aware of these, just like a visionary leader. How can a teacher do that? By setting intellectually challenging activities and arousing their interest and curiosity to solve them.

"It is crucial, therefore, for teacher coaches to motivate their students into activities that are as realistic as possible. Whether the forum is a debate, discussion, or simulation, students must feel that they are writing and researching for practical use" (Stix, 2006: 9).

Thus, they need to feel that the proposed activities are meaningful, that their work is meaningful so that they understand how the activities are helping them progress and acquire life skills. One example is an interview simulation for second year-students. Such an activity, preceded by proper investigation into the rules of attending an interview and the vocabulary used in this context and followed by feedback and reflection on one's performance, gives students a sense of reality and utility.

One of the most important life skills is to develop good relationships in team work. In order to manage well team work, teachers should know their students' way of acting. Some of them act as managers, while others as problem solvers. As a teacher you have to know your students' talent and do the best to unleash it. If a teacher wants to make a team work as a unit, which is the ideal case, he/she should have in mind three basic goals of teaming: inclusion, assertion, cooperation. Inclusion refers to assigning different roles to different students. They should all practice various roles and in this way they develop a sense of belonging to the group. Rather than letting some students dominate the group, while others be ignored, the teacher should rotate the roles so that everyone contributes and knows what is expected of them. Assertion refers to the situation when a team member, who is assigned to do a managerial task, is able to delegate responsibilities to other members of the group. Cooperation refers to the unity which is created in a truly cooperative group where energy is unleashed towards a common goal. If everyone understands his/her role in a group and works towards the common goal cooperation is ensured.

2. Leadership in teaching

In his book "Leadership Wisdom" Robin Sharma mentions that leadership is a philosophy for life and it can be found in many domains of activity. He believes that not only CEOs can be great leaders but also caring teachers, scientists and compassionate mothers. And this happens because leadership is an inner state which begins with leading and knowing yourself. According to Sharma, if we want to become great leaders we have to start by learning about ourselves, by developing life skills. If we want to develop people's relationships, we have to be good at maintaining relationships ourselves. Everything begins with a purpose and great leaders remain focused on their purpose. He believes that there are 8 rituals of visionary leaders which may apply to companies and by extension to all areas of life.

1. The ritual of compelling future focus.

A great leader understands that people need to be part of something, to make a contribution. In this respect, students need to see they belong to a group, that their work is meaningful and they contribute and are important. In this manner the teacher has to motivate the students work toward a common goal and make them understand that each student's contribution is important. The students' full potential is thus developed and they are motivated to give more. As part of Sharma's philosophy, failure is a step forward, is an opportunity to learn, to learn how to win. That is why, students' mistakes should be discussed as opportunities to learn with the whole class. Every teacher has teaching objectives. These should be announced from the beginning of the lesson and should be explicitly made clear to all the students so that they should know what is expected of them. Assessment criteria should also be explained and worked on together with the class so that students have more responsibility for their own learning and assessment. By setting clear teaching and assessment objectives students become aware of their own progress and focus more on their future objectives.

2. *The ritual of human relations and communication competency.*

A great leader will establish good relationships with his/her employees just like a teacher with his/her learners. A teacher-leader will keep his/her promises, will listen actively and show interest in students' problems, will be compassionate and behave empathically. Compassion is shown in terms of gratefulness and respect for each other. People feel they count and that they are important when you show interest by simply remembering their names, asking about what they like and dislike, being interested in their family member and in their relationships with their family and colleagues.

3. *The ritual of team unity: reward routinely and recognize relentlessly*

According to Robin Sharma (2003) employees who feel appreciated deliver superior results. Like them, students need to feel that their efforts are appreciated in order to become motivated to learn more. In order to do this, teachers should reward good behavior and results. Moreover, they define very clearly what results are expected of them. "Once people know where they are going and what is expected of them they will fulfill their responsibilities" (Sharma, 2003: 126). Reward in Sharma's terms, refers to praise and small gestures of satisfaction. Progress, for example should be praised and mistakes, forgiven. Praise must be specific and immediate, otherwise it loses its power. It must be done in public and must be sincere and short.

4. *The ritual of adaptability and change management*

As we mentioned earlier a good coach decreases stress levels associated with pressure to high performance in the learning environment. Sharma considers that a visionary leader should lessen the anxiety by continuously reminding people why a certain change is necessary. People may be reluctant to change, but if the leader can help them defeat their fear of change by continuous learning and the acquisition of knowledge, anxiety decreases. In the same manner can an effective teacher guide his/her students decrease their level of anxiety when they learn a foreign language, for example. All learners fear that they may not perform well at a certain stage of their learning phases and they should be encouraged to overcome their fears by teacher's support. The teacher may look for good results, not perfect ones, and praise them.

5. *The ritual of personal effectiveness.*

Good leaders set aside a period of time for weekly planning. This way he/she will select only those activities which help him/her advance the purpose. Teachers-leaders will do the same. They will ask themselves: "what steps should I take in the next week to feel that I have advanced in the direction of my purpose?". Teachers have teaching objectives. These should be explicitly made clear to their students for them to know where they are going, what's the purpose. Along with the objectives teachers design a plan of activities and methods which will help their students achieve the lesson goals. Effective teachers do not only plan, but also teach their students to plan their learning, how to set objectives in order to make progress.

6. *The ritual of self-leadership.*

As we mentioned earlier leadership starts from within. Great leaders become inspirational if they consider self - improvement as a basic personal rule. That is why, Sharma recommends that a leader should designate a period of time, every week for personal renewal to recharge his/her batteries. Teacher-leaders need that too. They need time to reflect on their own work and on themselves. Personal reflection helps teachers to improve their

skills and attitudes. Reflection is also recommended to students as well, based on teacher's or peer feedback.

7. The ritual of creativity and innovation

People should be encouraged to be creative. Innovation may lead to success. Creativity is a life skill that visionary teachers encourage in their students. Creativity and innovation spring from relaxation and happiness. That is why work and learning should be a pleasant experience and even fun.

8. The ritual of contribution and significance

Great leaders leave something behind them. Teacher – leaders will do the same. How many students have vivid memories of some of their teachers and owe them their knowledge, skills and attitudes? After all this is what motivates effective visionary teachers: their students' satisfaction and success.

3. Conclusions

Teacher effectiveness is measured against students' progress and satisfaction. It starts from measuring the involvement in the class activities and assessing the classroom atmosphere. Involvement is marked by effective group work, vivid classroom discussions and active listening to teacher's explanations. The students are interested in the teacher's activities and the teacher definitely shows respect, encouragement and praises when the students offer good answers and proactive behavior. The mastery of the content is also important along with the effective planning activities.

Another important aspect of teaching as leadership is to set high expectations at the beginning of the year so that the students will make efforts to achieve.

Reflecting on where their students are performing at the beginning of the year and holding high expectations for their true potential, highly effective teachers develop an ambitious and inspiring vision of where their students will be academically at the end of the year. They set big goals informed by that vision—goals that when reached will make a meaningful impact on students' academic trajectory and future opportunities (Farr, 2010: 15).

Great leaders have inspiring visions, but it is not enough to communicate this vision to your people, it is important to share it with them and make them part of it. The feeling that one contributes to the whole is meaningful and satisfactory. Students alike have to feel they are part of the unity and by their work they take part to some degree to the common purpose of the lecture. Meaningful, measurable goals will make the students want to achieve at the end of the school year. These attract motivation and engagement. Students' progress is measured against some indicators, for example speaking activities may be effective if students:

- Use rational strategies to present arguments and draw conclusions
- Construct explanations and test understanding of concepts
- Challenge the quality of each other's reasoning
- Rephrase and ask questions for clarity purposes
- Listen actively to one another
- Elaborate and build on ideas and each other's contributions

According to Steven Farr (2010) many effective and successful teachers consider that student investment and engagement rests on two factors: students believe they are able to

achieve at high levels and they want to do this. Effective teachers' responsibility is to ensure that the answer is yes to both questions. Still, making student become engaged and invested is a challenging activity. Those who remain uninvested make little progress. So teacher leaders understand that learning is a contract between two partners: the teacher and the student. If the teacher gives appropriate content using highly effective methods and techniques such as praise for adequate behavior, the student has to be determined to become invested. There are a series of investment strategies which an effective visionary teacher may use.

According to Steven Farr (2010) there are three major directions in which an effective teacher may act: the learning environment, the classroom culture, instruction and learning. Regarding the learning environment, the teacher will build relationships with students and will create a sense of community in the classroom. The classroom culture of achievement will promote values that drive student investment, will make progress transparent and will praise success once it was achieved. In terms of instruction and learning the teacher – leader will establish the relevance of the content, and will empower students with choice and responsibility.

The relationship between teachers and leaders is very relevant. Both work with people and lead them into working together. Both should manage groups of people with their minds by implementing management strategies and both should lead them towards a success path with their hearts by motivating them, establishing effective relationships and engaging them to work hard. Both address a variety of personalities, expectations, needs and learning/working styles.

The teacher's role as a leader is sometimes overwhelming. "Researchers, writers, and practitioners generally agree that leaders in general influence others in a positive way by generating new/creative ideas, instilling values, making tough decisions, and by helping other members of the organization do the same" (Simerson, 2006: 5).

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