A Discussion on Autonomous Teachers and How to Get Them Reach Their Utmost Capacity in SLA Classroom

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ABSTRACT

It is of paramount importance for a teacher to do his best and make sure the student are becoming quite a learner, this paper tries to analyze autonomous teacher meanings, features, learner autonomy and how to accelerate the second language acquisition. And it also endeavors to shed some light on developing language teachers' potentials, understanding and valuing their endowments and sharing them among colleagues. It is discussed that cooperative development can be achieved through collaborative learning and peer observation. Indoctrination and observing are also needed to fortify professional growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing prominence of learner autonomy in second language acquisition (SLA), teacher autonomy as a new concept in understanding learner autonomy has been paid more attention to. The discussion of teacher autonomy has already become a major emerging concern. The analysis of teacher autonomy will be of great help to the understanding of learner autonomy and the facilitation of SLA.

2. TEACHER AUTONOMY

A. Explanation

Little (1995) first defines teacher autonomy as the "teachers' capacity to engage in self-directed teaching." After that, scholars have been trying to define teacher autonomy from different aspects. Aoki (2000) offers an explicit definition of teacher autonomy, suggesting that this involves "the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching". According to Richard Smith (2000), teacher autonomy refers to "the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others." Benson (2000) argues that teacher autonomy can be seen as "a right to freedom from control (or an ability to exercise this right) as well as actual freedom from control". Nevertheless, these definitions focus on the ability of teachers, failing to point out the dynamic relationship between the teacher and learners. The ability of these learners may influence the teacher's capacity of managing their knowledge, skills and even attitudes, and vice versa. Therefore, the author puts forward her point of view on teacher autonomy. It means the capacity of teachers in managing knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the students' acquisition of a language with regard to learners.

B. Features

Researchers have been analyzing teacher autonomy from different dimensions. McGrath (2000) illustrates the characteristics of teacher autonomy from two dimensions, "as self-directed action or development; as freedom from control by others." When teachers act in a self-directed manner, they are not guaranteed to learn from the experience. Because their professional development of autonomy could be considered as one form of professional action, but their action

and development of autonomy do not necessarily mean the same thing. When teachers make use of their self-direction and actual self-directed behavior.

C. Teacher Autonomy and Learner Autonomy

It is of vital importance to understand the dynamic relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. They are interrelated and interactive. To put it specifically, in order to understand and instruct learners, teachers become involved in various activities, asking questions which are helpful in increasing students' awareness of autonomous learning. Smith (2001: 43-4) explains explicitly their relationship. "Teachers also need to constantly reflect on their own role in the classroom, monitoring the extent to which they constrain or scaffold students' thinking and behavior, so as to engage students in autonomous and effective learning". According to different circumstances, teachers' management of autonomy vary respectively. However, as Little (1991) points out that learner autonomy does not mean "learning without a teacher (at home, with a computer, in a self-access center, etc.), and/or that it does away with the need for a teacher". Instead, learner autonomy concerns a capacity (for taking control of learning) which can be cultivated and explored in a number of ways and situations, especially in the classroom with the help of teacher autonomy. Scholars become more aware of both the importance of developing teacher autonomy in structuring or scaffolding reflective learning and of the complex, shifting interrelationship between teacher and learner roles in the advocating of learner autonomy. As a result, teachers are required to get fully prepared for teacher autonomy besides, as Carey emphasizes, teacher autonomy is wrongly "coupled with uniformity". Teachers tend to adopt uniform teaching in order to meet the existing standard of teacher evaluation. Consequently, teacher autonomy has been linked to the same pattern of teaching. Accordingly, Tholin (2009) observes that "The focus here is both on teachers' freedom to reflect their teaching towards self-directed learning and on how their own experiences as autonomous language learners can give character to the teaching that they themselves carry out." Therefore, in order to avoid such uniformity teachers' freedom should be taken into serious consideration. Staff development is to bring about changes in teachers' instructional practices, students' learning outcomes and teachers' beliefs and attitudes, which requires educational leaders to provide and facilitate as much opportunities and training as they can to develop their staff to their full potential. Actively using every valuable chance of formal and informal training programs is the first step for every staff to be their best selves.

2.1. KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHERS' STRENGTHS

In the same way that individual learners have different ways of learning at their best, teachers each have their own, individual ways of being the best teacher that they can be. Each individual is unique and has distinctive talent. Therefore, the first step in developing the potential in others is to understand and appreciate those talents. Then cultivate these talents by providing inspiration, support and opportunities to teachers as they work toward refining and sharing their strengths. A very important and effective way of helping the staff recognize their own strengths is providing opportunity for the individual to reflect or self-evaluate. This can take many forms, such as formal evaluation forms, professional portfolios, peer observation, interest group. A good evaluation form, which includes most of the important ingredients for effective teaching and professional development, will be a guide for the staff to their future grow and full play of their potential.

2.2. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Collaborative learning is designed to build collegueship among teachers to prevent isolation from one another so that they can share common problems and collective solutions. Teachers can develop collaboration relationship through interchanging with one another within the informal system of the school and college. Collaboration naturally complements autonomy. Freedom to direct one's own learning is a vital aspect of collaboration. Collegial groups must be flexible in their composition and purpose. They must form and disintegrate based on the needs of individual teachers. And it is teachers who must decide on the specifics of their collaboration. Participation in

cooperative collegial groups can expand teachers' levels of expertise by supplying a source of intellectual provocation and new ideas. A collaborative group can furnish the emotional support and encouragement teachers need to cope with the risk that is inherently involved in learning to teach well. Colleagues can demonstrate to one another that they value attempts at growth and reassure group members that the effort and pain are worth it.

A. Cooperative Development

It offers a practical way of working towards the widely accepted goal of autonomous development. Attentive listening is the way to effective communication, to better solutions and to facilitating staff grow as well. Teachers can encourage each other's professional development by learning to talk and listen to each other in a way that allows to take the whole idea of evaluation (along with the exchange of comments, opinions, suggestions and advice) out of the equation altogether for an agreed period of time. This allows the person who needs soundboard the extra space in which to work on their own development in a way that facilitates the growth of their own ideas, while also encouraging an increase in collegial feeling among the language teachers involved.

B. Fellow Observation

It is the case that even the finest teachers can still learn. Fellow observation of teaching is of growing importance in higher education both for purposes of assessment and development. Fellow observation gives teachers an opportunity to learn from each other in a non-threatening environment. Observing other teachers' teaching can give them new ideas for their own teaching and illustrate techniques they might never have thought of. Being observed by others from the committee and from the department also can give ideas about how the class looks from the student's perspective, and about things we might try in order to increase the effectiveness of teaching.

2.3. SUPERVISION

Teachers need training, follow-up and technical assistance provided by respected persons. They also need ongoing coaching and feedback by credible persons. Such training activities as seminars, workshops and conferences on the campus or off the campus are the most popular, in which diagnosing and prescribing, giving information and demonstrating, discussing application, practicing and giving feedback will be major parts. Apart from these formal activities, it can stimulate and reinforce teachers' professional growth through informal but focused communication and supervision.

A. Inducing Incentives

Some positive factors on/off the campus can be used to introduce a new idea or concept to raise teachers' interest. Informing teachers of all kinds of professional opportunities, such as situations, courses, lectures, books, language teachers and all manner of other things that will help them grow, through emails and announcements—providing bit of information about a program or encouraging teacher's professional interests—are ways in which, through relatively small actions, can exert incremental influence on teachers' development.

B. Motivating

Staff members will be pleased if their professional growth interest is appreciated. Disseminating professional and curriculum materials—duplicated and distributed articles, hands out curriculum materials, lend books to individual teachers and set up displays for their faculties in central locations—personal one-to-one follow-up seems to have a positive influence on teachers' responses to the activities. Conversational inquiries soliciting teachers' opinions about a display or an article may have increased the impact of the disseminated materials by promoting teachers exposure to them. If the teachers have not read them, the summary of some ideas or questions can be provided to them. Some teachers, apparently motivated by the questions, will read the articles and then express their opinions.

C. Appraisal

One of the key points in staff development is to convey support for the staffs in general attention as well as in informal conversation, which can guide and encourage language teachers to stretch them from their current reality towards their potential. Teachers in turn willing to experiment with new or innovative tech because they feel their dean is supportive and would not penalize them for experiments that failed. The attitude of the dean is crucial factor in the willingness of the staff to pursue new ideas and programs—opportunities for both personal and professional growth. We are never too old to hear praise. Working very hard to find something positive as often as possible will be positive reinforcement which is a valuable tool for a change not only in the praised, but also in the others. What's more, it is also a powerful tool that can be good for the praiser, who will find it easier to help language teachers reach their full potentials.

D. Perceptivity

One way to help individual staff members to grow is to understand, appreciate and utilize their strengths. If we can recognize teachers' positive efforts with specific recognition, we can help them see specific areas of value. For example, acknowledging that a teacher did an effective job of using questioning skills during a class period can help reinforce this teaching style. At the same time, this kind of authentic praise will have impact on other teachers or can arouse their interest. Individual teacher's achievements can be recognized by publicizing teachers' successes by talking about them to parents, other teachers and other higher leaders. Also encourage teachers to seek info/assistance from successful colleagues, which provide opportunities not only for instructional improvement, but also for increased self-esteem for the teachers whose special work was being recognized.

3. CONCLUSION

In short, it is of great necessity to investigate into teacher autonomy if teachers intend to engage successfully in advocating learner autonomy in second language acquisition. As a result, this brief analysis of the definitions and characteristics of teacher autonomy is very helpful to understand learner autonomy and then to facilitate SLA by consciously developing teachers' capacity and freedom in knowledge, skill and attitudes. Most of us find ourselves in a position to help others achieve more of their potential than we realize. Sure, as leaders, one must be well qualified to help their staff reach their potential. I believe it is part of the purpose to serve others in this way—to encourage and support language teachers we care about in becoming their best selves.

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