

Vol. VIII
Number-2

ISSN 2319-8203
17
(March - April 2018 (Special Issue))

EDUCATION TIMES

**A Peer Reviewed Journal of
Education & Humanities**

APH PUBLISHING CORPORATION

Reflection on Power Structure in Classroom and Its Impact on Life Skill Development of Secondary School Students

Ali Ussain T. and Dr. Amruth G. Kumar**

ABSTRACT

Power in classroom is a topic that needs to be discussed in present days. Teacher's power appears in many guises and it affects teacher-student relationships. The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of power structure in classroom on the life skills development of school students. If the classroom is fully teacher dominated, learners cannot freely interact with teacher in academic pursuit they engaged. If teacher creates his own hegemony in classroom, utilizing the authority that derives from knowledge and position, it will lead to intellectual suppression and passiveness of learners in classroom activities. This submissive behaviour of learners slows down their critical thinking ability and it negatively affects the life skills of learners. Hence teachers need to employ the maximum participation of students individually and corroboratively in classroom intellectual discourses and create a democratic classroom climate to help students attain life skills in daily life.

Keywords: Power structure, Critical thinking, Life skill

INTRODUCTION

In order to manage social life effectively and systematically, it is necessary to every individual to have certain life skills. Life skills are the basic skills that help individuals acquire the competencies that are necessary to deal with the problems of life they encounter. It enables individuals to succeed in the environment they live in (Danish and Nellen, 1997). The concept of life skills is used in many fields such as health, business, education and social life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) life skills involve countless skills and the definition and the nature of it may vary according to the culture and the situation. The existence of many definitions of the concept of life skills makes it difficult to construct the conceptual framework (Hodge, Danish and Martin, 2013). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2003) defines life skills as a wide range of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that will help people make the right decisions to have a healthy and productive life, establish effective communication and develop coping and self-control skills. WHO (1999) lists the basic five life skills to be appropriate for all cultures. They are: the skills of decision-making and problem solving; creative and critical thinking; self awareness and empathy; coping with emotions and stress; communication and interpersonal skills

The role of environment in achieving life skills is very important as it can be acquired effectively when circumstances are created in such a way that promote potential development of innate capacities of learner. Educational system of any progressive society reflects its norms on constructing ideal citizens. This can be attained only by creating a school system which capable promising generations

*Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Education, Central University of Kerala.

**Associate Professor, Department of Education, Central University of Kerala.

Therefore, school needs to inculcate in the learners a spirit of critical questioning, a new knowledge and deconstruct traditional myths that have acted as constraints on modernity. In modernization of society one of the main functions of school is to prepare learners for adjustability to the change in the society. Therefore, the school system can function of social control as well as social change. Dewey (1890) proposes that authentic learning should be centered on the natural interests of learners and their desire to learn with others. It also centered to build things, to inquire objectively about various matters and express themselves artistically. Rather than being created as a space to work and obeyed, the classroom is designed as a place to create new inventions and collaborative interactions. In the classroom everybody is to be treated as the same. The impulses of children are to be considered, and learners wish to communicate with others. They want to know the nature of things and express their own ideas (Dewey, 1890). It is very true that learning and training will be taken place where children feel a homely atmosphere. The essence of this home setting is that of enjoyable participation in activity, creation, conversation and inquiry based discourses in the classroom.

Classroom learning of school student is influenced by many factors related with the learning and environment. The classroom is the best canvass for students' educational development (Burns). It plays an important role in students' overall development. In understanding the nature of environmental influences on individuals was clearly developed by the Lewin's (1936) formula $B = f(P, E)$. He believed behavior of human beings is being shaped by the interaction of individual and his environment.

Learning learners' attachment with teachers has long lasting influence on students' cognitive development. If the learners keep positive and supportive attachment with their teachers, they attain higher-levels of development in cognitive and affective domains than those learners with negative attachment. If a student feels a personal connection to a teacher, he will feel more freedom therefore he/she shows more engagement in the academic content presented in the classroom and can gently steps to the ladder of achievement. Positive teacher student relationships leads into the process of learning and enhance their desire to learning process. It leads to the development of effective learning and meet students' developmental and academic needs.

The present study theoretically explores how power structure in classroom exerts its influence on the skill formation of students. The study neither does this through any quantitative approach nor a field based attempt. Absolutely explorative strategy is used depending heavily upon phenomenological perspectives of the researchers to draw observations about such influences. The formation of secondary school students is affected by many factors. Among those factors, power structure in classroom is explored here. This paper particularly attempts its influence on critical thinking, because among the life skills listed by WHO in 1999 it has very pivotal role on the academic success in educational endeavors of school students. Therefore, in this paper, life skill formation of school students is studied associating with power structure and critical thinking ability.

POWER STRUCTURE IN CLASSROOM

Power is defined as an individual's potential to have a control over others or group of persons'. This view sees power as the potential capacity of an individual to influence another person to do something he/she would not have done had he/she not been influenced. An individual's change in the behavior, attitudes, beliefs, etc., as a result of influence from another person is regarded as the sign of power. This influence can have a reflection on his attitude and perspective towards various life consequences. French and Raven (1968) qualify this

kind of definition by indicating that such change would be a direct result of the influence of another person rather than the result of a combination of different forces which may have additional influence. From this view of the nature of power, French and Raven (1968) identified four potential bases of power: coercive, reward, legitimate, referent and expert.

The baseness of coercive power is on a learner's expectations that he/she will be punished by the teacher if he/she does not conform to the teacher's influencing attempt. Reward Power is based on a learner's perception that the degree to which the teacher is in a position to provide a reward to her/him for complying with the teacher's influence attempt. Legitimate Power is also known as "assigned power". The base of such power is the assigned role of teacher as a teacher. Legitimate power is based on the student's perception that the teacher has the right to make certain demands and requests as a function of her/his position as a "teacher". The foundation of referent power is based on the student's identification with the teacher. This type of power is based on the student's identification with the teacher. This type of power is based on the student's perception that the more powerful person (the student) to identify with and please the more powerful person (teacher). Expert power stems from the student regarding the teacher to be competent and authentic knowledgeable expert in many specific areas. Most information taught in a classroom is presented from a base of expert power.

Students did not have any formal power or authority in the school and class. Students and teachers held ultimate power. A certain degree of teacher power in classroom is always present (Scott and McCroskey, 1978). The more power is employed by the teacher as a means of control, the more it will need to be used".

It's necessary that teacher should help the students in moulding their behaviors, which is beneficial for both the students and teachers. Many of the students think that power of the teacher is essential for the growth and development of the teaching learning process in a harmonious manner. The students have different perceptions about the power structure in the school, these perceptions about power structure influences the students in different ways.

POWER STRUCTURE AND LIFE SKILL FORMATION

Life skill formation of school students is studied here associating with power structure and critical thinking ability. The ability of critical thinking in learners can effectively be developed in settings that are free of fear and stress and when the information being learned is relevant and interesting to the learners. These conditions can best be attained when students are empowered to direct their own thinking with the support of adults. It has been recognized for many years that one of the fundamental aims of education is to foster learners' ability to think critically, to reason and use judgment effectively in decision-making.

Critical Thinking is a complex notion that is difficult to define. American Philosophical Association Delphi panel of 46 experts' defined critical thinking as "to be purposeful, self regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based".

Power dynamics in the classroom has significant role on the critical thinking ability of learners. Teacher autocracy will be negatively affecting thinking skill of learners. As critical thinking is best achieved in academic journey of a student when the teacher provides the instruction giving opportunity to think about the content he/she conveys. This can be achieved by providing training for critical thinking in a harmonious manner. Researchers like Peck 1981, Postlethwaite and Siegel 1988 argue that such training is a necessary condition for the effective learning in classroom. This can be possible when teacher adopts a mode of presentation that promotes engagement of learners. Studies conducted by Astin (1993) support this view he found

related factors such as giving class presentations and having critiqued by instructors positively related to learners progress in critical thinking. This criticism should be done in an open tolerance as suggested by scholars like (Paul 1982, 184, 1987 and Scriven 1980). This open tolerance will not create any havoc in classroom atmosphere as some teachers falsely think so. Moreover it creates an intellectual responsibility in students learning teaching (Walter, 2004). In a study conducted by Winter *et al.*, (1981) concluded that a curriculum that is focused on an integrative theme encompassing different disciplines leads to development of critical thinking. This curriculum approach can be effectively implemented in a situation where students and learners are engaged in learning dedicating to construct knowledge with real and pure academic spirit.

On the other hand, if the classroom activities are formulated, directed and controlled fully by teacher without giving opportunity to learners, the graph of intellectual collaboration will reach a diminishing stage. So the learners cannot freely interact with teacher in academic pursuits in classroom. It will lead to teacher hegemony in classroom. This teacher hegemony in classroom, using the authority that derives from knowledge and position, leads to intellectual suppression and passiveness of learners in classroom activities. This submissive behaviour of learners keep them away from the academic collaboration in the classroom and it result to slow down their critical thinking ability. The diminishing range of critical ability reflects in their classroom academic activities thereby it negatively affects the life skills of learners.

CONCLUSION

Life skills are the basic skills that help individuals acquire the competences that are necessary to deal with the various problems of life. It enables individuals to succeed in the environment. It is necessary to study the factors and circumstances that have influence on it. This paper was prepared focusing on power structure in classroom and its relation with critical thinking. If the classroom is fully teacher dominated, learners cannot freely interact with teacher in academic pursuit they engaged. It lead to slow down their critical thinking ability and it negatively affects the life skills of learners. Hence teachers need to employ the maximum participation of students in classroom intellectual courses to create a democratic classroom. It will help to cultivate ideal successful learners both in life and academic pursuits.

REFERENCES

- Abrami, P., Bernard, R., Borokhovski, E., Wade, A., Surkes, M., Tamim, R. & Zhang, D. (2008). Instructional Interventions Affecting Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions: A Stage 1 Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 1102-1134. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071155>
- Austin, G.R. & Garber, H. (Eds.). 1985. Research on exemplary schools. New York: Academic Press
- Clerk, P. (1976). Critical Thinking. *College English*, 38(3), 224-233. doi:10.2307/375880
- Danish, S. J. & Nellen, V. C. (1997). New roles for sport psychologists: Teaching life skills through sport to at-risk youth. *Quest*, 49, 100-113
- Dewey, J. (1890). *The school and society and The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Edward M. Glaser(1941) An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking, Teachers College, Columbia University <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>
- Frenth, J. R.P., Jr., and Raven. B.(1968) The bases for social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in* (Jcllll power. Ann Arbor. Michigan: University of Michigan Press
- Hodge, K., Danish, S. & Martin, J. (2013). Developing a conceptual framework for life skills interventions. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 41(8), 1125-1152. Doi: 10.1177/0011000012462073
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_School_and_Society

10. Jackson, P. (1998). John Dewey's School and Society Revisited. *The Elementary School Journal*, 98(4), 415-426. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1002322>
11. Lewin, K. (1935). *Principles of topological psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill
12. McCroskey, J. C. & Richmond, V. P. (1983). Power in the classroom I: Teacher and student. *Communication Education*, 32(2), 175-184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634528309378527>
13. Nejat, O. & Kezer, A. F. (2016). A Program Implementation for the Development of Life Skills of 4th Grade Students. *Journal of Education and Practice* www.iiste.org (Online) Vol.7, No.12, 2016, pp.11-15.
14. Paul, R. W. (1982). Teaching critical thinking in strong sense: A focus on self deception, and dialectical mode of analysis. *Informal Logic* 4:3-7
15. Postman, N. (1985). Critical thinking in the electronic era. *National Forum* 65: 4-8, 17
16. Scriven, M. (1980). The philosophical and pragmatic significance of informal logic. In *First international symposium*, edited by J. A. Blair and R. H. Johnson, 147-60. Inverness, CO: Swallow Press.
17. Siegel, H. (1988). *Educating reason: Rationality, critical thinking and education*. New York: Oxford University Press.
18. Tsui, L. (1999). Courses and Instruction Affecting Critical Thinking. *Research in Higher Education* 31(2), 185-200. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40196338>
19. UNICEF (2003). *Life Skills: Definition of terms*. Available: www.unicef.org/lifeskills/ (20.02.2016)
20. Waiters, K. S. (1986). Critical thinking in liberal education: A case of overkill? *Liberal Education* 16(1), 1-10.
21. World Health Organization (WHO). (1997). *Life skills education in schools*. WHO/MNH/97.12. Geneva: WHO.