TRAINING TEACHERS FOR THE MODERN WORLD: LESSONS FROM JESUS CHRIST THE GREAT TEACHER

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Abstract

"Control theory" states that behavior is inspired by what a person wants most at any given moment; that all living creatures "control" their behavior to maximize their need satisfaction.[1] The essence of this postulation it appears is motivation. It means that human beings are motivated to work towards what they deem to serve their immediate need. Applied to learning, we could argue that learning is likely to be more effective in a situation where learners are aware of why they go to school or what they want to achieve.

It is notable that teachers the world over have complained that today's students are unmotivated. Responding to these complaints, Glasser, in his propagation of Control theory observes that if students are not motivated to do their school work is because they view school work as irrelevant to their basic human needs.[2] Learners are perhaps not motivated to relate school work with what they need in life. The question then is: How can today's students be motivated to sustain interest in their school work? Put it another way: Are teachers sufficiently equipped to effectively respond to the motivational demands of their learners? Is it perhaps necessary to find new ways of training teachers on how to motivate their learners?

While working within the precincts of control theory, this paper also employs deconstruction theory to advance the argument that while the traditional Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor domains still applies to today's learning, the order in which these learning levels needs a fresh approach. The paper tries to explore approaches to learning that hope to fulfill the dictates of control theory: those of need satisfaction as a requisite for making learners motivated. Since the teacher plays a significant role in motivating or causing interest in his/her learners, this

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[1] Glasser, W. (1996). "Control Theory". In *International Certificate of Teaching Mastery*. Teachers Without Borders.

[2] Ibid.

paper attempts to answer two pertinent questions: Who is going to be the ideal teacher for the new millennium? Or, who qualifies to be a teacher for the new millennium? Secondly, what is special about the new millennium? Of course 'millennium' here stands for the times we are living in today.

In emphasizing the need for motivation, the paper attempts to suggest an alternative approach to motivating learners by drawing the reader's attention to the approaches Jesus Christ used in His own teaching – perhaps what partly earned his the title: The Great Teacher. The paper argues that the approaches Jesus Christ used in his teaching if emulated by teachers today would be effective in addressing the lack of motivation among learners cited above.

Introduction

From time immemorial, the teacher has been at the centre of societal growth and development. This is due to the role the teacher plays in the formative years of a child. As a formatter, the teacher has over the years, been a source of knowledge and a mentor. However, the teacher's role as a source of knowledge and mentor is increasingly becoming threatened. Teachers the world over have complained about learners' lack of interest in their school work. Besides, teachers are apparently becoming less preferred as role models.[3] The following two scenarios aptly illustrate this state of affairs:

Firstly, lack of interest in school work has led to a situation where some learners pass through the school system without learning the bare basics of the literate process. A recent report by ANPPCAN (an organization that deals with children's programs in Kenya), for example, reveals numerous cases of school goers who are now in class 8 (the top-most class in Kenya's primary school system), but who can neither read nor write.[4] This is an indicator that learners are not fully benefitting from the education process – a process presided over by teachers. A possible explanation to this is that there is a disconnect between the process (i.e. learning) and the means of facilitating the process (i.e. teaching). Every conscious teacher will of course be keen to work with a group of motivated and responsive learners.

Secondly, the teacher has increasingly become a less preferred role model as captured by the learners' responses during my research in a number of Kenyan schools. Asked what they would like to be when they grow up, most learners indicated that they would not want to be teachers. They, however, still strongly admired the traditional professions such as becoming doctors, lawyers, engineers, or architects. No single instance among the more than one hundred school-goers that I interviewed said they would want to be teachers. It must be frustrating for anyone that the people you mentor do not want to be like you. The irony, though, is that the learners know that they need teachers if they will pass their exams, which means that they believe what the teachers tell them.

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[3] Ibid

[4] ANPPCAN report, 2009.

The question then is: why would they believe what teachers tell them yet not want to be like the very teachers? Could it be a question of believing but not having faith?

It is apparent that the position of the teacher has metamorphosed and any consideration of the teacher today has to be done against this backdrop. During the days I was going to school, the teacher was, first, the sole source of knowledge. Today, with the internet, students are often ahead of the teacher on many issues. Secondly, the teacher was the most seeable and accessible role model. Today there are many more preferred role models. Thirdly, the teacher was a person who made impact on and had influence over the entire village; or the entire locality. Today the teacher even hardly has complete influence over his/her class/classroom.

The foregoing realization, I may wish to observe, calls for some innovations that will redefine the role of the teacher; a repositioning that will have the teacher remain relevant in the new millennial dispensation. Of greatest significance is perhaps going to be a re-consideration of the traditional approach to learning and the role the teacher plays in this process.

Traditional Approach to Learning

The traditional approach to learning heavily mirrors Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills acquisition. In the traditional approach to learning, a child once able to grasp some facts (perhaps at age five or six), is taken to school and introduced to cognitive skills (reading, writing, mathematics, history, religion and other knowledge acquisition activities). In other words, the approach starts – as the first level, by trying to train the learner's mind.[5] In the process of acquiring knowledge, the learner, through interaction with others is hoped to train on affective skills (emotions and values). S/he learns to relate with other people and it is expected that the cognitive skills acquired will come in handy as they learn to appreciate their own needs and those of the people they are interacting with, as well as those in the environment in general. The learners' own needs here are of course what would be considered as the needs of the heart. The third level after the cognitive and affective levels is that of application. The learner is then expected to apply what they learnt through practical demonstration of the skills (psychomotor skills).

 It is the view of this paper that this hierarchy of skills is defective. It fails to put into consideration the crucial element of motivation and could result in the learner engaging in an exercise that he/she is not prepared for. Expecting the learner, for instance, to take interest in mathematics as a cognitive skill before understanding how this relates to his/her need satisfaction can be a vain effort. The

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[5] Bullock, A. and Stephen Trombley (eds). "Bloom's Taxonomy". *The New Montana Dictionary of Modern Thought.* Hammersmith, London: HarperCollins Publishers.

learner needs to know why s/he has to learn this knowledge in the first place, if the lack of interest cited above has to be avoided. In this respect, motivation is key.

The Theory of Motivation

Motivation is literally the desire to do things,[6] (Stuart Kaplan). Of course the desire to do things is inspired by the need as "control theory" posits. In his propagation of "control theory" (an important motivational theory), William Glasser asserts that behavior is not caused by a response to an outside stimulus, instead it is inspired by what a person wants most at a given time.[7] Such needs, Glasser itemizes as including survival, love, power, freedom, or any other basic human needs.[8] One realizes that these needs identified are in fact affective (doing with the heart) rather than cognitive (doing with the mind). This then appears to place affective needs before cognitive ones since the former (affective) are basic human needs while the latter (cognitive) could be considered as secondary needs, thus, taking second place. Yet the traditional practice has always been: 'take the child to school for reading and writing as the first step'.

In a classroom situation, the teacher needs to inspire this need by recognizing his/her learners' need satisfaction. The view here is that learning is likely to be more effective in a situation where learners are motivated and know what they want to achieve, therefore, want to work towards it. Otherwise, teachers the world over, as already pointed out, have complained that today's students are unmotivated; complaints that Glasser in his propagation of "Control theory", responded to by suggesting that the students are not motivated to do their schoolwork because they view it as irrelevant to their basic human needs.[9] Thus, the main concern should be how today's students can be motivated to sustain interest in their work and whether there is need to find new ways and alternative approaches to the training of teachers on how to motivate their learners.

Alternative Approaches

A major step to working towards alternative approaches to motivation is to deconstruct the traditional approaches to learning. Deconstruction as a theory targets to offer an alternative to the

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[6] www.infoagepub.com/.../ Culture,Self and Motivation – Stuart Kaplan.

[7] Glasser, W. (1996). "Control Theory". In *International Certificate of Teaching Mastery*. Teachers Without Borders.

[8] ibid

[9] ibid

conventional practices. It gives an alternative meaning to what is known – deconstructing.[10] If the traditional approach to learning is to be restructured to respond to the motivational demands of the learner, Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor domains has to be deconstructed. While the taxonomy still remains very relevant in today's education, the approach needs to be reversed in terms of its hierarchy. Instead of starting with the training of the mind (cognitive skills of knowledge and the development of intellectual skills), the training should start with affective skills, i.e. feelings, values and attitudes. This means that learners will first undergo the training of the heart, to recognize their needs and the requirements of their need satisfaction. Once aware of their needs the learners will feel the necessary motivation to seek the other skills that will help fulfill the said need satisfaction.

Indeed, Rogers (1994), argues that a person's need leads one to seeking the solution to satisfy the need.[11] He gives the example of a person who develops the interest to become rich, emphasizing that such a person so motivated will of their own volition, seek out books or classes on economics, investment, financiers, banking and so on. That such an individual would perceive and learn any information provided on this subject in a much different fashion than one who is assigned a reading or class.[12] The argument here is that the interest to become rich once recognized as a value in one's heart (affective), it becomes a need that will entice one to seek knowledge (cognition) – mathematics, economics and so on. The need will, thus, motivate the seeking of knowledge.

The question then is: how would one start by recognizing the value first? The answer to this question could perhaps be found in the possibility of deconstructing the traditional approach to learning so that learning starts with seeking to train the heart first before seeking to train the mind. This is what Jesus Christ, the Great Teacher did.

When Jesus came, he found a race that had been preached to by the Pharisees, Sadducees and the prophets including John the Baptist but had remained unhearing. Apparently they were not motivated to want to hear and understand the word of God. Then, instead of he himself also starting with "I have brought you the Good News," like John the Baptist before him had done, (i.e. starting with the cognitive approach of giving knowledge), he started by giving signs. He first performed

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[10] Norris, C. (1982). "Deconstruction". In *International Certificate of Teaching Mastery*. Teachers Without Borders.

[11] Rogers, C. R. & Freiberg, H. J. (1994). *Freedom to Learn (3ʳᵈ Ed)*. Columbus, OH: Merrill/Macmillan.

[12] ibid

miracles. This started raising the people's curiosity and questions were asked: Who is this? What is he after? Whom does he represent? Where does he get his powers? This created the need to want to find out. The people then took interest to hear him to have their unanswered questions answered. This way, Jesus had won their hearts, motivating them to want to listen. He had created in them the need to hear him as a requisite to getting answers to their questions – to satisfying their curiosity.

Having thus won their hearts, Jesus Christ at this point introduced the word. He taught them about the Kingdom of God and they listened. The point is, Jesus Christ was now addressing the minds of people who were then prepared to listen – to gain cognitive skills. Their need to want to know had opened their minds to knowledge. When they heard Him and wanted to know more, they asked what they could do to enter the Kingdom of God.[13] At this point Jesus now told them to take up the cross and follow him. This was the point of application (the psychomotor stage).

The lesson here is that today's teacher will need to learn how to win their learners' hearts first the way Jesus did (affective domain), before going on to introduce knowledge (cognitive domain) and then the learners will be able to happily learn and apply what they have learnt (psychomotor domain). Indeed, it has been observed that one only needs to be impressed upon on the need to, say, become rich and they themselves will want to go out of their way to discover what they need to become rich, since they already know what they want.[14] This means that motivation and interest should come before the step of acquiring cognitive skills.

What the modern teacher needs

To motivate and capture the interest of his listeners, Jesus started with miracles. The teacher in the classroom cannot of course perform miracles the way Christ did. The teacher can, however, emulate Christ's approach by motivating the learners first before introducing knowledge, as this will facilitate interest and understanding. But having no advantage of the ability to perform miracles, what will the teacher do to keep today's unmotivated, internet and movie child interested in school lessons? How will the teacher in the new millennium motivate his/her learners? As a formatter and mentor, the teacher is not only expected to know the way, s/he should show the way and take the way too. The teacher must be practical.

Let me highlight some approaches to learning which can be of great help to a teacher who intends to sustain interest among his/her learners, so as to forestall the lack of motivation cited above. Having noted that the learner today is adversely prone to distractions resulting from increased options of

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[13] The Holy Bible – Luke 10:25; John 3:4.

[14] Rogers, C. R. & Freiberg, H. J. (1994). *Freedom to Learn (3rd Ed)*. Columbus, OH: Merrill/Macmillan.

acquiring knowledge; diverse role models to choose from; and even more crucial, the emerging tendency towards knowledge for need satisfaction, only an innovative teacher will be effective. As a first step, it will require that the teacher makes the effort to know his/her class really well. Only then will he/she know how best to motivate them. This will perhaps demand that the teacher remains sensitive enough to discover what his/her learners want to know or learn – that which responds to their need satisfaction. The teacher should then be able to negotiate with the learners on both content and methodology.

It is observable that the learners' lack of interest cited above seems to exist even in the face of increasing high grades as a reward, or/and the threat of failure in life as punishment if one does not perform well in academics. In Kenya, for example, exam grades have been rising tremendously. At the inception of the 8:4:4 system of education, leading to the first Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE), and through the 90s, for instance, a Form 4 graduate of the system would get direct admission to the university with a mean grade of C+. This was in fact at a time when public universities were only four. Today, public universities are in double digits and other new ones still being launched, yet a grade of B plain may now not earn one direct admission. The reason perhaps why such a high grade cannot qualify one for admission into the overwhelmingly increased public university space is because grades awarded have been getting higher. But despite the attractive grades, learners apparently still show little interest in their schoolwork. The conclusion here then is that the promise of reward (high grades), or punishment (failure in life) are not reason enough to motivate the learners.

We could argue that the foregoing type of reward or punishment cannot motivate learners because they are extrinsic – they emanate from the outside. So the learners fail to find actualization in the grades. I would, therefore, recommend intrinsic motivation by which learners are motivated from within. Of course motivation from within has to be closely tied to the self-initiative that is anchored on one's need satisfaction. The argument here is that a learner who knows what he/she wants and is strongly attracted to it will of necessity generate the required energy to perform the tasks related to the need.[15] If this be the case, it starts to spell out the teacher's primary task as that of assisting the learners to discover their potential and therefore, their need. But how does a teacher do this?

A possible pragmatic way of assisting the learners to discover their potential and need is perhaps by engaging them in 'metacognition' (Flavell, 1976: 232). Matacognition is explained as one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes or anything related to them. It involves the learners discovering that they are, say, strong in A but weak in B, thereby identifying the need, thus,

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[15] Glasser, W. (1996). "Control Theory". In *International Certificate of Teaching Mastery*. Teachers Without Borders.

leading to the decision on where to put emphasis.[16] It could be estimated that where learners themselves notice their weak points and decide to work on them the outcome can be tremendous. Metacognition processes are central to planning, problem-solving, evaluation, and many aspects of learning.[17]

In working towards metacognition, this paper recommends Rogers' 'experiential learning'. Rogers (1969) distinguishes two types of learning: cognitive (which he terms meaningless) and experiential (significant).[18] While cognitive learning refers to the pursuit of academic knowledge, for example, learning multiplication tables or vocabulary, experiential learning refers to applied knowledge such as studying the map of a region in order to discover the route to and exact position of the destination of one's intended visit.[19] The key distinction between the two types of learning is that while cognitive learning is simply speculative, experiential learning addresses the needs and wants of the learners. Rogers identifies the following as the key qualities of experiential learning: personal involvement, self-initiative, self-evaluation, and pervasive effects on the learner.[20] The key argument here is that learning is facilitated when the learner participates completely in the learning process and has control over its nature and direction; and that learning is based upon direct confrontation with practical, social or personal problems, while self-evaluation is the principal method of assessing progress or success.

Besides, Rogers observes that all human beings have a natural propensity to learn, subsequently the role of the teacher is to facilitate such learning by setting a positive climate, clarifying the purpose of the learner, making available the learning resources, sharing feelings and thoughts with the learners, and balancing intellectual and emotional components of learning.[21]

A major lesson from experiential learning is that significant learning takes place when the subject matter is relevant to the personal interests of the learner. Besides, self-initiated learning is the most lasting and pervasive.

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[16] Flavell, J. (1976). "Metacognitive Aspects of Problem Solving". In L. Resnick (ed), *The Nature of Intelligence.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erbaum Assoc.

[17] Duell, O. K. (1986). "Metacognitive Skills". In G. Phye & E. T. Andre (eds), *Cognitive Classroom Learning*. Orlando, F. L: Academic Press.

[18] Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to Learn*. Columbus, OH: Merrill/Macmillan.

[19] ibid

[20] ibid

[21] ibid

Additional approaches by which teachers would encourage metacognition, thereby enabling the learners to discover their need and develop the impetus to work on their tasks could include 'Thematic learning', 'Cooperative learning' and 'Outcome based learning'. Thematic learning encourages the learning around a predetermined theme where the learning efforts are geared towards responding to the dictates and expectations of the set theme.[22] The argument here is that the human need to succeed becomes the driving force, which makes the subject want to keep working until they see that they have achieved.

In Cooperative learning, learners depend on one another and work as a group. This encourages discussion, observation, sharing and understanding. The learners share roles that are pertinent to the subject of the learning and each has to strive to fulfill his/her role to the objectives of the group.[23] In other words, individuals in their wish to belong to and to be accepted will aspire to be seen to contribute to the aspirations of the group. They will tend to see themselves as answerable to the group to which they belong, thereby taking it as a personal responsibility to meet their part of the bargain in the group.

On the other hand, in Outcome-based learning, the learning programs and institutional efforts are designed to produce specific, lasting results that are defined in advance.[24] Indeed, this type of learning also specifies targets and time lines whose completion causes a sense of self actualization, thereby providing the impetus to keep working to achieve. It is observable that all the three types of learning (thematic, cooperative and outcome-based) ensure active and practical participation by the learner, but even more importantly his/her involvement in definite and measurable outcomes pursued from a more or less need based approach.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore the need for teachers to recast themselves for the teaching/ learning challenges in the modern world, arguing that learning that is based on need satisfaction is more effective; its effects more lasting and more pervasive. That paper argues that learning based on need satisfaction is the ultimate solution to the now common complaint about unmotivated learners in schools. The paper has further argued that the reason why learners show disinterest in their schoolwork is because they view schoolwork as irrelevant to their basic needs. Teachers need to train on how to lead their learners into discovering their needs while on the other hand relating their learning to their need satisfaction. The paper puts emphasis on the need to motivate learners.

[22] Stiggins, R. (2001). *Student Involved Classroom Assessment*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

[23] ibid

[24] ibid

Calling upon the approaches Jesus Christ used to motivate his listeners, the paper considers the possibility of teachers emulating the very approaches, so that they too can draw and build the interest of the learners before beginning to teach. The paper suggests 'metacognition' as an ideal approach to assisting the learners to discover their needs; a prerequisite to gaining interest in class work. Subsequently, the paper recommends, first Experiential learning, then Thematic, Cooperative and Outcome-based learning as some of the ideal approaches to realizing metacognition.

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