

Teachers as Leaders: Understanding What We Bring to the Classroom

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As educators we bring to the classroom a set of skills, knowledge, expertise and experiences, convictions, talents and/or gifts. We usually also bring preconceived notions, traditions, learning culture, and intelligences, as well as misperceptions that shape how we teach and how we shape our lessons. Normally, all this baggage we bring will influence our learners, and it can be either positive or negative. In addition, it will generate a daily impact and contribute to the classroom dynamics. We make daily decisions on how to approach our teaching, and regardless of what we decide, we can be certain that we are an influence and have an impact, which means that we have a huge responsibility as educators.

As language educators, we have an even greater responsibility, as we are not only responsible for teaching the language; we also bring into the classroom the culture, the pragmatics of language use in an academic or social context, and an awareness of our own identity and that of others, which will allow engagement and effective communication. It is of utmost importance for language educators to understand their role to prepare learners to navigate the context of using the foreign language with

those who speak it as their mother tongue and those who don't. Language educators need to bring to the classroom an understanding of the intercultural dimension, gauging expertly the complexities and avoiding prejudice or misperceptions when interacting in the language being learnt. Thus, the language educator has a double responsibility. As stated by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002), beyond linguistic competence, the development of language competence implies making our learners aware of differences in culture as well as in individuality and perspective, values, and behaviors that



will allow them to have an enriching communicative experience.

Next, it is relevant as we embark on these reflections to understand that the positive influence and leadership of an educator, and moreover of a language educator, encompasses personal skills and values leading to professionalism and commitment to the profession (Marcia, 2002). As such, these identities evolve as time goes by and are shaped by all the experiences and challenges that a teacher faces in childhood, with peers, and finally in the classroom. In addition, the support network within an institution will also contribute to a teacher-leader having a high-level contribution to the lives of their learners. Hence, it is important for teachers to continuously engage in reflective practices that allow them to change and adapt and incorporate flexibility into their teaching. Allowing



▲ *Sophomore students leading plagiarism workshop for freshmen students.*

early reflection among pre-service teachers as well as novice teachers will contribute to a successful classroom environment where learners succeed and thrive. By building on these reflective processes, educators can move beyond the complexities of educating and establish high, achievable expectations for learners. Yoo and Carter (2017) state that success in a language classroom will be built on the relationships learners and educators establish that go beyond the methods or resources used.

Finally, professional development that is ongoing, up to date, innovative, and creative will also influence the level of evolution and have a positive impact on a teacher-leader. Being connected, up to date, learning from others' experiences, building on others' successes, and learning from failures will shape a teacher-leader to become an inspiration for hundreds of lives that they will touch during their teaching terms. Maintaining teachers engaged in the realm of professional development opportunities will highly motivate them and create incentives to seek opportunities to grow on their own, help peers grow, and above all, support their learners' growth. From my very own experience, being able to attend events and conferences, deliver sessions, and share with like-minded colleagues worldwide since 2007 has allowed me to broaden my perspectives and have insights beyond my own culture and country in such a way that I continuously encourage my colleagues and my students to embark on these professional ventures as well. My overall feeling is that everybody should have a chance to experience the world and learn like this!

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By understanding these premises, a teacher's leadership in the classroom acquires relevance and translates into effective language teaching. By understanding the interconnections between teachers as leaders and the contributions they bring to the classroom, we can see that an effective teacher will be one who creates an ambience of trust and has a positive impact in the classroom. Thus, a teacher who is a positive classroom leader – a teacher as a leader and a professional in the classroom – will be able to inspire, empower, motivate, and generate commitment and enthusiasm, leading to effective learning and high-level accomplishments by the learners. It is then our duty to create networks of support, work, and contributions that will result in more effective learning and more motivated learners!

References

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▲ Junior engineering students' Food Fair project.