

EMPOWERED LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a model of expressive versus instrumental teaching. Expressive teaching is proposed as a mechanism for creating an environment in which students feel empowered. This type of environment is created by envisioning, exploring, empowering, energizing and implementing. When both students and teachers are engaged in these types of activities, learning and growth occurs for everyone involved.

INTRODUCTION

Effective teaching strongly depends on a complex pattern of interactions among the teacher, the student and situation. Effective teachers manage a complex set of tasks and interpersonal relationships in real time. All teachers are playing two roles simultaneously. The first is the expressive role, and other is the instrumental role. The expressive role encompasses teaching strategies that encourage, support, empower and energize students. At the same time, every effective teacher fulfills the instrumental role of setting standards, providing information, supervising on-task behavior, evaluating performance, and providing negative consequences for ineffective performance.

Instrumental teaching focuses on the accomplishment of clearly identified tasks and the achievement of outcomes defined in advance by the teacher. Designing the course syllabus, establishing learning objectives, preparing objective tests, planning lessons, delivering carefully prepared lectures, correcting tests and homework, and providing technically correct answers to student questions are instrumental teaching behaviors. Instrumental teaching is task-centered. Expressive teaching, on the other hand, focuses on establishing good interpersonal relations with students and empowering them as self-directed learners. Empowerment has been conceptually defined as the process of creating intrinsic task motivation by providing an environment and tasks which increase one's feelings of self-efficacy and energy (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The impact of empowerment on learning has been

demonstrated by Shulman, Houser, and Frymier (1995) who found a direct correlation between student empowerment and learning. This type of environment can be created by addressing the student by name, complimenting accomplishment and effort, encouraging greater effort, showing respect for the ideas of students, responding positively to creative student responses, and delegating responsibility to students for designing and implementing the learning experience. Expressive teaching is student-centered.

Every teacher employs both instrumental and expressive teaching tactics, but most teachers have a preferred teaching style. Some teachers concentrate primarily on instrumental teaching tactics, while others use primarily expressive tactics. In American schools, the dominant style is instrumental with teachers putting a great deal of emphasis on covering material, testing content knowledge, and keeping order in the classroom. In such classrooms, the teacher has a large amount of power compared to the students and uses that power to determine how time will be used. Typically, the instrumental teacher structures an active role for the teacher and a passive role for the students. In these classrooms the teacher frequently talks more than 90% of the time. Virtually all tasks are initiated and structured by the teacher, and the students are implicitly assigned the roles of passive listeners, note takers, homework doers, and test takers. As a result, many students are passive, uninvolved, and minimally committed. Information is retained long enough to pass the test but seldom integrated into the student's understanding of the world. In some cases, discouraged by the students' lack of enthusiasm for the classroom situation and teacher-initiated learning tasks, instrumental teachers frequently resort to punitive measures such as expressing disapproval of the level of student performance, harsh grading, sarcasm, and put downs of individual students.

This paper argues that the over reliance on instrumental teaching de-motivates and alienates students from the learning process. Further we maintain that the most effective teachers employ both instrumental and expressive strategies but use each for

different purposes. The most effective teachers use instrumental strategies for setting clear, concrete, and high performance standards. Instrumental strategies are also used to teach the basic information and simple skills. Expressive strategies are used to involve students in the exploration of complex information, development of complex skills, the exercise of judgment, and the formation of positive character traits.

At the highest level of abstraction, the teacher's job is to manage the learning environment. Teachers set the stage for empowered learning by using appropriate instrumental and expressive teaching strategies. The balance of this paper is devoted to strategies that teachers can use to create an empowered learning environment.

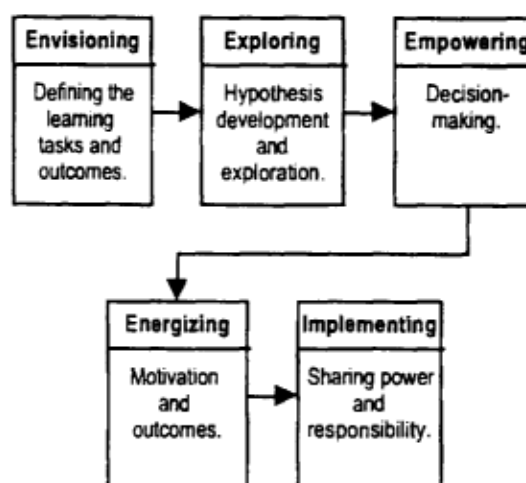
Empowered students trust their teachers and themselves. The relationships between student and teacher and between student and student are collaborative rather than adversarial. In the empowered classroom, students believe that the teacher is devoted to helping them learn, not catching mistakes and exposing their ignorance. Because the teacher has built strong interpersonal ties to the students, they have the self-confidence to take risks in asking questions and exploring unusual aspects of topics. When teachers delegate power and share responsibility with the students for the learning process, students can become empowered and self-directed learners.

This perspective has received strong empirical support. Davies (1989) stresses that effective learning should be both cooperative and active and cites educational theorists such as Beckwith (1983) and practitioners (Carroll, 1985; Bruner, 1986) in his support. Harasim (1989), through extensive empirical research, found that collaborative learning contributes to higher order learning through cognitive restructuring or conflict resolution. Earlier studies, such as Stodolsky (1984), and Myers and Lamm (1976), similarly showed that group interaction produced greater development and that active learning is essential for the facilitation of opinion change.

No single list of characteristics describes the good teacher. In addition to the skills listed above, good teachers are expected to possess a reasonable number of desirable characteristics, such as suitable intelligence, specialized knowledge of a subject area, articulate speech, honesty, and the like. But good teachers must also do something else: they must take

action that creates an effective learning environment. This environment is created by taking action in four specific areas: 1) defining the learning tasks and outcomes (envisioning); 2) creative thinking (hypothesis development and exploration); 3) decision making (empowering); 4) motivating (energizing); 5) sharing power and responsibility (implementing). These skills are necessary not only for the teacher but must be developed by the students as well, for them to become self-directed, empowered learners. The model of empowered learning which we are proposing is

**FIGURE 1
EMPOWERED LEARNING**



illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Defining the Learning Tasks and Outcomes

In the traditional classroom, the teacher is responsible for setting the task and outcomes. Since teachers have subject matter expertise and students are frequently naive about the subject, it is reasonable to expect the teacher to know much more than the student about what needs to be learned in a particular course. In the empowered classroom, however, the teacher shares the responsibility for setting learning objectives and tasks with the students. The teacher attempts to find out what the students already know and what the students believe they want or need to learn. This information is used to help the teacher design appropriate learning experiences for students.

It is important for the teacher to work with the student to set high performance standards. Without high performance standards, expressive teaching

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tactics increase self-esteem and satisfaction but do not increase learning. Goal setting theory suggests that students should have clear, concrete, challenging but attainable goals. When students are aligned with the goals of the course, they become empowered to perform with personal latitude (Potocki, 1994). This is the single most important instrumental strategy that the teacher can employ.

Creative Thinking

Creative thinking enables a teacher to bridge the gap between known facts and the unknown. In this way, new and changing situations do not cause teachers to falter, to fail, or to lose their direction. A teacher's resourcefulness and initiative depend heavily upon this skill. A practical definition of creative thinking is the process of combining known facts with imagination or insight in bringing into being an idea or mental picture that is unusual or at least unconventional.

The desire to create and a willingness to concentrate one's mental powers on a specific problem are essential. This requires concentration. In defining the problem, individuals must make sure they understand its nature and scope. They must also estimate its practical limits. They cannot solve a problem until they know what it is. Exploration and preparation involve fact gathering and the sorting of the person's knowledge of the subject under consideration. Brainstorming has to do with applying all known ideas pertinent to the problem in every conceivable combination. This encourages new concepts and points of view. Incubation involves unconscious thought which gives ideas time to "hatch." illumination is the step wherein the idea "hatches." Insight, a peculiarity of creative thinking, brings into the mind's eye the new idea or the new combination. Verification takes place when the idea is judged as to its applicability, and this step completes the creative thinking process (Wallas, 1926).

Decision Making

In the traditional classroom, the teacher makes most of the important decisions by determining the syllabus, the learning objectives, the lesson plans, lecture notes, dates of the test, the form and format of the test, and who speaks and when. In the empowered classroom, students decide some of these issues for themselves or in consultation with the teacher. However, the most important decision in either type of classroom is made by the student.

The student decides whether to be an enthusiastic partner in the learning enterprise or a reluctant conscript.

In the empowered classroom, as the instructor's role changes to one of empowering the students, the student becomes the investigator, the seeker of knowledge. This type of classroom provides an opportunity for joy in learning, and increasing student autonomy is one of the qualities demanded in revitalizing the educational process (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

This joy in learning is experienced by both students and instructors. The student-instructor interaction not only helps the students, but it also challenges instructors and motivates them to delve continually into their knowledge bases and processes to assist the always-inspiring students. An environment such as this becomes charged and enriched by strong mutual interaction and curiosity. It makes teaching and learning fun.

Empowered classrooms are more likely to be populated by students who are enthusiastic partners in the learning process for several reasons. First, allowing students to be involved in designing the learning activity increases the student's commitment to the process. Second, expressive teachers will design tasks that require students to learn by engaging in active, problem solving using authentic tasks. Teachers who foster active learning are less likely to bore students with lectures. Lectures efficiently package and deliver large amounts of information in a short period of time. However, lectures frequently cast students in the role of passive recipients of information that may or may not be perceived as relevant. Third, the teacher who attempts to empower students typically uses an active learning approach characterized by presentation of theory, modeling or demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching. Fourth, students will be encouraged to integrate new learning with previous knowledge and experience. These four characteristics of the empowered classroom require the student to be an active decision-maker at each stage of the process.

Motivation

All teachers attempt to motivate their students, but some are much more successful in their effort than others. The research literature on task completion and goal setting suggests that task characteristics and the nature of the goals involved provide im-

portant motivational cues for students. As noted earlier, effective teachers set high standards and are very clear about expectations. The most successful teachers employ expressive motivational techniques in addition to instrumental tactics such as goal setting.

Highly effective teachers find ways to make learning tasks intrinsically interesting and rewarding. The empowering teacher also searches for ways to provide extrinsic rewards. Teachers who believe in empowerment consistently encourage effort and generously praise students whose accomplishments merit recognition. They are enthusiastic about the student, the ability of the student to master what needs to be learned, and the benefits that *will* accrue to the student upon successful completion of the course. The empowering teacher stresses and rewards self-discipline. In the face of student failure, empowering teachers are consoling and help students look for learning strategies that are likely to yield better results in the future. The empowering teacher relies much more heavily on coaching skills than judging skills.

Less effective teachers emphasize the possible negative consequences of failure. These classrooms are characterized by fear and the threat of coercion. Harsh disciplinary measures are the rule rather than the exception. While effective teachers seem to believe that students will do a good job if opportunity and incentive are made available, the punitive teacher takes the position that students must be coerced in order to cooperate and to be productive. The punitive teacher's view is, "You do (his, or else.)"

When students are led, their energies are added to their teacher's to accomplish the planned results. When students are coerced or threaten by the teacher, they waste their energies in nervous worry and resistance to their orders. The empowering teacher exercises power through students instead of power over students.

We recognize that both approaches get results. The difference is that we believe empowered teaching builds student drive, enthusiasm, and cooperation while developing better quality and quantity of work in the long run. Even the most competent teacher will, at times, find it necessary to be punitive. However, motivational strategies that make the student a willing partner in the learning process produce more positive results.

Sharing Power and Responsibility

The classroom is an arena of power. For a specific period of time, the teacher has a tremendous amount of control over the behavior of a significant number of students. Few supervisors in industry have as much control over their employees as the typical classroom teacher has over students. However, empowering our students for greater achievement requires that we share power and responsibility with our students.

The first step in sharing power is an understanding of the reasons why we may be reluctant to give up the power we have. First, we lack confidence in our students to use the power wisely. The traditional educational value system considers cooperation or collaborative learning, in many cases, to be a form of cheating. There's a scarcity mind-set that drives this. If I win, then you have to lose (Peak, 1995). Second, we are afraid that students will waste time and not reach their learning objectives. Third, teachers lack training and practice at delegating and managing work environments. In actuality, teachers lamenting that students today are not motivated may really be admitting that they do not know how to create an environment where students feel empowered to learn (Frymier & Shulman, 1994). Fourth, if we do not exercise control in the classroom, some of us fear that we will be criticized for not doing our jobs. However, the empowered classroom liberates teachers from constant pressure to perform, allowing their creative energies to be focused. It fosters an attitude of learner rather than master. Whenever someone feels like a master of something, learning seems to stop. When learning stops, people start protecting the status quo (Covey, 1991).

The students may also resist sharing power and responsibility for their own learning. Given that they have spent many years adapting to the passive, "consumer" environment of most classrooms, this is not surprising. If we are going to successfully share power with students, we must understand why they might be reluctant to take on the burden. First, it is less work to allow the teacher to take responsibility. Second, they lack confidence and fear criticism and failure. Third, they lack the necessary information and resources. Fourth, they may feel overloaded with current responsibilities and fail to see the rewards for being self-directed learners.

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Power sharing is a two-way proposition. For it to work, both the teacher and students must be willing and able to accept it for what it is -- a way of extending (the goal setting, creative thinking, decision-making, and learning responsibilities throughout the classroom. The rewards of this approach to teaching include:

1. Developing students' critical thinking and analytical skills;
2. Giving them more direct control over their own lives;
3. Modeling behavior that will encourage them to delegate to their future subordinates;
4. Providing more chances for them to "try their wings" for their own self-development.

The trick to empowerment is creating high performance expectations that the students will adopt as their own. This shows students that you have confidence in their ability to reach certain predetermined levels of achievement. Given the needed resources and a facilitating structure (the instrumental part of the teaching role), in most instances, empowered students will do their utmost to oblige. This is an obvious way to build commitment. By empowering students you enhance their self-esteem and feelings of self-confidence, often motivating them to perform beyond expectations.

This point of view is also shared by students. In a study done by Leigh (1995), students reported that they believed they achieved more because the entire class worked together. They reported that they were able to talk about many things that could help them in other classes and in their lives. Because they were given more input into what happened in class, and because they realized that what they were studying had relevance, students completed their assignments more consistently. They also realized that they should always search for ways to improve.

Gifted teachers create environments where students have peak experiences, where in their excitement they become completely involved in what they are doing and they lose their sense of time. Here, the empowerment process plays a major role, and this should be reflected in the design of the classroom culture. A classroom culture has to be created in which students have a sense of control, a feeling of ownership in what they are doing. In creating this environment, it

is important to encourage students to trust themselves and the other students.

Examples of Empowered Learning

Cooperative/Collaborative Learning. The heart of the collaborative classroom movement is a fundamental change in instruction: a shift from "expert" instructors lecturing to passive students to "facilitating" instructors helping active students. Slavin, a prominent researcher in the area of cooperative learning, describes it simply as "heterogeneous groups working toward a common goal (Slavin, Sharan, Kagan, Hertz-Lazarowitz, Webb & Schmuck, 1985). Students are given the responsibility for assessing expected classroom norms, brainstorming creative alternatives and implementing changes into the course. The primary goal for the teacher in this situation is to serve as a confidence builder, help develop team-building, and encourage consensus decision making, and research has supported the use of cooperative learning as a method for increasing undergraduate learning (Beckman, 1990; Cottell, 1991; Markulis & Strang, 1994).

Problem Based Learning. Problem based learning is learning that results from the process involved in understanding or resolving a problem. It differs from traditional lectures and/or case-based teaching because real world situations are used to give students the opportunity to grapple with situations and dilemmas, which they are likely to encounter in the real world. This type of learning is characterized by a problem being presented to a small group of students who discuss the problem in light of what they know and what they need to know along with the identification of learning issues. Students then engage in self directed, independent learning followed by return to the small group for further sharing of knowledge and identification of additional learning goals. Students work toward solving the problem and developing management strategies. Each small group has a tutor, usually a faculty member or graduate student, who serves as a facilitator or guide for the discussions.

Guided Learning. To foster active, independent learning, no lectures are used for guided learning. Instead, the instructor prepares a workbook-like "Classroom Supplement" that the students use to work their way through the reading assignments. Each chapter consists of a series of fill-in-the-blank sentences linked directly to the corresponding chapter in the textbook. Students are given periodic

exams based on the textbook and supplement material. Two exams are given each time. The format for exams involves 30 minutes of discussion, taking the first exam, and grading the first exam (Students are given the answer key and asked to grade their own exam.) To encourage students to assume responsibility for their own learning, students are given the opportunity to take the exam a second time, during the same class period, if they are not satisfied with their grade on the first exam. If they choose to take the second exam, only the higher of the two grades is recorded. Between the first and second exams, 45 minutes of discussion occurs. This provides an opportunity to discuss and correct misconceptions and it motivates students to study for the first exam. If they do not need to take the second exam, they are able to leave class an hour early.

Walk the Talk. This type of classroom model was developed by David Leigh (1995) and begins with the teacher and students jointly developing a class vision and a set of class values. The teacher, who is a facilitator and guide, helps the class establish a vision and values at the beginning of the semester or school year. When developing the class values, the class must agree on how the values will be enforced. By completing these first two steps, ownership and responsibility for learning is transferred from the teacher to the students. This shared responsibility empowers students.

Guidelines for Empowerment

A teacher succeeds only when the students succeed. Classroom learning is not a solitary activity. You and your students are lifted to success by those working with you, no matter whether they are your students, your peers, or your mentors. Learning is maximized when everyone within and around the classroom feels empowered.

The empowerment principles explained in this paper are valuable in helping delegate learning responsibility in the classroom. The following are four special rules or principles that may help you in your efforts to empower students:

1. See through your students' eyes. It's easy to get others to do what you want them to do if you'll see things from their point of view. Ask yourself this question before you act: "What would I think of this, if I changed places with the students?"

2. Create a zone of respect and courtesy. Ask yourself, "What is the human way to handle this?" In everything you do, show that you are concerned with the students' performance and well being. Just give other people the kind of treatment you would like to receive. You'll be rewarded.
3. Think progress, seek continuous improvement, and reward success. Think improvement in everything you do. Think high standards in everything you do. Since students tend to emulate their teachers, be sure the master copy is worth duplicating.
4. Take time out to confer with yourself. Managed solitude pays off. Use it to release your creative power to find solutions to personal and classroom problems. Set aside some time each day just for thinking.

As practiced by master teachers, teaching is the art of influencing students to engage in the learning processes eagerly, enthusiastically and effectively. This influence is brought about through an effective personal relationship between the teacher and students. The degree to which the teacher can create relationships which facilitate the growth of students as separate persons is a measure of excellence.

In considering how to become an excellent teacher, Erich Fromm (1947) points the way: "In the art of living, man is both the artist and the object of his art, he is the sculptor and the marble, the physician and the patient ... While it is true that man's productiveness can create material things, works of art and systems of thought, by far the most important object of productiveness is man himself."

From this, we should realize that as teachers, we must be both teacher and student. We must be students of our own teaching. We must experiment, borrow from master teachers, try new classroom techniques, and learn from our mistakes. Every semester we have the opportunity to try again more wisely. It is a worthy aspiration.

REFERENCES

Available by contacting the authors.