

A dichotomy of becoming a teacher: its opportunities and challenges

by: Irene Rosanti Tjandramihardja

Education is not simply spoon-feeding our students with numerous facts, figures and rules. Rather, education of these days is related to knowledge construction formed along the way. It is deeply rooted from the concepts of both personal and social constructivism introduced respectively by Piaget and Vygotsky and began popular in the 1990s when the two concepts were merged to complement each other. In a constructivist class, every student is expected to form knowledge based on what they can build individually (personal constructivism) and together (social constructivism) in the teaching-learning processes. It is not based on the transmission of knowledge from their teacher anymore, where the students are passively constructing their knowledge in a 'traditional' class. In such a class, the students are treated like empty vessels (*tabula rasa*), where knowledge is poured until the vessels are full. The role of a constructivist teacher, on the other hand, has shifted to be more like a facilitator than a dictator or a transmitter in a 'traditional' class, as what happened in the old days. In this special article, some opportunities brought about by the teachers as catalysts or agents of change in education will be touched upon, then followed by some prevailing challenges commonly found in educational settings.

First of all, as a facilitator, a teacher opens up the doors of opportunities for the students, bridging the present to the future. The teacher provides a bridge to the world of knowledge and the students can actively choose which pathways they want to participate in. In this way, the teacher gives a lot of freedom to the students. The students, on the other hand, should become independent learners if they want to succeed in their learning journeys.

Not only does a teacher open up the doors of opportunities for the students but a teacher has a strategic position in inculcating values as well. If this is to succeed, a teacher should not only teach the values, but s/he also becomes a role model to his/her students. A teacher is a person of influence who never knows how much influence s/he can assert to his/her students. A teacher sometimes cannot see the results of teaching the values right away but, as a matter of fact, s/he has planted a seed in the students' minds. Producing students with good characters and values is the dream of every teacher.

More importantly, a teacher has a golden chance to create leaders of tomorrow. This seems to be a popular objective in most schools. Leaders should be 'created'. They are not born automatically as leaders. The best place to create them is the school.

Eventually, providing for the spiritual quotient (SQ) appears to be inevitable in the near future. This is likely to be the ultimate opportunity that education can bring to the students. Equipping the students with their high IQ and EQ is deemed insufficient recently. The trend of introducing SQ is getting more and more prevalent in each educational institution these days.

Apart from the aforementioned opportunities in the field of education, there are some challenges which we should be aware of as well.

The first challenge is quite a cliché, that is the ever-changing policies concerning the curricula, for example, wave the stability of education as a whole. Both teachers and students

become perplexed, being unable to complete a certain curriculum when suddenly it has changed drastically. The idea of internationalization seems to be the driving force in these tough competitions and uncertainties, which are consistently inconsistent.

Another challenge is how to cater to the different capabilities in a classroom. Not all students are the same. Some can grasp the concepts discussed in class easily, while others are grappling with the ideas of mastering the simplest theories available.

In addition to that, finding the right tool to measure one's accomplishments in education should be fostered. The right measurement determines the right results. If they are successfully achieved, the quality of education can be maintained to a certain level.

Last but not least, the race with technology has become a never-ending challenge. The need to keep up with the advances in technology should be carefully monitored. Otherwise, we will be left behind. The rise of e-Learning, for instance, has changed the educational landscape for the past few years. Many people are of the opinion that e-Learning is unquestionably the major 'mission critical' in education systems the world over, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

In conclusion, education is basically an exceedingly complex process. We have been struggling to improve it in the past few decades. Many things have been done for the betterment of our education system. Yet, the opportunities and the challenges, which have apparently outnumbered the opportunities, are still there to add to its complexity. As a result, we have to constantly think positively that the direction we are heading toward is right. We have to be optimistic. No matter what will happen, if we are to accomplish something in this area of education, we have to adhere to the belief that the heart of education is education of the heart.