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**The ROLE
and
FUNCTIONS
of the
TEACHER**

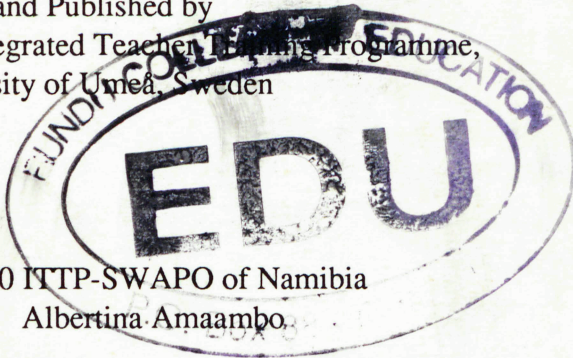
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The role and functions of the teacher

by Albertina Amaambo



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How a good teacher could be

I have worked as an untrained teacher in the SWAPO schools at the Namibia Education Centre (NEC), Kwanza-Sul, Angola, for four years where there are a number of teachers without teaching experience. Of course I tried with great effort to help the Namibian children to learn and gain knowledge, values and skills. During my teaching, I realised that teaching without experience and training is very difficult, therefore I needed to undergo a teacher training course and study how to be a successful and good teacher. This lack of teaching experience gave me an interest in learning more about the teaching profession. When I chose an area for deeper studies, "The role and functions of the teacher", felt natural for me. I wanted to know more about the teacher's responsibilities and also the concepts of what, how and when to teach. I wanted to know the characteristics of a good teacher and how a good teacher behaves towards children of different ages and with different problems in the community. I also wanted to develop good attitudes and help the children to learn more. To create a good learning environment must be the aim of every teacher.

I think these are the important factors affecting learning in our schools.

But, to avoid problems, we need to be very careful and serious in our work of bringing up children. We need to support our teachers with in-service programmes and the training of primary school teachers has to continue. The teachers need to learn how

to produce helpful teaching material and how to use them. Teachers who apply effective teaching methods, who are teaching with self-confidence and take initiative, will always contribute to a productive school environment and to co-operation with other teachers.

How I organised my work

I used different methods to find information about the role and functions of the teacher. I read books and compared the different ideas about the teacher. After I had compared the ideas, I formulated ten (10) questions for teachers, school administrators and other people in the Department of Education, and I observed some teachers in the classrooms.

Some of the questions were about what a good teacher needs to learn during his/her training, what characteristics a good teacher should have, and what a teacher needs to be able to teach in a free Namibia. "How can a teacher improve the learning conditions in the classroom?" for example. I made twenty questionnaires and handed them out. It was however difficult for me to get the necessary information. When I handed out my questionnaires, I did not receive all of them back. I got only ten instead of twenty. Some of the people had too much work to attend to and found it difficult to participate in the investigation. I decided to hand out questionnaires because I felt it would be better for the people to do it when it was suitable for them. The time was too short for me to call in persons for interviews. I still believe that the interview method would have been preferable. In

an interview I could have received clarifications of some of the answers.

Teacher and Teaching

When we talk of a teacher, we mean a person who passes on the ideas and knowledge to others and helps them to learn both in and outside the classroom. He is responsible for the children he teaches, and for the methods he uses and the content of the subject he teaches.

Teaching is something that takes place between two persons by sharing knowledge and ideas. We can as well describe teaching as the process that facilitates learning. In this process, the teacher is not really teaching the children but helps them to learn. Some methods often used in schools are called teacher-centred methods. In those methods, it is assumed that the teacher has the knowledge that the children have to learn. The method does not consider the pupils' experiences and knowledge. The method creates pupils that think that maybe their experiences and ideas are wrong and that the teacher must be right all the time.

When I first went to school, teachers used the "talk and chalk" method. In this kind of method, the teacher is most active during the lesson and the children usually sit and wait for the teacher to give the knowledge that they need to learn in school. This can be called a formal method. I noticed that children were learning for exams or tests only, they could not remember what the teacher had taught the previous day: they were passive during

the lessons.

"Child-centred education is the name applied to a philosophical approach to schooling that recognises the importance of matching the content and methods of children's learning to what is known of child development and the basic needs and characteristics of children.

Teacher-centred education is applied to forms of education in which the teacher dominates the learning process by determining what is taught, how it is taught, and the sequence and pace of the teaching. In teacher-centred education, the teacher exercises a major influence on the kind of education that is offered, while pupils have only a minor say in shaping their education." (Farrant, 1980)

During our teaching practice in Kwanza-Sul, we tried to use a language learning approach where children are more active in the classroom. We also tried to start out work from the children's reality. We discussed something the children could see either in the pictures or in reality. After the discussion carried out in mother tongue and English we wrote a text together, then the children drew something related to the discussion and the text.

The role and functions of the teacher:

Many authors have tried to find characteristics that could de-

scribe a good teacher. In the literature I found descriptions of these characteristics. In many ways, they correspond to my ideas about how a good teacher should be and with the ideas that were described by persons I have interviewed. Here is a short summary of Farrant's ideas about the good teacher.

The teacher should be able to take wise decisions and act without hesitation. The teacher should always show strong feelings of interest and admiration. He should be able to deal with difficulties. The teacher should give a chance to others as well as to himself. He should always contribute to any success that may be achieved, pay attention to and respect others. He should have the ability, power and right to control the pupils in the classroom, e.g. to prevent them from disturbing others during the school time. The teacher should be friendly, kind, sympathetic and understanding. He should establish trust and promote faithful and friendly relationship among others. He should have the ability to imagine and always take initiative in what is happening. The teacher should always persevere to overcome difficulties and take responsibility for the children he is teaching, to know their needs and consider their problems. He should act as a story teller in order to capture the children's imagination, motivating and making them interested in what he is doing.

The teacher acts as a controller in the class he teaches. He controls not only what the pupils do but when and what language they use in communication. But speech control is not all that important, for the teacher wants the pupils to learn the language by using it. The students should have a good chance to learn

without complete control from the teacher. That means that control should be limited sometimes during communicative activities. The teacher as a controller is therefore inappropriate in this situation.

The teacher is responsible for assessment, correction of students' errors and organisation of feedback. He should see how students perform and show what is incorrect, to enable the pupils to realise their mistakes and correct them. When mistakes are being made in class during the lesson, for instance, "he goed", the teacher should encourage the learners by saying, "Well, that's not very good. We don't say "he goed", but "he went".

The teacher should also give the pupils feedback, a response to their activities. There are two kinds of feedback. Content feedback is concerned with assessment of how well the students performed the activity rather than of language exercise. This can be described as the 'content' of a lesson. Assessments helps us to know if the pupils have learned what the teacher wanted them to learn. Form feedback tells the students how well they did in the use of language.

"The teacher should take great care not to make form feedback dominant after communication activities: Content feedback should usually come first and the teacher decides when form feedback is appropriate and when it is not." (Harmer 1983)

The teacher as an organiser is the most important and difficult role. He must give clear and understandable instructions about what is to be done to avoid conflict and confusion. This will be good for time saving so that more activities can take place during the lesson. The teacher should give instructions first before handing out the materials they are going to use. He gives a lead-in, instruction or demonstration and initiates and organises feedback later on.

The teacher needs to encourage the students to participate and give suggestions about how to proceed with the activities. He should also encourage them to ask questions. The teacher should take part in activities that involve simulation only. But the teacher should not instruct the children to work alone, while he sits or does other personal work. He must be together with them as a source of information.

"This will help the students improve the atmosphere in the class and give them chance to practise English with someone who speaks it better than they do. The teacher should be careful not to become dominant during the activities." (J. Harmer, 1983)

The teacher should know what is going on during the activities as a king of "walking resource centre". He should always be ready to help when needed, by giving information during individual writing, writing in pairs or in groups, discussions and planning. He should be present as a source of information that the students may need. In addition to these, the teacher is de-

must prepare termly, weekly and daily schemes of work according to the recommended guidelines. Lesson plans should be prepared to show the objectives, teaching procedures, the methods and teaching aids. Every teacher should do a follow up of every individual child's development and take care of the school materials. The teacher should respect time and school rules and regulations. He should make sure that his classroom is clean. He should attend inservice training and workshops and contribute to the production of work with other teachers.

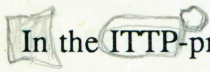
Lesson plans are very important for teachers because they guide him to what he is supposed to do, following the steps stated in it. Each and every teacher is therefore expected to plan his lessons. Here are some advantages of lesson plans.

- Lesson plans enable the teacher to think of what is to be taught and revised, to prepare the objectives, and to plan the material.
- They make the teacher think of how, what and when to teach.
- They make the teacher aware of what kinds of teaching aids are needed for the lesson.
- Lesson plans help the teacher to evaluate the pupils' learning after the lesson.

The teacher is expected to plan his teaching structures in connection with the pupils he teaches and know their abilities, interests and needs. He should think of the curriculum and plan according to what he is asked to teach. Pupils should be encouraged to be creative. The teacher should think of suitable materi-

als in and outside the school. Teaching material and methods should be considered as the most effective means to help the pupils to learn and develop their thinking.

The learning conditions in classrooms may be improved if teachers organise group activities and use teaching material. The teacher needs to know the individual problems in his class and give extra help to those who need it. He should change his teaching methods and choose the one that suits the learners. He should analyse and follow the pupils' development, by testing and diagnosing. Pupils need to be encouraged to participate during the lessons and read many different books. The teacher may summarize the content of the lesson after his teaching.

 In the ITTP-programme we have written our visions about the new teacher. Here is my vision.

The new teacher

The teacher needs to activate the pupils during his lessons to make learning more effective. He should be impartial and never favour some children before others. He is expected to be honest, humble, respectable and show interest in and love of the children he teaches. He should know the children's interests and needs and consider their learning problems in his teaching, if possible. He should be punctual all the time to give a good example to the pupils. It is important that he is able to change and

choose teaching methods that suit the learners. The teacher should use the spiral approach and child-centred methods rather than teacher-centred methods where he is the person who is active and talks during the lesson. He should plan his lessons according to the children's understanding and not start with a new topic until the children have the necessary pre-knowledge. He is not expected to know everything but to know how to get the necessary information to help the learners. That is how I think a new primary school teacher should be.

What teacher think about teachers

When I made the investigation, the test persons outlines their views about how a good teacher could be. When I asked them if they could remember the teacher that they liked most, many of them said they liked them because they had been happy and friendly with them. (Teachers who had patience, strong feelings and were helpful during the lessons) were also mentioned. They used effective teaching aids and methods and planned the lesson according to the learners' capacities. A good teacher was easy to approach in the sense that students were free to ask and discuss with him in and outside the classroom. He was clear when giving instructions about what to do or when teaching and always corrected the pupils' mistakes. Most of the time he encouraged the students to study hard and gave advice to both fast or slow learners. He followed up by giving homework and assignments to develop the students' interest in learning. He was self-confident, when conducting group and pair work.

The test persons said also that the teacher should not only know what to teach but whom, how and when they teach. This is because as a teacher, he has to master concepts and plan his lesson according to the level of each child's understanding. It is good when a teacher starts with what pupils know before he comes to unknown concepts. If he knows their individual differences he can plan extra work to help them. He should choose suitable methods and learning and teaching materials. He should try to use concrete material and pictures as much as possible. The classroom should be well organised to motivate and capture the children's minds and interest. The teacher should know the pupils' learning problems, their age and interests.

Conclusion

Since the aim of each and every individual teacher is to help the children to learn by instructing, guiding and advising them, I suggest that they start their lessons with an interesting activity to motivate the pupils and capture their minds, so that they listen to what he is doing. He should keep the pupils busy during the lesson, not let them wait for a long term before the lesson starts because children lose interest and feel bored very quickly.

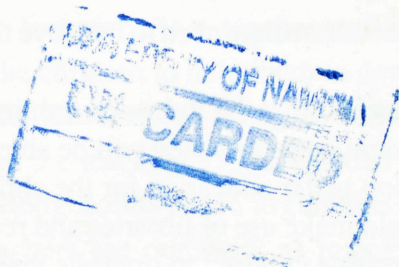
When teaching, the teacher must think of the children he is teaching, their level, age, capacity, interest etc. and the methods he should use when teaching a particular concept. It may be better if the teacher makes child-centred methods dominant because in these children are encouraged to discover things and

solve problems on their own. For instance, the teacher puts the children in groups and gives them work to produce things themselves. He may ask the children to make models with clay or cut papers and glue them together. The teacher should start his teaching from known concepts to unknown and from simple to more complex ones, meaning that the pupils can start to learn from what they see in the environment in which they live.

I believe that new active methods can improve the teaching and learning in a free Namibia. Inservice training for teachers could be continued so that they will be able to help each other and develop better education for the children we teach. Teachers can make use of libraries and resource centres more often to enable them to master their learning skills.

Report from my practical work

I started my practical work by making some posters with questions.



The role of the teacher

Picture of a teacher - Is this a good teacher?

- * Someone may be regarded as a good teacher if he fulfils his/her duties in accordance with SWAPO educational goals.
- * A good teacher is the one who has teaching experience with full responsibility and love of the children he teaches. The teacher is expected to be patient and impartial with the children, to be active and to encourage creative learning.

What is his/her aim in becoming a teacher? •

- * The main aim and objective of each and every teacher is to help the children around him/her to learn.
 - * This can be done through instructing and advising them to read many different books which will make the children interested in reading materials that inform them about what is going on in the world around.
- What methods is he expected to use to support the learning in Kwanza and in a free Namibia?
- * The teacher is expected to use active and constructive methods that suit the learners. He should be free to change methods according to the learners' level of understanding.

What is the immediate need to improve the learning in our centres?

- * I suggest that the inservice training of teachers should be continued so that they will be able to help each other and develop better education for the children we teach. Teachers could make use of libraries and resource centres more often to enable children to improve their learning skills.

I invited the teachers to come and discuss the role of the teacher at an inservice meeting. I put up posters, for the teachers to read in advance, and asked them to write their comments on one of the posters. During the inservice meeting we discussed the following questions about a good teacher!

Why are you a teacher or want to be one?

What do you expect from a good teacher?

What methods do you use to support learning in Kwanza and will you use in a free Namibia?

What are the immediate needs to improve the learning in our schools?

Can a teacher force children to learn by corporal punishment?

Do you think that the children will learn in the best way by reciting what the teacher says during a lesson?

What are the other ways for children to learn?

What do you mean by 'real learning'?

In the discussions teachers expressed the following ideas.

Teaching is an important and interesting job. Through it it is possible to help children to learn. As a teacher one needs to have a relationship with the children to help them to develop. In some developed countries, teachers are going down in value. They are not well paid and the teaching job is regarded as easy. Short working days and long holidays are arguments for low pay. Of course we as teachers see our work as important and valuable, and we have to fight those ideas with our professional

knowledge and selfconfidence.

A good teacher is expected to be punctual, friendly, cooperative and helpful. He should show a good example and be impartial with the children. He should organize well and let the children produce things and express themselves in many ways. A good teacher is responsible for the children as a parent or a guardian. The teacher is expected to be active, meaning that he should organize the lesson well, take initiatives, be involved and innovative in his work.

An active teacher is active before the lesson and plans suitable activities for all pupils for slow as well as quick learners. A good teacher tries to vary his methods and arranges group as well as individual work. It is no use to stand in front of the class and use chalk and talk methods. Children should be given a chance to think, create, judge for themselves and find facts on their own. They need to discover, investigate, analyze, criticize and report what they have found out.

A discussion arose around the statement: Children cannot be taught but they can be helped to learn.

Someone questioned this, saying: if children cannot be taught why are we teachers? There is a big difference between looking at pupils as resourceful and looking at them as empty containers.

Teaching material can be used to support learning. Concrete

material should be used as much as possible to help children to understand. It is necessary for a teacher to prepare lessons for both fast and slow learners. Experimenting is a method that supports active learning. Through experimenting, children learn to draw conclusions. During the discussion it was suggested that it might be better if there were separate schools for bright children and slow learners to avoid wasting of time for the quick ones. This suggestion brought out a lot of comments.

- We don't want our fast learners to act like bullies.
- Children should have the right to decide and select what they learn rather than to be like prisoners.
- The teacher can arrange so that the fast learners help the slow learners.
- What kind of pupils do we want to produce in our schools? Do we want equal schools for all children or do we want segregated schools?

It is important to observe and know the children's problems, what they know and what they don't know, and then plan the teaching from that information. We need to build more schools, train more teachers, and produce more books. The participants discussed what was most urgent and many had the opinion that it is most urgent to train more teachers.

As teachers we should never leave children with errors. We should help them to correct, so that they learn from the correction. The discussion about corporal punishment got a lot of speakers active. Some thought that punishment helps learning; others objected and said that would help pupils backwards. We

Questions:

1. Do you remember a teacher that you liked? Describe him/her.
2. What did he/she do that made you like him/her?
3. How do you feel about being a teacher?
4. What do you think a good teacher should learn during his teacher training?
5. What characteristics can you imagine that a teacher in a free Namibia should have?
6. What do you think a teacher should learn in his/her teacher training course to be prepared for teaching in a free Namibia?
7. Why must teachers not only know what to teach but also give careful consideration to who, how and when they teach?
8. How can a teacher improve the learning conditions for his pupils in the classroom?
9. How can a teacher evaluate his pupils?
10. What is wrong with the teaching that consist of chalk and talk?