LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH : ICEBREAKERS

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ABSTRACT

In my present paper I have tried to throw light on the learner-centered approach. I strongly believe that today we cannot use the traditional methods only. We want a classroom where students are active participants; where teacher is just a facilitator. Her job is to motivate students and bring 'life' in the class. It is possible with the technique called "icebreakers". It is a recent innovation in language teaching. I have explained the concept with its advantages. I have discussed the various activities which can be used in the class for promoting learning. It provides the same blend of reality and responsibility within a language context.

INTRODUCTION:

"We cannot really teach a language;we can only create conditions under which it will develop in the mind in its own way.",Von Humboldt.

The word 'pedagogy' comes from the Greek word '*paidagogia*', in which means '*paido*' means a child' and '*agos*'means to lead, literally translated as 'to lead the child'. Pedagogy can be defined as the art or science of teaching. Pedagogy not only includes issues like classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objective, and examinations but also honing the skills and knowledge of the pupils. It also thinks of various approaches, methods and techniques to facilitate the learning. An approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language teaching and learning. It describes the subject matter to be taught. A method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material. It follows the principle laid by an approach. Within any approach there can be several methods. A technique represents implementation; it is the actual implementation of a method in the classroom. It is a particular way of doing things to accomplish an immediate objective. We have approaches like Structural Approach and within this approach several methods emerged. E.g.audio-lingual method, direct Method. Today I think it's a high time to change our approach towards 'learners'. The center of a class should be a student. Therefore I strongly feel that the traditional methods and approaches should take a backseat now and paved a way for approaches like "learner-centered approaches". Hence the methods will be different.

How to create a warm ambience in the classroom has always been a great concern for the teacher. The teacher's job is to activate the behavior of the students. To motivate the students the teacher has to think of various techniques so that students are motivated to participate in the activity organized. If teacher's job is to transform the passive learner into an active learner or to improve the cognitive intelligence of the students or to direct their behavior toward a particular goal or to improve the performance of the students. It means if students are not internally motivated then situational motivation is needed.How do we feel when we ask students question and they didn't respond to us. We feel that we have failed in our job as a teacher. Making students participate in certain activity or task is the goal of the teacher or to bring about a change in the behavior of the students is the ultimate aim. Thus the importance of motivation is undeniable. When I say that

"I teach Priya English',

it means I know the language very well and I know Priya very well. Teacher's job is to facilitate the learning by motivating the students. Now, motivation is not an easy task. It is not just a matter of getting the students interested but making the students accept the reality of their functions.

Today, learner-centered approachdemand techniques like "Icebreaking". Earlier a good classroom was that classroom where one can have a pin-drop silence. But how can a language classroom be a quiet classroom. One can't learn a language in a vacuum. It's a skill. It is not a content subject like History or Geography. Skills can be developed through constant practice. A teacher has to make very student participate in the class. But in a language class ethnic groups grow together according to their sex, status and ability. There can be different groups within the class, which hampers the learning process. If this how classes are then learning is impossible and teacher is faced with a professional problem. If classrooms have problem like inter-rivaly group or students not co-operating with each other then the teacher need to spend time on this. A sort of 'ice' is formed in the class. To break the ice we need to think of indirect ways of it. First, let me explain what is a icebreaking method. The term 'ice breakers' comes from the 'break the ice', which comes from the ships called 'icebrakers' that are designed to break the ice in the arctic region. These ships make other ships to travel, an icebreaker helps to clear the way for learning by making the learners more comfortable. Icebreaking can occur whenever ice is formed. Students might continually sit in the same chair, mix with the same groups and hesitate to participate. And teacher too feels little helpless in such situation. Icebreakers help the teacher to plan activities which involves all students and demand the participation.It can break up the silences and

encourage a talk, debate, interaction, argument and agreement in the classroom. Icebreaking sessions are short warm-up activities. Teacher can thinkof activities that are related to the topic. It allows the student to focus on the topic.

Advantages of icebreaking techniques:

1. Teacher gets to know her class -
2. Students get to know one another
3. Breaking up of silences in the class
4. Boundaries disappear
5. Boosts the confidence of the students
6. Destroy the supremacy of the teacher
7. Fears tend to disappear
8. Shyness of the students can be broken.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Know your friend- Ask the students to form a pair. The teacher has to be careful that the pair is not of two friends but of acquaintances. This can be done by pairing two students who are born in the same month. Ask the students to collect information like background information, goals for future and so on . Ask one of them to introduce the other.

2. After hundred years- form a group of students and ask them to participate in a group discussion. A teacher can think of subjects like 'what will be the future of the earth after hundred years?' or even teacher can think of topics like technology/ social media after hundred years.

3. One day PM of a country- Ask students what they would like to do if they become PM of India. What will be the three different things in education they would like to change? Or have them discuss what things they would like change if they become the boss. This activity helm them realize others' desires and frustrations.

4. Note 10 unique things of your group- Ask the students to form a group and motivate them to find out 10 common things of the group member. It will surely generate interest among the student and boost a friendly ambience for the classmates. This activity will bring them closer and will promote teamwork.

5. Complete the sentence- To tickle the minds of the student teacher can ask the students to finish the sentence. If you want to introduce the students to each other you can simply ask

student to complete the following sentence:

I am in the class because……..

6. Tell me – teacher can actually ask students to come on the stage and share their ideas with the classmate. It boosts the confidence of the students.

7. Use cards- If you are dealing with new concept and want students to imagine the possibilities of the subject then distribute the cards in the class and ask each student to write his thoughts. Then ask students to exchange the cards and make them discuss whose thought is more close to the concept. Announce the person's name whose idea was closer to the concept.

8. The snowball activity- Ask students to write three things about themselves and then crumble them up so as to look like a snowball. Let them have a snowball fight with each other for a minute and ask them to grab a snowball and describe the person who wrote it.

CONCLUSION:

From the point of view of educational psychology and learning theory, the motivation arises through icebreakers provide comfortable atmosphere. Icebreakers are definitely effective ways of starting a class. A teacher who is just a facilitator can help students to overcome their fear. Their talk is not just a casual talk but it is related to duties. Teacher is able to design the activity which bridges the gap between the teacher and students and promote learning. Teacher plays an important role in it because s/he has to choose an activity, has to introduce it effectively and need to monitor the language. Icebreakers should get a prominent place in our class. I believe that these activities not only look after language but also social, behavioral skills of the students.Hence, the monitoring includes social, behavioral and communicative skills of the individual participants.

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