

CHOICE-CENTERED CLASS ROOM - A CASE STUDY

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Abstract : In this paper, the concepts of values clarification and personalizing education have been briefly presented. These concepts can advantageously be made use of in developing a choice - centred (free-choice) class room management style. Several strategies and games have been reported for developing such a style. The application of the Gantt chart for scheduling and process control has been proposed which can help institute a learning centre, a product of the choice-centred class room. In a learning centre, students act as autonomous and self-directed learners. This has been highlighted through a case study. The concept of choice-centred class room it is believed, can prove an interesting and useful one to the teachers and educationists.

1.0 INTRODUCTION :

The cardinal objectives of any education system are to develop generations having enduring values of life in society, thereby, yielding peace and tranquillity and quality among man, and to instil among students how to live to the right values of life and bring the entire generation to enjoy greater quota of intellectual poise, mental stability, health, social happiness and national wellbeing ^(1,2.). In the education system, the teacher is not expected only to work as a catalyst transmitting the knowledge information from several sources, like books, case studies etc, to the students, but also he is expected to instil the values among the

students. Values help us to establish the purpose and direction to our lives, values, therefore, need to be clear, consistent and carefully chosen. Values can be considered as the things for which we stand or otherwise. If we lack values or our values are confused and complicated, our lives, as a result of a logical / physical consequences, turn into troublesome or frustrated ones. Personalising education can help students to get motivated and to be more respective for learning values. personalizing education, in other words, emphasizes on students' personal growth (development) rather than their intellectual development. Thus, values, clarification can play a key role in effectively instituting personalising education. In fact, the ancient Indian "Gurukul" education system can be considered as an education system encompassing both values clarification and personalizing education. (2)

2.0. VALUES CLARIFICATION :

Values clarification (VC) does not mean teaching students right and wrong values. In fact it helps students to prize and act upon their own freely chosen values. Thus VC is a continuing process with the help of which student can arrive at their values rather than the contents of these values[3]. The process of VC can be made more effective by helping students to learn to [3] :

- choose their values freely;
- choose their values alternatives;
- choose their values after weighing the natural and logical consequences of each alternative;
- prize and cherish their values;
- share and publicly affirm their values;
- act upon their values and
- act upon their values repeatedly and consistently.

The process of VC can successfully be implemented if students are allowed to move gradually from no-choice centre to free choice centre class room teaching. This can be achieved by adopting the steps listed below :

1. Personalizing human relations :

Punishment, a primary means of controlling students' behaviour,

must be discarded. A more humanistic approach needs to be developed. This can be achieved by instituting such means as climate of trust, acceptance, open communication etc..

2. Personalizing goals :

This should be with minimal conflicts between teacher's and students' individual goals. The process of personalizing goals helps individual students to develop and clarify their values, purposes and goals.

3. Personalizing curriculum :

It helps students making their knowledge and cognitive skills serve their values, purposes and goals.

4. Personalizing classroom organisation and management :

This can immediately help students to facilitate their learning and personal growth.

Several classroom teaching strategies and games have been reported for achieving the goals of personalizing education ^[3]. Especially, in the higher education, personalizing classroom organisation and management style, based on the preceding three steps mentioned above can be found to be more beneficial.

3.0 CHOICE-CENTRED CLASS ROOM : THE CONCEPT :

A choice centred classroom reflects a personalising classroom organisation and management style. However, students' and teacher's needs and goals should dictate the classroom organisation and management procedures and not the other way round. Such a classroom management needs to be flexible and open for continual change(s). The flexible component of this management style recognizes the students' different skills and their levels of dependents on teachers. A choice centred classroom inherits a "do-it-yourself" values centre. It is humanistic nature. It permit students to pace, select, initiate design and evaluate their learning process. It helps students to be self directed (autonomous) learners. Thus, the goal of teaching students "to learn how to learn" can be achieved. Students are, thus, gradually evolved from no choice to free choice classroom management style. In short, a choice centred class-

room helps students to ⁽³⁾ :

- Know "what is worth knowing?"
- Select from alternatives & examine consequences of their acts.
- Build self-confidence turing them to be less of pawn and more of an origin.
- Learn to take up responsibility
- Maintain learning pace ; and
- Build healthy and sound environment for search of values.

However, introducing a choice - centred classroom management style right away from the very start without exercising the due precautions can prove a fruitless exercise. It may create chaos and mismanagement in a class. The journey from no choice to free choice classroom teaching needs to be undertaken carefully. This can be achieved through ⁽³⁾ :

- Teacher designed and directed learning;
- Student self paced learning;
- Student self selected learning ;
- Student self designed and initiated learning ; and
- Student free choice learning.

The concepts mentioned above, if judiciously applied, can develop a very good learning centre. It converts a classroom into the individualise one. The individualized classroom basically encompasses such components as selection of activities, pace, location, movement, interaction, correction and record keeping. Evidently, VC is an essential part of every activity, task, learning centre etc.. It is an essential and integral part of the total curriculum. In order to achieve the desired results through such learning centres, several tools and techniques such as goal sheets, skill grids, peer teaching, group learning, community meetings, mini workshops, group dynamics etc., have been reported ⁽³⁾ . The author has been experimenting the choice centred classroom organisation and management style since the last few years. Some of the major features and outcomes of his experimentation have been illustrated through a case study in the next section.

4.0 The Case Study :

The major features and outcomes of the case study are presented in the

following sub-sections.

4.1 Details of the Class :

The relevant class data is presented below.

- Class : BE(Mechanical) final year
- Class Strength 56 Male Students in the age group 20-22 yrs.,
- Duration of study Two semesters of the academic year 1988-89
- Subjects Taught **First Semester :**
 1. Production Technology (Theory - 3 Hrs/ week)
 2. Production Technology (Practical - 2 Hrs/week
Batch size : 14 students)
 3. Seminar & Project Work (4 Hrs /week;
Batch size : 8 Students)
 4. Computer Programming
(Theory - 1 Hr./week)
Second Semester :
 1. Operations Research
(Theory : 3 hrs/week)
 2. Operations Research (Practical: 2 Hrs./week)
Batch Size : 14 students)
 3. Seminar and Project Work (8 Hrs./week)
Batch Size 5 students)

4.2 Teacher's Action Plan Before Implementation :

The following planned activities were undertaken as essential prerequisite before introducing the choice-centred classroom teaching.

- The concepts of values clarification and personalising education alongwith relevant strategies and games were studied.
- Enough resource material, like text books classnotes transparencies, slides, and others were collected, kept ready and their lists were prepared for the students' use.
- Teaching planning for the entire semester was done.
- Four short sessions each of one hour duration were held for the

students in the beginning of the first semester making them aware of the areas, like, group dynamics, community meeting, peer teaching, mini-workshops, planning, execution and evaluation techniques. Also the concept of Gantt Chart was explained in detail. ⁽⁴⁾.

Four mini classes (*batches in case of practicals) were designed and for each mini class (batch) a leader was unanimously elected by the group member only.

The planning of teaching done already by the author was discussed among the groups and necessary modifications accounting students' pace etc. were carried out.

Each group was delegated enough responsibility for decision making in respect of their activities planning, execution and evaluation thereof. And each group member was required to submit one copy of the designed Gantt chart to the author keeping one copy with the member. The author was required to keep close liaison with the groups during their planning, execution and evaluation stages so as to enable him to extend counseling and necessary guidance as and when required by the groups.

Enough responsibility was retained by the author so as to enable him to deal with the unexpected situations and to monitor the progress of one and all groups.

A close feed back loop was designed for intergroup and intergroup interactions and that for between each group and the other.

4.3 Results and Discussion :

Several problems were encountered during the first semester because majority of the students were coming from the low achieving groups. Their dependency on teachers, as a consequence of earlier teaching techniques, was considerable. Moreover, pace differences amongst the students were remarkable. Nevertheless, the low achieving groups posed really a hard problem. Only with mutual consistent consultation, these groups fell in line after a

Subject : Production Technology (Theory)

Class : B.E. (Mechanical)

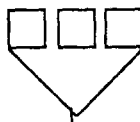
Name : A B C

Roll No. : BE(M) : 51

Planning Horizon : 1st Semester 1988-89.

Elapsed Time : 1st Week of July '88 to IV week of October '.

Date of Review



Period :	July				August				September				October			
Week	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
Activity No.																
1.	[*****]															
2.					[*****]				[*****]				[*****]			
					_____ D D D C D _____											
3.													[*****]			

*

Legends :

'C' : Commencement of an activity

'J' : End of an activity

'D' : Delay (causes of delay : Sickness, out of stn., etc.)

'*' : Planned activity

_____ : Actual performance

1. : Collection of source materials and completing the first chapter of the syllabus.

2. : Completing Chapters 2,3,4 and 5,6, and 7

3. : Revision of the portion.

Fig.1 : Gantt chart for scheduling and progress control for Production Technology (Theory) subjects (4)

period of about two months. Obviously, the author could not proceed beyond the self-selected learning stage in the first semester. The students were motivated through local industrial visits. Technical film shows allowing them to handle independently, the equipments, like, single spindle automatics machine, capstan lathe, personal computer. However, in the case of handling equipments, the author used to demonstrate the operations on these equipments, then allow the students to handle these equipments in his presence to build self-confidence in them, and finally used to withdraw his assistance so as to enable the student to handle these equipments independently.

The classroom teaching methodology was also gradually changed. At the end of each teaching / practical session, students used to take a review of the portion covered in the class and the author used to highlight the portion to be covered in the next session. In the beginning of each session, the author hardly used to engage the whole class for about 15-20 minutes, and then the mini-classes were allowed to function independently. Each group was allowed to interact with other groups only after reaching their target. These groups had already designed their subjectwise Gantt Charts showing scheduling and progress of their activities (see Figure 1). The groups were asked to undertake review at the end of each week, and to discuss their evaluations intergroup and intergroupwise fashion. All the groups used to report to the author regarding their performance every fortnight at an appointed hour. At times, an extensive joint discussion used to be held regarding the lacuna, if any, and review of the group's planning, execution and evaluation methods. Just before the commencement of the second semester, the examination results in respect of the first semester subjects listed elsewhere were discussed in the class. It was observed that the results in respect of the Production Technology theory paper were not as per the student's and author's expectations. The class pointed out the following probable reasons for the state of the affairs :

- The nature of the paper was ambiguous.
- The duration of the paper (three hours) was insufficient to attempt all the questions.
- The results, when compared with the last four years' results of the college and with the results of some other colleges affiliated

to the University, were found to be statistically satisfactory.

However, the University results in respect of the other examinations, namely, Computer Programming, Seminar and Production Technology orals were excellent.

As mentioned above, this review was taken one week earlier before the official commencement of the second semester utilizing three sessions, each session being of the one hour duration. This had helped students to reconsider and review the strategies adopted in the first semester, juts to know either the shortfalls if any, or otherwise in the activities planning, execution and evaluation done earlier, and to improve further so as to turn the teaching process into a choice-centred class room in the ensuing semester.

The students then prepared the detailed Gantt charts subjectwise and took every care to ward off the evils faced in the preceding semester. In a span of one month, the mini-classes were marching from students self-designed and initiated learning to students free-choice learning. The author could get hardly any time during the months of January 1989 and February 1989, because of his official engagements out of the station to have enough rapport with the class. However, the class was closely following the schedule and maintaining the progress. On his coming back to the stage, the author again conducted an informal session in March 1989 to see into the state of affairs the class had. The author had found that almost on all fronts the mini-classes had paced themselves as per the designed Gantt charts. However, almost all the mini-classes were finding difficulty in solving numerical problems on Operations Research topics, and one mini-batch of project work was lagging behind for want of advanced materials on certain areas and for want of dBase III package. These groups were supplied the requisite materials in two weeks and they took off. During the remaining period of two months, the groups did not encounter any noteworthy setback or difficulty. The theory and practicals were satisfactorily completed ten days before the close of the semester.

The results in respect of the Operations Research theory paper and oral, and that of Project Work were excellent. One of the students scored 95 marks out of 100 in the Operations Research paper, and stood first in

this subject in the University.

5.0 Conclusion :

This paper has briefly presented the essentials of the two concepts, namely, values clarification and personalising education. It has been pointed out that the ancient "Gurukul" education system in India can be considered as a combination of these two concepts. The concept of choice-centred class room teaching has been briefly presented. A case study carried out for a choice-centred (free choice) class room teaching has been highlighted. The duration of this case study is of two semesters. The strategies adopted, problems faced and the results obtained have been presented. The approach has been shown to be reasonably acceptable and beneficial for the students' personal growth. However, the success of such a teaching style is entirely dependent upon the interest and innovative abilities of a class teacher. This is perhaps one of the greatest limitations of this style. However, by organizing the appropriate teachers' training programmes in the areas of values clarification and personalized education, the choice-centred (free choice) class room teaching (as against the existing no-choice class room teaching style), it is believed can be advantageously introduced in the higher education system.



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