

HR in the Classroom

Jennifer Yamin-Ali

There is no doubt that the human resource in the learning experience is an asset to both teacher and learner. As learning becomes more and more an online experience for many, there is much discussion in academic circles about the value of the human element in teaching and learning. One of the compromises of e-learning is what is known as “blended learning,” which gives student and teacher the opportunity to combine the online experience with “face-to-face” interaction.

The teacher and the students constitute the basic human resources available within an average lesson. How can such resources be maximised even without the use of technology and other costly apparatus?

Let us begin with the teacher. In local classrooms across Trinidad and Tobago I have witnessed teachers’ talents in action. Some that have been dormant have come to life during the teaching practice component of their teacher education programme, while others seem to have kept teachers sane for their entire career. It is in this sense that the teaching profession easily enables one to be true to one’s nature, and to demonstrate or develop traits and gifts that may be enriching to others and to oneself. Perhaps it is for this reason that, in reminiscing, some lawyers, bankers, and business persons who had initially joined the labour force as teachers say that their teaching days represented their most satisfying professional experience.

I applaud teachers who use drumming to create rhythm to accompany student repetition or to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge. The drum is the teacher’s table. The rhythmic practice is thus able to engage students’ attention and interest, while at the same time act as an aid to memory. Musical ability is a vehicle through which new material can be introduced and practised. Apart from using a musical instrument, many teachers use their voices to create melodies in a lesson.

Art and craft are other media through which many teachers present concepts and invite students to participate in the learning experience. They are strategies that come easily to some and also help to create context in the lesson. One of the more common examples of teachers’ artistic talent is the creation of charts. For those who are computer literate, there is often a practical blend of computer-generated graphics and handcrafted elements. The novice teacher, however, has to be wary of an imbalance in the time spent on creating these “works of art” and the time spent on developing a sensible lesson plan.

A personality that embodies interest, enthusiasm, charisma, and liveliness can also be an irreplaceable asset in a teaching/learning situation. More often than not, expressiveness—both facial and vocal—is one of the essential qualities of an effective teacher. Positive facial expression and tone can aid in comprehension, and can be an invitation to a student to participate in a lesson in a variety of ways. A teacher who is sensitive to situations or is emotionally intelligent is also skilled in recognising and maximising a “teaching moment.” Such a teacher can successfully integrate academic subject matter with health

and family life issues, thus creating more meaningful experiences for students in their classroom.

Students account for the other major human resource in a classroom. Their talents and personalities must be in harmony with the teachers' efforts if learning is to take place. What, then, do students have to offer in an average classroom? Whether it is attention-seeking behaviour or true acting ability, some students' ability to perform for a small audience is a resource that every teacher can count on to make a lesson interesting. This resource may be used to effect role-plays, dramatisations, demonstrations, and to enhance instructive game playing.

The affective domain of learning is a resource not to be underestimated. Generally, students want to please, even though they may not know how and their actions may convey the opposite message. If teachers design tasks that are student friendly and which include some objectives (even unstated) that are attainable by any student, it is likely that students will experience a feeling of achievement in any lesson. Students' boredom is an indication that the teacher has to redesign some element of the delivery of the lesson.

To be able to utilise and incorporate students' humour, characters, and experiences in lessons requires not only skill, but also cleverness and the willingness to draw upon any resource that would enrich the classroom experience for both teacher and student. The wise teacher efficiently harmonises all the available human resources in a classroom.

School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine