Abstract

Teachers play a very important role in the lives of their students. Their ability to engage the learner has at times been described as a continuum with facilitative teachers achieving greater student gains over their controlling non-responsive counterparts (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman & Ryan, 1981). This facilitation is best accomplished by understanding student background experiences which result in instructional communications that acknowledge and value students’ sociocultural backgrounds. This type of diagnostic information is accessible to the teacher through a structured problem-solving activity called the LIBRE Model, an acronym for: L – listening, I – identifying an issue, B – brainstorming, R – reality testing, and E – encouraging student investment in self and self-managed skills (Guerra, 2001). The LIBRE technique provides key information about how to the student defines personal “worldviews” and engagement in processing a problem.

Introduction

Teachers have an unfathomable influence on students. Whether intentional or not, this influence extends beyond instructional prerogatives in executing curricular and accountability mandates. Schools provide multiple opportunities for learning how to think, self-regulate, and evaluate knowledge. The highly skilled teacher recognizes this and develops instructional methods and deliveries that deliberately target these objectives. While traditional teacher (and some teacher training) models establish teachers as sole-source, didactic educator, teacher preparation paradigms have more recently shifted to teachers as facilitating collaborators, working with students toward the curricular goal. This paradigm in teacher training encourages identification of student needs from a shared, strength-based perspective to allow opportunities for students to learn the value of meaningful critical thinking. For teacher preparation programs, this focus means providing teachers-in-training with opportunities to learn and develop skills for assisting students with (1) self-assessment, (2) personal needs analysis, (3) prediction of consequence, (4) strategy development, evaluation, selection, and execution, and (5) evaluation.
Theoretical Framework

Learning is "an enduring change in behavior or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience" (Schunk, 2004). Learning requires the appropriate external as well as internal "conditions" to occur. Students who are incapable of moving beyond social or environmental pressures will not likely be able to gain much from instruction. The LIBRE approach is based on integration of learning theory, Bandura's (1986) dynamic triadic reciprocity, and the opportunity to teach metacognitive, self-regulated critical thinking. During the LIBRE "dialogue," the individual organizes internal values and external press to determine goals and objectives and select behavioral approaches likely to achieve those self-selected ends. In light of the problem-solving activity and respect of not only the process, the LIBRE model can facilitate current and future behavior change. A person who actively interacts with and responds to the structured self reflection and determination experiences positive (self-enhanced) learning and a shift in environmental (context) views. An important generalization that is possible from successful and engaged experience with LIBRE is that challenges and barriers are common; do not necessarily reflect an inherent, unalterable personal trait and that internal resources available for problem-solving are augmentable with external resources including other people. With experience, environmental challenges and the resultant debilitating personal interpretations can be re-contextualized as normal and surmountable and a sense of self-efficacy can be developed and strengthened.

Teaching complex and abstract material within a problem-solving schema facilitates learning (e.g., Chen & Mo, 2004). Provision of supportive problem-solving cues assists with both problem-solving and the development of skills; the prompts encouraging the individual's self-confidence related to the probability of success (Hagen & Weinstein, 1995). In as much as the LIBRE protocol serves as a facilitated, self-directed process for problem solving, it engages the individual with familiar language and support. Ultimately, the individual is able to reflect and manage personal goal setting, action planning and behavior change by internalizing the protocol.

The LIBRE model is designed to assist individuals with achieving a practical, applied level of self-awareness. The model offers a mechanism for managing unanticipated challenge either from curricular expectation or working with others. The LIBRE model has learning implications for both the teacher and student; the more skilled one becomes at knowing self, managing language and the value of assisting others toward a positive goal, the more skilled one becomes in facilitating positive change and in resolving conflicts. In application, the model provides a structured process to guide the individual toward positive change without unduly attending to individual deficits. The teacher remains "present" with the student and provides only prompts to encourage the student's exploration of options to the self-identified concern. Students who experience positive results from personally developed, manageable
behavior or in the capacity to behave in an active or other forms of experience are appropriate external as well as internal incapable of moving beyond social or able to gain much from instruction. In the learning theory, Bandura’s opportunity to teach metacognitive, the LIBRE “dialogue,” the individual to determine goals and objectives to achieve those self-selected ends. In regard of not only the process, the future behavior change. A person who is the structured self-reflection and free-enhanced) learning and a shift in ant generalization that is possible from LIBRE is that challenges and barriers inherent, unalterable personal trait and problem-solving are augmentable with. With experience, environmental personal interpretations can be role and a sense of self-efficacy can be rial within a problem-solving schema 04). Provision of supportive problem-solving and the development of skills; aid’s self-confidence related to the (sin, 1995). In as much as the LIBRE acted process for problem solving, it language and support. Ultimately, the personal goal setting, action planning protocol.

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The LIBRE Model

The LIBRE problem-solving model (the Spanish word “LIBRE” means free) was initially developed as a problem-solving activity via a structured, facilitated problem-solving dialogue in a counseling setting (Guerra, 2001). However, it is presented here as a potential approach for “teaching” problem-solving in both teacher training and K-12 classroom settings. The approach name is based on an acronym made up of steps used to address problems: Listening, Identifying the most predominant concern, Brainstorming options, Reality testing each of the identified options and Encouragement. As applied in an educational setting, the approach is designed to organize and sequence component problem solving skills (i.e., self-assessment, personal needs analysis, prediction of consequences, strategy development, process evaluation, selection and execution, and outcome evaluation) resulting in a framework which provides both a mutually referring context which enables a conceptual understanding of each component as well as a working plan for addressing actual problems.

The LIBRE model uses a problem-solving framework and begins with the teacher providing a “safe” space for communication. In other words, the student is allowed non-judgmental freedom to speak. The process proceeds through a series of open-ended questions designed to prompt the individual’s thinking from problem to plan, moving to more abstract or sophisticated solution options. Finally, the problem-solver is encouraged to reality-test options, develop plans, and self-encourage. This process parallels “real life” learning, and development occurs within safe parameters; ground rules establish the boundaries of the dialogue. The process is linked to a social construct rather than purely individual initiatives. As in real life and in conjunction with outcome, this problem-solving and decision-making has an impact on self-esteem and self-efficacy. The LIBRE process is intended to provide the responding individual with a non-judgmental facilitator who guides the individual through a process that is non-threatening and straightforward. The experience, regardless of problem resolution, is one that is likely to be easily internalized and easy to negotiate without assistance after the first time (Guerra, 2005).
The LIBRE model is designed to build individual capacity to speak, listen, think, problem-solve, evaluate and develop a personalized plan of action through guided supportive steps. The teacher (facilitator) introduces the new active listening behaviors, and listening is introduced as a valued element. The student is given the freedom to vent appropriate/inappropriate feelings within the safe environment. As the student and teacher dialogue, a new environment is established (Table 1. LIBRE Ground Rules). The facilitator begins to re-state the concerns using “non-loaded” language. The problem is identified, the focus shifts to resolving the identified concern. The dialogue continues with an open-ended questions posed by the teacher, “What can be done to address the identified problem?” The brainstorming continues until all possible options have been identified. The teacher then guides the student to reality-test consequences. In assuming the various options identified, the student begins to picture what would happen if steps were taken. The individual processes each identified option. This process continues until the best solution is reached. Finally, encouraging words are offered and the session closes with a review of the problem-solving process. The social exchange concretely demonstrates the value of the person by separating the individual from the problem, focusing on the problem while assisting the individual in processing the concern in a non-affective/non-judgmental fashion. Decision-making skills are modeled/taught and the individual’s potential to process conflict in the future is maximized by the positive affirming communication.

Table 1. LIBRE Ground Rules

1. **Respect** of all persons involved with the LIBRE activity. Maintain goodwill with the goal of assisting the individual(s) in a respectful manner that neither demeans nor embarrasses.
2. **Safety** in the setting offers the individual a time to explore the resolution of the identified problem(s). The LIBRE facilitator/teacher affords the individual a relaxed secure environment, protection from oppression often associated with diversity.
3. **Confidentiality** to allow the individual the opportunity to process difficult feelings without losing face.
4. **Independence** of thought and action. Although the process is a sequential and programmed approach, within the boundaries of that guide and the limits of the rules, “anything goes.” This is intended to facilitate internalization, generalization and development of automaticity. Teachers’ opinions and thoughts are strictly limited to implementing the approach and “enforcing” the rules.
Initial Examination of the LIBRE Problem-Solving Model

Preliminary clinical examination of the efficacy and effectiveness of the LIBRE model has resulted in successful problem-solving with various multicultural populations, children, adolescents in transition to adulthood, and older adults. The LIBRE model has been used with rural community adolescents, at-risk populations and public housing facility residents (Guerra, 2005). Experience suggests application of the model may take as little as 30-45 minutes, though with younger or less sophisticated individuals the process may take longer. Adolescent students have reported that it is almost like playing a game as the person transfers life challenges into a rule based, self-defined linear strength-based process. The process has been applied in counseling, teaching, advising and classroom settings. Clinical observations and participant comments strongly support the internalization of the process and its application to new problem situations after the initial interaction.

The LIBRE model is based on motivational, social, developmental, problem-solving, and cognitive theory. The LIBRE trained teacher considers Maslow's hierarchy of needs in providing motivational incentive and in order to assure the student is in a "safe" space. Problem solving instruction is organized and presented incorporating Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (scaffolding from a place of experience) and Bandura's social cognitive modeling including notions of vicarious reinforcement. The complexity of human development theory is considered with this application, the model building on motivated human cognitive and social facets of interpersonal exchange for the complex and critical task of problem solving. The zone of proximal development is foundational in the structure of active listening and encouraging prompts.

The student learns to listen to his/her needs, to vent (if necessary), explore and create a plan to change what is known, and identify what needs to be learned. The teacher facilitates and encourages healthy exploration with an awareness of the student's prior experience and an "eye" to future potential. The student experiences self-awareness, self-control, and self-directed problem-solving rather than teacher- or other authority-centered direction.

Conclusion

The LIBRE Model incorporates basic conversation while capitalizing on the social cognitive components involved with an interpersonal exchange. The student is valued and engaged. The individual is given safe space to tell his/her story and experiences acceptance and respect. Moreover, this experience can become foundational in setting a framework for future problem-solving which can be utilized for academic as well as personal challenges. Teachers and teacher educators have a responsibility to prepare their students for future challenges beyond the mere acquisition of detail or formulaic approaches. Perhaps one of the most important of those responsibilities is to teach basic
problem-solving skills and decision-making. The LIBRE technique provides an easily learned, easily accessible process for engaging in that process, providing teacher feedback and support for active student learning.

References


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