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ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN AN ESP CLASSROOM

Roles determine the relationship between the teacher and the student in the language classroom, and both are crucial for the learning process to be effective. The effectiveness of the study process is determined by the ESP teacher awareness of students' needs. University students need to get prepared for lifelong learning; they have their own needs and wishes in learning a language. Therefore, one of the principal roles of the ESP teacher is carrying out a needs analysis. Practice shows that analyses of students' needs help the teacher to design and/or upgrade the syllabus.

Designing a course and writing teaching materials are other ESP teacher roles which involve choosing available materials and adapting materials when published material is not suitable. Collaboration with subject teachers when preparing materials for students is characteristic for an ESP teacher as well.

Besides being a planner, the teacher is also an organiser of learning tasks. "The end purpose is to make it easier for the participants to work and learn together. It is ... important that such organising should be done to meet the requirements of the learners rather than for administrative convenience or for an easy life for the teacher" (Rogers 1996:193).

Eventually, the teacher is an evaluator of courses and teaching materials designed because they should meet students' needs, interests, and language skill level. Besides, both the teacher and the students are evaluators of learning: "The teacher will share the activity with student participants so that they may become critically self-reflective on their own learning" (Rogers 1996:200).

The ESP teacher is not the primary knower of the carrier content of the material, students may know more about the content. The teacher uses this students' knowledge of the content in order to generate genuine communication in the

classroom. Willingness to be flexible and to take risks is one of the keys to success in ESP teaching.

When learners see themselves as active participants, the teacher role is that of facilitator of learning, whose task is to arrange students into small groups and give them a shared task which is not difficult. What is difficult is to let these groups function without the teacher. In a learner-centred approach the teacher role as a facilitator is of primary importance. McGill and Beauty (1993) define the role of facilitator “as one of helping the group to form more quickly and more effectively, to create an environment of safety in which people can explore relationships with others in the group”.

Being a part of the learning process, the teacher is also a member of the group. This role of the teacher is of great importance as he becomes “a model of learning for the student participants” (Rogers 1996:198). Kidd (1973) stresses that being a member of the group means that the teacher himself is a learner: “if the teacher has lost his capacity for learning, he is not good enough to be in the company of those who have preserved theirs” (1973:303).

The teacher is no longer the only person who is responsible for the learning process. Students and teachers have a shared responsibility for setting goals, planning, selecting materials, assessing, etc. Students become actively involved in the learning process; the role of the teacher is as an encourager of students. Creating conditions in which students are able to learn is of primary importance.

Nowadays, the university language classroom is characterized by the replacement of traditional teacher-fronted models of learning by learner-centred models in which the learner is central to the learning process and cooperates rather than competes with the other learners.

Therefore, university language teachers should know innovative teaching methods and techniques in order to choose and use the most effective approaches and tasks relevant to students’ level, needs and interests in order to help them be competitive in the constantly changing and demanding job market.