THE 7 ROLES OF A TRAINER IN THE 21ST CENTURY
The 7 Roles of a Trainer in the 21st Century:

By Nola Adams for Eton Institute

It is clear that the 21st century classroom needs are very different from the 20th century ones. In the 21st century classroom, trainers are facilitators of participant learning and creators of productive classroom environments, in which attendees can develop the skills they might need at present or in future to enhance their personal and professional prospects.

Are you getting 21st century training? When you are considering booking or paying for training, think about the type of training you normally receive:

- In which roles is the trainer often involved?
- Are there any roles in which they have less experience?
- Are there any new roles you would love to see them try in the future?

However, before we begin to understand the evolving role of a teacher or trainer, consider some of the most popular teacher roles. Harmer, J. states that ‘it makes more sense to describe different teacher roles and say what they are useful for, rather than make value judgments about their effectiveness.’ So here are some of the most common trainer roles:

**Trainer Roles:**

1. The Controller
2. The Prompter
3. The Resource
4. The Assessor
5. The Organizer
6. The Participant
7. The Tutor

Most teachers or trainers take on a variety of roles within the classroom. Which roles have you experienced?

- **The Controller:** The teacher is in complete charge of the class, what students do, what they say and how they say it. The teacher assumes this role when new language is being introduced and accurate reproduction and drilling techniques are needed.

In this classroom, the teacher is mostly the center of focus, the teacher may have the gift of instruction, and can inspire through their own knowledge and expertise, but does this role really allow for enough participant talk time? Is it really enjoyable for the learners? There is also a perception that this role could have a lack of variety in its activities.
• **The Prompter:** The teacher encourages students to participate and makes suggestions about how students may proceed in an activity. The teacher should be helping students only when necessary.

When learners are literally ‘lost for words’, the prompter can encourage by discreetly nudging students. Students can sometimes lose the thread or become unsure how to proceed; the prompter in this regard can prompt but always in a supportive way.

• **The Resource:** The teacher is a kind of walking resource center ready to offer help if needed, or provide learners with whatever language they lack when performing communicative activities. The teacher must make her/himself available so that learners can consult her/him when (and only when) it is absolutely necessary.

As a resource the teacher can guide learners to use available resources such as the internet, for themselves, it certainly isn’t necessary to spoon-feed learners, as this might have the down side of making learners reliant on the teacher.

• **The Assessor:** The teacher assumes this role to see how well students are performing or how well they performed. Feedback and correction is organized and carried out.

There are a variety of ways we can assess learners, the role of an assessor gives trainers an opportunity to correct learners. However, if it is not communicated with sensitivity and support it could prove counter-productive to an attendee’s self-esteem and confidence in learning the target language.

• **The Organizer:** Perhaps the most difficult and important role the teacher has to play. The success of many activities depends on good organization and on the students knowing exactly what they are to do next. Giving instructions is vital in this role as well as setting up activities.

The organizer can also serve as a demonstrator, this role also allows a teacher to get involved and engaged with learners. The teacher also serves to open and neatly close activities and also give content feedback.

• **The Participant:** This role improves the atmosphere in the class when the teacher takes part in an activity. However, the teacher takes a risk of dominating the activity when performing it.
Here the teacher can enliven a class; if a teacher is able to stand back and not become the center of attention, it can be a great way to interact with learners without being too overpowering.

- **The Tutor:** the teacher acts as a coach when students are involved in project work or self-study. The teacher provides advice and guidance and helps students clarify ideas and limit tasks.

This role can be a great way to pay individual attention to a student. It can also allow a teacher to tailor make a course to fit specific student needs. However, it can also lead to a student becoming too dependent or even too comfortable with one teacher and one method or style of teaching.

Now that we’ve had a chance to look at some of the variety of roles let’s see how we can adopt these into a real classroom activity/task:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY/TASK</th>
<th>HOW THE TEACHER SHOULD BEHAVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team game</td>
<td>energetic, clear, fair, encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Play</td>
<td>supportive, retiring, clear, encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher reading aloud</td>
<td>dramatic, interesting, commanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole class listing</td>
<td>efficient, clear, supportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What we notice here is that the roles are often interchangeable. The trainer’s role is never static. One activity could see an experienced teacher smoothly transition from one role to another.

That said, the 21st century classroom is created on the premise that students experience what they require to enter the 21st century workplace and live in the global environment. The characteristics of the 21st century classroom therefore set it apart from the 20th century classroom.

Lectures on a single subject at a time being the norm is in the past. Today, collaboration is the thread for all student learning. For instance, the collaborative project-based approach ensures that the curriculum used in this classroom develops:

- Higher order thinking skills,
- Effective communication skills,
- Knowledge of technology that students will need for 21st century careers and the increased globalized environment.
While there is certainly a place for teacher centered, lecture style learning, the evolving trainer must embrace new teaching strategies that are radically different from those previously employed. The curriculum must become more relevant to what learners will be exposed to in the 21st century.

An interactive teacher is by definition one that is fully aware of the group dynamics of a classroom. As Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) explained, the success of classroom learning is very much dependent on:

- How students relate to each other and their trainer
- What the classroom environment is
- How effectively students cooperate and communicate with each other
- The roles not only the teacher plays but roles in which the learners engage

Brown, H. Douglas (2007) mentions that “teachers can play many roles in the course of teaching and this might facilitate learning. Their ability to carry these out effectively will depend to a large extent on the rapport they establish with their students, and of course, on their own level of knowledge and skills.”

According to Harmer, J. (2007), the term ‘facilitator’ is used by many authors to describe a particular kind of teacher, one who is democratic (where the teacher shares some of the leadership with the students) rather than autocratic (where the teacher is in control of everything that goes on in the classroom), and one who fosters learner autonomy (where students not only learn on their own, but also take responsibility for that learning) through the use of group and pair work and by acting as more of a resource than a transmitter of knowledge.

Facilitating learning is empowering for both the learner and the teacher and frees the teacher from many of the burdens that having to be an ‘expert’ might entail. It would traditionally have been seen as a weakness for a teacher to say ‘I don’t know, let’s find out’ or ‘I don’t know, do any of you students know the answer?’ But, times have changed and so must the role of the modern day trainer.

So next time you consider a class or recruit for training, consider the quality of the trainers and the questions you ask before confirming the contract. Are they teacher centered, with the trainer always at the center controlling everything? Or are they able to ‘let go’, and allow students to take center stage?

Regardless of the roles they assume, trainers shape the culture of their classrooms, improve student learning, and influence practice and production. Making the shift from teacher as expert to facilitator is sometimes seen as diminishing a teacher’s power and authority, but this is not be the case at all; rather, this is progress.
Resources:

Harden RM and Davis MH. *The good teacher is more than a lecturer - the twelve roles of the teacher*, 1995

Nisbet J. *Teaching as a professional*, 1986

Wright S. *What makes a tutor effective?*, 1996


Blasé J. *Teachers bringing out the best in teachers: A guide to peer consultation for administrators and teachers*, 2006

Larner, M. *Pathways. Charting a course for professional learning*, 2004

Marzano, R., Pickering, D, & Pollock, J., *Classroom instruction that works*, 2004