

Editorial

Philosophy of Teaching

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Most teachers develop their classroom skills fairly early in their teaching careers. Teachers entering the profession may find their initial teaching efforts stressful, but with experience they acquire a repertoire of teaching strategies that they draw on throughout their teaching. It is also important to realize that teaching styles and methods are very subjective, and despite much research, so far there has been no proof that any one method or style of teaching is significantly more successful than others.

How can teachers move beyond the level of automatic or routine responses to classroom situations and achieve a higher level of awareness of how they teach, and of the value and consequences of particular instructional decisions? One way of doing this is through observing and reflecting on one's own teaching and using observation and reflection as a way of bringing about change. People who routinely plan, record and reflect on their learning tend to see more opportunities for personal development. It's a matter of capturing the moment. The fact is the world becomes a richer more stimulating place when you embrace reflective learning, because you switch on a kind of intuitive radar that's tuned to pick up useful information.

Recommendations to novice healthcare teachers about effective teaching of the 'how to do it' variety tend to be based on the obvious ('prepare well'), personal opinion ('this is how I do it') and faith ('trust me, I'm a teaching expert'). This differs from an approach that would look to see whether we can detect any common themes in the behaviors of the teachers of those learners who are achieving. Or indeed, whether we can map those recommendations against measures of learning or student progress.¹

Teaching Philosophy: Teachers enjoy teaching on ward rounds. Ward rounds are an ideal opportunity to achieve synthesis between basic science and clinical practice. The tendency is to ignore the underlying science and work in the area of disease and their management, but this, if persisted with, leaves the learner with the idea that bioscience was not important and does not need to be kept under review.

Sometimes during rounds, juniors are frightened of being shown to be incompetent, and particularly those who cannot bear to lose face, will adopt defensive tactics. At best this will consist of staying at the back of the group, avoiding eye contact with you, trying to get out of presenting the case or demonstrating the skills you want to see. So, to avoid this type of behavior, don't make a theatre out of it. Sometimes perform the procedure or examinations in front of the students and encourage them to ask any questions. The discussion should not only be about the disease or treatment but other issues surrounding the patient such as pain relief, social circumstances at home and consent.

As a clinical supervisor of trainees TONTO's (one to one teaching) is also performed with trainees. This is a difficult form of teaching: with undergraduates the power differential is overwhelming; with doctors in the training grades the shift from collegial to pupil role and status is uncomfortable for both teacher and learner. The learner really understands the subject in depth. These sessions are a form of joint exploration of complex problem to which each participant brings something: the learner, his or her preparatory work, the teacher experience and the sense of proportion that comes from it. That is not to say that the teacher need not prepare for a tutorial. As for every other type of teaching you must have your aims clear in your mind before you start.

Discussion and review of literature: *"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough"* Albert Einstein

New information becomes more meaningful if learners are given an opportunity to identify how new material or information is related to many experiences they possess. The creative experience is always seeking to be fed; it derives nourishment from the everyday experience.² The learning process becomes more effective when teaching material is made more meaningful for the learner.

As a reflective teacher I always try to be aware of how students are responding to teaching techniques in the class. This allows me to change technique whenever it's deemed necessary. McKeachie reveals his philosophy of teaching which is student centered and promotes

active learning techniques to involve students. His teaching is informed by research and also by his values.³ Korn says that a clearly articulated philosophy gives substance and coherence to the brainstorm and fantasies of reflection. Sometimes reflection should be detached from the data of the classroom and allowed to spring from the imagination. Challenge all the conventional wisdom about teaching and create an ideal learning world. Go where no academic mind has gone before. Then return and translate your most creative thoughts to ideas and ideals that you want to have an influence on your teaching and include these in your philosophy.⁴

Idealism is an ancient philosophy that focuses on concrete thinking, analyzing and discussing of ideas instead of memorizing of facts and lectures. In addition to thinking about and discussing their ideas, students truly learn when they actively participate in the learning process. Students should be guided to reflect upon what they have learned and guide them towards an understanding of how this knowledge could be applied to help others.

Teaching is an art and not a science and this art can best be developed by a reflective view. This includes reflection on action, the ability to reflect both before and after on our own practice, reflection in action, the ability to make decisions and adapt during the process⁵ and creative reflection, the examining and assessing of our own values and beliefs in the light of the theories and practice of others.⁶

Dewey felt that knowledge in the philosophical sense was not an end in itself; it could be used in society to make positive social action.⁷ If someone wants teaching to be effective then students should be provided with opportunities to actively engage in the learning process. If learners are given more control over their learning it

increases their motivation in the long term. Every learner should feel safe to express himself or herself and all other participants will have an opportunity to experience different views from another frame of reference.

Learning can become a lifelong endeavor when it is continually experienced in a personally relevant, interesting and fun manner. One should treat each student that enters class room as a unique person. Learning is so personal and varied from student to student that care must be taken to create an atmosphere where each student feels at ease with his own learning style and finds a way to truly learn in his maximum potential. Student and teacher alike can assist each other toward a better understanding of the world around them and true learning.

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