"Winners Don't Do Different Things, They Do Things Differently": What Do Great Teachers Do?

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Abstract: What does it mean to be a good teacher? Is it simply being nice to students, or is it understanding the needs of each student? Or does being a good teacher incorporate a bit of both, plus an adaptation by the teacher to each student's learning strategies and capabilities? Some teachers prefer to use certain teaching methods that are often not compatible with what their students are capable of. Other teachers prefer to learn more about each student as an individual, in order to ascertain the best teaching methods that will be most effective; they feel that they can accomplish more in a shorter span of time in doing this. Although many teaching methods seem to be complicated, they are in fact rather simple when put to use correctly. There is generally no "right or wrong" method of teaching, but seeing only the bad in students is not going to achieve the ultimate goal of providing the best possible learning environment for students. The best possible results are obtained by having a positive view of each student and using methods that pertain to each student's specific needs relating to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. A clearer picture of possible outcomes can be obtained when investigating what the best teachers do to provide students with a good learning experience. Displaying a high expectation of each student assists in bringing out the best in each individual and from there it is up to the student to either rise to the occasion or ignore the challenge. The main purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of what the best teachers do and how they go about doing it.

Key words: Active learning · education · self · society · teacher's effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

The most critical part of all lectures and class discussions are student's ideas on learning. Besides the need to learn the subject for the classes attended, another major reason for learning is to focus on critical thinking and logical reasoning. Teachers are only really able to offer their students course material that is best suited to encourage them to participate in class discussions when the teacher has a constructive attitude towards the students. This constructive attitude assists the teachers in knowing the differences between each student. Teachers do not have all the answers for every question, but they do however act as guides to assist students to work together as a team and by working together, students are able to learn from each other and build confidence.

An atmosphere of trust is vital in order to create a good environment for teachers. The more relaxed the students are, the more likely they are to contribute to class discussions. The said class discussions are impossible without student involvement and they are easily facilitated by the teacher asking the class various questions. Learning involves paying attention to both the social level and the individual level of students; this means that each student plays an important role in the level of teaching. In order to facilitate this type of learning, the teacher needs to create a hands-on type of project

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that should be based on the student's understanding. A student's understanding of any given subject is far more important than any test or exam. The student's ability to take what they have learned in the classroom and use the knowledge to function in the "real world" is the one true measure of success.

ASSUMPTIONS ON HOW PEOPLE LEARN

Society and Self: As society is in perpetual change, so does similar change need to be brought into the educational world. Individual students are constantly changing due to their life experiences and so are teaching and learning styles changing. It is essential that teachers take note of these changes in order to ensure that correct teaching methods are used.

Bill Gates stated in an article, "Schools were designed 50 years ago to meet the needs of another age. Today, even when they work exactly as designed, our high schools cannot teach our kids what they need to know" (Pournelle, 2005, p.1). His statement was bold and not accepted by many. Even though his statement seems rather extreme and judgmental, there are some parts of it that should be considered. Due to the constant changes in society, teachers must keep up with the times and apply suitable new teaching methods. If they do so, then they will remain connected and it will be easier for both teachers and students to relate to the subject matter at hand and will more than likely be able to apply what they have learned in a more personal manner.

Critical Thinking: Critical thinking should be at the top or near the top of the list of outcomes that teachers strive for. Brightman (20005) defines critical thinking as the ability to go beyond what students know without crumbling emotionally. Good teachers are constantly looking for ways to be more effective teachers. To ensure better learning, students should be prevented from merely sitting in class and inactively accepting any information that is thrown their way. Critical thinking involves questioning anything that does not make one hundred percent sense. Beyer even says that critical thinking is necessary for sound personal decisions and daily affairs if students want to be successful in the real world (Beyer, 1995).

Bain (2004) suggests that the best teachers consider integrating explanations with questions and problem scenarios into the classroom, instead of simply rattling the facts off. Other than the obvious questions, other things that assist teachers to encourage students to develop and think critically are group learning and case study discussions. When presented with a subject matter that has no set conclusion, students are forced to take the opportunity to discuss possible conclusions and thereby are challenged in their own thinking.

Bain (1997) also says that teachers should be conscious that their students will do most of their learning outside the classroom and must include relevant instructions in class to facilitate this process. Teachers who are effective will assist students in thinking about information and ideas that will encourage them to: analyze, evaluate, synthesize and apply this information. Eanes (1997) has four suggested methods of improving student critical thinking.

The first suggestion is that teachers should avoid using literal-level questions instead of questions that require more critical thinking, as a student's response reveals the extent of their understanding of the facts, as opposed to "parrot-learning". The second is that students relate more to what is being taught when it involves aspects of their own background, knowledge, experience and values and that this in turn keeps them motivated and interested. Thirdly, teachers should make sure that questions are phrased in a way in which they can be applied, analyzed, synthesized and evaluated by students. And the fourth is that a major key to formulating questions designed to develop critical thinking is to use verbs that are associated with tasks where critical thinking is required.

QUANTITATIVE AND SYMBOLIC REASONING

Core Beliefs: For the purpose of this paper, the term "core beliefs" represents statements regarding the practice of teaching that is assumed to facilitate learning in adults. Core belief principles are founded on the idea that outside forces

influence the development of each student and that they include intellectual, physical, emotional and social development. Developing creativity and increasing a student's confidence levels through the use of a planned curriculum is the primary focus of good teaching practices. Knowledge is not limited to any select group of individuals, but is peripheral to learners and learned through application of the given knowledge.

It is not good enough for teachers to merely possess a thorough knowledge of the subject that they are teaching; the teacher must also continuously update their knowledge base and develop new skills. Studies (Anderson and Piazza, 1996; Beijaard and De Vries, 1997; Goodlad, 1990; Munby, 1982; Nespor, 1987) represent the core beliefs of great teachers:

- Commitment to students and their ability to learn. This implies that teachers will continuously evaluate their students learning and understanding; so that when success is not achieved then they realize that it is the curriculum and not the student that is at fault.
- Ability to facilitate critical thinking (done by asking questions rather than spoon-feeding students).
- Ability to use various perspectives and finding creative ways in which to challenge students into problem solving.
- View themselves to be part of a larger community. Instructors that are willing to work hand-in-hand with others (administrators, other teachers, parents) and who in fact find this collaboration necessary in order to use all available resources for the benefit of the students.

Core Values: Core values go hand-in-hand with core beliefs. Like core beliefs, core values allow teachers to gain understanding on why other teachers have certain viewpoints, where they stand on certain issues and to gain an appreciation for students and their values. Above all, these foundational values enable teachers to share the passion that they have for teaching as a career, as well as the subject that they are teaching. This passion is apparent to students and will hopefully inspire them to have a passion of their own for the subject matter. Without these core values, teachers would have no reason for being passionate about their work.

In 2001, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC) developed a set of common values, with the hope that teachers would realize the true reason for teaching and that they would therefore adapt to these values (Wergin, 2005). Of the values that were included, some were student learning (related to specific institutions) and a willingness to accept that there should be one method used to teach every subject (Wergin, 2005). This gives the reader a beginning to understand, although it refers to only a very small part of the core values that teachers should possess. Core values are vital and enable teachers to keep a perspective on their personal reasons for teaching.

LEARNING CENTERED PRINCIPLES

Encourages Contact between Students and Faculty: The first principle is to encourage contact between the faculty and the students. Ritter and Lemke (2000) say that contact between students and teachers is the most important contributor to successfully motivating students. More often than not, students will be motivated to keep trying in class if they know that their teacher is there to support them and help them if need be (Chickering and Gamson, 1997).

Lack of communication with students is one of the downfalls of some teachers. Many teachers don't make the time or simply just do not care. Even so, some teachers who do have good intentions of communicating with their students still have difficulty in reaching that goal. During the free office hours that the teachers have available, busy schedules and time constraints are often a factor that prevents communication between students and teachers (Ritter and Lemke, 2000). Ritter and Lemke (2000) suggest an increase in Internet communication between teachers and students. In this ever-growing age of technology and Internet usage, some institutions have found that e-mail communications is the most efficient method of communication (Ritter and Lemke, 2000).

Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation among Students: The second principle is effective teaching. Good teaching develops collaboration and reciprocity between students. This portion of our Learning Centered Principles focuses on the principle that student learning is facilitated when students communicate with themselves and are involved in teamwork. According to Rau and Heyl (1990), teamwork is both a collaborative and social way in which to interact with other students and with the teachers. When students work alone, they tend to become competitive with other students and have less inclination to consider the ideas of others.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1986), students working alone achieve lower levels of thought and information is retained for a shorter period of time than students who participate in teamwork. When students are working together towards a common goal, they become responsible for one another, in a sense. This assists in preparing the students for the workplace, where the success of their manager will largely be determined by the performance of that manager's staff.

The various knowledge and experience that each member possesses has a positive effect on the learning process as a whole. Rau and Heyl (1990) connect the improvement of critical thinking skills and students being confronted with various interpretations of any given situation. When working as a team, students are forced to analyze ideas as a group and each opinion must be followed up with reasons. In order to apply this technique to enhance teaching skills, good teachers must view teaching as a process of development and enhancement of a student's learning ability. As discussed earlier, a good teacher does not simply transmit information and teach "parrot-style", but also serves as a facilitator for learning. Teamwork is simply another tool that is used to stimulate the student into thinking through real world problems.

Encourages Active Learning: Many students have had the misfortune of being taught that the only way in which to learn is to sit in the classroom and listen and then regurgitate whatever it is that they think their teachers want to hear. Active learning is a way in which to show students that there is more to learning than regurgitation (Chickering and Gamson, 1997). Chickering and Gamson (1997) suggest discussion on what is being learned, relating the work to personal experiences and applying it to the students' personal lives. By finding ways for the student to relate to the material, they will gain real knowledge and have a better outlook on the whole learning process.

Ritter and Lemke (2000) give a scenario of a Geography 101 class and investigate the means that active learning was applied to the class. The students of this class were given control on how they wanted to learn the lessons. Simply by giving them a form of control, active learning was being applied. Some students learn by supplementing the given material with information from the internet, while others found that field trips better enabled them to see first-hand and gained a more advanced understanding of the material (Ritter and Lemke, 2000).

Peter Cookson (2005) tells his readers. "To maximize brain growth we need active learning. The use of computers, field trips, guest speakers, games, journaling and multi-age projects are just some of the strategies that we, as teachers, can use to stimulate thinking and the growth of imagination" (p. 1). Cookson (2005) suggests four different elements to create a challenging environment. Those four things are: problem solving, critical thinking, relevant projects and complex activities. He also suggested that teachers should give timely, positive feedback to students and that this feedback should be specific.

Assisting a person to learn, whether young or old, is a huge responsibility and should not be taken lightly by teachers. With such responsibility, a teacher should make every effort possible to assist students to learn in a way that is the most effective for each student.

Gives Prompt Feedback: Giving prompt feedback can be tied in with each of the other principles being discussed. This is something that is not only helpful to the students, but is also helpful to teachers as it allows the students to understand what the teachers expect from them. According to Ritter and Lemke (2000), e-mail is the preferred method of communication and is also the most convenient and fast when it comes to obtaining feedback from teachers.

Prompt feedback enables students to narrow the focus of their studies and obtain the results that their teachers expect them to. Feedback from teachers is an incredibly useful learning tool for students. "This allows students to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know and how to assess themselves" (Chickering and Gamson, 1997).

"Teacher feedback is the consequence (written or verbal) that follows a student's action and shapes future behavior. Feedback is an important aspect of every school day and plays a critical role in the teaching/learning process." (Konold, Miller and Konold, 2004, p.64). Konold, Miller and Konold (2004) say that those teachers who consistently provide the proper type of feedback are the ones who will see their students' learning being affected in a positive manner. An important thing for any teacher to keep in mind is that they should always include positive feedback in their comments. Students who receive only negative feedback will end up thinking that they have completely failed at what they set out to accomplish. However, when students receive positive feedback along with any negative feedback, then they will know that they have the potential to improve and they will be motivated to try even harder (Konold, Miller and Konold, 2004).

Emphasizes Time-on-Task: Good teachers must also assist students in learning how to use their time effectively. When emphasizing time-on-task, teachers should advise students what their expectations are, in order to avoid students feeling as if they are a failure due to misdirected energy and time. A good teacher will never assume that their students know how to use their time wisely and will instead facilitate learning methods that are based on time-on-task practices in order to improve the quality of study time.

As well as class work, family, friends and employers often demand time from students. This demand of students' time from other sources competes with their study time. Ehrmann (2003, pg.2) poses the question before faculty, "In what ways has technology been used in your courses or at your institution that directly or indirectly results in students spending more time and energy in their studies?" The majority of the articles reviewed on this subject make some reference to the use of technology and that teachers in today's world need to be aware of the implications of time-on-task.

There are many opportunities outside of the classroom that assist students to improve their time-on-task accountability. One example is to e-mail assignments from the student's home, which helps the student to turn assignments in on time. Ehramann (2003) says that when students interact on the school's network, they save time on getting to the campus and having to make numerous copies. In addition to that, the Blackboard course management that is used in class encourages students to spend more time participating in on-line discussions, where they are easily able to find new material that is being discussed by fellow students. Additional information received in this manner can often be the most useful.

Communicating High Expectations: The first thing that is common in effective teachers in urban schools is the idea that all students can be successful at learning and the communication of this idea to students (Delpit, 1988). Hodge says that teachers should have a personal commitment to aiding all students to achieve success and to truly believe that they are able to make a difference in their students' achievements (Hodge, 1990). Winfield distinguishes between those teachers who take responsibility for their students' learning and those who shift responsibility onto others (such as the students themselves, parents, the school system, etc) when students fail or do not perform well (Winfield, 1986).

Many teachers in teacher education institutions cling to the idea that some students cannot learn and hold low expectations for those students, despite evidence to the contrary (Goodlad, 1990). Students of color, thought of as deprived, are often the focus of low expectations for conduct and educational success. Research has confirmed that many teachers view the diversity in students' backgrounds as a problem instead of a resource that will assist them to enhance the students' learning experience. These attitudes manifest themselves in low expectations, which in turn are expressed into a fragmented curriculum for students of color (Moll, 1988). Further to this, there are teachers who have negative attitudes towards some of the racial, ethnic and language groups over that of their own. However, teachers who have high expectations towards all students and not just certain groups of students, transform their beliefs into a more rationally challenging program of study that benefits each and every student in the class.

It's possible that the best evidence that this principle is a valid one comes from the extensive research that is known as PSI (Personalized System of Instruction). "Unit Mastery" is one element of PSI that is "the requirement that every student attain a high performance standard (often 90%), before being allowed to advance to the next unit of the course...this

tells every student that they are expected to attain high levels of performance" (Parsons, 1978, p. 227). Parson also states that "the evidence that PSI works to foster higher performance, better retention of material covered, more student activity (work) and higher course ratings is well documented in a number of research articles" (Parsons, p. 227).

By using one or all of the following methods, high expectations can be communicated to students, thereby encouraging their success:

- To provide students with detailed outlines of what is expected of them.
- To establish a peer relationship versus that of a student-teacher relationship.
- To ask students to speak out about how they are feeling about their progress, as this lets them know that their opinions are respected and considered.
- To allow the student to know the teacher on a more personal level. This works well because many students have stated that when they know their teacher on a personal level, then they feel as if they do not want to let the teacher down and thereby set higher expectations for themselves.

Using a mastery approach to testing and putting the emphasis on understanding, students are empowered to create a positive assessment and encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning and success or lack thereof. Cooperative learning techniques, however, also set high expectations for students to live up to. Students work collaboratively in groups and become more familiar with their team members. This assists in enhancing their self-esteem, as well as the raising expectations of what they are able to accomplish. Interactive discussions should be facilitated and requests for a philosophical basis for desired changes should me made. According to Panitz, "Accepting the classes' collective wisdom has an empowering effect which raises their expectations of themselves. Imagine convincing a professor to alter his/her class procedure" (Panitz, 2005). With two-way knowledge, students are able to better believe that they can learn in a group, as well as express their separate abilities and beliefs through various means, such as exams, oral presentations, written assignments and board-work.

Respecting Different Abilities and Ways of Learning: There are many ways in which attitude can affect teaching and learning, including the attitude that teachers have towards each student. This is probably the most important and relevant aspect to this principle. Indifference or cruelty from a teacher is something that can devastate a student and cause them to lose interest in a subject. It is a teacher's responsibility to be sincere and concerned for his or her students. It is far better when teachers emphasize the positive aspects and use encouragement instead of a penalizing system. At no time is it acceptable for a student to be humiliated.

Good presentation does automatically mean that students have a positive outlook towards any specific area of work under discussion. Modest attitudes have a tendency to be casual observations. According to Wulf (2006) one approach is to ensure that the work is set out in a way that students can relate to it through their everyday experiences. For example, various mathematical topics, such as fractions and statistics, can be presented to students in the context of a student's interest in professional sports. In order to do this in an effective manner, teachers must, of course, know their students well.

Learning different styles is both uncomplicated and influential. When detailed information is provided, then students are able to learn more. Some students are "image learners" and are able to learn easier if work is presented to them in the form of pictures of text. Other students are "hearing learners" and learn best when listening to a lecturer. Many students show only a slight preference for one specific style of learning, or respond best when several styles are incorporated into the teaching. The best approach is then to enable students to consider what their own learning preferences are and then help them to integrate other styles of learning into their studies.

Howard Gardner, a Cognitive Psychologist who published an alternative view of intelligence in his book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligence* in 1983, suggested that instead of a single monolithic intelligence measured by

IQ tests, there are actually various types of intelligence. Other forms of intelligence that he listed were: linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, intra-personal intelligence, inter-personal intelligence and natural intelligence (Gardner, 1983).

Instructional changes in plans are forced by multiple aptitudes. These serve to point out which topics each student is best suited to and which subject would best assist in creating a stronger self-esteem in a student. What is known as a "low resolution" classroom is the result of instruction approaches that take multiple intelligences into account being put into practice. This is obviously very different from the conventional classroom, where student placement by educational ability is clearly visible. In a "low level" classroom, each student has the opportunity to shine through, as various talents and differences are respected and taken into account. This results in students having a higher self-image and a higher commitment level to their work.

A good way to begin to learn about a student's needs, talents and capabilities is to acquire an effective perception of each student's cultural and ethnical background, especially if these are different from the teacher's. Teachers should always value and respect students' cultural and ethnical backgrounds and should support them in respecting each other's as well. "Incorporating women-centric activities within instructional design better engages the women students. Literature indicates that young women like group vs. individual work, see technology's expressive qualities, see computers as a means to converse, focus on the social function of technology, like expressive/communication-based tasks" (Farmer, 1998, p. 18).

CONCLUSIONS

Unless a teacher displays some degree of empathy and respect towards students, none of the above is possible. Motivation to know the students well enough in order to organize an effective course is not possible without respect and empathy, and teachers will therefore lack the energy to be flexible and enthusiastic and to maintain high expectations (Schlewitz, 2004).

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