



Research Article

ANALYSIS OF INSIGHTS ON THE UNIVERSAL PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

The path of any individual from the cradle to the grave comprises winding up through numerous actions, people, incidents, perspectives, perceptions and everything tangible and intangible that the life offers. In such a vast and deep journey, these raw assets of life are molded into meaningful and significant tools of transcendence in intelligence and creativity when a responsible mentor takes the entry. A responsible mentor or a teacher is said to be so when the words that take flight from those lips are soaked with wisdom and extracted from the depth of life's understanding. It can be conveyed with a set of skills that is a must for any teacher to adhere to, be it the path of conventional one or the modern one—the destination is the same.

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INTRODUCTION

Each year the faculty members in institutions of higher education take on the task of teaching others. For most of these people, this is a recurring task. In fact, for the majority, this is the central task of a life-long career. Assuming that no one is perfect and therefore everyone has a room for improvement, evaluation is the means by which we try to identify which aspects of our teaching are good and which need to be changed. The question then arises as to who should take the responsibility for doing the evaluation.

During good evaluation is like doing good research. In both the cases, you are trying to answer some important questions about an important topic. The key to doing both activities well is (a) identifying the right questions to ask and (b) figuring out how to answer them.

What are the key questions in the evaluation of teaching? Basically, they are:

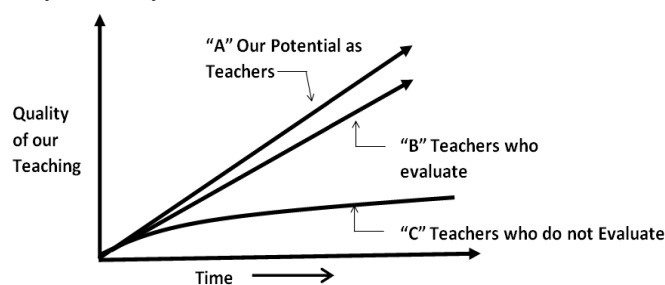
- How well am I teaching?
• Which aspects of my teaching are good as which need to be improved?

The first question attempts to provide a global assessment, while the second is analytical and diagnostic in character.

Necessity of Evaluation: Regardless of how good or how poor we are as teachers, we all have the potential to get better over time.

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Yet some teachers continually improve and approach their potential while the others experience a modest improvement early in the career and then seem to level off in quality or sometimes even decline. Why? I would argue that the primary difference between those who do and those who do not improve, is that only the former gather information about their teaching and make an effort to improve some aspect of it—every time they teach.



The Source of the Information: There are four basic sources of information required to be in the skill-set of teachers, that they can use to evaluate their teaching. All evaluation efforts use one or more these basic sources. Each of these five sources have a unique value as well as an inherent limitation.

Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring is what people do semi-automatically and semi-consciously whenever they teach. Unique value. It is immediate and constant. You do not have to wait a week or a day or even an hour to get the results. It happens right away. Hence adjustments are possible right away. This information is automatically created in terms that are meaningful to the teacher because it is the teacher who create the information. Limitation. The very strength of this source is also its weakness.

Because this information is created by us for us, it is also a subject to our own biases and misinterpretations.

Information from Students

As the intended beneficiaries of all teaching, students are in a unique position to help their teachers in the evaluation process. Special Value. If we want to know whether students find our explanations if a topic clear, or whether students find our teaching exciting or dull, who else could possibly answer these kinds of questions better than the students themselves? Of the four sources of information described here, students are the best source for understanding the immediate effects of our teaching, i.e., the process of teaching and learning. This information can be obtained by questionnaires and interviews with students.

General limitation: One needs to remember that this is information from students. Although they know better than anyone what their reactions are, they can also be biased and limited in their own perspectives. They occasionally have negative feelings about teachers. Perhaps more significantly, students usually do not have a full understanding of how a course might be taught, either in terms of pedagogy or content. Hence they can effectively address what is, but not what might be.

STUDENTS' TEST RESULTS

Teachers usually give students some form of graded exercise, whether it is an in-class test or an out-of-class project. Usually, though, the intent of the test is to assess the quality of the students' learning.

Special Value. The whole reason for teaching is to help someone else learn. Assuming we can devise a test or graded exercise that effectively measures whether or not students are learning what we want them to learn, the test results tell us whether we are succeeding in our whole teaching effort. This is critical information for all teachers. Although the other sources of information identified here can partially address this question, none address it so as test results. Limitation. The problem with this information is its lack of a causal connection: we don't know why they did or did not learn. Did they learn because of, or in spite of, our teaching? Some students work very hard in course, not because the teacher inspires or motivates them but because the major requires a good grade in course and the teacher is NOT effective. Therefore, they work hard to learn it on their own.

Evaluation by Outsider/ Peer observer

In addition to the two parties directly involved in this course, the teacher and the students, valuable information can be obtained from the observations of a third party or peer, someone who brings both an outsider's perspective and professional expertise to the task. Special value. Part of the value of an outside/ Peer observer is that they do not have a personal stake in the particular course, hence they are free to draw positive and negative conclusions without any cost to themselves. In addition, as a professional, they can bring an expertise either in content and/or in pedagogy that is likely to supplement that of both the teacher and the students. A variety of kinds of observers may be peer colleague, a senior colleague and instruction specialist.

Limitations. Again the strength of being an outsider is also its weakness. Outside observers can usually only visit one or two class sessions and therefore do not know what happens in the rest of the course. Apart from this general problem, each kind of observer has its own limitation. The peer colleague may also have limited experience and perspectives; the senior colleague may be someone who makes departmental decisions about annual evaluations and tenure; and the instructional consultant may have limited knowledge of the subject matter.

CONCLUSION

People who have chosen careers as teachers in higher education owe it to themselves, to their students, and to their institutions to fulfill their responsibilities as effectively as possible. The thesis of this chapter is that the only way to improve one's teaching over time is to continuously monitor and evaluate that teaching, and then to use the information obtained to make needed changes. The various techniques described in this chapter, especially when used together, can give us the deep personal and professional satisfaction of being able to say, after a single course or after a career of teaching, "The best was done, and it couldn't be any better."

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