

Editorial: On Teaching

As the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Chiropractic Education* (JCE) I wish to share some thoughts about teaching. Since most of our readers are faculty at chiropractic educational institutions, I would like to offer some inspirational and insightful perspectives.

I am not aware of anyone who wishes to be a “bad teacher.” Some pride themselves in being “hard” or “demanding” but never “bad.” But what is a “good teacher?” What constitutes “good teaching?” Standard measures include: the number of articles or books published, faculty rank and academic credentials, student assessment of faculty performance, student performance on exams, and peer evaluation through performance reviews.

The true measure of a “good teacher” or “good teaching” is not easily defined. Today, knowledge becomes obsolete almost as fast as it can be taught. Emphasis on content, while important, pales in the shadow of the “character” of the teacher.

The true function of the teacher is to create the most favorable conditions for self-learning. True teaching is not that which gives knowledge, but that which stimulates pupils to gain it. One might say that he teaches best who teaches least. (John Milton Gregory, 1884)

In an article titled *Inspirational Teaching*, Lance Secretan lists the following attributes of what he calls “great teachers.” They:

- See themselves as mentors, spiritual guides, inspirers, enquirers, partners, equals, students. . .
- Succeed in leaving their egos outside the room. They are less concerned with how they will be perceived and whether students will be impressed with their smarts, whether they will be liked and respected, than they are with connecting-soul to soul, sharing their genuine passion to serve.
- Have no need to be right, to control, or to create a student/teacher hierarchy based on power and authority. In fact, they do everything they can to create a community based on truth and love.
- Do not form preconceived impressions of students based on personality profiles, third-hand reports, or hearsay; nor on their sartorial elegance (or lack of it); nor on their squeaky voices, endless monologues, or apparent boredom.
- Listen two-thirds of the time and speak the remaining third. They read the energy of each participant and interact and address both the stated and unstated needs of each of them.
- Embody what they are teaching. If they teach punctuality, they arrive on time. If they teach truth-telling, they don’t play with the truth.
- Are brave, take risks, lay their principles and reputations on the line, and experiment with cutting-edge ideas and thoughts that excite and inspire—and, as a result, often make sizeable mistakes from which they learn.

- Don't use teaching formulas.
- Are comfortable with ambiguity and paradox, creating the necessary structure while being willing to scrap agendas and "wing it" if a better process appears.

From the above list, it is apparent that a "good teacher" is a composite of many attributes. But the teaching process involves a learner as well. The student after all is the focus of the teaching process. The interdependence between teacher and learner is also complex.

The role of a teacher is, to help individuals take responsibility for learning, to awaken in them the desire to study, understand, and live and to show them how to do so... The learning has to be done by the pupil. Therefore it is the pupil who has to be put into action. (Teaching, No Greater Call, 1999, p. 61)

As a teacher, it is easy to teach those who teach themselves and it is a pleasure to teach those who are easy to train and teach. The challenge to provide good teaching is when the teacher is confronted with difficult-to-teach students.

David Locher balks at the idea that students today are of a lower quality than in days past. He argues that you "...could lock the excellent students in a dungeon, throw them a few books, and watch them quickly master the subject matter... Yet we pat ourselves on the back for teaching them so well... We forget that we are merely helping them do something that they already want to do. The 'poor students' show us how well we teach."

Both "excellent students" and "poor students" can benefit from "good teaching". Perhaps not in the same way or with the same teaching methods, but both are potential learners waiting to be taught.

Successful teachers focus less on imparting what they know and focus more on helping class members gain and develop their own desires for seeking knowledge and inspiration. (Author Unknown)

Every teacher exhorts students to learn; it is the master teacher who can convey to a pupil the message that one must reach beyond the knowledge of things that is merely knowledge, to the knowledge of others that is wisdom, and thence to the knowledge of self that is enlightenment. (Author Unknown)

So why does someone want to teach? Why face those challenging and sometimes ungrateful students who want to know why you can't give them their final grade 15 minutes after you collect the final exam so they can leave for the semester break? What a test of endurance and fortitude! What a commitment we make as teachers to be all knowing, all caring, entertaining, compassionate, forgiving, and all for pay that is usually lower than the prevailing scale for teachers in programs that only teach 9 months in a calendar year. Do our students and administration really appreciate us? Why do we continue in what some may consider a frenzy of madness? I think the following quotation best answers these kinds of questions.

In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have. (Lee Iacocca)

As those who hold the responsibility to pass civilization from one generation to the next, we shoulder an awesome responsibility that comes laden with rich fulfillment in many forms. We must recognize our duty, our opportunity to touch the future by being a teacher. The very presence of teaching is a statement of faith in the future.

If we indoctrinate the young person in an elaborate set of fixed beliefs, we are insuring early obsolescence. The alternative is to develop skills, attitudes, habits of mind and the kinds of knowledge and understanding that will be instruments of continuous change and growth on the part of the young person. Then we will have fashioned a system that provides for its own continuous renewal. (John Gardner)

And, finally, to those struggling students who wonder why we must learn “this or that,” let me just say: the aim of knowledge is wisdom, not certainty. Never stop learning!

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