

Teaching is Skillful, Complex but Can Be Learnt and Taught

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Abstract:

Teaching is one of the most common—and also one of the most complicated—human activities. Teacher education encompasses teaching skills, sound pedagogical theory and professional skills.

*Teacher Education = Teaching Skills + Pedagogical theory + Professional skills.
At its heart, teaching involves being able to "unpack" something one knows well to make it accessible to and learnable by someone else. This requires explicit knowledge and skill, beyond simple expertise. Teachers today are expected to help a much wider range of learners reach complex levels of performance. It is crucial, then, to identify the high-leverage practices that underlie teaching complex content to all students. to equip students with models and conceptual frameworks that will not only help them understand how organizations work, but also will assist them in coping with the demands of organizational life as they seek to become effective professionals and/or managers. This article talks more in depth on the notion that 'Teachers are made'. Teacher education is based on the theory that —Teachers are made, not born in contrary to the assumption, —Teachers are born, not made. Since teaching is considered an art and a science, the teacher has to acquire not only knowledge, but also skills that are called —tricks of*

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the trade. The teacher is required to acquire adequate knowledge, skills, interests and attitudes towards the teaching profession.

Key words: Teacher, Education, Pedagogy, Skillful

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a complex and learnable craft (Saphier, 2005).

Teaching is one of the most common—and also one of the most complicated—human activities. Despite the prevailing view of teaching as requiring little more than patience, basic content knowledge, and liking children, teaching is "unnatural" work; that is, the skills involved in teaching do not come naturally (Jackson, 1986; Murray, 1989). They are distinct from informal showing, telling, or helping (Cohen, inpress) in three fundamental ways.

Specialized Expertise In 1906-1956, the program of teacher preparation was called teacher training. It prepared teachers as mechanics or technicians. It had narrower goals with its focus being only on skill training. The perspective of teacher education was therefore very narrow and its scope was limited. As W.H. Kilpatric put it, —Training is given to animals and circus performers, while education is to human beings. Teacher education encompasses teaching skills, sound pedagogical theory and professional skills.

Teacher Education = Teaching Skills + Pedagogical theory + Professional skills.

Teaching skills would include providing training and practice in the different techniques, approaches and strategies that would help the teachers to plan and impart instruction, provide appropriate reinforcement and conduct effective assessment. It includes effective classroom management skills, preparation and use of instructional materials and communication skills.

Pedagogical theory includes the philosophical, sociological and psychological considerations that would enable the teachers to have a sound basis for practicing the teaching skills in the classroom. The theory is stage specific and is based on the needs and requirements that are characteristic of that stage. Professional skills include the techniques, strategies and approaches that would help teachers to grow in the profession and also work towards the growth of the profession. It includes soft skills, counseling skills, interpersonal skills, computer skills, information retrieving and management skills and above all lifelong learning skills. An amalgamation of teaching skills, pedagogical theory and professional skills would serve to create the right knowledge, attitude and skills in teachers, thus promoting holistic development.

At its heart, teaching involves being able to "unpack" something one knows well to make it accessible to and learnable by someone else. This requires explicit knowledge and skill, beyond simple expertise. A tennis player with an amazing serve, for example, does not automatically know what goes into producing it. A native speaker of Spanish does not, while speaking fluently, readily notice the nuances of syntax or key semantic or grammatical features; nor do good readers necessarily see what they are doing to read and interpret complex texts. Being accomplished in a specific domain does not automatically include the capacity to break that domain down into its core components for someone who does not yet have that skill or understanding. In fact, expertise depends on a high degree of fluency. Accomplished practice requires automaticity with many elements to enable careful attention to its less routine aspects. A writer who had to puzzle about simple grammar or word meanings could not focus on the intricate challenges of composition. A runner who had to think about the movement of her legs while running the final 25 yards of a race would be distracted from executing a skilled performance. A pianist who focused on the coordination of his hands would be unable to play smoothly. Teaching is unnatural in that it

demands not only skill in a given domain, but also the ability to take that skill apart so others can learn it.

As surgeons, must meticulously carry out procedures that result in high levels of success; pilots must land planes safely. Teachers, too, must teach skillfully so their students learn.

LINKAGE TO MODEL OF TEACHING

Cognitive apprenticeship is a theory of the process where a master of a skill teaches that skill to an apprentice.

Constructivist approaches to human learning have led to the development of a theory of cognitive apprenticeship. This theory holds that masters of a skill often fail to take into account the implicit processes involved in carrying out complex skills when they are teaching novices. To combat these tendencies, cognitive apprenticeships "...are designed, among other things, to bring these tacit processes into the open, where students can observe, enact, and practice them with help from the teacher...". This model is supported by Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of modeling, which posits that in order for modeling to be successful, the learner must be attentive, must have access to and retain the information presented, must be motivated to learn, and must be able to accurately reproduce the desired skill.

The Challenge of Multiple Perspectives

Teaching is unnatural in a second fundamental way. Because teachers must help others learn, they must see ideas and skills from others' perspectives. And their students often learn differently from the way they themselves learn. Even if a teacher remembers what helped her solve linear equations, write a good paragraph, or understand the concept of gravity, this may not help her students. Figuring out what others find difficult or intriguing or how experience shapes their interpretations is far from simple. And yet teaching without

attention to learners' perspectives and prior knowledge is like flying a plane in fog without instruments. This has big implications for equitable education because the greater the differences between learners and their teachers—in culture, language, and experience—the less precisely attuned the teaching is likely to be.

Working with Many Learners

Knowing a domain well enough to teach it and seeing it from someone else's perspective are hard enough when tutoring. But unlike many other professions, where the "clients" are serviced individually, teachers work with theirs in batches (Jackson, 1986). Not only do teachers have more learners to understand and interact with, but they also must design and manage a productive environment in which all are able to learn. One student requires a firm hand and a great deal of direction whereas another works best when left to puzzle further on his own. One student is active—tapping her pen, doodling, and rocking on her chair—even while deeply engaged whereas a second is easily distracted. Differences show up inside the content, too. For example, although five students might correctly explain why $.6$ is greater than $.45$, eight others might get the answer right but for reasons that will fail when the numbers are more complicated. Noticing this difference requires careful listening to the students' answers. Attending to these differences while steering toward ambitious learning goals is no simple task but a complex task

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Teachers today are expected to help a much wider range of learners reach complex levels of performance. It is crucial, then, to identify the high-leverage practices that underlie teaching complex content to all students. To equip students with models and conceptual frameworks that will not only help them understand how organizations work, but also will assist them

in coping with the demands of organizational life as they seek to become effective professionals and/or managers.

Teachers' work is full of other instances of crucially important, complex, and "unnatural" practices, such as discussing a student's progress with a caregiver, writing careful feedback on a student's essay, or designing an assessment that will provide useful information to students and teacher alike.

The National Academy of Education Committee's Report (Darling-Hammond and Bransford) wrote that: —On a daily basis, teachers confront complex decisions that rely on many different kinds of knowledge and judgement and that can involve high stakes outcomes for student's future. To make good decisions, teachers must be aware of the many ways in which student learning can unfold in the context of development, learning differences, language and cultural influences, and individual temperaments, interests and approaches to learning.

RECOMMENDATION

Teaching is learnable and can be taught.

As teachers

- ❖ Provide opportunities to observe and engage with children, communicate with and relate to children
- ❖ Provide opportunities for self-learning, reflection, assimilation and articulation of new ideas; developing capacities for self -directed learning and the ability to think, be self-critical and to work in groups.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for understanding self and others (including one's beliefs, assumptions and emotions); developing the ability for self - analysis, self-evaluation, adaptability, flexibility, creativity and innovation.

They need to

- ❖ View knowledge generation as a continuously evolving process of reflective learning.
- ❖ Be receptive and constantly learning.

- ❖ View learning as a search for meaning out of personal experience, and knowledge generation as a continuously evolving process of reflective learning.
- ❖ View knowledge not as an external reality embedded in textbooks, but as constructed in the shared context of teaching-learning and personal experience.

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The teacher is required to acquire adequate knowledge, skills, interests and attitudes towards the teaching profession. The teacher's work has become more complicated and technical in view of the new theories of psychology, philosophy, sociology, modern media and materials. The teacher can be made proficient with well planned, imaginative pre-service and in-service training programs.

Professionally, powerful teaching is very important and increasing in our contemporary society as a result of the steam of dynamic initiatives of human development and evolution. Due to these developments and evolution, standards of learning would be higher in the 21st century than it has been in the 20th century. As a result teachers would need to acquire additional knowledge and skills, both general and specific, to be able to survive and be successful in the 21st century school environment.

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