



TeacherTalk

YOUR SPACE YOUR PLATFORM

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WHAT'S IN IT!

The Quest for Excellence in Teaching

In the entire educational ecosystem the most significant lever for student achievement is teaching practice. Teaching methods and pedagogies adopted by a teacher can raise or lower learning levels through involvement and motivation in the teaching-learning process. If a teacher exhibits excellence in teaching, students get motivated to reach heights they have only dreamt of. Time and again we hear successful people remembering teachers who inspired them.

What then is Excellence in Teaching? Teaching excellence is an academic process by which students are motivated to learn in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how they think, act, and feel; a process where they learn deeply and remarkably because of teacher attributes.

An excellent teacher is viewed as one who contributes positively to the learning environment by providing exceptional energy, keen interest

"Excellent teachers are remembered for their love of a subject, being positive and inspiring and for their open-mindedness and for never giving up on their students."

in students, and extraordinary strengths in the following areas

Communication skills

Teaching by itself is a communication exercise which requires deep involvement and engagement with the audience. Excellence in teaching can be achieved through transparency and by being approachable to your students; with the vast inequity in the classroom, effective communication transcends cultural and social barriers and keeps the class cohesive and oriented towards learning.

Student centralism

For excellence in teaching, a teacher accords the highest priority to a student; works to stimulate each student to learn through a variety of methods and encourages and invites active student participation; Rather than adopting a presentation mode a teacher adopts an interaction mode. She gives adequate opportunities for feedback and classroom discussions. Understanding visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile learning styles to adopt suitable

teaching often gives good results in the classroom.

Continuous and comprehensive assessment

Excellent teaching flows out of setting student outcomes and using appropriate assessments to continuously improve student learning in keeping with objectives; meticulous teachers keep the class material fresh and new, recognize their own and students' limitations and learn from them; good teachers advocate learning over testing. To conclude teachers can achieve excellence in teaching through:

- ✓ Methods that help students to develop as independent, critical thinkers.
- ✓ Approaches that stimulate creativity in students.
- ✓ Effective use of technology to enhance learning.
- ✓ Empathy, respect and support of students and the diversity that they bring.
- ✓ Use of creative formative assessment, to gauge the level of learning and adjustment of teaching on the basis of student feedback and results.
- ✓ Evaluation of practice that improves and enhances the learning experience.
- ✓ An understanding of students and their needs.

Learner Centralism

Excellence in teaching requires a commitment to active learning and student engagement. It allows students to develop and apply their knowledge and skills to real-world problems.

Learner-centred is a way of thinking about learning that guides your teaching practice. Your focus is on how the students are learning, what they are experiencing, and how they engage in the learning context.



“Without taking away from the important role played by the teacher, it is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does” (Shuell, 1986).

How can a teacher ensure Learner centralism?

Understanding your learners

First you need to know as much about your students as possible. What are their backgrounds, experiences, and abilities? What are their aspirations and motivations?

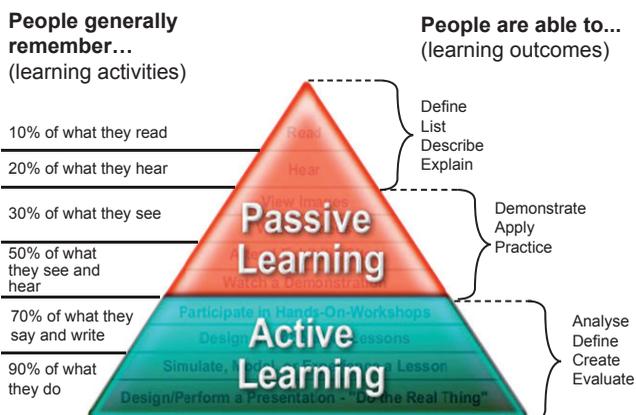
Understanding your Content

As a teacher you have specific discipline-knowledge that you will want your students to learn. However, your subject is not a stand-alone subject but forms a part of a larger curriculum. It is therefore important to know how a subject is linked to others.

Understanding the Learning process

If we adopt a learner-centred approach, then we also need to understand how our students learn. As you can see from the image below, active learners retain more knowledge if they have opportunities to ‘say’ and ‘do’ what they have learned.

Active learning



Teaching strategies for Learner Centralism

The following kinds of activities can be used to facilitate student-centred learning and teaching. Use these strategies to give students a chance to actively engage with the content and to provide variety within the lecture or tutorial

Blended learning approach is student-focused, with the potential to offer a more robust educational experience than traditional learning can achieve.

- ✓ It permits flexibility in course design and delivery and access to learning materials, activities and assessments
- ✓ It can help students develop independent learning skills

Brainstorming is a large or small group activity that encourages students to focus on a topic and contribute to the free flow of ideas.

- ✓ The teacher may begin a brainstorming session by posing a question or a problem, or by introducing a topic.
- ✓ Students then express possible answers, relevant words and ideas.
- ✓ Contributions are accepted without criticism or judgement and usually summarised on a whiteboard by the teacher or a scribe as the ideas are called out.
- ✓ These ideas are then examined, usually in an open class discussion format.

Case studies are effective ways to get students to practically apply their skills, and their understanding of learned facts, to a real-world situation.

They can serve as launching pad for a class discussion, or as a project for individuals or small groups. A single case may be presented to several groups, with each group offering its solutions.

- ✓ encourages higher-order thinking
- ✓ facilitates creative problem solving
- ✓ creates an opportunity for students to learn from one another

Questioning Through thoughtful questioning, teachers can not only extract factual information, but help learners

- ✓ Connect concepts and make inferences
- ✓ Think creatively and imaginatively
- ✓ Explore deeper levels of knowing, thinking and understanding

Achieving Excellence in Teaching

A teacher touches eternity; you can never say where (her) his influence stops.

This age-old adage expresses the true meaning of teaching, but the part on excellence needs to be examined, based on the stated premise.

Just stumbled upon a tweet from no less a person than the 44th president of the United States of America – Mr Barack Obama. It seems like a cosmic plan to support the point I wish to make in this article today.

The tweet is quoted below:

President Obama Verified account@POTUS

To my 5th grade teacher Ms. Mabel Hefty and the educators who inspire our young people every single day: Thank you.

No other single profession impacts society as much as this (profession) does!

If teachers were to understand this, they would not feel that sense of dejection (that they silently suffer); instead they would learn to take pride in having shaped the vital human resource across the globe.

What defines a teacher's success in achieving excellence in teaching?

Could we ever draw out a set of rubrics to evaluate Ms Mabel Hefty, Mr Obama's teacher?

I don't think so; at least it wouldn't be easy.

For those who think a teacher's job is only to disseminate information and train students to crack examinations, it would perhaps be easy to evaluate teachers' achievements on excellence in teaching.

But for those, who would agree with me that a teacher's job 'reaches far beyond knowledge', it would be a long-haul process—in terms of time taken and strategies adopted to evaluate if they excelled in teaching. I suppose we would have to observe and analyse their students and see what they made of themselves and evaluate the teachers' excellence in their students' efforts and achievements.

The contemporary objective of teaching, unlike what it was till some time ago, is not only livelihood; it is more importantly enabling happiness— while learning and post-learning. Perhaps, a better statement would be enabling happiness in the continuous process of learning, unlearning and relearning.

In my view, most educators understand this dictum, except the teacher herself, who is swept away under the pressures of her daily chores in the school. It is this cyclical, unending pressure that breeds an apologetic attitude for having become a teacher with recurrent stress of tasks, tests and corrections.

Have we ever reflected on why a teacher is apologetic about being a teacher?

This analogy might help – a teacher is like the musk deer that carries the 'musk' but unfortunately, she doesn't realise it and society refuses to recognise her contribution.

In our society, excellence is measured in terms of wealth, power and position; and teachers fall short on these parameters.

But it would be good to realize, teachers are the ones who set foundations for success. No wonder, the president of the most powerful nation on earth goes back to thank his 5th grade teacher.

Well, that's what I call 'achieving excellence' in teaching'!

—Ms. Bhawani Sinha,
Education and Training Consultant, Mumbai

4 Teaching styles

4 Styles	Presenter	Facilitator
Pedagogy	Transmitting (one-way)	Transmitting (two-way)
Tagline	'Sage on the Stage'	'Guide on the stage'
Intent	Understand information	Apply knowledge
Taxonomy	Knowledge & comprehension	Application & analysis
Settings	Repetitive	Familiar
Thinking	Convergent	Divergent
Outcome	Product & correct answer	Process & experiential
Approach	Faculty-directed	Learner-centred (LC)
Faculty Role	Lecture & demonstrate lesson	Discuss & moderate reflection
Typical teaching techniques (examples)	Lecture, demonstration, expert panel debate, real-world case-studies, poster board display, competition, oral drill, audio listening, video watching, reading & workbook	Cooperative learning, peer instruction, peer-assessment, one-on-one debate, mock/real presentation
Questions	Confirmatory (well-known)	Reflective (problem focus)
Curriculum	Standardised	Flexible
Process	Data-based lessons	Problem-based training
Plan & Prepare	Lessons & objectives	Dialogues & experiences
Learner (L) incentive	Extrinsic: grades and, since subject matter is ready, learner must be prepared to learn now	Social: use just-in-time & on-demand learning in order to socially or personally benefit it
L experience	Share life examples	Reinforce & challenge
L consumes	Textbooks	Video-captured lectures or blended learning
Means of assessment	Objective: Skill performance, test, quiz	Subjective: Portfolio, peer presentation, blog

Conductor**Mentor**

Transmitting (change)

Transmuting (invent)

'Catalyst in the Mist'

'Friend at the Bend'

Generalise Wisdom

Systematise innovation

Synthesis & evaluation

Review & improvement

Unfamiliar

Risky & uncharted territory

Critical

Creative

Democracy & Social Justice

Imagination

Self-directed & LC

Inquiry–discovery (alliance)

Advise & encourage practice

Join & participate as partner

Field trips, lab, volunteering, fieldwork/
internships, team-basedImagination, logical reasoning,
scientific method, storytelling, inspired
brainstorming,
self-teaching

Dynamic (solution-focus)

Exploratory (uncertainly)

Custom made

Non-existent/open

Project-based change

Evidence-based research

Support & resources

Opportunities & dreams

Altruistic: making a difference in society,
bringing revolution & championing changeIntrinsic: Invent new, innovate better,
imagine/think differently

Refine & redefine

Determine what is lacking

Interview/observation data

Research outcomes/proposals

Descriptive: Project impact,
presentation, work experience, report

Productive: Final publication/presentation

An 'Excellent' Teacher

I remember the day our Principal, introduced us, restless sixth graders, to our new Physics teacher. Considering this branch of science was being introduced to us for the first time, we were quite apprehensive about what to expect from both, the teacher and her subject.

At that moment however, considering the petite brunette standing next to the principal our fears of having to spend a year under the painful scrutiny of a strict instructor were assuaged. We all started nudging each other in anticipation of all the fun we were going to have at her expense in the following months. Or at least the fun we thought we were going to have.

*For every child, in every class,
there is an excellent teacher.*

The moment the principal swept out of the room, our new teacher swept towards the blackboard and wrote her name in big, bold letters with incredibly swift movement of her hands.

We soon realised that penmanship wasn't the only thing quick about her. Her wit, her gaze, her mind... Just about everything about her was fast, and she rarely missed a beat.

Despite the fact that she caught every single thing that happened in the classroom [passed notes and hushed jokes included] she never let on, unless she found you cheating on a pop quiz, in which case may the odds be in your favour. On most days, she would march into the class and dive right into the subject without as much as a 'Good morning'.

She was super speedy yet a brilliant teacher and each one of us absolutely adored her. So, it came as a bit of a shock when we realised that, going into the ninth grade, we would have a different teacher for Physics.

In our new tutor's first class with us, most of us were subdued and unwilling to participate. Understandably, for we'd just left behind a truly amazing teacher.

Turned out that our new teacher wasn't half bad, either. Sure, he wasn't at all like our first Physics guru. In fact, they were totally different in a number of ways.

For starters, he was a LOT more laid back. He'd enter the class with a relaxed strut and get us into the 'mood' with an internet joke or two before digging into the syllabus and, that was exactly what we needed in the midst of all the pressure of having 'grown up' and being thrust into high school.

He was patient and gave lengthy explanations, often entwining the theories we were forced to learn with interesting personal anecdotes.

I was thinking the other day, that despite their stark differences, both teachers perfectly fit my description of an excellent teacher. One was so fast, it seemed like she was eternally participating in a 100-metre sprint while the other was quite relaxed; one preferred to jump right into work while the other tried to ease us into it; one kept a vigilant check on us while the other let us do our own thing....It all boils down to how they were both extremely talented at their job and made fine teachers.

They were approachable and spent hours of their free time crafting life-sized models, creating colourful PowerPoint presentations and devising smart little experiments so that students could learn better.

So what qualities, characteristics, and features does one need to be 'excellent'? I mused a good deal about this before I figured it out; it takes just **passion** to be an excellent teacher. It doesn't really matter whether you are slow or fast, firm or easy-going and brisk or chilled out. You just need to care about your students. [Of course, a basic subject competency is essential.]

And that's the recipe for being an 'excellent' teacher; there is little need for diplomas to mix in with the batter; it doesn't matter what quantity of quickness you've poured in and litres of vigilance can be anything from 1 to 1000.

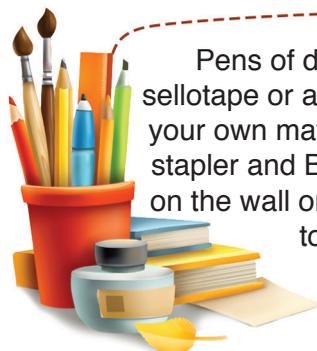
Just make sure you add a generous quantity of passion and the cake of your education will taste just fine.

—Ms. Trusha Ganesh,
Student of Vidya Vikas Academy, Goa

'A Teacher's Survival kit'

By Lindsay Clandfield and Duncan Foord

Stationery Pack



Pens of different colours, scissors, sellotape or a gluestick for putting together your own materials, paper clips or a small stapler and Blu-tack (for putting things up on the wall or bulletin board). Don't forget to label your tools!

Photos



Include photos of your family, your home, you at a younger age (or at a time when you looked quite different), a place you have visited, etc. The amount of work that can be derived from a simple photo is considerable!

Music



Have different playlists for classroom use. Playlists can contain classical music to; something more noisy and upbeat. These serve as background music to suit the activity type: from quiet writing or pairwork to a 'find someone who', or an 'at a party' type role-play.

Notebook



From jotting down lesson plans to, taking down students' errors in communication activities, it works for all. Use it to write your own reflections on some of your classes: A great way to help yourself develop as a teacher! The notebook format means you can look back if you want.

Pocket-Size Dictionary



Dictionary is not only useful for resolving communication problems in class but also for helping the teacher prepare. Dictionaries tend to have more than just words. There are useful phrases for different situations, verb tables, and sound symbols which can be exploited.

Data Storage Device



Your own personal data storage device is very useful to have. You might prepare material for a class on an outside computer but, want to print it at work. Or, a colleague might have a great exercise on the school computer that, you would like to adapt. Another thing to keep would be a 'My Favourites' collection of websites for easy access at home or at work.



Selfie

Contest

Explore the world through a lens

3 simple steps to enter!!

1. Take your best selfie shot at a heritage site/landscape
2. Give the selfie a suitable caption
3. Email your selfie with your contact details to marketing@macmillan.co.in
(Name, Subject you teach, Name of your school and Contact number)

Terms and conditions

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