What is Good Teaching?

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All students have had hundreds of teachers in their lifetimes. A very few of these teachers they remember as being exceptionally good. What are the qualities that combine to create an excellent, memorable teacher? Why do some teachers inspire students to work three times harder than they normally would, while others inspire students to skip class? Why do students learn more from some teachers than others?

If you are trying to become a better teacher, these are important questions. This issue of "Emphasis on Teaching" focuses on the four essential qualities that distinguish exceptional teachers: knowledge, communication skills, interest, and respect for students.

"Core qualities" are the essential characteristics needed to be a good teacher. I would like to concentrate on the core qualities in this article.

Knowledge

In every survey I have given, students consistently and clearly target as the number one quality of a good teacher exactly what you would expect: knowledge of the subject. You must be an expert in your field if you are going to be a good teacher at a university. This is a prerequisite.

Communication

The second core quality that good teachers possess is the ability to communicate their knowledge and expertise to their students. You may be the greatest expert ever in your field, but what would happen if you lectured in Latin? How much would your students learn?

It is a common misconception at the university level that knowledge of a subject is all that's required to be a good teacher; that the students should be willing and able to extract the meat from what you say regardless of how it is delivered (even if it is delivered in Latin). This might be true at the upper graduate level, but elsewhere it is definitely untrue. It is especially untrue at the undergraduate level. The teacher's job is to take advanced knowledge and make it accessible to the students. A good teacher allows students to understand the material, and to understand what it means (because it is one thing to understand how nuclear bombs work, but quite another to understand what nuclear bombs mean).

A good teacher can take a subject and help make it crystal clear to the students. A bad teacher can take that same material and make it impenetrable. Or a bad teacher can devote so little time and effort to preparation that the material presented is intrinsically confusing and disorganized. A good teacher is willing to expend the effort needed to find
Does Turnitin Detect Plagiarism?

Originally published on the Turnitin website this article is interesting on a number of levels, not the least is that Turnitin is a tool for both instructors and students whom are pursuing superior writing skills. It is also in my opinion an educational site where students can learn the proper use of attribution in their work.

~Editor
Lots of people have impressions about Turnitin – what it is, what it does, how it works. Unfortunately, many of these impressions are based on misconceptions. So to kick off our new blog, we’ll tackle the #1 misconception: that Turnitin detects plagiarism.

But isn’t that what Turnitin is – a plagiarism detector? No, Turnitin does not detect plagiarism per se; Turnitin just finds text that matches other sources in the vast Turnitin databases and shows those matches. It is up to a human being to determine whether those text matches are a problem or not.

It is important to realize that the Similarity Index is NOT a “plagiarism index” – there is no score that is inherently “good” or “bad”. 0% does not necessarily mean that everything is OK with the student’s paper and 75% does not necessarily mean that the student should flunk. You have to look at the report and decide: what is going on here?

The Turnitin originality report shows the paper’s text highlighted with any text that matches sources found in the Turnitin databases containing vast amounts of web content, previously submitted papers, and subscription-based journals and publications.

It is up to the person looking at the matches to decide whether the writer’s intent matters. Some people care about intent; others do not. Sometimes it matters; sometimes it doesn’t.

Since plagiarism is one of those topics that gets people all riled up (like politics and religion), there is no shortage of discussion on what it is, why it is complicated, and what to do about it. This is an important conversation with lots of shades of distinction – and that conversation should continue as today’s “digital natives” have become the “new normal” and they have a very different way of relating to content.

So does Turnitin detect plagiarism? No – Turnitin offers a tool that helps educators (and their students) make informed evaluations of student work rapidly and move on to the important task of discerning what their students need in the way of instruction, correction or judicial action.

“"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."  
-- Henry Brooks Adams

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- Celine Lang
  Dean of Libraries

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innovative and creative ways to make complicated ideas understandable to their students, and to fit new ideas into the context available to the student. A good teacher can explain complicated material in a way that students can understand and use.

There is a saying, "Give me a fish and I eat for a day, teach me to fish and I eat for a lifetime." This is the philosophy of a good teacher. Give your students an answer and they can solve one problem, but show students the techniques needed to find the answer for themselves and they can become self-sufficient in the field. Students need to be shown how to apply the new techniques you teach to problem solving.

Interest

A good teacher starts with a firm knowledge of the subject, and builds on that with a clarity and understanding designed to help students master the material. The best teachers then go one step further. Because good teachers are interested in the material being taught, they make the class interesting and relevant to the students. Knowledge is worthless unless it is delivered to the students in a form they can understand. But the effort expended making the material understandable is wasted if the students are asleep when it is delivered, or if the students can see no point in learning the material.

Good teachers recognize this, and work hard to make their material relevant. They show students how the material will apply to their lives and their careers. Bad teachers make material "relevant" by threatening students with failure on a test. Good teachers go far beyond this: they make students want to learn the material by making it interesting.

This is one of the things that makes research so important and vital to a university: research makes the ideas discussed in class exciting and important to the teacher, as well as to the students. If the teacher isn't interested in what's being taught, then why should the students be?

Respect

Good teachers always possess these three core qualities: knowledge, the ability to convey to students an understanding of that knowledge, and the ability to make the material interesting and relevant to students. Complementing these three is a fourth quality: good teachers have a deep-seated concern and respect for the students in the classroom. Why else would a teacher put in the time and effort needed to create a high quality class?

The creation of a good class requires an immense amount of work. You don't simply come up with clear explanations and examples and experiments for class off the top of your head. You don't create fair, consistent, high quality tests and homework assignments (read "learning experiences") five minutes before you hand them out. You don't figure out ways to integrate new materials and research into a class in an understandable way on the drive in one morning. You work at this sort of quality all the time. You spend time with your students so you can learn about holes in their understanding. You read and write and create to build an exciting and interesting class every day. The only thing that would drive you to do that is a concern and respect for the adults in your classroom.

Conclusion

When you strive and work to become a good teacher and to create a good class, the four core qualities are essential: knowledge, the skills to convey that knowledge, the ability to make the material you are teaching interesting and relevant, and a deep-seated respect for the student. Without these four qualities, good teaching will not exist.