

EDUCATIONAL FORUM

Seven habits of highly effective teachers: Narrative reflection

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“I need them to want me to learn,

I need them to know how to make me, too.

Probably it's too much to ask, for they're humans, and I'm not easy.

But if I had an ideal teacher, that's what they'd do.”

As a student, these thoughts and feelings pondered within my mind. Now, as a teaching faculty, I wonder what habits a teacher should possess to be an effective teacher. This thought motivated me to talk to my mentor, guide for many M.Sc., MD, and PhD candidates within the field of medical physiology and allied branches like physiotherapy. He has acquired Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research fellowship in 2010 from regional center G.S. Medical College and is recipient of various awards in the field of physiology and medical education, namely, “Professor K. P. Puthuraya Award for the best teacher in Physiology” during APPICON-2009; “M. L. Gupta Prize in Medical Education and Technology for substantial contribution to Medical Education and Technology with a special reference to Physiology” at APPICON-2012. The Association of Physiologists of India instituted an award, “Professor S. K. Singh Award for best research work conduct by an undergraduate medical student” in 2018 for undergraduate medical student to motivate budding researchers to conducting research work. The most dedicated, caring, humble, and pioneer faculty, from the department of physiology and medical education, Dr. S. K.

Singh (Ex. Professor and Head, Department of Physiology, PSMC, MCI Nodal Centre, Karamsad, Gujarat).


Dr. Puja: Good afternoon Sir. Thanks for being a part of this narrative story telling. It will be our pleasure to learn from your 34 years of teaching and research experience. Sir, kindly guides the budding teacher about how to be an effective teacher.

Dr. Singh: Hello dear Puja, thank for providing this opportunity to me. I would like to begin with a story of myself as a medical student in 1975 at KGMU, Lucknow. There we had an Anatomy faculty, Professor Abdul Haleem, whose well-planned lectures and ability to explain topics in a simpler manner always impressed me. Encouraging students to ask questions without any fear, solving students' problems beyond lecture session reflected his humbleness and modesty.

Professor Nishith, Professor and Head Physiology, too created a deep impact on my teaching approach. He taught the difficult physiology topic of central nervous system in an unscramble manner, to get down to basic understanding of the topic to each and every student. Moreover, his love and dedication towards teaching made him create an unofficial record of non-cancellation or postponement of any of his lecture session.

You won't believe Dr. Puja that the lectures attendance for those teachers used to be 100%, like myself, the majority of our batch mates had great regards for them. During the tenure of our undergraduate medical program, we were exposed to approximately 150 different teachers, why we all, students till now, have great regard for such efficient teachers? Why other teaching faculties were not rated at par to those two teachers? Motivated by those two superb teachers, my journey as a professional, a researcher, and as a teacher impelled me to read varied literature in context to be an effective medical teachers.

I have enjoyed my 34 years of medical physiology teaching to undergraduate, postgraduate students, and PhD candidates.

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The education given to wards should be with Honesty, Love, Kindness, Compassion, and Care. I strongly believe that a good teacher should have these qualities. Palmer (1997)^[1] in its chapters specifies “A good teacher is someone who is approachable, engaging, and inspiring, and who has a sound knowledge of the subject of what they are trying to teach. They also have the ability to communicate well with students.”

To strengthen my insight, I started a current literature search which showed various review study for What Makes a Good Clinical Teacher in Medicine? Sutkin *et al.* (2008)^[2] suggested that excellent teaching is characterized by inspiring, supporting, actively involving, and communicating well with students. Twelve qualities of a good teacher or mentor are tabulated by Azer (2005).^[3] Hasan *et al.* (2011)^[4] study suggested the six key competencies of an ideal medical teacher, namely, passion, respect, integrity, motivation, creation of a good learning environment, and leadership. Singh *et al.* (2013)^[5] study specified three desirable qualities of an effective teacher were knowledge of subject, enthusiasm, and communication skills.^[5] Al-Mohaimed (2018)^[6] comparative study identified the qualities of an effective medical teacher as per faculty and student perception matching at three levels, knowledge and qualification, then respectful attitude, and finally sense of humor.

My personal 34 years of teaching experience along with the literature available has allowed me to identify main seven qualities within an educator of any level or hierarchy to be remembered as an effective teacher not only an effective medical teacher.

Those seven qualities are as follows:

1. Integrity	2. Effective communication skill	3. Humility
4. Lifelong learner	5. Passionate toward teaching and learner	6. Building long-term relationship
7. Self-awareness and reflection		

INTEGRITY

Integrity is all about doing the right things; even when no one is watching. Palmer (1997)^[1] identified that integrity involves truthfulness, self-awareness, responsibility, and always doing the right things. Integrity entails moral principle and cannot be influenced by wrong practices or prejudice.^[1] Thus, effective teachers should possess a high degree of integrity.

Reflecting few years back, one of my colleagues told me a true story of a medical teacher who was an external examiner for physiology course, during the 1st year MBBS examination at one of the government colleges in Gujarat. Examination was conducted for 3 days as per schedule, and on the 3rd

day noon, all the four examiners assembled to write and prepare the final result. There was one particular student who was failing by a margin of 6 marks. The chairman of the examination requested the external examiners to pass that student since he was the son of a minister within the state. The external faculty, whom I am referring, declined to pass the student, although other three were willing to pass the student. Everyone tried to influence the said examiner by various ways, including financial gain, but the examiner as a teacher declined all the appealing offers. Finally, the result was prepared and that student failed, in spite of his influential family background. This is the role of a teacher, as an assessor, who did not compromise his integrity despite of all the pressure, and attractive offers put forth.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

According to my experience, an effective teacher should possess immense interpersonal skills, along with exceptionally good communication skills. Communication involves verbal component of patient listening, good writing and reading skill, and soft speaking skill along with non-verbal behavioral, including attitudinal skills.

An effective teacher should have the quality of empathic listening to his/her pupil. According to my experience, teacher with a good communication skill makes the topics interesting, interactive and easily understandable by the learner. Rubio (2009)^[7] specifies that to be an effective teacher is a complex process, where they care about students' progress and let their students know it at all times, by providing feedback. The study highlights core areas of effective communication starting from creating a safe learning environment in classroom, less talk more group task, less authorities while more facilitative approach, active listening for the voice of students, and apt positive feedback in the class to motivate other to move ahead in better direction and negative feedback in private, so as to respect the identity of his/her pupil.^[7]

Malcolm Forbes quoted “The art of conversation lies in listening” points toward the importance of active learning. Bernard Baruch also quoted that “Most of the successful people I have known are the ones who do more listening than talking.” Jahromi *et al.* (2016)^[8] mentioned in their study that all effective medical teachers have developed good listening skills which are important component in teacher-student communication as well as doctor-patient communication.^[8]

Recollecting my journey as Head of the Department, Physiology course, I would love to share another one of my experiences, when one of the 1st year students' approached me since he had failed in his first internal examination. He told that he was not disturbed by his failure in the subject, but had a concern about the behavior of examiner. He said that the assessor was not listening to me at the time of viva voce

examination. This story might seem to be a usual one in your teaching experience too, Dr. Puja. Listening is one unique skill which transforms teacher into a state of effective teacher. Like us, students also want to be listened to, be heard well by their teacher. Moreover, in health professional sect, faculties, specifically from clinical specialties, need to have excellent listening practice. Patients want their voice to be well heard and focused by their treating doctor.

HUMILITY

Confucius well quoted “Humility is the solid foundation of all virtues.”

Dictionary (Vocabulary.com) definition of Humility is “the quality or state of being humble...” The word humility comes from the Latin word “humilis” which literally means “low,” that is, freedom from pride or arrogance. Sezgin and Erdoğan (2018)^[9] study shows a significant and positive relation between teachers’ humility, forgiveness, and self-efficacy levels. Thus, effective teachers should have excess of humility. The trait should be including these components:

- Accepting once mistake in front of anyone, including students
- Respectful to colleagues as well as students
- Focus on the student’s strength and help them to convert weakness to strength
- Share the success credit with colleagues and regularly reinforce the humble ethos.
- Self-aware by reflecting on their work process and progress
- Seek feedback from others on their teaching strategies and skills by asking “How am I teaching.” It takes humility to ask the question, and even more humility to accept the true feedback. Finally redraft or modify the teaching strategies and again come forward, with a same zeal, for the next feedback review.
- Understand and accept once limitations.
- Regularly expressing gratitude to deserving persons including students.

LIFELONG LEARNERS

Albert Einstein quoted: “Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.”

Lifelong learning is a deliberate and voluntary act. An effective teacher should be a lifelong learner. They should be self-motivated to learn and develop.

Effective teachers should exhibit following traits of lifelong learning:

- Stay motivated to learn and read daily.
- Attend conferences, workshops, or various courses regularly to be updated in their subject knowledge and

other educational skill strategies such as usage of digital strategies, need of hour, to be at par with the present generation students, and involve them toward your teaching.

- Actively seek opportunities to grow academically, digitally, and professionally.
- Reflect and be self-aware
- Willingness to learn from mistakes
- Self-assessment by reviewing the performance in real-life settings
- Develop meta-cognitive skills (skills for “thinking about thinking”).

PASSIONATE TOWARD TEACHING AND LEARNING

“Passion” originally meant a willingness to suffer for what you love. The example of Jesus Christ is the most know. In my opinion, passion for an effective teacher refers to love and commitment toward teaching. In other words, passion can be described as an activity, goal, or cause that one cares so much about, that he or she is willing to suffer for it. Passion also means making conscious decision to give up other enjoyable activities to focus energy on the most important activity.

Researcher Mart (2013)^[10] concluded that passionate teachers have an effect on the students’ achievement. Commitment is an important component of successful teaching and plays a crucial role in development of students.

In my opinion, passion motivates effective teachers to acquire sound and updated subject knowledge. They try to learn from everywhere and everyone, including students and colleagues. They become an expert in their field by their passion of lifelong learning. They are always willing to help and give time to their students. They remain updated with the recent development (like virtual digital development; in present set-up) and trends in their area of specialization and other fields too. They inspire, excite, and motivate students about what they are learning and what they should learn.

BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

The most blessed and deeply inspirational relationships are that of a devoted teacher and a willing student. Effective teachers should have a unique quality of developing strong student-teacher relationships. James Ford, the program director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina commented, “Our first job as teachers is to make sure that we learn our students, that we connect with them on a real level, showing respect for their culture and affirming their worthiness to receive the best education possible.”

Al Nasser *et al.* (2014)^[11] review study concluded that building teacher-student relationship in terms of supporting students

self-confidence, fostering students' self-trust, and increasing their motivation to learn, influences their professional development and future career pathway. Haidet and Stein^[12] in their study concluded that the relationships, teacher in a medical institute, form with students will be key sources of experience that those students will draw on when they find themselves in the role of teacher with their patients. Plaut and Baker (2011)^[13] in their study highlighted that the discussion of case vignettes may help build awareness and thus help foster more balanced teacher-student relationships in medical institute. Across several recent studies, researchers have found that teachers who cultivate empathy for their students are able to manage students' behavior and academic engagement better.^[14]

SELF-AWARENESS AND REFLECTION

In my opinion, the highly effective teachers are having good self-awareness and the unique quality of reflection. Reflective teaching is a self-assessment of teaching, wherein a teacher examines their teaching methodologies, articulates reasons and strengths for their strategies, and identifies areas for revision or improvement.

There is a positive relationship between teachers' reflectivity and students' achievement (Kheirzadeh and Sistani, 2018).^[15] Teacher's reflectivity on their own teaching is an important tool to improve their own effectiveness as a teacher.

Dear Dr. Puja: I would like to conclude by two inspirational quotes by William A. Ward "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." "Teaching is more than imparting knowledge; it is inspiring change. Learning is more than absorbing facts; it is acquiring understanding."

Dr. Puja: Thanks a lot Sir for sharing your valuable experience and explaining important points for being an effective teacher, educationist, and scholar.

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