

How best to 'time' education

Effective teaching has never been easy. It is common practice in higher institutions to concoct, every so often, new ways to better educate the students. In fact, it is a never-ending quest. These are systems loaded with lofty and complex statements of objectives and goals, assessments of outcomes, and numerous other elements. They are practiced for a period, and then discarded in favor of the latest. To our knowledge, there is no evidence that any of these systems replace mentoring. This editorial will argue that these prescriptive ways to teach might be missing out on a fundamental issue: timing.

Despite the plethora of teaching systems, a never answered question is: when in the life of a student it is most effective to teach a particular topic? Learning has to be voluntary; teaching cannot be forced. Perhaps, it is possible to make a student to memorize enough facts to pass an examination, but the educator cannot claim the student has learned. Interestingly, teaching is very similar to raising a family. Parents give their children their best and then some more, and hope the child will be an asset to the society. But when does the child recognize s/he had a good upbringing?

When the child recognizes that her/his upbringing was something s/he could be proud of, then all that was given by the parents come out and held dearly. But until that moment, the child was upset because the parents did not know anything. They've just tortured her/him and did not allow her/him to look cool among her/his classmates. Everybody else's parents would let their kids do everything, but not her/his parents. Parents are to be hated.

When does a student realize s/he had a good education? Certainly, while in school instructors put her/him through series of hoops, made her/him suffer through trivial exercises; nobody did those things in practice! Instructors don't know what it is like out in

the real world. School and the instructors are to be hated.

During the course of their upbringing young people might simply not appreciate what they have right away. Yet the educational system wants the immediate gratification of demonstration of wisdom, competence, gratitude, and the like, from the student while in school. Perhaps, there is nothing wrong with wanting the student to learn indelibly and appreciate what was given to her/him, but is the curricular sequence conducive to such response from the student?

If appreciation is a form of delayed response, perhaps one must consider the nature of the delay. Arguably, the delay is due to student's life experience. In the absence of life experience, it is hard for the student to place a value on the education. In other words, the education has to be tested. Then if it performs well, appreciation follows. The question then becomes how can one shorten the timeline of life experience? A case can be made for experience to precede the classroom. A foundation of experience can make learning better, appreciated sooner, and more wanted. Typically, practical exercises follow the didactic. Why couldn't the sequence be reversed? No reason other than no one has done it. A shift in tuitional mindset can yield the much-sought-after high quality education.

If timing is everything then the student will be more receptive to learning as s/he can connect experience with the didactic. Lectures are no longer endless, confusing, and abstract statements. Everyone knows, in the clinic, as the complexity of treatment increases, clinician's expertise becomes more important. Thus, why not graduate expert clinicians rather than ones only competent to begin?

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