TATJANA SIMOVIĆ, VELJKO SIMOVIĆ, LJILJANA MILOVIĆ, BILJANA BALOV

STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON TEACHING STYLES AND METHODS

Introduction

When imparting knowledge, teachers use several teaching methods and strategies. The selection of methods and the way they are deployed differs from teacher to teacher, causing that each teacher has his or her own teaching style. A teaching style depends on a teacher's experiences, his or her personality, as well as the students he or she works with (their age, their command of the subject matter, their willingness to participate, etc.). Discussing teaching styles there are three important questions we must ask: What is it? How is it developed? What are good styles and what are bad ones?

In spite of the fact that there exist several definitions of a teaching style, the concept is very often understood as "a set of teaching tactics" (Galton et al, 1980, in [3]) or "the general pattern created by using a particular set of strategies" (Teaching Styles in Physical Education and Mosston's Spectrum, in [3]). To put it simply, a teaching style is a sum of teaching strategies and teaching methods teachers employ in their instruction. It is important to notice the distinction between a teaching style and a teaching method, for a teaching style is something that is specific for a certain individual while a teaching method refers to general principles and management strategies used in a classroom [5]. Thus, even if more teachers use the same set of teaching methods, they employ them in specific ways.

There are many different categorizations of teaching approaches but the most prominent is the one that differentiate between a teacher-centered and the student-centered one [1]. When teachers approach teaching according to the first model, they view students as passive learners whose role is to receive information, the teacher's role being passing the knowledge onto the students. Teachers who center their teaching to students, view learners as equal partners in the learning process; they coach and facilitate student learning, the students actively construct their knowledge and understanding, and learn through discovery [1]. We, however, believe, that both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, meaning that a single model of instruction will not be the best for all situations, and often not even a single method is enough for a single class, a teacher must find different ways to transfer the knowledge. He or she needs to combine models and employ different teaching methods, and even improvise in order to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect and learning in the classroom.

Traditionally, the education of health professionals is directed towards teaching about health only through treatment, care and rehabilitation. The introduction of the concept 'active client' brings a new dimension to education of health professionals. The concept of active client includes a holistic perspective to health and treatment, a perspective that takes the influence of people's lifestyle, work, social and cultural activities and a person's interaction with various groups into consideration. In order to recognize and respond to these new challenges, innovation in education of health

professionals is crucial. The education of health professionals is centered on acquiring knowledge and skills in the area, but also to be aware that the needs of healthcare are changing over the years, moving from the need for education about health and prevention to palliative care. It is crucial that health professionals are trained to approach clients so that their capacities are respected and supported. The clients expect the health professionals to be kind, reliable, competent for the tasks they do, honest and caring [2]. This perception points to the necessity of providing integrated health and social protection to the clients, as well as the education of health professionals in various areas: geriatrics, psychology, management, interdisciplinary teamwork.

Aim

The purpose of this study is to assess the efficiency of teaching styles and methods from students' and teachers' points of view.

Methods

The design of the study is an analytic cross-sectional study. Different teaching styles and methods were compared through opinions of students and teachers. Two focus groups were conducted: (1) a group of 27 students from the College of Health Studies in Ćuprija and the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade and (2) a group of 18 teaching staff from the same institutions.

Results

The two focus groups (students and teaching staff) discussed two domains of teaching style: teacher-centered (TC) and student-centered (SC), and four sub domains: teaching methods (TM), classroom milieu (CM) (the social environment in the class), use of questions (UQ), and use of assessment (UA). The majority of students (91,1%) prefers SC style, and the third-year students more than first-year students and this difference is, statistically significant (X^2=4,62; df=1; p<0,05). The majority of students (89,1% of first-year and 96,4% of third and four-year students) knew the learning outcomes of the study program, although there is no statistically significant difference between students (X^2=2,62; df=1; p>0,05). About 58% of the students perceive the risk of TC styles for their way of making conclusions and usefulness for everyday life and future work. About 80% of students estimated that the additional lectures about some fields are needed during the studies in order to be applicable in real life, but only 24% of teaching staff thinks the same, and this difference is statistically significant (X^2=17,77; df=1; p<0,01). Approximately 40% of the teaching staff surveyed thinks that they need knowledge about new teaching methods and there is always room for improvement in teaching, but 75% of them do not know how to acquire that knowledge. Findings revealed that there was a significant difference between the group of students and group of teachers in their preferred teaching style. The group of students reported a greater preference for interactive and dynamic learning than the group of teachers.

Discussion

Teachers develop a certain teaching style through research and experience throughout and though life experiences. Today, when lifelong learning is practiced more and more all over the world teachers get even more opportunity to develop and improve their teaching styles. A good way to do this relates to the pre-service and in-service teacher education. When having the opportunity to spend some time shadowing more experienced teachers (main characteristic of pre-service training) or trying out different (even hypothetical) pedagogical scenarios, teachers get to see first-hand what works well in the classroom and what does not and thus improve their style of teaching accordingly. Furthermore, it is important to mention that the sooner the young teachers start experiencing the atmosphere in the classroom the sooner they get to develop their specific style. Starting young, they also have much more opportunities to experiment with their teaching methods and find what works best for them.

A teaching style cannot be simply evaluated as good or bad, because its appropriateness and quality depends on the learning situation and the learners themselves. Teacher-centered practices refer to beliefs that the teacher holds the subject matter expertise and students are generally passive learners who must be told what to think [1]. Student-centered practices refer to beliefs that students must learn how to construct their own understanding [1]. Today, some teaching methods are used less than before (e.g. standing and lecturing in front of the board and passing information while students write in their notebooks), but that does not necessarily mean that they are inadequate – teaching method should be chosen considering both the subject and the students. Even though there is not a singular style or model that will work in all classrooms with all learners, interviews with students (young adults between ages of 19 and 24, from a variety of faculties) and teaching staff have shown that there are some methods of teaching that are well accepted and preferred by both learners and teachers.

The study revealed that the students preferred 'interactive learning', because this method engages students into thinking for themselves and trying to reach a conclusion without the teacher providing them with information from the beginning. This is a method which belongs to the 'student-centered' model of teaching. We believe it is appreciated by the students mainly because it deviates from what they were used to in their previous education – mainly teacher-centered learning where a teacher would give information while standing in front of the class and occasionally ask a student to answer a question [4]. Furthermore, the student-centered model provides the teacher with a more relaxed atmosphere to converse with students less formally which in turn enables the students to speak what is on their mind freely and without fear of getting the answer wrong. However, even though the method of interactive learning is the first choice of the students, for the teachers it is not completely unproblematic. The teachers fear that by deploying interactive learning they might lose some students' attention, especially if the group of students is large. This is the main problem with all of the student-centered interactive models of teaching – it was made for smaller groups. We offer a few ways of addressing this issue. The easiest solution (and probably the best with a large class) would be to divide students into groups and give them separate but related tasks (research, reading, acquiring information related to the topic of the lecture) and organize a

conversation in which all groups would present what they found and connect their findings to those of other groups. Not only does this demand the student's participation, but it also encourages them to communicate and coordinate their knowledge with their peers. Another solution to the mentioned problem would be to introduce some strange and unusual behavior. It is surprising how many students had mentioned that they like a certain strangeness about their teachers. Moreover, when asked what best captures their attention, more than half of the interviewees answered that professor's unexpected activities or behavior does it best for them. Such unusual behavior can best be introduced in ice-breaker exercises in workshop model classes. It does not have to be drastic; it might otherwise redirect students' attention too much. When students were asked to provide examples from their experience they mentioned the following: teacher sitting on the desk while doing the ice-breaker exercises or coming in the classroom really loud and energetic were both met with the approval of the students.

Of course, not all students prefer the same methods of teaching and respond to them in different ways. Some like a more direct method, some an indirect one while others want something completely different. However, there are some issues regarding the professors' teaching on which most of the students agree. First, no matter what the subject, all of the students interviewed want to learn something that is applicable in real life, at least through discussion. Second, interviewees said that they preferred to get the examples and to figure out the rule for themselves and not the other way around. Furthermore, demonstration is preferred to just plain lecturing since students tend to like energetic teachers more. Most of all, students like patience and cheerfulness in their teachers and said that it inspires them to learn and be engaged in the class. And if all else fails, remember that good humor can help overcome any obstacle.

There are certain things that interviewees disliked about their teachers' behavior during class. The foremost of which is teacher's inability to admit their own mistakes. To err is human, and there is nothing wrong with it. Another thing they disliked was teachers who did not have the patience or the will to include the shy students in the activities. Also, the problem that can sometimes occur, according to the interviewees, is that teachers do not give enough time for the information to sink in before presenting new information to the class. In addition to this, the students mentioned some of the other things that bothered them such as teachers giving them no time to write down what is important; monotonous lectures; reading from PowerPoint slides. They also dislike when teachers are too strict, when they split hairs or are unprofessional. All in all, it is the students' general opinion that teachers should present themselves as people, to maintain an orderly and relaxed atmosphere and not be too strict.

On the other hand, the teaching staff emphasized that it is a real challenge to teach 'multitasking generation'. They also point out that not all teachers are willing to accept new ways of teaching and develop a more open teaching style. They believe that new approach requires good preparation and focus. The teachers however find an interactive approach aimed the most suitable for meeting the students' needs. They believe that a teacher's feeling that the instruction was well managed and that both students and teachers were satisfied are excellent quality indicators.

Conclusion

Every teacher develops his or her own teaching style. It is advisable that he or she stays true to it, but simultaneously to further develop and improve it. During pre- and in-service training (future) teachers are given the opportunity to experience the challenges of teaching from the very beginning of their career. Moreover, younger teachers can shadow their more experienced colleagues, and learn all aspects of the job and some tricks of the trade, thus helping to improve their teaching style and in improve the quality of their work. Finally, teachers have to develop their own style by themselves. In the process it is of course useful that (future) teachers have several opportunities to observe their colleagues in the classrooms, and to get well acquainted with their work and challenges. One however must not be afraid to experiment with his or her own ideas to find the best combination. Diversity of methods makes instruction interesting, but a teacher has to remain true to his or her style of teaching.

References

1. Behar-Horenstein, L. S., Mitchell, G. S., Notzer, N., Penfield, R., Eli, I. (2006): Teaching style beliefs among U.S. and Israeli faculty. *Journal of Dental Education*, 70 (8), 851-6.

2. Churchill, J. (2011): *Supporting the area between formal and informal care improving employability in social care in the EU*. Lisbon. Available at: http://www.cohehre.eu/files/James_Churchill_Supporting_the_area_between_formal_and_informal.pdf

3. Learning and Teaching Styles. Available at: edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Teaching_style

4. Techniques & Strategies for Teaching and Learning. Available at: http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/techniques.html

5. The Difference between Teaching Methods. StudyMode.com. Retrieved 12, 2012, from http://www.studymode.com/essays/The-Difference-Between-Teaching-Methods-1305050.html

Tatjana Simović, Ljiljana Milović, Biljana Balov
College of Health Studies in Ćuprija
Serbia

Veljko Simović
Faculty of Philology of University in Belgrade
Serbia

Corresponding author:
Dr. Tatjana Simovic
College of Health Studies in Ćuprija
Serbia
tatjanasimovic@gmail.com