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### Nurturing an Education: Acknowledging What We Do

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#### Abstract

This article emphasizes the importance of incorporating nurturing elements into teaching. As such, it focuses on the evolution of the teaching role, reviewing the characteristics found in effective teachers and identifying the similarities between teaching and psychotherapy. As we acknowledge the fact that college teachers do more than teach, the notion of nurturing is introduced as an area which requires further exploration.

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#### Introduction

Effective teaching in the post-secondary environment begs teachers to create and maintain a careful balance of facilitating learning toward specified learning goals and providing an environment where the achievement of such goals can happen. In general, post-secondary educators are charged with the duty to help students meet learning objectives while emanating personality characteristics that invite students into a process of learning and growth. Overall then, the underlying task of the post secondary teacher is directed at educating a cohort of people to prepare for the uncertainties of the future (Haberman, 1996). Much of a student's learning is self-directed, where faculty assigns work, and the student completes the work for evaluation (Grasha, 2002). Therefore, students go into the future prepared with knowledge. Yet, classroom-delivered knowledge is simply insufficient and it becomes increasingly important to acknowledge the pastoral aspect of teaching (Hockey, 1995).

Many of the aspects of this pastoral or caretaking side of college teaching are borrowed from the counselling and psychotherapy field (Raney, 2003; Wheeler, 1988; Hockey, 1995; Bowman and Hatley, 1995, Keely and Shemberg, 1995). The underlying premise is that there are similarities between teaching and counselling and although the outcomes may be different for students and clients/patients, the overall processes are very much the same. In this regard, there is merit at exploring further, some of the issues surrounding the pastoral side of teaching.

This article will describe the evolving role of the teacher. It will outline some of the positive traits of an effective teaching style and discuss the pastoral aspects of good teaching. The article will borrow from the psychotherapy literature in attempting to strike a balance

between teaching effectiveness and nurturing students. The beginnings of a nurturer-educator model will be introduced as an area for further review, research and discussion.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **The evolution of a teacher**

The job of a post-secondary teacher has always been encapsulated in the role of an educator, someone who provides knowledge to people as they prepare to contribute to society in a meaningful way (Davis, 2001). We have moved further away from the title as "knowledge disseminator" to that of "learning facilitator" (Robertson, 1999). The former appears more authoritarian, while the latter, more egalitarian. Regardless of the title, the student will learn, but they will learn better when teachers do not exert authority (Raney, 2003). This nonauthoritative-facilitative role is further validated when we recognize that teachers attribute the success of students not to their teaching, but to students themselves (Tom and Cooper, 1986).

The demographics of students have also changed over time. No longer do we have the traditional student (Miller 2003). Now, we teach students who are older, who may have dependents of their own, who may be working long hours and who may not have high school education. These non-traditional students do not tend to have similar achievement levels as do their traditional counterparts (Miller, 2003). In order for greater successes to occur, teaching must be modified to individualize learning, make ideas a basis for academic achievement and facilitate personal growth (Haberman, 1996). In this regard, the importance of the facilitative role in teaching can not be overstated.

The role of the teacher is not thought of in a vacuum. How one teaches is a choice. In this regard, whether the teacher "disseminates knowledge" or "facilitates learning" is influenced by a number of factors including the capabilities of the student, the teacher's need to control learning and the learning style of the teacher (Grasha, 2002). In addition, the evolution of a teacher moves from a focus on teacher mastery, to a focus on the experience of the learner, through to a simultaneous focus on both teacher and learner in interaction (Robertson, 1999). Consequently then, a teacher's growth is influenced not only by the very act of teaching, but also the growth of the teacher, himself or herself.

### **Effective teaching - style and personality**

The literature is replete with information about the principles and techniques of effective teaching. These come from countless reviews of teaching methodology and evidence-based studies. Effective teaching then, seems to arise from a reconciliation of style and personality. In other words, a teacher's style (how I teach) may be a reflection of their personality (who I am). As a result, overall teaching

effectiveness might lie in a greater awareness of the two.

In terms of factors that reflect good style, effective teaching seems to be most associated with the idea of facilitative learning (Robertson, 1999). In this regard, the acknowledgment and yet, the non-use of a teacher's authority brings about better learning experiences for students (Raney, 2003). Facilitative learning also includes the idea of presenting information as knowledge to be sought (Raney, 2003) instead of information to be delivered.

Inherent in a successful teaching style is the element of demonstrating expertise (Bowman and Hartley, 1995). As such, students do well when their professors have established credibility (Keely and Shemberg, 1995) and come to class prepared and organized (Check, 2001). In other words, if the teacher has little to share and does not come ready to teach, then students lose faith in the teacher and subsequently, in their own learning experiences. Therefore, the science of teaching remains of paramount importance. In short, know-how is critical.

Style also includes the creation of an academic atmosphere that promotes learning. The successful teacher creates an environment of safety and trust (Keely and Shemberg, 1995; Wheeler, 1988; Jacobson, 2000; Anderson and Carta-Falsa, 2002). There is also an air of fairness, firmness, yet kindness (Wheeler, 1988; Check, 2001, Grasher, 2002). Students are evaluated in numerous formats and the teacher provides multiple modes of instruction and information delivery (Anderson and Carta-Falsa, 2002).

When students are exposed to this type of classroom atmosphere, their own experiences are reflected in their learning. Students find greater successes when they are empowered to find their own answers (Raney, 2003). Empowerment seems to emanate from the teacher's ability to create high hopes (Keely and Shemberg, 1995) and individualize learning (Haberman, 1996). Additionally, students appreciate teachers who can advocate passionately for what they believe in, as well as counter, just as passionately, against their own beliefs (Gerety, 1999).

As stated above, a teacher's style (how I teach) comes from their personality (who I am). The successful teaching styles noted above, are best delivered when the teacher has some awareness about their own strengths and beliefs about teaching. Wheeler (1988) identifies several suggestions on successful teaching including establishing relationships based on trust and mutual respect, winning the cooperation of the students and using encouragement. These traits must be appreciated in the context of the professional teacher and success in demonstrating any of these suggestions depends on the humanity of the teacher.

### **Similarities to Counselling**

Many have commented on the nature of the similarities between teaching and psychotherapy (Hockey, 1995; Bowman and Hartley, 1995; Keely and Shemberg, 1995). One such similarity between counselling and teaching is around the concept of resistance. Kelly and Shemberg (1995) assert that whereas clients of psychotherapy undergo a natural resistance to new growth and change, students undergo a similar resistance to the adoption of critical thinking skills. In both settings, the client or student is challenged to come out of their comfort-zone and so, a natural, self-protective reluctance ensues. Resistance is further seen as a natural intra-psychic process that does not simply occur, but should be actively engaged in order for students learn and develop critical thinking (Raney, 2003).

Another unconscious process that is borrowed from psychotherapy into teaching is that of transference (Robertson, 1999). In general, transference is a process whereby a client sees the counsellor or psychotherapist as something they are not (Corey and Corey, 2003, Gurman and Messer, 1995; Cormier and Hackney, 2005). Usually, the client engages the counsellor in a way that is reminiscent of a past or desired relationship. Countertransference is then, the counsellor's response to the client's transference (Corey and Corey, 2003). Contemporary models assert that counsellors engage similarly in this unconscious process of transference (Corey and Corey, 2003; Cormier and Hackney, 2005) and that countertransference may not always be sufficient or appropriate in explaining some of the underlying unconscious processes between client and counsellor (Murphy and Dillon, 2003).

Finally, a summary of the similarities between counselling and teaching would not be complete without acknowledging the risk of dual relationships. These are defined as relationships where the counselor and the client engage in more than one capacity, usually, outside the bounds of the counselling context. (Corey and Corey, 2003). As such, when a counsellor is receiving a benefit other than what is prescribed or agreed upon by the explicit nature of the counsellor-client relationship, the counsellor is said to be in a dual relationship. Where a conflict in the relationship can lead to abuse, maltreatment or exploitation of the client, the counsellor's needs have become primary over the client's, thereby violating the helping relationship.

Bowman and Hatley (1995) note that the primary and explicit role of a teacher is to teach and evaluate students. However, an additional complementary function of a teacher is to facilitate growth and self-awareness. This element then, resembles a therapeutic relationship. The personal exploration inherent in teaching exposes the teacher to the non-academic aspects of the student (Hockey 1995). As such, the risk of a dual relationship developing becomes a veritable reality as the teacher becomes potentially less objective (Hockey 1995).

Dean and Rhodes (1992) state that ethical tensions or dilemmas

in the counselling relationship must be acknowledged and recognized and such tensions are similar in teaching; however, Kelly and Shemberg (1995) remind us that tensions such as resistance and transference actually provide an opportunity for problem resolution, limit setting and greater self-awareness (1995). In the counselling literature, this sentiment is echoed by others who believe in the value of setting boundaries and engaging in these types of discussions with clients (Hang, 1999; Hartmann, 1997; Hermanson, 1997; Owen 1997). Subsequently, given the nature of teaching and traits of effective teachers (Wheeler, 1998), it is not inconceivable for teachers to engage in similar processes, if only to ensure openness, accountability and awareness in the student-teacher relationship. Note that as counselling is a fiduciary relationship (Webb, 1997), where the client places immeasurable trust in the counsellor, so too is the teaching relationship; neither should be violated.

### **The Idea of the Educator-Nurturer**

The concept of a nurturer comes from traditional models of care giving (Murphy and Dillon, 2003). As stated above, students find teachers to be effective when they present the following traits: a diminished expression of authority, credibility, preparedness, the ability to create a safe learning atmosphere, the capacity to generate trust, set limits, be fair, empower the student, having a belief in the student's potential, respecting the student and providing encouragement. These traits are markedly similar to the traits of someone in a position to nurture.

The caretaking or pastoral aspect of teaching essentially speaks to the humanizing of the experience for the student. It follows then, that the demonstration of such nurturing is more than just a complementary function of teaching. There is, within a nurturing approach, the serendipitous opportunity for modeling of positive traits necessary for the work world in which the student will eventually participate. Therefore, teachers are not just equipping students to perform satisfactorily in the work world, but they are also modeling desirable traits which humanize the way in which students will work in the future.

Given the fact that the very nature of students coming into class has changed over the years, the teaching approach has been forced to make a parallel change. As much as we can acknowledge the fact that there are similarities between teaching and psychotherapy/counselling, it may not be appropriate to go as far as to consider the modern day teacher as an educator-counsellor. The two roles are inherently in conflict.

Yet, we do perform a complementary function to teaching. In short, we do more than just teach. We care, guide, encourage and support and model. No longer can we avoid this dual role, and consequently, the potential for dual relationship tensions. It becomes critical for the evolution of teaching to acknowledge and accept the

notion that the modern-day teacher may more likely to be an educator-nurturer. It is what recent students have expected of teachers, and it is what teachers have evolved to become.

Adopting this kind of a concept does not indemnify the post secondary teacher of the potential for dual relationship issues and other ethical tensions. Rather, it simply acknowledges a reality in which teachers perform the service of post-secondary education. It allows teachers to validate what they do as educators and to take responsibility for these functions are performed. The notion of the educator-nurturer has probably been in existence for a long time, however, the profession of teaching has been particularly careful about making sure that it does not adopt the unobjective model of educator-counsellor. Yet, many teachers can openly acknowledge that what they do actually is, in a minor form, counselling. The suggestion then, is that the function should be names, the role revised and the process, acknowledged.

### **Conclusion**

The passion for effective teaching challenges the teacher to reconcile and acknowledge the relationship between the functions of "disseminating knowledge" with "facilitating growth". One cannot happen without the other and only when we appreciate the importance of these two roles, can we recognize and further our effectiveness as post secondary educators in the present and future.

This article began with the idea that the effectiveness of how one teaches is heavily influenced by his or her personality. Concurrently, students have claimed to have a better learning experience when their teachers demonstrate various pastoral aspects within their role as educators. These caring traits are reminiscent of counselling or psychotherapy and the literature provides us with sufficient information about the parallels between the two professions. Teaching however, has ensured that it has not become counselling. Yet, when we combine teaching with effectiveness, we simply can not ignore the fact that the best teachers give from what is within themselves. This personal contribution, in its many forms, constitutes the nurturing function of the teacher.

The idea of an educator-nurturer has been introduced as a way to very openly acknowledge the overall direction toward which educators have been evolving. If we are to acknowledge this, then there are several implications for post secondary teaching and research. First, teacher-training must reflect the reality of what happens inside and outside the classroom. A component of training needs to be oriented to the nurturing aspects of our interaction with students. Second, if we are to acknowledge a nurturing element in teaching, then further measures must be taken in order to protect the student from becoming exploited in the process and the teacher from moving from the nurturing role into personality-changing psychotherapy. Third, a greater link between the post secondary

institution and the student must be forged. Simply put, the teacher can not nurture alone. The institution must also necessarily provide it services in an effort to nurture the student. The teacher is only effective as his or her institution and the institution is only as effective as its teachers. Fourth, as teachers model desirable traits for students, it may be prudent to direct research towards employer evaluations of personal characteristics of recent graduates. In essence, we need to ask employers whether graduates have the personal skills necessary to maintain their businesses and clientele (assuming that skill-based job-competence has been established). Fifth, research ought to be directed at students uncovering specifically how their professors' nurturing approaches assist them in achieving their learning goals. Finally, professional development for teachers should be oriented toward incorporating more of the personal with the professional. In other words, post secondary instructors would themselves benefit from being encouraged to discover and "nurture" their own personal traits that make them effective teachers. To put it succinctly, for our students to discover their own very best, we need to discover our own teacher within.

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