Effective Teaching for Humans

Asaf Bartov, User:Asaf (WMF), asaf@wikimedia.org

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Teaching is public speaking
Teaching is midwifery

Socrates was a weird dude, but he got that right.

Opening

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creating the circumstances and providing guidance to let learning happen in another person's mind
Everybody is a teacher. (Some get paid to do it.) So it's a good idea to learn to do it well.
Exercise 1: Great teachers

1. In your group, think about someone you consider a great teacher.

2. Share your example with the group, and name one quality that makes them a great teacher.

(7min)

A great teacher? Drawing by John Tenniel, public domain, via the British Library
Let's share back...
So what does matter?
These things matter:

● The public speaking virtues (confidence, integrity, etc.), but most especially
  ○ Listening and observation
  ○ Humility and respect
  ○ Patience and empathy

● Great teaching is amplified by great teaching materials

● What about learning styles?

● Final exercise
Listening and observation

- Most importantly: **connect to people where they are.** Start where your students are, not where you expect them to be, or where it would be easiest to start.

- **Observe and assess understanding.** Is everyone with you? Are 80% with you? [what's missing for the 20%?] Are only 20% with you?
  - Pause, repeat, **rephrase**, or invite questions
  - Do a quick exercise
Humility and respect

● You have something to teach, but you're not superior
● Some of your audience may actually know more than you do, or have more (even if different) experience
● Be confident, but:
  ○ You don't need to know everything. Admit it freely.
  ○ Your goal is for learning to happen, not necessarily for you to personally be its source.
● Earn trust. Keep your promises.
Patience and empathy

- Impatience is the enemy of teaching and learning
- Basic empathy:
  - Your student isn't you
  - Your student has their own context, distractions
- Difficulty in learning often stems from an assumed step/context that is in fact missing
  - It's your job to identify and remove the obstacle
  - Examine your assumptions; break it down
- Just be kind
Crafting effective teaching materials
Teaching should have goals
Rationale vs. goals

- You should have a clear **rationale** for the teaching to even happen: why teach this at all? Why does this audience need this? (the **why**)
- With a clear rationale, the specific teaching/learning **goals** can be identified (the **what**)
  - Learning goals are the primary measure of the teaching success
  - There can be other kinds of goals (social, experiential)
Rationale/goals examples

- **Rationale**: the group will be handling an image donation, so needs media uploading skills.
- **Goals**:
  a. Students understand media uploading workflow, limitations, and pitfalls of batch uploads
  b. Students learn troubleshooting and metadata manipulation techniques
  c. Students experience executing a small batch upload themselves
Rationale/goals examples

- **Rationale:** the group is already involved with movement organizing, so would benefit from a core set of movement organizer skills

- **Goals:**
  - a. Students learn and practice public speaking
  - b. Students learn and practice effective teaching
  - c. Students network and form connections across communities and languages
Start with the "why?"
Start with the "why?"

- Now you know why you're teaching this, but your students do not!
- Human attention is capricious and pragmatic
- For effective learning to happen, the learner should be at least somewhat convinced it is worth paying attention to the teaching.
- As close as possible to the opening, offer a compelling answer to the "Why is this important? Why do I need to learn this?" questions.
Start with the "why?" Ex.

- A Gentle Introduction to Wikidata for Absolute Beginners does not begin with teaching Wikidata basics, or even showing Wikidata; it begins with "Why does Wikidata exist? Why should I care?"
- What was the "why?" for this talk right now?
Have and communicate a clear structure
A clear structure

- Like any public talk:
  a. Have an opening, body, and closing
  b. Have form and proportions serve the goals
- But for learning, it's especially important to communicate the structure: spell out transitions, and the opening and closing of "parentheses" (digressions)
- Be modular, if possible - links, extra credit sections, etc.
Side note on 1-on-1 tutoring

- When tutoring a single learner, structure is still useful, but can often be secondary to following the learner's interest, progress, and specific, immediate questions.
- It is often effective to teach-by-prompt -- providing guidance only when requested, and only to the immediate question asked.
- (works great with very young humans, too!)
Teach for understanding

- The "Packing" versus "mapping" model, or the fish and fishing-rod proverb (both are actually needed)
- Help your learners map, not pack
  - Focus on principles over details
  - Some may need more help than others
  - Some may map differently than you would
- A good mental map is more robust and ready for dealing with the unexpected
Discovering is better than being told
Work with the energy, not against it.
"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education"

--Grant Allen

Crafting effective teaching materials

Mark Twain, 1907. Photo by A.F. Bradley Public domain, via the Library of Congress
Never let prepared material interfere with learning!
What about learning styles?
They're not really a thing

- "Learning styles" are (still) a fashionable theory in education, but its predictive power is very weak
- People **do** have learning **preferences**, but they **do not** correlate to better retention or better test results
- Learners would feel better if their preference is met, but it won't necessarily help their learning
- Source with links to the scholarly works:
  
Final exercise
Please pair with a partner
Final exercise: let's teach!

1. Both pick a tool/technique, wiki or not, that you feel you can confidently teach
2. Both take 5 minutes to **plan a 5-minute lesson** (goals, structure, teach for understanding)
3. First partner **teaches** the other for five minutes
4. **Take feedback** from learner partner for **one minute**
5. **Switch roles** and repeat steps #3, #4
Share back?
In conclusion...
Teaching is learnable! :)

- Teaching is midwifery
- The goal is for learning to happen; not "to get through the material"
- Start with the "why?"
- Teach for understanding
- Work with the energy
- Practice makes better!
THANK YOU

Keep in touch!

asaf@wikimedia.org