

Factors To Improve Teaching: An Experiential Anecdote

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EFFECTIVE teaching has always been a matter of concern for faculty members and academic administrators. Some teachers perform extremely well in the classroom and others poorly. Researchers have used a long list of variables and their complicated relationships to answer the question: what causes variations in students' evaluation of teachers. Though teaching evaluation score is widely used by administrators, the question of its validity is raised by many, who also contend that findings based on teaching evaluation scores are not reliable. The fact that teaching performance varies not only between instructors but also between courses and semesters for an individual instructor makes things more complicated.

Notwithstanding the controversies, if one observes the classroom behaviour of effective and ineffective teachers, she/he will notice that certain rules are practised by effective teachers, which are not generally followed by ineffective teachers. Based on my observations of ten accounting faculty members over a period of five years at an AACSB accredited school I have extracted the following five factors which form the basis for such rules:

1. Confidence
2. Contents
3. Contact
4. Communication
5. Concern

Needless to say that these five factors interact with each other and are sometimes interrelated.

Confidence: Confidence of a teacher within the classroom and outside is a pivotal factor for his/her success in any teaching assignment. Confidence is gained over a period of time. To start with one must have adequate knowledge of the subject matter he/she teaches. Unfortunately, in many teaching assignments adequate knowledge of the subject matter is not closely monitored. Young faculty member out of his/her enthusiasm or a push from the chairperson sometimes jumps into a sub-

ject not adequately known and end up with a disappointing experience. To have an adequate knowledge of a undergraduate course it takes two to three semesters of experience in teaching, reading, and thinking. For an upper level course, additionally, relevant research experience is very useful. A confident faculty is able to relate lecture topics with the real world environment and make use of new information without much difficulty. Much of the confidence comes from ones level of preparedness to teach the course. Some may think, though not well prepared to teach the course they can manage, unfortunately students find out weaknesses of their instructors sooner than we think.

Contents: The objectives of a course are achieved through its contents which are defined by the course syllabus. The text-book, reading materials, assignments, and tests must completely correspond to the syllabus. Careful selection of the course materials will largely determine the instructor's success in running the course. These course materials should be relevant and recent. A highly successful instructor invests a lot of time in planning the course. Last minute preparation of syllabi or tests inhibits teaching effectiveness. I have seen instructors who leave these things for the last minute receiving poor course evaluation. Even for a repeat course the same care and attention should be given to developing the contents as for a new course. The course content should be relevant and precisely defined, class lecture should follow the syllabus, assignments should follow the lecture topics and should be reviewed and discussed, and finally test should

represent the assignments and the teaching method (i.e. if problem solving is emphasised in teaching the course then tests should have similar emphasis). The course syllabus is an unsigned contact between the instructor and the students and should be earnestly followed and completed. A realistic and achievable syllabus is very important for classroom success.

Contact and Communication: Establishing classroom contact with students to open a line of communication is a very crucial step to successful teaching. Conscientious efforts are needed to establish early contact with students and open channels of communication. An instructor may use various means to break communication barrier, such as: create a congenial environment; make eye contacts, move around the classroom, make the students feel your lively presence, and recognize each student as an individual entity. For example, students should be able to trust the instructor and consider him/her not a threat to ask questions. The instructor should encourage questions from the students and ask questions him/herself. Questions asked by the students must be answered and wrong answers from the students must be generously treated and, if possible, be turned into a positive experience. Any attempt to reduce anxiety from the minds of students and to give them confidence

is highly rewarded. Nothing is more useful in conducting an effective teaching session than the instant feedback received from the class in progress through questions and answers, eye contacts, and general reactions. A successful instructor is a userfriendly interactive human system packaged in compassion and thoughtfulness.

Concern: Classroom situation is a social environment. A group of people assemble in a classroom not only to learn certain skills but also to share values, norms, goals, and perform roles where emotions and sentiments play a definite part. Under-achievers need emotional supports while overachievers need recognition. An instructor who actively shows concerns for his/her students earns trust from them and can make a significant difference for the students and for him/herself also. It is important to recognize that students have minds and they want to perceive their 'teacher role model' in their college teachers. There is a general feeling among the students that teachers lack the feeling of concern about their students. In some situation we should do more to assure them that we care. In concluding it can be said that classroom success needs a lot of efforts and provide rewarding experience.

I suggest that if anyone wants, it will be a good idea to score him/her on these five factors on a nine-point scale for a period of time and observe how his/her performance varies with changes in these scores. One may also score the best and the worst courses to assess his/her strengths and weaknesses.

The Five C Factors Scale

How CONFIDENT am I ?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Is the course CONTENT satisfactory ?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Do I have class room CONTACT with the students ?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Do I COMMUNICATE well ?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Do I show CONCERN for my students ?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9