

So you're an expert in your field...

Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000) observe, "Expertise in an area does not guarantee that one can effectively teach others about that area" (p. 49). Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, and Norman (2010) also caution that expertise alone seldom automatically equates to teaching excellence. They suggest,

[the] attributes of expertise are an obvious advantage when instructors are working within their disciplinary domains, but they can be an obstacle to effective teaching. For example, the way instructors chunk knowledge can make it difficult for them to break a skill down so that it is clear to students. Moreover, the fact that instructors take shortcuts and skip steps with no conscious awareness of doing so means they will sometimes make leaps that students cannot follow. In addition, the efficiency with which instructors perform complex tasks can lead them to underestimate the time it will take students to learn and perform these tasks. Finally, the fact that instructors can quickly recognize the relevance of skills across diverse contexts can cause them to overestimate students' ability to do the same (p. 98).

Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, and Norman (2010) go on to recommend the following elements necessary for students to develop subject mastery: "(1) the acquisition of key component skills [the skills necessary to successfully employ the learning], (2) practice in integrating them effectively, and (3) knowledge of when to apply what they have learned" (p. 99). Of these elements, component skill ability is essential to the learning as suggested by Resnick (1976), "if students lack critical component skills — or if their command of those skills is weak — their performance on the overall task suffers" (Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, and Norman, 2010, p. 99).

Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000) also caution against covering content so rapidly that "there is not enough time to learn anything in depth" (p. 49). Additionally, they introduce the concepts of conditionalization – that is, helping the learner understand the conditions for when, how and why one would employ the learning. They observe,

Knowledge must be "conditionalized" in order to be retrieved when it is needed; otherwise, it remains inert (Whitehead, 1929). Many designs for curriculum instruction and assessment practices fail to emphasize the importance of conditionalized knowledge. For example, texts often present facts and formulas with little attention to helping students learn the conditions under which they are most useful. Many assessments measure only propositional (factual) knowledge and never ask whether students know when, where, and why to use that knowledge (p. 49).

Simply exposing novices to expert models seldom results in learners learning effectively. "What they will learn depends on how much they know already" and this can vary wildly from learner to learner, situation to situation (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 50).

Livesveld and Miller (2005) provide extensive evidence gathered by the Gallup Organization constituting the elements of effective teaching. Their conclusion is as simple as it is powerful; most successful instructors teach with their strengths. Livesveld and Miller (2005) assert successful teachers reject negative stereotypes of students, the latest teaching trend, and

work by instinct more than more than they even know, having worked out the strategies and approaches that succeed for them in reaching different students. In an extraordinarily high number of cases, their instincts lead them to the results they want – better educated students (p. 15).

In addition to employing innate skills and abilities, Livesveld and Miller (2005) suggest the value of relationships as a critical component of the learning dynamic, "relationships are what make the learning experience go; ***an essential truth about teaching...it's all about relationships***" (emphasis added) (pp. 23-24).

Do you rely solely on your expertise by telling learners what you know about a subject or on teaching skill and building relationships that allow the learner to make sense out of the learner based on their experiences? As "What is Learning?" suggests, creating learner experience is the essence of learning.

References

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