

Teaching statement

By Freddy Pérez

First of all, I must admit that, for many years, I had considered teaching as the act of planning lectures to share knowledge in a very organized and understandable manner. To me, the utmost manifestation of teaching used to require not only the acquisition and mastery of the intended knowledge to be transmitted, but also the acquisition of different tools to facilitate its assimilation. Recognizing that, in many cases, motivation in learning processes is a powerful trigger to bridges gaps and builds new knowledge, the extra effort that I envisaged as a teacher involved the use of additional strategies to make learning a friendly and entertaining process. This perception of teaching is due in part to the fact that most educational institution nowadays attempt to develop competences in student through a content-oriented curriculum instead of a real competence-based curriculum. Fortunately, however, the curricular vision that I had was shaped toward a more rational and contemporary educational model thanks to a pedagogical seminar in which I participated at the end of my Ph.D.

Consequently, based on my experience in this seminar, I currently define, in a broad sense, the art of teaching as *an agreed intervention in one or more learning processes conducting to the acquisition of knowledge and skills demanded by different stakeholders*. It is an agreement because, certainly, students will never learn what they do not genuinely want to learn; It is merely an intervention due to deep learning requires a set of biological, neurophysiological, cultural, linguistic and social processes that are not reachable to those who attempt to “teach”; and implies the satisfaction of different stakeholders because, in practice, teaching is not only oriented toward the interest of students, but also involves the satisfaction of all social groups (e.g., educational institution, student’ family, industry, communities of practice) that affect and are affected directly or indirectly by those who are learning.

Although a broad consensus exists on the close relationship between teaching and learning, it is important to note that the above definition differ considerably from traditional teaching regarding what the responsibility and purpose of teachers is. I do not conceive learning as a process that depends and is caused by educators (behaviorist learning perspective: Skinner, 1974). Instead, I conceive teaching as a planned intervention on one of those processes that lead to learning, either through what is known as “cognitive approaches” or through what is known as “meta-cognitive” strategies (Ashman & Conway, 1997, p. 130). In this light, teacher’s responsibilities are none other than design and guide learning activities where students must actively mobilize their resources to those inherent learning processes inside and outside the classroom. Because these processes continue to exist through time, i.e., they extend beyond teachers-learners interactions, it is also important to consider the different learner’ education stakeholders, even when they are not aligned and coherent in a curriculum, not explicitly defined, or not easily identifiable. Thus, the purpose of teaching,

from my perspective, not must just favour student's needs but rather should emerge as a mediating force among the different self-interests surrounding the education of learners.

My philosophical perspective on teaching, ultimately, recognizes the multidimensional nature of learning (Wenger, 2001, p. 20) and, consequently, embrace the different types of learning theories (neurophysiological, psychological, activity, and socialization) with varying level of integration for a given context. Although these theoretical frameworks differ from one another on the nature of knowledge and on what is considered important for learning, in practice, all these theories are applicable with different intensity. Hence, in my pedagogical labour it is crucial to face these issues as best as possible with the available resources, but above all, with a focus on what is learned rather than what is taught.

From a constructivist perspective (Ausubel, 2000; Piaget, 1954), for example, is known that the degree of effectiveness in which a new information is assimilated depends on its level of association with previous schemes or knowledge (cognitive structure). This general principle of the constructivist approach requires the identification of "previous student's knowledge" to facilitate the understanding of a new content. Thus, the identification of these "previous schemes" allows, on the one hand, to provide a disciplinary content that is not too far from the cognitive capacity of learners and, on the other hand, the pedagogical intervention of teachers on the Zone of Proximal Development promoted by activity learning theories (Engestrom, 2014; Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punam-ki, 1999; Vygotsky, 1962; Wertsch, 1985, 1991): that area bounded by what students can do and learn on their own and what they would only be able to learn with the help of other individuals. Unfortunately, in many cases, it may not be clear what students know or how they know it, so it is not always easy or feasible to define effective learning activities from well-defined cognitive structures.

As the good reader may have already anticipated, the different teaching strategies that, at some point, I would promote in classrooms are not entirely limited to any of the aforementioned learning theories. Although theorists tend to include, in a single explanatory model different aspect of learning with a broad perspective, in my opinion, each of these theories only succeeds in capturing an essential part of the processes that lead to learning. Thus, it would only be possible to obtain, for specific learning environments, efficient teaching strategies by considering the existing learning theories through an integrative approach.

Learning cannot be designed. Ultimately, it belongs to the realm of experience and practice (Wenger, 1998).

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