

TEACHING WHO WE ARE

We teach who we are! What we learn well changes us. It changes our behavior, our skill set, and our awareness. We manipulate and process information before it sits in our memory, transforms and becomes knowledge. What we learn becomes us. Whenever we impart that knowledge to others, we teach them something that has become a part of the definition of who we are, something that made us who we are. Learning, when defined as a change in knowledge, behavior and attitude brought about by an experience, signals that what we have become reflects what we have learned. A musician, therefore, is clearly someone who has learned to play music. Learning is supposed to transform our thinking, our behaviors, and attitudes, and if it does not, it needs corrective attention. Ideally, by the time we are able to clearly articulate the concepts we intend to teach, we have presumably processed them so much that we understand

them just as well as we can explain them. We have achieved mastery of some sort. We can extrapolate, see implications, make connections, and articulate what is essential about the concepts. What we know well and what we teach well becomes part of the definition of who we are.

We are the product of our connections. We learn through interactions with our peers and the physical world. Without connectedness, our learning stalls. The experiences we have had, what matters to us, what we want, who and what we love, who we focus on, all helps define who and what we are, as well as what we stand for. That is the stuff that makes us relatable. It provides a context to be tapped into ever so carefully. Teaching who we are and teaching from the heart become one and the same thing when our intimate familiarity with a concept unburdens us from relying on props as we elaborate on it. Teaching from the heart requires us to draw on information that resonates deeply with us and share it candidly. Teaching from the heart has

direct implications for delivery, listeners' buy-in, listeners' enrolment and our ability to move others. Our teaching appears more authentic, more believable, more fluid, and less contrived. We show up in the classroom as real, feeling human beings, not drones regurgitating information.

When we teach who we are, we can relax and appear relaxed, which goes a long way in boosting our charisma. We can play up our natural warmth creating a feeling of intimacy that, in turn, makes opening up easier for an audience. We can have a heart-to-heart talk and leverage sincere feelings. When we teach from the heart, we exercise influence to a degree unparalleled with any other style of instruction. It never hurts to review and rehearse the material, which makes our performance appear even more effortless and natural.

When we teach from the heart, we talk straight, create transparency, confront reality, become accountable, and extend trust. We set the context for change and model the behavior that we

expect. Teaching who we are can only be done credibly if we can take our knowledge of the subject matter in new directions, elaborate, simplify, expand, and summarize at will. We then will have captured the essence of our subject and can leverage our own experience to add to the scholarship in that domain. We have in effect become the main material of the class. Handbooks and slides are only props.

When we teach from the heart, our purpose is no longer simply to deliver a message; it is to spur people on to action. We want people to do something with the knowledge they are acquiring. When we teach from the heart we leverage the power of emotions. Emotions set people in motion. “EMOTION” says Doug Stevenson, master storyteller, “IS THE FAST LANE TO THE BRAIN.” John Medina, the author of *Brain Rules* further validates Stevenson’s point, saying, “*Emotionally charged events persist much longer in our memories and are recalled with greater accuracy than neutral memories.*”

When we teach and speak from the heart, it becomes evident that we care. The audience experiences our emotions and we stimulate their interest at a primal level. We become totally plugged in emotionally, driven by unmitigated passion.

When, to illustrate a major point, we use stories that build on the point, have fun, and stimulate the imagination of our audience, our message sticks more. Doug Stevenson, a master storyteller, explains that stories are our most powerful tool for creating rapport. He invites us to find the lessons we learned in our stories of adversity, and then unleash them on the audience. Stevenson advises that to speak from the heart, we must tell the truth, and be honest with the audience; we must stand in our power, love ourselves, and let the audience watch; we must speak from our head with our heart wide open; tell people what we think and how we feel; and speak to them like they are our friends, rather than just as members of an audience.

To teach from the heart we have to have something significant to say, something we believe needs to be known, and something in which to be confident. Knowledge that absorbs our consciousness, and in the process, absolves us from the burden of self-consciousness can be taught from the heart. That compelling truth will be the source of the confidence we will feel and demonstrate. The knowledge will become us as we become it, at least in the eyes of the beholders. Having a mind filled with meaningful things to draw on and impart to others makes the fear of speaking in front of a group fade away. Teaching who we are is not an act of egotism or vanity. It is the highest expression of communion with the knowledge we share. It is a gift of self for the purpose of another's higher learning. It is an act of love.

Moving from the Concrete to the Abstract with the Triad Framework:

Ego, Environment and Wider World

To become meaningful, information needs to be personalized, made

relatable, made to speak to us, and must be relevant to our needs. We need a connection. Learners benefit when information is articulated in very concrete ways; and abstractions are made concrete. Students do better when able to discuss how a piece of information relates to their personal life. They also need to be able to relate that same piece of information to their immediate environment, to the context in which they live, and to the wider world. This process seals the learning, moving from the self, to the immediate environment, to the larger world, from the concrete to the abstract, from the simple to the complex, every step of the way. This process of identifying the ramifications and implications of any idea to the self, the immediate environment and the larger world, causes concepts to resonate, to be understood, and to be articulated in ways that solidify learning and show integration.

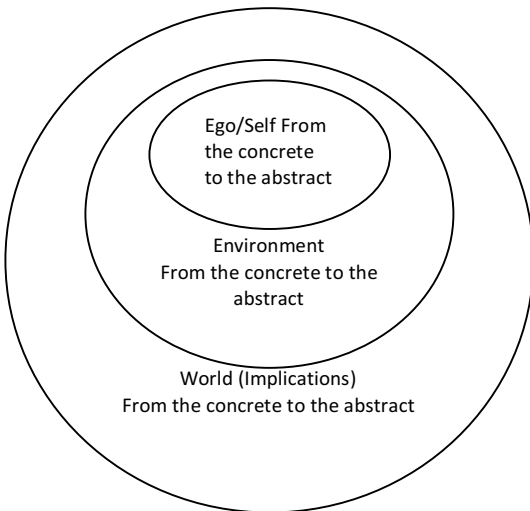
Imagine a language learner confronted with having to reuse vocabulary she just learned. Imagine, especially if you

have ever had to learn a foreign language, the level of effort that each step in the articulation of her narrative would require. Starting with the self, then moving to the immediate environment, and then moving to the wider world and drawing implications.

The more language is produced, the further away from self the narrative evolves, the more complex the thoughts and structures used become out of sheer linguistic necessity. People are always interested in relating whatever content they are learning to their lives and their very real need to communicate. People's urge to know and be known accelerates their language acquisition. With that approach, they feel as if they can immediately produce and use language that is relevant and compelling. Teach a new lesson with a focus on how each student can immediately reuse and integrate the information, or vocabulary shared, to talk about and describe their personal experiences moving each time from the concrete to the abstract, which makes their speech

acts more complex. The self is the starting point of all new learning. It should also be the end point. All learning is ultimately learning about self. A strong emotional connection anchors the points.

With subjects other than foreign languages, such as leadership, the opposite approach is helpful: starting from the big picture, the worldview, and proceeding to the particular, the subjective, and the concrete ways in which the learner is affected by the object of study. In other words, one should bring the topic home to the student so it stops being some detached object of study. Have students answer the necessary question: what does this mean to you?



When teachers have students tactically relate newly covered information to their lives, and discuss it, teachers help students learn. People cannot be treated like sheep and expected to detach their personal reality from the context of learning. Students are central to the learning. At a minimum, we are teaching because they are there to learn. All learning becomes us.

You “teach who you are” when the subject that you teach is so ingrained in you that your behavior, attitudes, reflexes, and ways of thinking reflect a deep integration of the lessons you teach. You live and breathe that stuff!

What is learning anyway? Learning is intellectual, social, and emotional. It is ordered and it is erratic. It happens by design, and it happens by chance. It can be conscious and even unconscious. It is not limited to schools or formal classrooms. We all do it, even though we do not always have a clear sense of how it is happening or that it is happening at all.

There is no real consensus on the answer to the question, ‘what is learning?’ however, learning theorists – the behaviorists, the cognitivists, and more recently, the constructivists – have concocted learning theories which taken together give us a pretty good holistic sense of what learning is.

Behaviorism focuses only on the objectively observable aspects of learning. Behaviorists define learning as a change in behavior brought about by experience, with little concern for the mental or internal aspects of learning. Cognitive theories look beyond behavior to explain brain-based learning.

Cognitivists view learning as an active mental process of acquiring, remembering, and using knowledge. Cognitive learning is about enabling people to use their reason, intuition, and perception to learn. The cognitive view sees people as active learners who initiate experiences, seek out information to solve problems, and reorganize what they already know to achieve new insights. In fact, learning,

within this perspective is seen as “transforming significant understanding we already have, rather than simple acquisitions written on blank slates.” Learning is concerned with the acquisition of information about the environment, and with the acquisition of problem-solving skills with intelligence and conscious thought.

Constructivism views learning as a process in which the learner actively constructs new ideas or concepts. Constructivist perspectives on learning and teaching are increasingly influential today. These views are grounded in the psychological research of Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Gestalt psychologists, Frederic Bartlett and Bruner, as well as the progressive educational philosophy of Dewey. Some constructivist views emphasize the shared, social construction of knowledge; others see social forces as less important. There is not just one constructivist theory of learning, but most of them agree on two central ideas:

- Learners are active in constructing their own knowledge.
- Social interactions are important in this knowledge construction process.

For our purpose here, our working definition of learning is: learning is a process through which experience causes permanent change in knowledge, attitude, and/or behavior.

Learning is about change. Learning is change. The change can be provoked, intentional, and for better or worse! To qualify as learning this change must be brought about by experience – by the interaction of a person with his or her environment.

1. How do you learn best?
2. What have you learned that has become essential to who you are today?
3. What is it that you expect students to do differently as a result of your instruction?