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TEACHING/LEARNING: THE STUDENT VIEWPOINT

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Learning is a vital aspect in the life of every individual. To some it comes easily, but to others it does not. Why this happens depends on several inter-related factors. Among them are home environment and parental support, individual capabilities/potential including mental maturity and personal drive, and school/educational classroom methodology or procedures. The latter point is the focus of this paper.

While conducting a research project in Antwerp, Belgium, we were fortunate to have time to chat with a small number of high school students. During these informal meetings in which they talked about their goals and their concerns, we asked them for their ideas as to

how their teachers could improve classroom procedures. That is, we posed the question, "How can your teachers better teach you?" Then we asked, "What would you like to have your teachers do in the classroom so that you could learn with more enthusiasm?"

After some discussion to clarify our meaning, the students requested time to consider their responses. When we met again the following week, this is what they told us:

1. Teachers should use a positive approach in evaluating students' work and should not stress errors made.

The students went on to explain that teachers usually emphasize that which is wrong or incorrect about their work rather than what is correct or good. Moreover, they suggested that teachers praise students for work well done.

2. Teachers should provide for a pleasant learning atmosphere in the classroom. (6)

This included having a visually attractive classroom setting that fits the subject being taught and the age of the students. It also included the idea that lessons should be made interesting. Interest is generated more easily if students can be taught to understand how the knowledge they gather can be applied to their lives.

3. Teachers should show that they enjoy teaching.

Students are quick to sense the non-verbal messages that teachers transmit. (4) If teachers really enjoy their work, they show it in many ways and students soon pick up on this.

4. Whenever possible, bring some humor into the lesson or activity. (2)

Although education is a serious undertaking, teachers should not leave humor at the door. A joke from time-to-time, as it fits the lesson, adds much to the joy of learning. Moreover, a slang expression now and then is also beneficial.

5. When teachers make mistakes they should not try to cover up.

Everyone makes a mistake now and then. Some

more so than others. That is part of being human. Teachers are no different. Some of them err and try to hide it or, what is worse, blame or punish their students. When a mistake is made, take it in stride.

6. Give homework.

We found this to be an interesting point and, rather unexpected. The students said that they wanted homework, but not too much in each subject because it can become overwhelming. They wanted just enough to cover the topic and help them learn.

7. Let students talk. (5)

Learning has many sources. Students learn from their teachers, parents, and from each other. It was suggested that teachers should allow at least a little time for student give-and-take appropriate to a given lesson.

8. Really teach.

This was the most difficult suggestion to interpret. They were vague and somewhat ill at ease in discussing this. We believe that the students were concerned with meaning. That is to say, all too frequently what students learn has little or no meaning for them in the immediacy of their lives. This is probably because they lack experience and background and the ability to synthesize information.

Because of this, students seem to be asking that teachers be patient, tell them what to do, and also tell them why they are doing it. (3) Explain how the factors of the discipline fit together to form the major concepts. This should take place in each subject area. Teachers should show, tell, demonstrate, and have students actively participate in lessons of every sort.

This is the way to teach for effective learning. Certainly there is more, but there can be no less according to these students. Moreover, it needs to be noted that these individuals seemed eager to learn and they wanted so much to understand now only what they are learning, but why they are learning it, whatever the subject.

During these informal conversations with the

students (N = 12) we were impressed with their sincerity, yet there seemed to be a lack of enthusiasm or drive. We concluded they really want to learn, but may not know how to do so efficiently. This is where teachers can help. (5) That is, show them how to learn and use their suggestions as noted.

Their ideas, incorporated into teacher practices, could bring about more effective education and learning for the betterment of all. Moreover, we may be able to fulfill Toffler's (7) premise that a small change in procedure now can have monumental and far-reaching results for the future.

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