Role of teacher in present day dental education

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In India education has always been in top priority. Even from ancient times the importance of education has been highlighted as an attempt to develop model men through harmonious development of head, hand and heart. The role of teacher was emphasized in this context. The qualities of a teacher were defined by Sankaracharya as follows: 1. capable of discussing the pros and cons of a problem 2. understand and remember pupils question, 3. self control, equanimity of temper, 4. genuine desire to teach the student, 5. master of scriptures, 6. no attachment to objects, 7. never transgresses rules of conduct, 8. avoids ostentation, cunningness, jealousy, egotism, 9. knower of Brahman. These qualifications will never lose its relevance.

A teacher of dental science should have an enthusiasm for his/her speciality and a personal commitment to teaching and learning. The teacher should express sensitivity and responsiveness to the educational needs of students and junior doctors. Capacity to promote development of the required professional attitudes and values and an awareness of the principles of education as applied to dentistry will be an added qualification. An understanding of research method, a commitment to audit and peer review of his/her teaching, ability to use formative assessment and a willingness to develop both as a dentist and as a teacher are the other attributes, the profession expects from a teacher. Students also have an expectation about the teacher; a role model and mentor, teaches how to learn, cares for patients, takes a team approach, listens, provides constructive feedback, challenges the learner and challenges himself.

Evolution of the teacher
The university teacher is formed or evolved through different stages.

Athidhi - the stage of learning
Bodha - advanced learning and analysis
Acharana - the period of practice
Pracharana - the stage of preaching or teaching

This evolutionary process is diluted today and many professionals make a frog leap from the first to the fourth stage. The teacher thus formed is neither competent in his profession nor in teaching. Under the pretext of giving pedagogic exposure, postgraduate students are thrust with the complete load of undergraduate teaching without supervision bringing good to neither the student nor the teacher. Three years of clinical experience after postgraduation should be made a requisite qualification to be appointed as a senior lecturer and that will improve the standards of teaching.

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The Four Stages of Teaching

Fantasy
Survival
Mastery
Impact

The Fantasy Stage

Some people call this the idealistic stage. This is usually the period before a new teacher walks into the classroom. The new teacher feels that he would make a fantastic teacher because of various reasons, that the new teacher is there to save the world or at least save the students, and that every college day will be fun. The new teacher might voice the idea that, “Certainly, teaching will be hard.” Inwardly, the teacher feels that it would be easy.

The Survival Stage

This usually begins sometime during the middle of the first month of teaching. The Fantasy Stage meets the reality of real personalities in the form of 50 to 100 adults with differing rates of interest. The teachers in the survival stage begin to rely on practices that they see other teachers use or follow their own teacher’s methods. Teaching becomes a matter of getting through one day after another and holding on till paycheck day which generally is delayed. Many Survival teachers begin to whine and make excuses and take no responsibility for the students’ learning. Teachers in this stage cover up their inefficiency by expressing anger towards the student. They make fun of professional development meetings and never actually develop as a professional. Because the survival teachers do not succeed in teaching their students, they will try to convince the teachers around them that it’s not possible and make fun of teachers who are working hard. Unfortunately, many teachers never leave this stage.

The Mastery Stage

The Mastery Stage begins when teachers take responsibility for what goes on in their classes and hold themselves accountable for their students’ learning. Suddenly, the master teacher uses effective practices, have high expectations, and strive to improve professionally at all times. The Master teacher is not afraid to ask for help or ask “How did you do that?”. This is where true enjoyment of teaching begins. The master teacher is very threatening to the survival teachers because they become the living proof that students can learn. The master teacher may not yet be the model teacher, but their attitude and professionalism will soon lead them there.

The Impact Stage

This is the ultimate teacher who makes an impact on his/her students’ lives. Every day is focused on learning effectively, rigorously, and in an engaging manner. The students may view learning as fun. The Impact teacher has achieved the dreams of the fantasy teacher. The teacher has come full circle and teaching becomes an everyday joy.

Traits of master teachers

Enthusiastic about what is taught

Master teachers will be passionate about the content and exercise great care about the material that is taught.

Current

Master teachers do not rely on old, dated, yellowed notes from earlier editions of the course. They try new activities, asking new questions and essentially reinventing the class each time they teach it. They also personalize the material, fitting in appropriate anecdotes and illustrative stories to make the content alive.

Not be content to rest on their laurels or past routines

They ask themselves questions as they teach—am I being effective? Am I repeating myself or relying on a stale script? What can I do differently to ensure understanding?

Make learning fun—but not just entertaining

Master teachers can be witty, clever and often funny. But their goal is not to make the classroom a comedy club. It is to help students see the point of a discipline’s content while helping them retain as much of it as possible.

Encourage problem solving and higher order thinking

Master teachers teach students how to think rather than what to think. Of course, facts and figures have their place, but students are guided to go beyond the information to analyze and synthesize it.

Have high standards

Master teachers are friendly to all students but friends with none; an invisible line of evaluation exists that cannot be crossed.

Demonstrates

A master teacher takes pride in demonstrating clinical as well as practical exercises and stands behind the student while he performs. He derives pleasure when the student attains proficiency and confidence in performing the skills.

Show concern for student welfare and learning

Master teachers make clear that they care about
what and how well students learn. They make an effort to learn students’ names, to call on them as individuals in class discussion, to praise as well as critique student contributions.

**Demonstrate a deep love for humanity through teaching**

This criterion is a tough one for many teachers, as it appears to be a significant departure from the course material. But this will ensure in moulding a desirable attitude in the students.

**Embody lifelong learning**

Education and learning will always change and a master teacher knows that they need to change with it. They will look at ways that they can grow along with students and develop their own skills. Growth is essential as a teacher. Society changes continuously and so do its needs and teachers must show that they are on the leading edge of this.

**Focus on learning goals and not performance goal.**

Performance goal would aim to receive first class or distinction where as learning goal would aim to become competent in clinical dentistry. A master teacher sets the goals based on learning, not on receiving a grade.

**Ensures to impart character education**

Character education is just as relevant or in fact more important than any learning objectives set out in a curriculum. We live in a world where collaboration is vital to success and working with others is an important skill. Working with students to teach the fundamentals of respecting others and being able to listen and learn from others is vital. Students can have the smartest understanding of objectives but not have the ability to share these ideas with others in a respectful way or take the time to listen to other ideas. A master teacher ensures that students not only grow mentally in class, but also emotionally.

**Teacher in the digital world**

Some of the traditional roles of teachers already seem rather obsolete, because of the introduction of new technologies. Those who are based on the assumption that the teacher is the only and authoritative source of information, are rooted in a society which is not ours, if it ever was. One character of the Information Society is a dramatically increased amount of information available, and an increased access to a variety of rich information sources. Another aspect is the increased possibility of presenting, editing, organising and manipulating information, e.g. in multimedia format. The chances that a teacher will be able to compete with the entertainment industry concerning the presentation of information should not be overestimated.

The wealth of available information probably makes it more difficult than before to apprehend structures and meanings. Students’ perception of knowledge as pieces and bulks of information may be strengthened both by the amount and by the way it is accessed and organised. It may stimulate the senses more and give a more vivid flavour of reality, but the meaning and coherence may disappear. It is easier to grasp the structure of a linear textbook than that of a hypertext with a multitude of links. Which one is the best representation of reality is of course a different question. The teacher cannot continue to insist that his or her structure is the only one or even the best one. But it will be much more important in the future that students and teachers together address the issue of apprehending and constructing structure and meaning. The lecture and the textbook will not be sufficient any more. The teachers and learners will have to produce their own “textbooks” and presentations, as part of their articulation of the world, built from a wider range of sources. The teacher who thinks that this is her job only, as the “sculptor”, is far from reality. The new teaching experience should be conceived as a learning process in public. Role of the teacher becomes more important and he leads the student from a world of information to that of knowledge and finally to that of wisdom.

**What master teachers avoid while teaching**

**Always asking recall level questions in the class**

Cognition operates on ascending levels of complexity i.e. recall, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Always asking recall level questions will not give information on the intellectual upgradation of the student. Teacher should carefully frame questions to test higher levels of cognition.

**Programmed answer**

“Why third molar is not placed in complete dentures? Because there is no space, it is an inclined plane and might endanger stability.” If this pattern is followed while introducing the subject, many students may be wondering. In a review class a programmed question-answer system might work. Teacher should always make sure that the question, its answer and its relevance are clearer to the student.
Rapid reward or compliment

Problems teacher raises should be addressed to the class as a whole and when one student answers, do not comment on it with “very good or right answer”. The moment teacher makes such a comment, other students stop thinking. Teacher should give opportunity to other students to answer. Finally the teacher should restate the correct answer so that each and every student can understand. The moment one student answers, if the teacher proceeds with the lesson, many slow learners will miss the opportunity to understand.

Non stop talking

While a question is posed to the group or the class we should give adequate time to think. When the teacher becomes a non-stop talker, students get no opportunity to think over what is being said, to formulate intelligent responses, or to ask for clarification. The teacher should make sure that the student thinks and tries to find a solution.

Feedback through non specific questions

After a session, if the teacher wants to find out whether the class has understood, do not ask vague questions like “Do you have any question,” Instead topic related questions such as “How many teeth are arranged in complete dentures?” “What is reason for eliminating the third molar?” “What is the relationship between inclined plane and stability of the mandibular denture?”

Egotist

“Haven’t I explained this several times?” “As you have understood, I need not explain it further.” “My time is valuable, you cannot expect me to explain it again and again.” Such statements are not conducive for a learning atmosphere especially when the learners are adults.

Every one in the teaching profession should try to become a master teacher. And mastery is not achieved on a single day. It is a long course. Initially we enter the teaching profession with fantastic ideas or as an idealist. Very soon you confront the real world and you have to survive in this deterrent world. If you are not a hard worker with clear mission, you stay there forever as a negative teacher. If you surpass this stage, you tread into the stage of mastery. Your final goal is to become a teacher who can make an impact in the life of your student. Then only you will feel that the time spent is fruitful. After all what counts is not the number of hours you put in, but how much you put into these hours.