**TEACHING - The GOOD, the GREAT, and the EXCELLENT**

*DISCLAIMER – the notes below reflect and represent my thoughts of teaching. I am not a recognised academic expert and do not profess to have any more significant qualifications than 30 years of teaching in public high schools, which personally I rate quite highly as a qualification, but others may not.*

**Introduction**

Teaching is becoming more challenging a more complex – this has certainly been my experience over the last 30 years. Asking teachers or academics “what makes a teacher good at their job?” now evokes a huge variety of responses. Most of the answers to this question will focus on what happens in the classroom; some will refer to characteristics such as time management; and fewer again will mention academic achievement. It is fair to say that decades of mainstream education research and practice have not really yielded a simple, or precise or even definitive answer to this question. The odd aspect of this question however is that good teaching is very recognisable. What I mean by this is that even people who may have differing opinions of what good teaching is will usually agree it is occurring when they observe it. I think good teaching is one of those easily recognised, but hard to define ideas. For an experienced teacher who is recognised as being good at their job and who feels secure in this knowledge, this lack of a precise definition is rarely an issue. However, for a beginning teacher who is consciously thinking about their mastery of good teaching skills, the lack of a clear picture of good teaching can make mastering the skills of a good teacher seem like a very difficult task.

**“Good” Teaching models**

One of the best recent answers to the good teacher question is the well-referenced *Framework for Teaching*, developed by Charlotte Danielson in 2007. While comprehensive (four key domains; 22 components; and 76 elements), I believe this framework is symptomatic of many such studies in that it reflects a deterministic measure of good teaching. While very useful in measuring the outcomes of good teaching practice, I find such frameworks are less useful for teachers who wish to purposely, and consciously, develop the skills of a good teacher. Thus, while good teaching is easy to recognise, it can be very difficult for individual teachers to consciously plan a deliberate process to improve their teaching skills.

However, there are some simple and direct approaches to help teachers develop the characteristics of good teaching. I refer to these collectively as “teaching methodologies that are based on education research”. The common attribute of these approaches is that evidence in the form of effect size is used to support the use of particular teaching strategies. Two methodologies that appear very popular are John Hattie’s *Visible Learning* and Robert Marzano’s *The new Art and Science of Teaching* (*ASOT*)” (an update on the original *The Art and Science Of Teaching*).

My non-expert opinion is that understanding and harnessing the strengths of either of these methodologies would be an effective strategy to improve teaching competence. However, I am more convinced by *The* *new Art and Science of Teaching*. The reason for this is that *ASOT* is constructed specifically from the viewpoint of a teacher seeking to improve their teaching competence. Marzano’s early work in *Classroom Instruction that Works* and the ten design questions of *The Art and Science of Teaching* provide a teacher with a logical planning sequence for continual improvement in effective instruction. In other words, I believe that by structuring *ASOT* around the continual asking of design questions, Marzano provides a terrific platform for teachers to structure a process of continual improvement in teaching practice.

Simply put - *The* *Art and Science of Teaching* will enable a teacher, through consistent effort, to generate effective teaching practice. A motivated teacher who consistently asks the design questions of *The Art and Science of Teaching*, and implements evidence based instructional strategies will inevitably demonstrate the attributes of good teaching.

**Great Teaching**

What is more difficult for some people is becoming a “great” teacher. Great teachers exhibit genuinely care for their students and relate to students in a very personable yet professional manner. Thus, great teachers are generally liked by students for their affective, rather than effective attributes. It is this affective quality that makes great teaching very different to the effective outcomes of good teaching.

Academics invariably rate great teaching as a step above good teaching on the assumption that great teachers will also possess the effective attributes of good teaching. I believe this is not always the case. Affective qualities can be very intuitive by nature and some teachers are naturally gifted with these qualities without consciously developing them. I have met many great teachers with natural affective qualities, and they are invariably well liked and respected by students. However being effective in the classroom requires a different set of skills and being great, and being good, do not always go hand in hand. It is possible however to develop both sets of attributes. Hattie and Marzano’s methodologies encompass a range of affective attributes and strategies that can be developed by teachers.

**Excellent Teaching**

Becoming an excellent teacher is surprisingly simple, but difficult to achieve; even for great or very good teachers. Where there are many differing opinions on good teaching, there is a broad consensus amongst academics about excellence in teaching. An excellent teacher recognises that the goal of a learning outcome is not so much the knowledge but the process by which it is learnt. That is, the process is not the means by which you teach the knowledge; the knowledge is the means by which students learn a process. An excellent teacher is one who does effectively teach content and process, but more importantly designs their lessons around the goal of students developing an understanding of how to become better learners. This appears a deceptively simple, and in some ways, an obvious idea. Excellent teaching occurs relatively frequently throughout most schools for this reason. However, for individual teachers, excellence is manifestly difficult to implement with any degree of consistency. Some of the obstacles to excellent teaching are obvious, such as a lack of time for planning or competing school priorities such as ranking achievement over effort. However, the biggest obstacle is that each individual student requires their teacher to be excellent in slightly different ways. Differentiation in the classroom has its limits, and it is practically impossible for a teacher to be excellent for all of their students all of the time. Teachers who can be consistently excellent are rare. I walk out of practically every one of my classrooms, knowing that I have been excellent for some of my students, but I have invariably failed to be excellent for others. I am reconciled to the fact that this may be unavoidable, but I still struggle to find it acceptable.

Many teachers, even those with years of practice behind them, find the challenge of becoming a better teacher daunting. The sheer quantity and variety of skills involved in good, great, or excellent teaching is imposing. However, evidence based teaching methodologies can provide an effective platform for teachers to become good, or even great teachers. To go on and become an excellent teacher is actually not a complex task, but doing this consistently for every single students is a significant challenge.