

How Well Do We Teach ?

K. T. KOSHY

NURSE teachers are under increasing pressure to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their teaching. This is due to the greater pressure on resources and the public accountability of the profession. As a teacher our main concern will not be so much with our actual teaching, as with whether or not our students learn. Let us examine the question "Are we being FAIR to our students?"

Do we provide Feedback to our students.
Have we built in Activity to our teaching.
Have we tried to Individualise our material.
Are our materials Relevant to our course.

(a) Feedback

Principle: 'Learning is increased when students receive immediate feedback about their performance'.

When a student takes part in any activity he should be given information about how the task has been carried out. In particular errors should be corrected. Ideally, the feedback should be immediate.

So, to provide feedback we must first arrange for students to do tasks which can be assessed. This means there should be frequent tests of the students ability to:

- (i) carry out practical skills.
- (ii) remember necessary facts.
- (iii) use the facts in solving problems of communicating.

Tests may be the formal examinations, but a much better system is for the activities and feedback to become part of the normal pattern of teaching.

Students too can be given the opportunity to assess their own performance.

(b) Activity

Principle: 'Learning is increased when students are actively involved rather than passive on-lookers'.

To help students learn, we should build in some activity to our teaching. We might get our students to answer questions, write notes or perhaps carry out an experiment. Do remember that whatever activity we do introduce, make sure it forces students to use information rather than just repeat it.

(c) Individualise

Principle: 'Principles which the students themselves discover are more clearly retained longer'.

The author is Lecturer, College of Health Sciences, Ministry of Health, Bahrain.

and used more effectively'.

Individualisation does not mean that the students should learn by themselves, but that teaching should be adopted to the individual student's needs. Almost all teachers will agree that students learn in different ways. It would, however, be so much easier to treat all students as if they were identical. It is also easier to keep control of the situation because the timetable will indicate where every student should be at any time. But this does not lead to the most effective learning. Think now of some of these questions.

The Principles of Independent Learning

1. Who controls the pace or rate of instruction?
2. Is the instructional material more available or less available to the student than in a traditional course?
3. Is the instructional material based on general aims or specific objectives?
4. How much active participation is there by the student during the learning experience?
5. What are the roles of the teacher?
6. Different students have different learning styles. What variables can be exploited?

Organisational Questions

1. What accommodation is available?
2. What staffing is required?
3. Who produces the learning resources?
4. What media are used?
5. What production facilities exist?
6. What presentation equipment can be used?
7. How many copies of each resource and sets of equipment?
8. Open or closed access?—supervision and security.
9. Cataloguing and retrieval.
10. Booking and borrowing.

Educational Questions

1. How is independent learning integrated with other aspects of the course? Do lectures and tutorials have a place?
2. How do we cope with students who work very rapidly and those who fall far behind?

Make sure that there is enough time for students to learn on their own. Some people suggest that there should be as much as 2 hours of time free for individual studying for every hour in a class. If we did this, the students would be able to learn at their own pace outside the lecture room.

(d) Relevant

Activities should be set at a level which offers a challenge to the student without endangering the patient.

Information and skills will be much more relevant to a student if he knows how he will use the information in his job. So be sure we relate our teaching to the work the student will be expected to carry out once qualified.

State our Objectives

Another way in which our teaching can be more meaningful is to explain in advance what we are going to say—state our objectives. By doing so, the students will know what we want them to learn. They in turn can, therefore, make more sense of the teaching.

What Kind of Teaching Methods Should be Used

The various methods can be classified according to their aim—for knowledge, for skill or for attitudes. Although there is considerable overlap the method under these three headings may be adopted for individuals and for groups.

Methods for Acquiring Knowledge

1. Reading material: the best way for large amounts of information. Testing however is necessary to ensure absorption of facts.

2. Lecture: requires considerable skill from the lecturer, should be supported with appropriate visual aids and plenty of discussion, time saving.

3. Tape-slides: cheapest form of canned presentations and can be made topical and relevant. Films or videotape can portray dynamic situations.

4. Find out: discovery by doing, seeing or feeling, some direction necessary to sustain relevance, requires suitable material being available.

Methods for Skill Development

1. Effective speaking: the one-way communication system to individuals or groups improved by stating purpose and checking progress.

2. Role-playing: more powerful technique particularly when supported by audio-visual feedback. Can be threatening to individuals.

3. Case-study: useful for developing analytical diagnostic skills; risks of prescribing "correct" solution; requires considerable preparation; promotes social skills in groups.

4. Stimulation: for developing decision making skills for sifting and sorting priorities; realistic in content and time pressures; can still be incorporated with role playing to complete the "games"; dangers of "gimmickry".

Methods of Attitude Review

1. Observing individuals: requires skill in perceiving behaviour but useful in identifying habits or prejudices unknown to the performer, e.g., clinical teacher; difficult to evaluate but it is the basis of much informal learning.

2. Comparison with peers: formal exchange of opinions expressed on a particular topic; the dangers of getting off the point (because the subject may be challenging) can be avoided by good preparation and discussion leading.

3. Demonstration: of others or self by candid counselling either by individuals or groups a formal programme is necessary with proper safeguarding against subjective judgements and may give the counsellor too much authority.

4. Analysis: Study of the derivation and expression of personality leading to comprehension of attitudes in self and others; the most potent changer of attitudes is understanding; requires the individual to have willingness to learn and to alter.

Conclusion

In short, students should (i) be actively involved, (ii) receive feedback on their performance, and (iii) discover and learn for themselves. In using the above strategies we are meeting the responsibilities of a teacher which are: (i) to guide the students; (ii) to put the students into situations in which they can learn what they need to know; and (iii) to ensure that the students learn as effectively as possible.

References

1. Effective Teaching Programme: Centre for Medical Education. The University of Dundee, 1983.
2. Cox, K. R. & Ewan C. E. (Eds), **The Medical Teacher**, Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, 1982.

NURSING NOW

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ture to contribute more of Nursing profession to the emerging health care system in the country.

The major organizations like Indian Nursing Council and Christian Medical Association of India who are responsible to set policies and standards of Nursing Education and Service in the country, as well as the Colleges of Nursing under the University Programmes would very soon realise the need for such progress and may take interest to plan the Continuing Education Programme for Nurses to update themselves in the profession so that the Nursing body may involve themselves at a greater length in the Health Care delivery system.