



Teacher, university academic and the right direction in the professional exercise

Maestro, académico universitario y el rumbo adecuado en el ejercicio

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It is interesting to analyze the inherent connotations to the word «teacher» that depend on the perceptions, experiences and analytical, spiritual or personal conceptualization for each one of us. Initially «teacher» is defined according to the dictionary of The Royal Spanish Academy as: 3, f and m. Person who teaches a science, art or craft, or has the title to do so, hence cornerstone in personal and professional development of an individual and in a more global concept, a strong foundation for a more civilized and progressive society, and if we turn to the ought to be, enriched with values, morals and better human beings. Well this is what in theory or at least hypothetically we would think, because in the daily life of a society and development of a country, people mostly disagrees with this ideal.

The respect, admiration, and evaluation of the teacher has changed through the years. We will specifically focus on Mexican society where, if we remember many years ago when we were kids, the teacher was respected, admired, but only if he or she was competent and really devout to the profession, because we also remember the teachers that in reality only waved their dictatorial and executioner cane in a tough, crude and even offensive regime, abusing all the individual rights of a defenseless, immature and developing student population.

Although this situation still exists, it has been complemented with a more alert, irreverent, disrespectful student population, but on the other hand conscious of the rights and obligations, both own and the teacher's, as well as with a thirst for learning; but there is also the stronger counterpart: the student that only attends classes to heat a seat, without ambitions, goals or obligations.

From there we part to inspire us through this chaos and heterogeneity to ask ourselves whether it is the responsibility or obligation of a teacher to inspire, motivate, grow better goals and ambitions; if it is really our task to inspire «the student's like

for learning». This is the cause for films that have been blockbusters: to put on screen the devotion and dedication of a teacher toward a group of hopeless students that evolve to achieve important goals, as is the film «Stand and Deliver» 1988, (true story of professor Jaime Escalante). Or whether one must only dogmatically meet one's obligations, and in reality it is the family's work the motivation, punishment and reward for the obtained successes or failures.

Then we can ask ourselves if it can be acceptable the comfortable position of only «give class» or teach a course or subject in a robotic manner with the coldness and indifference to comment «the ones who can pass», «boy, they are stupid...», «What's the need, for what they pay me?», «Do what?», «but it requires a lot of work». Well, a series of hazardous comments that we could hear from many teachers.

So, can that posture be valid? The answer lies likewise in the pre-training, the values, ambitions and excellence of the teacher, as it happens in all professions, there are good, bad, and extraordinary. Let us categorize then the teachers in the following manner:

1. The not-a-teacher, the one that we definitely cannot understand what he or she is doing in an activity of this nature because he is not interested, does not like it and only creates trouble. **2. The lazy-incompetent** is the one that does not have skills or knowledge and in addition is lazy; beautiful combination. **3. The lazy-competent** which is the one that has skills, however the lack of enthusiasm and the path of the least effort guides every step

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of his or her life. **4. The incompetent worker** is the one that works hard, but the lack of capacities or abilities will hinder his career advancement; nevertheless he has a good attitude, something that is a key factor. **5. The competent-worker** are the teachers that are loyal to the implementation of their duties and obligations toward the institution and/or students as well as collaborators, and also have all the skills needed to develop their profession. **6. The worker-competent-charismatic-ideal**, to be short and concise we are talking of an ideal teacher. **7. The devout superstar** is an opinion leader, great investigator or figure in his or her area, that presents the characteristics of the worker-competent-charismatic-ideal. Finally, **8. The non-devout superstar** is the one who is leader of opinion, great investigator or figure of her area but that neglects the teaching activity either because of other occupations or simply because he or she lost interest for the grade achieved in his field or area, **9. The not mentioned** it is the one that I have not mentioned in this list, but perhaps you Mr. Reader already have in mind.

Once immersed in the sea of the histrionic possibilities of the teacher's character it may be utopian to think that all teachers can be inspiring, life changing or role models or demand them to be; it is a delicate point to suggest or inspire to take certain parameters to guide the practice of teaching without invading the sovereignty of academic freedom. It is then when you can analyze a specific profile out of the several that we can observe in the Faculty of Dentistry of our maximum house of studies, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, but that happens in all universities in different cities of the country either public or private.

In my particular point of view there are certain responsibilities and obligations that perhaps have been neglected or by lack of awareness have been omitted in our teaching practice. First we must be conscious of the various skills, duties and obligations that being an educator involves; this item is so complex that we do not want to get involved in the deep theories of learning such as constructivism, behaviorism, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, etc.; we are just talking about preparing a class with the best resources and tools that suit the academic, that is to say some of them are excellent speakers with only a marker in hand, others transmit the information through extraordinary audiovisual resources, and others through team work, presentations, or a combination of these. This is how they carry out their academic exercise,

but it is not a manual on how to give classes or the obligations, duties and rights of academics: for that matter there is a university legislation and guidelines in our faculty and university. It is about refreshing or inviting to consider certain activities that enrich the academic exercise, optimize the student's learning and the smooth functioning of each department, the Faculty and of the University itself.

To be an academic is more than to teach and educate, it involves the following points, which we need to improve, strengthen or implement in our academic exercise regardless of the area to which one belongs to:

- Excellence in teaching.
- Performing administrative work.
- Research.
- Service.

EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Excellence in teaching is carried out according to each academic's way or according to what best suits his or her skills, without forgetting the following items, which perhaps with the rapid passing of time, and our many activities may be neglected.

- Constant presentations.
- Detailed clinical instruction.
- Development of teaching materials.
- Development of tools for objective evaluation.
- Review of the literature.
- Production of scientific writings.

Just to mention a few. These in my point of view are the ones I think of as a priority (there is no intention on exposing a treaty of all the obligations and duties, as mentioned above).

PERFORMING ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

While it is true that many teachers are hired to perform such activities, in other words, they are academic and in addition they have positions of this nature and receive a salary for these activities, we are referring to the common academic without this double recruitment, which many times excuses him or herself in thinking that her only job is to teach or educate and does not get his or her feet wet to cross the river, as our city proverb would say. The invitation is to get involved and assist in activities of this nature as an intrinsic component of the complete academic.

RESEARCH

This point can be controversial, for many conceptualize that research can only be done under a recruitment as such or in a laboratory. However there are a huge number of studies that can be developed in all areas and subjects. Unfortunately, by maintaining this sedentary and passive attitude the awakening, development and maturation of the creative and scientific capabilities of our community has been limited. It is therefore necessary to restart the intuitive and curious investigation machinery, as well as the cultivation of the doubt and analysis, to discover and understand more of one's area or areas of interest.

SERVICE

One of the most harmful evolutions that human beings have suffered over time is to seek refuge in their own world and on many occasions be desensitized to the external world, involving apathy toward other human beings; as an example, how many times can a passerby walk by a person lying on the ground and not even care, or let's be more

practical and analyze how in public transportation, an older person travels uncomfortably and standing while all the other passengers show indifference. In the same way, it may be that, in some occasions, as academics we no longer perform actions of service to our patients, students and collaborators. I think we need to incorporate service in our teaching practice and we can even add altruistic actions for the patients, students, our faculty and/or university.

It is not the intention of this short analysis to deepen or cook a homemade university utopia to be applied and taste the recipe, but to initiate a self-analysis of our teaching and auto-assess our performance and produce changes, if they are needed for the enrichment of our teaching.

We can conclude by a possibly idealistic concept: «a fair and devotee of his or her academic activity can spread, inspire, mark and change the lives of each one of his or her students».

Mexico City, University City 2013.

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