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QUDWA 2017

EXPERT MASTERCLASS

Teaching Habits

Sunday October 8th, 2017

Speaker

Elizabeth Green, Co-Founder, CEO, Editor-in-Chief, Chalkbeat, USA

Summary Paragraph/Key Points

This session explored the common habits of successful teachers, as well as how technology can help or hinder teachers.

“Knowing a subject is not the same as knowing how to teach it,” declares Green. “A bird is an expert at making nests and flying, but an ornithologist is an expert at knowing how a bird flies, how its wings works and how it makes a nest. Just because you’re a bird, does not mean you’re an ornithologist. You know how to fly, but you do not know how to teach someone else how to fly.”

Teaching requires specialized knowledge and skill, insists Green. She quotes basketball coach, John Wooden: “You haven’t taught until they’ve learned.”

Every time he worked with a team, Wooden studied every player carefully, keeping detailed notes about what they were doing and what he planned for them to do. She gives examples of Wooden’s notes, which were very descriptive, physical and positive. He observed each player’s specific strengths, their bodies and their professional skills; in summary, what each player brought to the court. Green argues that Wooden had the special knowledge that teachers need to have when they teach - she identifies the intersection between their **knowledge of subject** and their **knowledge of students**. This intersection is the **knowledge to teach**.

Teachers need to understand the strengths of their students, and therefore what their problems may be during teaching. It is important for every teacher to identify what special knowledge they need to teach; this may not be related to the specific subject that they are teaching, but may be linked to the students’ cultural identity. This knowledge will enable teachers to develop strategies for particular problems in





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teaching. For example, you will need to understand what experience students are bringing to the problem and any wider problems that may apply.

“So, what are specialized skills?” Green asks, before stating that skills help us define the type of learning experience to apply, bearing in mind that specific adaptations are required for the number of participants, the length time a teacher has and the ways in which they are relevant.

Green presents the “**I / we / you**” model for helping children understand how to solve a problem. She begins with “This is how **I** do it” – she introduces the problem and demonstrates how to solve it. Then she moves on to the next stage: “This is how **we** do it”. Here, she encourages the whole class to solve the problem through modelling as a group. The final stage is: “This is how **you** do it”, when each student tackles a similar problem on his or her own.

Green created her own structure, inspired by her time working in the Japanese education system, called “**You / Y’all / We**”. (Please note that “y’all” is the American contraction for “you all”).

Each student begins by tackling a specific problem or “the challenge of the day”, spending 15 minutes by him or herself, in the inverse of the previous model. This is the “**You**” stage.

“They have to just dive in and try,” says Green.

In the “**Y’all**” stage, students work with partners to understand how each other attempted to solve the problem. Then, during the “**We**” stage, everyone shares his or her experience about how everyone tried to solve the problem. This section is teacher-led, and only at this point does the teacher consolidate the specific skill being taught in the lesson. She points out that this technique is very similar to “Think / Care / Share” and encourages teachers to consider how they can build on this.

Green states that “teachers need to understand what their students need to know, and then design experiences in response.”

Referencing her time in Japan, Green acknowledges that teachers there have “an amazing approach towards teaching as a public role and not as an isolated act”. In the west, teachers typically spend time on their own with their students. Conversely, in Japan, teachers are constantly being observed. This then leads to a “post-lesson discussion”, whereby everyone gathers together to discuss the lesson. This is not an evaluation of the effectiveness of the teacher, but a discussion about what the observers (often parents) learned about the “challenge of teaching”.

Through observations, teachers share best practice to enable students to develop different strategies for learning.





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“In the course of these post-lesson discussions, something amazing happens. Ideas about teaching spread very quickly,” concludes Green. “Knowledge and skills are built collectively.”

MAIN TAKEAWAY: The teachers of tomorrow must observe their students’ attempts at problem-solving, encourage them to find solutions and only then should they impart knowledge and skills.

