

Teaching in Community: a Subject-Centered Education

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Abstract

Our knowledge of the world comes from gathering around great things in a complex and interactive community of truth. But good teachers do more than deliver the news from that community to their students. Good teachers replicate the process of knowing by engaging students in the dynamics of the community of truth.

Community, or connectedness, is the principle behind good teaching, but different teachers with different gifts create community in surprisingly diverse ways, using widely divergent methods.

Engaging students in the community of truth does not require that we put the chairs in a circle and have a conversation. A sense of connectedness can also be generated – in classes large and small – through lectures, lab exercises, fieldwork, service learning, electronic media, and many other pedagogies, traditional and experimental. Like teaching itself, creating educational community can never be reduced to technique. It emerges from a principle that can express itself in endless varieties, depending on the identity and integrity of the teacher.

But our conventional pedagogy emerges from a principle that is hardly communal. It centers on a teacher who does little more than deliver conclusions to students. It assumes that the teachers has all the knowledge and the students have little or none, that the teacher must give and the students must take, that the teacher sets all the standards and the students must measure up. Teacher and students gather in the same room at the same time not to experience community but simply to keep the teacher from having to say thing more than once.

As for the practical use of this principle let's show it on the example of the subject "Practice of translation from English into Russian". The principle that the classroom should be subject-centered and the students should work in community can be easily demonstrated by using some methodologies. When teaching sight translation it is necessary to do some preparatory exercises. For example, "Texts' sorting". The following tasks encourage students to learn working in community. The task is: sort out the given texts according to the theme, genre, mentioned dates, names or the main communicative task. The work should be done in groups. The variant is: sort out the given texts, first deciding what principle is implied. Or it may be an organized material or bigger text. The students should pick out texts according to definite criteria.

Using such elements of teaching the students are encouraged to teach each other, the standards of accountability emerge from the group itself, and the teacher's role varies from facilitator to co-learner.

Modeled on the community of truth, this is a classroom in which teacher and students alike are focused on a great thing, a classroom in which the best features of teacher- and student-centered education are merged and transcended by putting not teacher, not student, but subject at the center of our attention.