

# The Ingredients Necessary For Teaching Excellence

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What is teaching excellence? Teaching excellence involves a combination of ingredients all blended together in proper proportion not unlike the process of making a good cake or pie. The essential ingredients are probably the same for every good teacher; but the exact quantity of each, and the method of blending them, will undoubtedly vary with each teacher.

The beginning college teacher, as well as the veteran who aspires to become a master teacher, seeks to learn the proper ingredients. The recipe for excellence in teaching is elusive for some; but for others, it is a delightful, soul-stirring discovery.

What are these essential ingredients of teaching excellence? What is the proper blend; that right mix in order to have a satisfactory product? How should the blending be done?

## Purpose

Some members of the agricultural profession, in attempting to describe teaching excellence, say, "Take a look at John Doe and Mary Doe; they are master teachers. Just be the kind of teacher they are, and you'll be successful." This often-heard suggestion prompted the Department of Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University to ask certain "master teachers" of agriculture to share their beliefs as to the proper ingredients for teaching excellence.

## Results

The essential ingredients for teaching excellence, as offered by these master teachers, can benefit all of us who teach agriculture or who work with those who do.

### Keep up-to-date

"Keeping up-to-date is a must for teachers if they want to be effective," say our master teachers. As one teacher put it, "... I feel a strong obligation to keep current, informed. Agriculture is a dynamic, exciting, sometimes discouraging, but always rapidly changing field. The successful teacher must keep up-to-date. The teacher who does not do this risks losing credibility. The one who does (keep up technically) not only has a lot to offer the students, but experiences a great deal of personal satisfaction."

Keeping abreast of current agricultural knowledge has to be a constant effort, according to another teacher. However, there are rewards for the effort. "Since agriculture has become such a technical field, it is necessary to keep yourself up-to-date by attending conferences, workshops, field days and (by) constantly reading. The reward for you as a teacher comes when

you see these young people grow and develop into leaders."

### Be motivated

Being a master teacher also requires motivation for both the teacher and the students. As one teacher sees it, "I find motivation and attitude as the two key ingredients of a student's success pattern. As a teacher, trying to find how to motivate each student and to build a positive self-image is the real challenge that makes teaching interesting."

Some master teachers pattern themselves after a former teacher. "I remember my master teachers not necessarily for what they taught me in subject matter (and yet they were my best subject matter teachers), but for the motivation they gave me to be somebody special."

"The big challenge in working with students," says another teacher, "is getting them to dig down deep inside and use their ability. The teacher must become a motivator using such phrases as 'You can accomplish,' 'You can succeed,' 'You can excel,' 'You can be among the top ten,' and 'You are capable of doing better.'"

### Be interested in the student

Sometimes the teacher assumes the role of a parent, not only in counseling the student but in the degree of concern shown for the student. This degree of concern is described by one teacher: "I think of every student in my class as part of my family, and I care about that student. I am not just interested in the facts they may learn in my class today, but I hope I can challenge them to set goals and aspire to greater achievements than they have ever dreamed possible."

From another teacher's viewpoint, being a good teacher is somewhat like being a good parent. "I believe excellence in teaching rarely occurs unless the teacher naturally possesses or has learned to develop the same feelings toward students that good parents have toward their own children. They are anxious to see them develop to their fullest potential, they're proud of their accomplishments, they're sad when they fail, and they let them know when behavior is less than acceptable. It's not just that they are very aware of the needs of their individual students; they want so much to see each of them 'make it.' They plan every lesson and each activity so that it automatically provides opportunity for the student to achieve and progress."

"Every student is special," is the belief of the master teachers. One teacher summed up that belief with these words: "... I believe each student is a unique individual with important needs, and he or she deserves the best I have to offer. I think in terms of reverse roles: What would I want to be taught? Or, what would I want a teacher to do for my own children? I'd want the best, and the best is seldom easy (to give)."

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### Set directions

"A good teacher will have definite goals." The master teachers state that these goals apply both to the teacher and to the student. Goals cannot be set too early. One teacher has this philosophy: "Although goal-setting and evaluation are daily functions, I like to make long-range plans about July 1. A new teaching year begins then and this is a good time to set goals for the coming year for myself and the program."

The direction teachers set for themselves should be realistic, attainable, and tailored for the individual. Claims one teacher, "Success is possible for the teacher of agriculture if he or she is willing to apply himself/herself to the job, develop courses that fit the needs of the students, and at the same time develop a schedule the given teacher can manage. Don't look at someone who is teaching and say, 'I have to do everything they are doing or I won't be successful.' Use others for ideas, not for duplication, and let your own personality show in your teaching."

### Evaluate performance

No teacher can improve without asking the question (and carefully considering the answers), "How am I doing?" "Evaluating the past year," suggests one teacher, "will help to revise the curriculum and prepare yourself educationally and mentally for the coming year."

Students also need to develop the ability to self-evaluate. A good teacher will help them develop this ability. Some advice about this help is given by a teacher, who urges "... a teacher to be a little fussy. Students who don't do a good job according to their abilities do it again."

### Develop a positive attitude

There's no question in the minds of our master teachers that a teacher's degree of success is affected by his/her attitude. As summed up by one teacher, "... teaching excellence ... involves ... a very healthy, positive attitude about one's self, one's students, and the job purpose. A positive mental attitude is hard to conceal; it is almost contagious. It is 'caught' not only by the students, but also by nearly everyone else with whom the teacher comes in contact."

Helping students develop a positive attitude toward learning is also the mark of teaching excellence. States one teacher, "I keep a sign in front of the classroom which reads, 'Learning is fun,' and learning really is fun. Sometimes, those of us who teach work at making it (learning) dull, monotonous, and a drudgery." This same teacher echoes an earlier premise, "... teaching excellence ... involves a caring attitude, a desire to do your best, and taking pride in your work."

### Conclusions

What the master teachers have told us about teaching excellence seems to be this: excellent teaching involves more than the traditionally advocated characteristics/traits enumerated by professionals such as

Rosenshine and Furst (1971), and taught in the usual college pedagogical courses. Teaching excellence centers around the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the job. Teaching is student-centered; the objectives of the teacher, the motivation to act, the evaluation of teacher performance, all start and end with the student. Perhaps the orientation of new teachers in our colleges ought to give more emphasis to the development of the ingredients for teaching excellence seen as so important by these master teachers.

### References Cited

Rosenshine, Barak, & Furst, Norma. 1971. Research on teacher performance criteria. In B.O. Smith (Ed.), *Research in Teacher Education: A Symposium*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

## Whatever Happened? To The Field Trip

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A field trip, when properly carried out, may be one of the best devices in making instruction more effective and relevant. While most audio-visual and teaching methods textbooks have contained information relative to institutionally sponsored field trips, and trips have been a part of the instructional programs for years, many college teachers seem to hesitate to use such trips for reasons that reach far beyond college budget considerations.

Some college teachers feel that the planning and problems connected with a field trip fail to justify the learning that takes place. On the other hand, many teachers, with well-planned field trips, have felt very positive with the outcomes.

College teachers should not expect learning to take place only within the confines of the four walls of a building. College teachers must be encouraged to gain experience in utilizing field trips in their instructional programs in all classes at all levels. Most college teachers seem to perceive the positive aspects of the field trip experience with regard to their present program, but appear preoccupied with their regular program efforts which may restrict the use of field trips. Some teachers would rather make assignments and correct papers than organize, promote, conduct, and evaluate a field trip.

Teaching and learning must be based upon information that is both intelligent and environmentally accurate. This needed knowledge can be obtained from daily experiences, some from activities provided from outside of the classroom.

Mendenhall (1967) suggests that there are five types of field trips: (1) the local field trip, (2) the community field trip, (3) the tour, (4) the in-

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