

Personal Statement

The Challenge of Making Teaching an Art

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October 29, 2012

Education and learning are present in all human dimensions. During our lives we learn various activities such as speaking and reading, family life, topics from formal education, how to lead our own lives, how to be professional, and how to serve others and society. In all these instances, the transmission of knowledge is an important part of the educational process. However, this is not essential and is far from being the most important part. Teaching is much more than knowledge transmission and here is where the first challenge arises for those of us who assume this teaching challenge; the challenge to teach, broadly and with care, those we are entrusted to teach.

Even though this realization may seem obvious, it is not easy at all and I experienced this as my first challenge when I started working as teaching assistant at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It was then that I realized that teaching is not only the transmission of practical knowledge but, above all, consists of the transmission of models and values that guide this practical knowledge. Teachers must help students to acquire convictions and ideals in order to achieve a more transcendental education on values and virtues.

As an example, in the short time I have been teaching, I recognized that it is very common for those of us who study economics to teach the solution to a mathematical problem. The first time I saw myself in this situation, I noticed immediately that teaching requires not only communicating the solution to a problem. Much more than that, it is necessary to teach a whole way of thinking, that is, to encourage students to question things, look at them from a critical point of view, to build intuition and in general to develop an attitude and way of looking at things that will be useful when faced with any other problem; not just the one of momentary focus. These have been and still are the ideals, standards and ways I have always tried to guide my work as a teaching assistant in the department of economics and still represent a challenge every time I begin a new class.

One of the most important features of education, teaching and knowledge is that they are multiplied when shared, contrary to what happens to the material goods that are divided when shared. For example, when sharing a cake, the piece that belongs to me is always smaller than it would be if I did not share. With ideas and education, the result is exactly the opposite. When teaching a concept or proposing an idea to solve a problem, the learning is multiplied through all students. This is one of the greatest values and is an enriching process for all: for the students and the professor. This is an educational feature which is so important

but that sometimes is difficult to notice: it always multiplies and allows expansion of knowledge among all participants in the classroom, from students, to the teacher.

I think that I am part of the lucky group who has noticed this essential feature of the art of teaching. From the very beginning when I started teaching in 2011, this has added to my lectures the additional challenge to encourage the participation of my students, as it is in this presentation and discussion of ideas where the real learning is created.

Additionally, one of the most important conditions to achieve a real education, not only with knowledge but with contribution to the transmission of ideals and virtues, is trust. The assimilation of knowledge is achieved only when a relationship of friendship and trust exists between teacher and student. Undoubtedly, the places where more is learned are those of prevailing confidence. It is trust which allows honest dialogue, without fear, between teacher and students. In my work as a teaching assistant in the department of economics this trust building has also been a constant challenge. I have always worried about building this confidence between my students and me, and even more so, among themselves. I am certain that through this process, students lose their fear of participating and are thus exposed more often to new ideas, with the consequent enrichment of all class participants (including me).

As a result, for me, to teach, educate and help train young professionals is a task loaded with responsibility and a tremendous challenge because through it I seek to contribute to the virtues of the student, and not only to just a better grade in a midterm. I am sure, however, that the latter will be a consequence of the former.

For all these reasons, teaching is a task that, without love, is empty. Every artist, driven by his love, always brings up something new, a new painting of incalculable value and uniqueness. In teaching, this also occurs. As the artist always makes unique pieces, so it happens and should happen with the teacher. Since I have had the honor of working as a teaching assistant, I have always considered my work such tremendous responsibility, full of challenges like the ones I have described in this statement: teach my students virtues, models and ways to think, try to inspire my students to think critically and to not be afraid to express their own ideas, build trust in my relationship with them, and above all work in search of the best for them. This is the only way in which true and long lasting knowledge is generated. I think, fortunately, so far I have been able to achieve this and I hope to be able to continue improving on it.

Because teaching is always an unfinished task, a task of service and a task with an immeasurable impact in the life of our students, it should be done with love and focusing on values, virtues and skills that transcend the immediate learning situation. This is the main challenge I have faced (and still face) while teaching and what governs my work every time I enter the classroom.