



Teaching on a Tightrope: The Diverse Roles of a Great Teacher

Jack Zevin

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Teaching on a Tightrope offers those seeking to play the teacher's role a way of thinking about the major components of teaching. These components or dimensions are described in terms of pairings that interact and overlap with each other, e.g., teaching as art and science, content and process, theory and practice, cognition and emotion. Each pairing is focused on the overall relationship and communication between actor/actress, the teacher, and audience, the students. Throughout the book, a rationale is proposed that a truly great teacher must learn how to balance the many components of teaching to fit both subject and audience. Success depends upon the knowledge, skill, and performance of the one playing teacher in reaching those in the student roles. Practice must be informed by theory, content by process, cognition by emotion; no single factor can stand by itself, but must link to others. By expanding your understanding of a teacher's many roles, you can experiment with a wide variety of instructional methods to motivate and sustain student learning. Reliance on one technique, lecturing or group work, from this point of view does not guarantee success in creating interested learners. Much more is need to achieve a joining of ideas, techniques, subject, and atmosphere, above all, attention to audience needs and interests, anxieties and problems.

Communication, the heart of teaching should be thought of as at least a two way, or better yet, a multi-path interchange of ideas and emotions. As teachers grow in experience and skill, they draw upon many sources for inspiration and satisfaction. They slowly integrate facts, ideas, concepts, and feelings into an overall philosophy that guides their choices of effective methods and materials in promoting learning. A balance emerges from competing factors and audience adaptations, or doesn't, leading to a sense of euphoria and success, or a feeling of depression and failure. Teaching is portrayed as difficult and rewarding, yet often disappointing as well, as a better teacher slowly emerges, and perhaps becomes the great teacher we would all like to be.

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