

How Can It Be?

Dennis B. Worthen

The questions that led to this series were, “What is excellence in teaching and how does one learn to be an excellent teacher, especially at the university and professional levels?”

In some respects, teaching is a lonely and difficult undertaking. It can take years to feel comfortable with the processes. It can take even longer to see the fruits of one’s labor. Teachers at the university level seldom have any training on how to teach; what they bring to the classroom, laboratory, or clinic is the knowledge of the content rather than the process of how best to communicate it. Historically, the rewards and recognition for teaching were frequently subordinated to other roles and requirements, including research and publication and service. This perspective is changing, however, as more attention is being focused on teaching competency and proficiency by both the institution and the students.

Perhaps our only training in how to teach rests in the memory of how we were taught. Hopefully, we remember the uttered promise that we would never do to our students what our teachers did to us. And, also hopefully, we have memories of good teachers, teachers who not only were competent in the subject matter but also had the skill and the

Dennis B. Worthen, Ph.D., is Director of the Lloyd Library and Museum, 917 Plum Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202.

desire to make the subject alive and meaningful, even if not necessarily fun.

It is this second memory, that of good teachers, that partially answers the opening question of excellence in teaching and how one achieves it. That is, each of us had a personal concept of excellence when we experienced it. While excellence was not rigorously measured, we were able to intuitively recognize and value excellence, and in so doing, develop some of our teaching approaches. Unfortunately, the personal memory approach may not help us understand how our model teachers got to be good in the first place. Our experience is static and limited by both time and place. Therefore, it is important to increase our exposure to a broader number of role models who have demonstrated the vision of what “good” looks like.

The purpose of the Profiles of Excellence series is to broaden the pool of role models of good teachers through an autobiographical accounting of the professional and personal life of individuals who have been recognized as master teachers. These master teachers have won recognition of their skills by students and colleagues and will, over time, represent all facets and sites of pharmaceutical education. The intent is to provide new and maturing educators with a sense of the career accomplishments and challenges that role models have worked through in their own careers. And, we are all maturing educators since learning is a life-long process.

So, where does one go to learn how to be a good teacher? We hope that this series will be a resource to help you answer that question. In no sense is this series a magic potion that will result in each of us easily becoming a master teacher. Hopefully, it will show how others have achieved excellence in an endeavor that is important to all of us. And, in so doing, encourage us to do better the next time that we are in the role of “teacher.”

So, how do you do that anyway . . . ?