*First Essay, word count: 1,333*

**“Historical” examples of different teaching techniques and their efficacy**

*“Knowledge is power”* – Sir Francis Bacon

As a student under varying education systems, I have experienced different kinds of teaching methods as well as teachings, some quite successful where I have learnt a lot while others not so much. Learning for me was not always so clear cut in that one method worked over another. For me, learning a new concept was something that I did not understand how it worked where I would completely understand one subject without extended explanation while not comprehending another despite extended explanation. From this I deduced that it may have been the abilities of teachers alongside my interest in the subject as a student that had a major impact. Teachers who had the ability to implement their teaching method in a useful way greatly assisted in my learning experience. On the other hand, teachers lacked the ability in communicating their ideas to their students in an effective way were not of great help to my learning experience, regardless of their teaching methods. For the sake of privacy, a pseudonym will be used for the teachers while the actual name of the school will be presented.

Teachers who greatly assisted in my learning experience were able to implement their teaching method in a useful way. Contrary to the modern belief system of “newer the better” in regards to the education system, there were teachers who were largely conventional in their teaching method whom had a great positive impact on their students.

One such teacher that comes to mind is one Mr M Clem, then head faculty of science and teacher in high school chemistry at Bethlehem College located in the city of Tauranga, New Zealand. Mr Clem was a teacher, who is best described as being rather strict, traditional, staunch, and at times scary. An example of his characteristic would be that he frequently employed what I would like to call as “non-corporal physical punishment” where students had to perform demanding physical exercise such as push-ups if they were late to class. He would also not hesitate to raise his voice and shout in a military manner should the class misbehave. He showed no favouritism nor mercy when it came to punishment as he firmly believed in discipline. Despite all this, he was almost universally respected by student, mostly because he had a sense of humour, but more importantly because of his passion to teach. He firmly believed doing the best for his students going to great lengths often approaching the subject from different angles to explain difficult concepts even going as far to tolerate what seems like a stupid question provided that the student was being genuine. His teaching style was that of a teacher-centred explainer in that he would lecture his students while preventing them from writing notes until he finished explaining so that individual students could ask questions without disrupting the class. Another favourable aspect of his character was that he was humble in that he was not above admitting he was wrong or that he did not know the answer to a question, where he would sometimes ask another student for an answer.

Another teacher who had a positive impact on my learning experience is one Mrs M Cant (nee Leigh, PhD), head of biology, also at Bethlehem College. Though uptight and in a way traditional, in contrast to Mr Clem, Dr Leigh came off as kind, empathetic, and warm. She almost always spoke in a soft voice even when her class was noisy and her tone was gentle and well-educated. Unlike Mr Clem, Dr Leigh was more of an involver in her teaching method. Though she would lecture in a teacher-centred way, she would frequently ask questions to students to make sure her students understood key concepts. Another positive characteristic was that she paid special attention to advanced students, not only so that they could help other classmates, but to educate them beyond the normal expectations of the class. For example, after class during lunch breaks, she set up a special “scholarship class” for students who were doing scholarship level biology, teaching them scholarly method on writing scientific essays all at the cost of her spare time.

One can see how a teacher can be effective with students’ learning experience by implementing their teaching style in a way students can be receptive to the knowledge being taught regardless of the teaching method.

In contrast, teachers who were not of great help to my learning experience, usually failed in communicating their ideas to the students in an effective way regardless of their teaching methods. Likewise with conventional method being not so out-dated, the same can be said about modern method where a teacher who lacks the ability to confer knowledge student can negate the efficacy of a new and improved teaching method.

One such teacher was Mrs R Tea, a teacher in high school mathematics with statistics, also at Bethlehem College. Though she was a passionate teacher always having the best intent for her students, she was not good at communicating her knowledge to her students while at the same time failing to gain command of their respect, possibly due to her incomprehensible accent. The class had to use computer for the first part of the course and a scientific calculator use was recommended if not required. Her teaching style was that of an explainer in that she would try to explain concepts extensively, but was also an enabler in that she would let the students work in pairs making it student-centred. In her characteristics in teaching, she had two major faults: first, she was quite biased in that she would often devote much time to advanced students at the detriment of those who are struggling; second, she was inattentive most of the time, leaving it up to advanced students to do most of the explaining during problem solving, and sometimes teaching the entire curriculum. Despite her flaws, she was still a caring teacher trying to understand her student, but to no avail.

In contrast to Mrs Tea, Mr T Mars, head of physics, also at Bethlehem College, was a very strict traditional teacher, mostly due to his age. Though his teaching methods are traditional teacher-centred explainer style, unlike Mr Clem, Mr Mars does not command the respect of his students nor does he seem to have any passion for them. At times he does not seem to care whether a student is late or absent, though he does get angry if someone disrupts the class. One of the major flaws of Mr Mars is that he speaks in a low monotonous voice which can be off-putting considering the subject matter is difficult and his low sense of humour makes it worse. Though he encourages asking questions, there is almost no teacher-student relationship where without sufficient motivation, a student will be bound to fail the course.

From this, one can deduce that it is not a matter of teaching style that makes them useful in one’s learning, but rather an ability to convey the knowledge to the students in an effective way, a failure to do so is a great disservice to the students as a teacher.

Learning itself is a rather polarizing experience. It can be rather easy to grasp with little or no explanation on one hand, while incredibly difficult to comprehend despite extensive explanation on the other. The varying teaching methods are important in that they have different uses depending on the circumstance; however it is simply not enough to use a popular method as the ability to communicate and convey the knowledge a teacher have to a student effectively is essential. Passion and humour are important traits to have, but are not essential as they do not establish a firm foundation on how a class should be taught. From experience, a teacher can be strict or easy-going, conventional or modern, but at the end of the day, if the teacher does not command the respect of their students, then their ability to teach is greatly hindered.