



## Book Review

### How to be a brilliant teacher

Author: Trevor Wright

Publisher: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

First published 2009/Special Nepali Edition 2012

170 Pages

Review by: Dr. Abhinav Vaidya

Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine,  
Kathmandu Medical College

**A**prelude to start the review: The moment I saw the title of the book in the book section of a newspaper, it was perhaps *Republica*, I immediately felt an urge to read it. My wish was granted about a week later when I saw a heap of the title lying in the KMC library office. Our Principal Prof. Hemang Dixit too had apparently seen it in the paper and had some ten copies ordered immediately. I picked up the first! Another round of telepathy with the Principal Sir was when he suggested to me to write a book review for the revived Journal of Kathmandu Medical College, and I had already thought about it and even told my editorial colleagues.

My and Principal Sir's enthusiasm for the book were not wrongly placed. The moment I began reading the book, I was immediately hooked by its relevance to us, the teachers of a medical school. Please be informed beforehand, however, that the book has not been written for us- the medical teachers. The premise is in fact elementary schools, and the examples are from English, history and crafts lessons! But the issues discussed are so universal that you cannot but contemplate their applicability in our own context. This I thought was a blessing in disguise- because as you read the book, it makes your mind to review your own teaching techniques, particularly the shortcomings that they may have.

At the risk of being labelled a case of plagiarism, I am copying three sets of lines from the book review that appears in a webpage<sup>1</sup> because I think these lines speak impeccably about the book:

- a. This cheerful and accessible book is packed with direct and practical advice drawn from the author's extensive and successful personal experience as teacher-trainer, teacher and examiner. It sets out clear and practical guidelines to support and enhance your teaching skills.
- b. How to Be a Brilliant Teacher is aimed at teachers who want to develop their careers, or just be better teachers, by monitoring their own improvement. In order to do this, they may need to re-connect with theory, to consider their own practice explicitly, and to begin to see themselves as researchers. This book suggests how to get started.
- c. Although a practical book, at its heart lie essential values about good teaching and learning. In particular it will seek to re-introduce teacher initiative and creativity and to reconcile these with the growing number of preformed strategies that the teacher has to work with. In exploring the issues faced by teachers it addresses many common anxieties and offers focussed solutions to them.

The book discusses many facets of teaching and learning. I think the most important and almost always neglected element that it touches is the psyche of the students. For example, at one point the book talks about the YAVA trap (You ask, Volunteers Answer). All of us as teachers have thought that we had a good teaching session because a few volunteers actively participated in the class proceedings- but what about those we completely ignored- the non-volunteers? Then there is SFC (Status, Freedom and Control) concept, where the author opines

how a teacher is actually, often unintentionally though, taking away the freedom (to learn) from the student, and how this milieu is counter-productive to learning. But among all the tips which the book has in plenty, the one that I would strongly urge the readers to take home would be about the importance of having a proper lesson plan, which appears in Chapter 2.

However, before reading this book, I think we as medical teachers need to go back a step, and ask ourselves a core

question: *do we want* to be a brilliant (medical) teacher? Or, perhaps the more relevant question would be: *do we want to be a (medical) teacher?* I would like to refer the inquisitive readers to a British Medical Association publication called 'Doctors as teachers'<sup>2</sup> for an insightful answer to this. But as far as the book we are discussing is concerned, I would advise that if your answer is a 'yes', you should go ahead and read this book. And, if your answer is a 'no', then you should *definitely* read this book!

### References

1. How to be a brilliant teacher: from teaching to learning [Internet]. [cited 2012 Sep 25]. Available from: [http://books.google.com.np/books?id=49T\\_LgEACAAJ&source=gbs\\_book\\_other\\_versions](http://books.google.com.np/books?id=49T_LgEACAAJ&source=gbs_book_other_versions).

2. British Medical Association: Board of Medical Education. Doctors as teachers [Internet]. London: British Medical Association; 2006 Sep [cited 2012 Sep 25]. Available from: <http://www.glossas.org/Library/Teaching%20and%20Mentoring/Doctors%20as%20teachers%20BMA%20Sept%2006.pdf>