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On Educational Literacy

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Education is a process, the chief goal of which is to bring about change in human behaviour (1). It utilizes teaching as a means of bringing about this change. Teaching has been defined as the process of helping learners to learn (2,3). It refers to the interactions between teacher and student in order to bring expected changes in behaviour of the student. To be effective, teaching should incorporate " timely and objective communication skills. Learning is a process resulting in some modification relatively permanent, of the behaviour, way of thinking, feeling and, doing of the learner" (1). Learning can be greatly facilitated in an atmosphere which encourages people to be active, accepts that difference is desirable, makes people feel respected and accepted, facilitates discovery, puts emphasis on self evaluation in cooperation, releases information, condemns chauvinism and so on.

Teaching is not merely an art to which one is born, but a science that should be learned (2,3). It is increasingly recognized that being, for example, a good researcher, a clinician, etc, is no guarantee of being a good teacher, that a person who is well versed in a subject is not necessarily skillful at helping others learn it (2).

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There is a need for systematic, and conscious preparation of teachers for their important professional tasks. The issue of teacher-training must be the most salient agenda of academic institutions.

The world is facing problems with shortages of teachers in the health sciences who are also knowledgeable about educational planning and processes (2). There are teachers who still use methods that ignore the fact that students learn how to solve a problem not by being told how to solve it but by themselves experimenting to find a solution. Outmoded methods of evaluation still in use merely provide some information on the student's capacity for memorization but may not assess the individual's ability to cope with the real problems he or she will be encountering after graduation (2, 4). In many teaching institutions, the condition is complicated further by lack of coordination between departments, by duplication and even conflict between certain disciplines and by rivalry among teachers. Though a rational teacher-training program may not be a panacea for the existing problems, it can at least be one step towards solving them.

Teachers being educators both to their students and the public need be oriented to modern principles of learning and the educational process. The very first step in any educational program is "the definition of educational objectives" (1,2,3,5). An educational program has more chance of being effective when its purposes have been clearly expressed. As the saying goes "If you are not certain of where you are going, you may very well end up somewhere else".

The need for a clear definition of educational objectives is an essential step before choosing the teaching methods and a system of evaluation of the lesson. (1.3.5). It is not possible to measure the results obtained from an educational program if its objectives have not been explicitly defined.

Educational objectives must be developed on the basis of information obtained from different sources, example: Health needs, demands and resources of the society, the prospective professional task analysis, the learners background, abilities, interests and role in the health system, the socio-cultural system and so on.

Educational objectives should be defined using behavioral terms corresponding to the tasks to be accomplished (1,3,5). In other words, the definition must indicate what the learners will be able to do at the end of the period of education or training that they were not able to do before. Educational objectives drawn must be relevant, logical, clear, feasible, observable and measurable (3,5). The learning objectives should include activity to be performed, the content (topic with which the objective is concerned), the condition under which the activity will take place and the minimum level of performance of the learner (criterion) (5).

Only when educational objectives are described in a practical and detailed manner will it be possible to determine with some precision the learning activities, the teaching methods and the evaluation approaches suitable for the educational program.

Besides training in educational principles; teachers (of health workers in particular) should constantly update their knowledge of the subject they teach, because involvement in personal learning is a necessary condition for being an effective teacher. Furthermore, such teachers must be aware of the developments in National and/or Global health policies, and current issues in health services, particularly in areas in which their students will be employed.

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