

Remediation theory and practice : transforming at-risk medical students

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Propositions
Regarding the dissertation

Remediation
Theory and Practice
Transforming At-Risk Medical Students

Kalman Winston
Maastricht 2013

1. In remediation, as in so many other things, dose matters. It takes time to build the trusting relationships needed to voice uncertainty and hear feedback, to practice and hone new skills, to evolve new ways of thinking, and to enact attitudinal and behavioural change.
2. The beliefs and behaviours we claim often bear little relationship to what we actually do. This belief/action mismatch has major implications for real-world research: you have to see it and feel it to really know what it is. As John Dewey noted, 'The meaning of the thing is made up of experiences of its active uses and not of intellectual contemplation.'
3. A small stable group, a community of inquiry, provides the ideal forum for effective remediation; social regulation is a valuable tool in the development of self-regulation.
4. Generalization of findings from real-world situations must always be tentative: the world is complex, there are no simple answers, and context shapes everything. Any proposition divorced from the detail of context cannot be consistently applied nor completely defended.
5. While student satisfaction and positive survey responses constitute a worthy goal in themselves, they bear little relationship to the effectiveness of an educational intervention on improving learning outcomes. What we like is often not the same as what is good for us.
6. The idea of a theory-practice gap involves the creation of a false dichotomy: theory and practice are interpenetrating and mutually constitutive, one cannot exist without the other. Educational advances require attention to the theory of educational practice and the practice of educational theory.

7. The right balance between learner autonomy and teacher guidance is key to successful course design. Shared control, whereby the teacher stipulates parameters, while offering students flexibility of choice within those parameters, is important for effective classroom interactions. Dewey: "The planning must be flexible enough to permit free play for individuality of experience and yet firm enough to give direction towards continuous development of power."
8. Weak students typically overestimate their likelihood of success, even in the face of disconfirming evidence, and often do not voluntarily seek help. If we offer these students a chance to repeat, and allow them to sacrifice further time and money, then we have a responsibility to mandate attendance in remedial programmes.
9. Loose language use and unfamiliarity with disciplinary discourse are hallmarks of struggling students. Language is intimately connected to understanding, critical thinking and knowledge construction. When learners are forced to be explicit, both they and their listeners can appreciate, and then remediate, misunderstandings. Language and discourse lie at the core of education.
10. Teaching experience matters. Good teachers of remediation need to embody the roles of facilitator, mentor, disciplinarian, diagnostician and role model. This combination demands extensive pedagogical context knowledge, teaching presence and practical wisdom. Since teaching those who find learning most challenging is difficult work, remediation needs the involvement of our best teachers.
11. "Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances." (Sunzi)