

PERSONAL MASTERY: The power of individual prowess

During an oral English test, Hannes does not even know the simplest answers. His classmates are starting to make fun of him, even though their teacher tells them that this does not help Hannes at all. Therefore, she hands out slips of paper and tells them: "Write down what you think would help Hannes better to fulfil the task given him." The pupils are surprised that they are called upon to do some work now and start to write down their own ideas. The teacher then collects the slips of paper and gives them to Hannes. He reads them out, one after the other, and with the help of the class, selects the ones that are most useful for him.

The teacher assesses the situation systemically: She involves all of the pupils in the process of helping Hannes to move his attention from the problem to the solution by finding or inventing new options from the pupils' perspective. The pupils are expected to share the responsibility rather than to poke fun at someone. The teacher's individual mastery lies in her making use of a situation that normally carries negative connotations and creating a social learning opportunity for the entire class which should help Hannes learn.

For teachers – and this also applies to pupils – it is not merely knowledge (*know what*) or skills (*know how*) that are important in teaching; rather, professionalism reveals itself especially in the way knowledge and skills are used effectively in a given situation. Knowledge without application remains static, while simple (re)acting blinds us to higher-level contexts (*know why*). How knowledge and skills are linked depends on a teacher's *personal mastery*.

In addition to the ability to successfully implement professional knowledge, personal mastery refers to the way one deals with the self. This also means regarding one's self as a learning assignment, to learn from mistakes and find (or invent) the new.

Individual prowess, therefore, does not result from a – mechanically defined – "good education". Rather, it is much more the result of an individual educational process, which is guided by the will to find one's own way effectively to have a positive impact on the learning processes of every single pupil in a variety of situations. If pedagogical knowledge is not to remain static, i.e. if it is to be transformed into pedagogical prowess, teachers must undergo a specific process of acquiring such knowledge and making it their own.

Those teachers who are open to the *new* and test it in specific situations to determine how it can be applied competently and professionally in practice are the guarantors of expert knowledge and ability. It is manifested in the resonance which occurs between teachers and learners. Finally, *personal mastery* is revealed in the extent to which teachers "do the right thing" based on their own experience and professional judgement. in a specific situation.

¹ Cf. Senge (1996).

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