

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to Bill Kane

In Defense of Pedagogy: A Response to Kane

In his article, "Teaching is Dead Last, or Worse," Bill Kane made the important point that "outstanding teachers" are not necessarily good role models for teaching and gave several personal examples to support his view. His article carries forward a notion from an earlier **Faculty Forum** piece, shifting from the emphasis on teachers to the process of teaching. Yet, one might be concerned that Kane's article also carries forward another tendency in discussions about teaching: the tendency to shift from an overemphasis on one dimension of the process to an overemphasis on another dimension of the process rather than to seek out the manner in which the dimensions of the teaching process compliment each other in the the teaching/learning situation.

Kane was certainly correct in ascribing an important role to the process of teaching, and most certainly to the teacher's "need to develop the skill to respond and adapt to the dynamics of the teaching/learning relationship." Yet there seems to be an important issue in the complex teaching/learning process that he did not address, probably because it is an issue about which an approach that emphasizes teaching/learning relationships in the absence of pedagogy has little to say.

Take the question of what goes on in the mind of the student during the teaching/learning situation. From this perspective, special emphasis would be given to the student's mental representation of knowledge or material to be learned. In this process, unlike Kane's emphasis on the process of interpersonal relationships, specific variables of the student's mental processes--such as acquisition, retention, and retrieval--would be addressed. As a consequence, there would be more attention paid to a systematic teaching strategy for facilitating the acquisition of knowledge and, thus, more emphasis on clarifying and explicating pedagogy that would facilitate the learning process.

If there is a generalization to be made about the importance of pedagogy or the teaching process it would be this: the teaching process has various dimensions that are critical to learning just as understanding the student's mental process is critical to teaching. Pedagogy can compliment learning and the acquisition of knowledge.

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