SOLVE A PROBLEM AND ‘CHANGE’ THE WORLD

by Clifford Sykes, Teach with Africa Fellow
Proven competencies and associated practices for successful teaching and learning:

1. **Pedagogical content knowledge strong evidence of impact on student outcomes**
   The most effective teachers have deep knowledge of the subjects they teach, and when teachers’ knowledge falls below a certain level it is a significant impediment to students’ learning. Effective teachers also have a strong understanding of the material being taught and understand the ways students think about the content and has insight on the learning style of each learner. Effective teachers must be able to evaluate the thinking behind students’ own methods and identify students’ common misconceptions. Teaching learners to understand their own learning processes is critical to deep learning.

2. **Quality of instruction (Strong evidence of impact on student outcomes)** – Effective instructional practice includes elements such as effective questioning and use of appropriate assessment by teachers. Specific practices, like reviewing previous learning, providing model responses for students, giving adequate time for practice to embed skills securely and progressively introducing new learning (scaffolding) are also elements of high-quality instruction.

3. **Classroom climate (Moderate evidence of impact on student outcomes)**
   Climate covers quality of interactions between teachers and students. Teacher high expectations are critical to the learning process: the teacher needs to create a classroom that is constantly demanding more, but still recognizes and affirms students’ self-worth. It also involves attributing student success to effort rather than ability and valuing resilience to failure (grit). The understanding of ‘growth mindset’ should be reflected in the classroom climate.

4. **Classroom management (Moderate evidence of impact on student outcomes)**
   A teacher’s abilities to make efficient use of lesson time, to coordinate classroom resources and space, and to manage students’ behavior with clear rules that are consistently enforced, are all relevant to maximizing the learning that can take place. These environmental factors are necessary for good learning rather than its direct components.
5. **Teacher beliefs (Some evidence of impact on student outcomes)**

Why teachers adopt particular practices, the purposes they aim to achieve, their theories about what learning is and how it happens and their conceptual models of the nature and role of teaching in the learning process all seem to be important.

6. **Professional behaviors (Some evidence of impact on student outcomes)**

Behaviors exhibited by innovative teachers such as reflecting on and developing professional practice, participation in professional development, supporting colleagues, and liaising and communicating with parents.

**Educational Theories and philosophies**

An instructor’s teaching style is directly related to their philosophy of what it means to know and learn. The rationale for making particular teaching choices becomes more apparent when new school members reflect on what they believe about teaching and learning. Much of what school teachers believe comes from their own experiences as students, the images of teaching they hold, and their experiences as a teacher. There is, however, an accessible shared body of action-based research on teaching and learning that should serve teachers well as they hone their teaching craft.

School instructional practitioners come to better understand their own philosophy through thinking, sharing and engaging about what they believe about teaching and learning. One means of thinking and distilling is writing. School educators benefit from taking the time to craft a teaching philosophy statement and a commitment to placing the child at the center of all practice and approach.
This sort of statement or something like it is often part of an application process for school positions. The clarity that results from crafting such a statement and associated values definition brings to the forefront the way teaching decisions are made, and this self-knowledge and metacognition will be invaluable when undertaking course and lesson planning.

The table below outlines major learning theories and links them to particular disciplines of knowledge.

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<th>Learning Theories and Philosophies as Applied to Schooling</th>
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<td><strong>Representative Philosophers or Learning Theorists (1)</strong></td>
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Note: (1) Includes Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Waldorf Schools.
It should be noted from the above table that, representative philosophers or learning theorists are subjectively allocated: Some schools of thought making this chart might well have categorized at least some of these philosophers and educational theorists differently. Such disagreement is appropriate and is based on differing readings of the people in question.

For example, in South African context, this table might include African philosophers and philosophies such as Ubuntu. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11159-016-9545-x

Moreover, the philosophies and learning theories listed here represent an attempt to characterize complex thinking in broad terms for the purpose of initial comprehension. Teachers should beware of "definitive" characterizations, which this chart does not attempt to produce.
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