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*You Haven't Taught Until They Have Learned: John Wooden's Teaching Principles and Practices*

by Swen Nater & Ronald Gallimore, Fitness Information Technology, Morgantown WV 2006

*An outstanding book on an outstanding coach! Not only was Coach Wooden a great coach, he was a master teacher. In fact, he was a great coach because he was a master teacher. What he has learned from others in the classroom and perfected on the practice court are fundamental principles and practices of effective coaching. These have a timeless and universal quality, applicable to all teaching situations- the classroom, the home, the workplace, and everywhere that a person has the responsibility for helping others learn and excel. Coach Wooden's approach- his principles and practices- can be studied and applied by teachers, coaches, parents, and anyone else who is responsible for, works with or supervises others.*

Dozens of Coach Wooden's former players will testify that the lessons he taught extend far beyond the basketball court. Yes, they learned to play well, but they also learned to live well through the values he taught and, more importantly, lived up to. He was their teacher in the truest sense of the word.

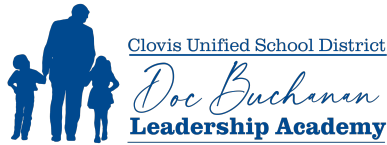
His father, Joshua Wooden, had repeatedly stressed he should never try to be better than someone else, but that he should never cease to try and become the best he could be.

The fact is, it requires many more than four or five years of university preparation for students to learn everything they need to know to be an accomplished professional in any field. Indeed, one of the defining qualities of a profession is that its practitioners are life-long learners who never stop learning new knowledge and skills.

"I learned more in my early years, of course, but you can always learn. It's what you learn after you know it all that matters most." John Wooden

Immediately after accepting the head coaching position at UCLA in 1948, Coach Wooden began to employ an organized research and development system, which allowed him to make substantial improvements each year in how he taught basketball. At the conclusion of each basketball season, during the off-season his self-improvement research began. He chose only one topic for each off-season study (e.g. defensive rebounding, free-throw shooting, etc.) The goal was to uncover all he could learn about a specific subject, draw conclusions, and apply it to his teaching.

He [Wooden] believes, and the research confirms, that you cannot teach well what you do not know very well. There are at least two kinds of knowledge this includes. The first is the conventional definition of knowledge: you know how to play basketball, or do algebra. You took




the classes, and passed the courses. The second is the kind of knowledge that is essential to teaching: pedagogical content knowledge which is having the ability to *make content comprehensible to learners*.

A young teacher might learn a great deal of subject matter in a college major. In his or her teacher education courses, he or she might learn some of what it takes to make subjects comprehensible to be learners. But few seriously believe that those entering the profession from college know all the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) they'll need. Realistically, when they leave pre-service programs they'll need to know how to learn PCK on the job.

To the researchers' surprise, most of Coach's statements in practice were short corrections or statements of how to play basketball. In fact, 75% of everything he said carried information intended for learning. The researchers were surprised at how seldom he positively reinforced players by praising them, or scolded their errors.

Having been [Swen Nater] the recipient of plenty of corrections, it was the "information" I received in the form of a correction that I needed most. Having received it, I could then make the adjustments and changes needed. It was the information that promoted change. Had the majority of Coach Wooden's corrective strategies been positive ("Good job") or negative ("No, that's not the way."), I would have been left with an evaluation, not a solution. Also, corrections in the form of information did not address or attack me as a person. New information was aimed at the act, rather than the actor.

1.  [Swen Nater](#) on [May 28, 2014 at 3:16 pm](#) said:

Nice article. Thanks,  
Swen