

# **The Threefold Way in Pedagogy: Emphasizing Process over Result**

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## *Underlying psychological principle*

Emphasizing process over result when communicating a desirable behavior to others better enables the audience to empathize themselves into that behavior. Pedagogical emphasis must be placed on effort, strategy, approach, and underlying principles instead of the end result, achievement, or individual. Just as the Cats or Dogs exercise employs narrative to defuse conflict, the situational nature of anecdotal examples fosters greater opportunity for empathy, resonance and agreement in an audience.

## *Strategic Case*

Best practices are the applications of guiding principles to specific situations. Cutting-and-pasting best practices from one company to another makes very little sense, but much can still be learned by examining how another company translates their guiding principles into practices. One company cannot fully embody an ideal, but their practices may serve as an illuminating example of how important guiding principles can be translated into practice in different situational contexts.

This idea also works at the level of the individual, when we're talking about innovation. The principles of innovation and the characteristics of an innovator are ideals. Such characteristics cannot be embodied by a single individual. Our most carefully chosen examples will always be fodder for argument, revisionist suggestions, and based on a highly specific cultural knowledge and context. Furthermore, when presented with another individual who supposedly embodies the essential characteristics for innovation, it is easier for a student to identify all the ways in which their situation differs from the exemplar. Distinctions can be drawn which separate the example and the subject, making empathy difficult. (ie. Well, she is a woman, she's from the South, she had a job that gave her more free time, and I have none of these things, etc.)

What is most important in describing principles and characteristics to an audience is to encourage the audience to "hear themselves" in the examples you choose to illustrate those principles. This is more effectively accomplished through case studies, using narrative to describe a process, showing how that principle was illustrated in a specific situation. This leaves room for the audience to empathize themselves into the challenge faced and the exemplar's response to the challenge. They must only identify with the exemplar situationally.

My suggestion here stems from the understanding that students are poorly served by being told they are "smart" instead of being praised for effort. We know that mastery is fostered and motivation is amplified when process is recognized over outcome. In lauding certain individuals as embodiments of desirable principles you are effectively

doing the same thing, labeling the ‘smart kids.’ A strategic improvement to communicate these ideas would be to emphasize the instructive principle with a context-specific example. This is important to do, not only for internal consistency between content and style, but also because a narrative technique speaks more openly to the audience, more empathetically. It encourages the audience to retain the principle over the specific exemplar, and instead of thinking “What would Oprah do?” when faced with a challenge, they might keep certain guiding principles in mind and formulate their own solution in accordance with them. We want to foster innovation, not emulation.

Gulag survivor Alexander Solzhenitsyn declared “the line between good and evil lies at the centre of every human heart.” And this is true. A single individual is so nuanced, multivalent, and polytheistic as to be no more capable of being a definitive example of Goodness or Brilliance or Passion than an entire organization or nation is. But we can and should identify, illuminate and emphasize instances of Good or Brilliant or Passionate decisions, actions and choices.

The case study or narrative model of illustrating examples defuses opposition and argument in the classroom (helping the instructor get her point across) and serves the student by permitting greater space for empathy, self-recognition, and attention to process, in accordance with the principles of empowered, productive human action.

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