

VIDEO SUMMARY

Becoming a Better Teacher

Resource person: Mariappan Jawaharlal | Mechanical engineering professor and engineering educator | Curated from TEDx Talks

Becoming a Better Teacher | In and Beyond the Classroom | pedagogy

Mariappan Jawaharlal recounts beginning his academic career with a familiar checklist: cover the syllabus, set demanding examinations and earn good student evaluations. Those indicators initially reassured him. Over time, he became less certain that they showed what students could understand or do.

His central question is simple: what is happening in the learner while the teacher is teaching? A polished presentation may make a class feel successful while leaving student thinking largely invisible. Jawaharlal asks teachers to focus on the actions students perform, the explanations they construct and the decisions they make with new knowledge.

Several practical moves follow. Teachers should explain why an idea matters and use language a learner can enter. Students need low-stakes opportunities to attempt difficult work, make errors, receive feedback and try again. When a student asks for help, the prompt 'What do you think?' can uncover the student's current model before the teacher supplies an answer. It also gives the learner a reason to articulate a claim.

Jawaharlal's bus-and-bicycle metaphor captures the shift. A passenger can travel while someone else controls every turn. A cyclist must steer and respond continuously. In teaching, that participation still needs a route, suitable challenge, feedback and deliberate consolidation. The teacher creates the situation, watches what students do and decides where support is needed.

The talk is broad and autobiographical, so its strongest use is as a prompt for course review. Choose one part of a lesson where students currently watch or listen. Ask what they could predict, explain, compare, build or test during that same time, and decide what evidence would show that the activity helped.