

A Giant and a Seminal Thinker in Medical Education - Dr. Hilliard Jason

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Abstract

This paper examines Dr. Hilliard Jason's approach to developing the teaching of doctor-patient communication skills. Dr. Jason's philosophy paved the way for alternate methods of effective learning within medicine. To communicate through different modes, is essential as it provides the learner with various methods to learn, further expand their knowledge, and broaden the field of medical education.

Keywords: Medical Education; Seminal Thinker; Teaching Methodologies; Faculty Development; Clinical Skills

As we read the stories of the seminal thinkers and the various lessons to be learned and the impacts that they have, we get reminded of a famous book, "Outliers" [1]. Dr. Hilliard Jason is one such outlier in the field of medical education.

There will always be an influence of a "geologic period" where cultural and political climate and changing social values guide few minds to create an out-of-box momentum for 'something new'. These outliers, seminal thinkers, and exemplars become the pioneers of a new paradigm in any given field. Through this, we see a similar pattern in medical education from mid to the latter half of the previous century.

In the early twentieth century, when digital technology was not available, learning was mostly restricted to memorization. This very prohibitive instruction mode agitated Dr. Hilliard Jason's inner self, which eventually led him into a lifelong quest for alternate methods of more effective learning. As he explored further, he was influenced by his contemporary educator Nathaniel

Cantor, particularly from his views on the value of the interaction between teachers and students as a learning process, appreciation of sensitivity and humanity in that process, and the importance of practicing thinking and solving problems [2].

After reading the journey of Dr. Hilliard Jason, we get remarkably impressed with the qualities of conviction, persistence, and 'speaking of his mind' from a very early age. He was the only medical student of Dr. George Miller's innovative experiment at the University of Buffalo, New York, to raise the quality of medical education received by students. This inclusion solely occurred because of his being vocal about problems with the methodology of medical education at such a young age.

His innovation in introducing the use of focal problem exercises, small group discussions, development of simulated patients, role-playing, and video recordings for teaching doctor-patient communication skills [3] is now considered a standard of teaching. We can compare Dr. Hilliard Jason and other exemplars' "inquiry

project" [4] to today's Google or a medical literature search engine. His attitude towards embracing new technology in education was remarkable. In the latter part of his career at the University of Miami School of Medicine, he starts exploring computers as a tool for faculty development and producing educational video programs equivalent to today's distant learning.

The lessons he taught from his lifelong experience as an educator are precious when he said: "I valued words, I valued communication." The ability to communicate via various tools and platforms to impart knowledge in a meaningful way is a common theme from the core of his work.

Dr. Jason's four lessons during the interview for "Stories of Exemplars" published in *Advances in Health Sciences Education* are biblical for education students [5]. These lessons included the ability to see themselves as anthropologists, be adaptable, develop extraordinary interpersonal skills, and understand the strength and risks of passions. They are core to the foundation of not only an individual educator's life but also of any educational institution. These lessons are in addition to his reminder to educators to use humor as an effective teaching strategy [6].

Despite many setbacks in his life, including when his report on medical teaching was disregarded, and his Division of Faculty Development was eliminated as a cost-saving measure by the Association of American Medical Colleges [7], he continued his mission with the same passion. This episode of his life in itself is a lesson for any educator.

In conclusion, the stories of all the exemplars and the many lessons they have taught us through their writings and actions are none less than guiding lighthouses to any education student, particularly in medicine.

Currently, Dr. Jason is a clinical professor of Family Medicine at University of Colorado, Denver. He is also a co-founder and director of academic affairs for iMedtrust (<https://www.imedtrust.org>).

Conflict of Interest

None of the authors have any conflict of interest.

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