

Five Whys and Better than the Internet

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GCH 205: Introduction to Global Health

My approach to teaching and advising has been inspired by my early career as an investigative broadcast journalist and later as a global health and development professional. As a journalist, I typically asked “who, what, where, when, and why” to uncover a story, and as an educator I ask my global health and development students to not only explore the answers to these questions, but to focus on the cause and effect relationship that underlies a problem *by asking “why” at least 5 times*.

This deceptively simple approach uncovers the complex set of factors or conditions that determine why an individual or a population is healthy or not. This discovery uncovers root causes of illness or disease that are based in factors beyond health, particularly in a developing country context, that may include the environment, culture, gender, education, poverty, geography, climate change, land ownership, politics, economics, civil conflict, access to transportation, mobile phone ownership, etc. Students quickly realize that global health problems are complex, and their solutions require a multi-sectoral response to address root causes.

“If all an educator does is put out content and let students do the work, and if that’s all they do, the Internet does it better,” quips scholar, musician, and Goucher College President José Bowen. My *attempt* to “do better than the Internet” is reflected in the four principles and approaches of my teaching:

- 1) active engagement of students through a variety of hands-on multi-media activities to understand the health, environmental, or development problem;
- 2) critical analysis of why a problem is a problem using hands-on tools;
- 3) exploration of solutions to problems through case studies;
- 4) and finally, using analytical as well as creative skills gained through the discovery and exploration process to *challenge students to create their own innovative solutions*.

These proposed “innovative” solutions must engage or draw from another sector, involve collaboration and partnership, demonstrate how “success” will be measured, and be able to identify potential resources.