

Teaching Philosophy

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Pedagogical Reflections

Ruminations. My teaching philosophy evolved through observation of my professors, participation in pedagogy workshops, and experimentation within the classroom during my tenure as a doctoral student and currently as a faculty member at the University of Alabama. Amidst this process of observing, training, and testing, I developed my own pedagogical style. In doing so, I have discovered that teaching is a blend of art and science—an amalgamation continually refined through introspection and feedback from students, peers, and mentors.

Learning Objectives

Curriculum. Goal setting is the cornerstone of my course curricula. With each course I teach, I strive to create learning objectives that are specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant, and challenging. At the outset of each of my courses, I provide students with my syllabus, which explicates my course expectations. During my syllabus review, I describe how each assignment works directly towards attainment of the course goals. I have found students appreciate this articulated approach, as they perceive greater relevancy of the course projects.

Bounded autonomy. I adhere to an authoritative teaching style in accomplishing my course goals. Under this paradigm, I establish clear learning objectives that serve as the proverbial scaffolding for my courses; however, within this framework, I foster autonomy by offering multiple options for accomplishing the course goals. I have discovered that empowering students in this manner instills within them a genuine sense of ownership over the learning objectives. For example, when I taught *Personal Health Behavior*, I administered an questionnaire at the outset of the course that requested the students rank-order the amount of emphasis placed on the health topics I covered in the class. This technique was extended to allow them to choose from a pool of assignments aligning with the course objectives, as well as selecting teaching methods for specific topics. Upon first implementing this teaching style, I quickly realized that each class has a unique personality, as no two groups of students selected the same combination of pedagogical proceedings. In addition, I have found this variety helps to keep the course content fresh; both for myself and for my students.

Intermittent feedback. Student feedback is crucial for achieving my learning outcomes. Throughout my courses, I regularly collect feedback from students through electronic surveys and focus groups. This benchmarking technique helps me assess student progress towards achieving my course aims. With this proactive approach, I can address learning gaps in real-time, rather than waiting until the course concludes to identify areas needing improvement.

Pedagogical Approaches

Organic learning. I believe that pedagogical experiences are enhanced when a diversity of modalities is integrated into the educational landscape. To create a rich learning environment, I incorporate a range of teaching techniques into my courses to facilitate higher learning. These include interactive lectures, classroom demonstrations, both in-class and out-of-class activities, role-plays, case studies, and group discussions. This blend of approaches contributes to a dynamic and comprehensive learning experience that accommodates the diverse needs of my students.

For instance, during my tenure as an instructor at the University of Cincinnati, I had the opportunity to teach the program's *Lifestyles, Health, and Wellness* course. In this role, I designed a curriculum that included self-assessment surveys for students, focusing on various health behaviors. After completing the surveys, students scored their responses and received personalized evaluations regarding their individual health profiles. This was followed by comprehensive group discussions where I explored techniques to enhance overall health outcomes. A key aspect of this activity was fostering peer-to-peer

interaction by allowing students to exchange ideas and solicit recommendations. This approach not only promoted classroom engagement but also tailored the learning experience to individual student needs. Similarly, in my *Applied Statistics in Human Services II* course, I regularly incorporated case studies designed to channel students into a quantitative mindset. Students consistently found this method effective in demystifying statistics and reducing their anxiety toward complex data analysis.

As a faculty member at the University of Alabama, I continue to embrace a range of teaching techniques. In each class, I strive to incorporate multiple pedagogical approaches to engage students and support diverse learning styles. For instance, in my *Principles of Health Promotion* course, I request my students complete a survey I designed that assesses healthy sleep based on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Once students complete this questionnaire, they participate in small-group discussions focused on devising intervention strategies to improve sleep behaviors. While the students are engaged in this activity, I input their survey responses into statistical software, setting the stage for an interactive lecture that effectively illustrates the practical relevance of public health theory. This interactive, hands-on approach empowers students to grasp the process of developing community-based public health initiatives.

Similarly, in my *Advanced Evaluation of Health Programs* course, doctoral students develop proficiency in systematically analyzing intervention research. The culminating project involves presenting their findings through conference presentations and manuscript formats. Students consistently express appreciation for this practical assignment, with many of them ultimately publishing their manuscripts in peer-reviewed academic journals. Throughout the course, I integrate active-learning methods, delivering core content related to evaluation design through online, audiovisual presentations. This is followed by hands-on data analysis in a computer lab, creating a blend of theory and application that enhances understanding and engages students in an activity that stimulates their interest in evaluation methodologies.

Professional preparation. Effective preparation extends beyond imparting content; it aims to equip students with the skills needed to apply acquired knowledge to real-world challenges.

Knowledge is necessary for, but not sufficient to produce, most behavior changes (Rimer & Glanz, 2005, p. 12).

This principle resonates in the classroom. Ultimately, I believe that students pursue higher education to discover fulfilling careers that infuse their lives with meaning and purpose. After obtaining my bachelor's degree, I spent five years working in both the private and public sectors, achieving two promotions during this span of time. This experience provided me with insight into the skills that employers seek in college graduates, which include: (1) the ability to follow instructions, (2) effective communication across various mediums, (3) critical thinking and problem-solving, and (4) goal-setting and achievement. In parallel, I design assignments to meet course learning objectives while fostering skills for professional success. When explaining my assignments to my students, I share this insight, illustrating how the course projects will nurture competencies essential for realizing their career ambitions.

Conclusion

Commitment is enhanced when people believe that achieving the goal is possible, and that achieving that goal is important (Locke & Latham, 1994, p. 17).

My pedagogical style encourages students to step beyond their mental comfort zones by engaging them in the learning process and bridging the gap between theory and practical application. After every class I teach, I reflect on the feedback I receive from students, peers, colleagues, and mentors in my ongoing quest to become a more effective teacher. I look forward to continuing to ameliorate my teaching philosophy in new environments and with diverse audiences of students.

References

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