

Teaching Philosophy

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Pedagogical Ponderings

Reflection. My teaching philosophy evolved through observation of my professors, active participation in pedagogy workshops, and experimentation within the classroom during my tenure as a doctoral student at the University of Cincinnati 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.

Pedagogical Assessment

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

Learning objectives. 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 assignments.

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 a questionnaire at the outset of the course that requested 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 technique, I 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 teaching style keeps 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 allows me to 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 learning deficits.

Pedagogical Strategies

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires" (William Arthur Ward, 2010).

Organic learning. I incorporate a range of teaching techniques into my courses to facilitate higher learning. Some examples include participatory 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 students' diverse needs.

Collaborative classrooms. Student-instructor collaboration lies at the core of organic learning. For instance, during my stint as an instructor at the University of Cincinnati, I was afforded the opportunity to teach the health promotion department's Lifestyles, Health, and Wellness course. In this role, I designed a curriculum that included self-assessment surveys for students that focused on health behaviors relevant to college student populations. After completing the surveys, the students scored their responses and received personalized evaluations regarding their individual health profiles. I followed their self-evaluation with a comprehensive group discussion in which we explored techniques to enhance the health outcomes they identified through their self-evaluations. A key aspect of this activity was fostering peer-to-peer interaction by encouraging the students to exchange ideas and solicit recommendations from one another. This approach not only promoted classroom engagement but also tailored the learning experience to the unique needs and interests of the students.

Data-driven pedagogy. I believe that pedagogical experiences are enhanced when a milieu of merging modalities are woven into the educational landscape. For instance, in my Principles of Health Promotion course at the University of Alabama, I request students complete a theory of planned behavior-based instrument I designed that assesses their sleep from a behavior change theory perspective (Knowlden et al., 2012). Once the students complete the questionnaire, they participate in small-group discussions focused on devising intervention strategies to improve their sleep outcomes. While the students are engaged in this activity, I input their questionnaire responses into statistical software, setting the stage for an interactive lecture that illustrates the practical relevance of public health theory. Similarly, in my Applied Statistics in Human Services II course at the University of Cincinnati, I routinely integrated case studies which were designed to channel the students into a quantitative mindset. In their course feedback, students consistently stated they found this method effective in demystifying statistics and reducing their anxiety toward complex data analysis.

Flipped instruction. Doctoral students in my Advanced Evaluation of Health Programs course develop proficiency in systematically analyzing intervention research. The culminating project involves presenting their findings through conference presentations and manuscript submissions. 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.

Scholarship incorporation. From first-year undergraduates to doctoral candidates, I have discovered that students possess an innate inquisitiveness concerning academic research and discourse. Subsequently, I kindle their curiosity by infusing my own research findings and artifacts into my course objectives, assignments, and presentations. For instance, in my masters-level, Program Evaluation course, I guide students through each phase of the measurement process using behavioral models and theory-based instruments I designed and validated. As well, students in my doctoral-level, Advanced Program Evaluation course, scrutinize randomized control trial data I collected and published. In both scenarios, students are presented with a series of case studies and are tasked with developing their own instruments and interventions using my research products and findings as a cornerstone of the curriculum backdrop.

Digital learning. To promote a dynamic learning environment, I integrate technology-driven skill building activities into my educational outcomes. For example, during my on-campus lectures discussing the concept of sleep debt with college students, I introduce the topic by requesting audience members use their mobile phones to complete an online mental alertness test. Additionally, students are prompted to self-report their sleep duration from the previous night. Following the completion of these tasks, I use statistical software to categorize the student's alertness test scores into two groups: short sleepers (<7 hours) and normal sleepers (7+ hours). The response from the audience is consistently enthusiastic, particularly when it becomes evident that those students who reported shorter sleep durations perform significantly worse on the psychomotor vigilance assessment compared to their well-rested counterparts. This simulation scenario provides students a tangible demonstration of how sleep deprivation directly denigrates their academic potential.

Research mentorship. Throughout my academic journey, I have been surrounded by individuals who have bolstered my research potential. As a research scientist, I desire to return the good fortune

bestowed upon me by serving as a resource to students. As noted by Walter Isaacson in his biography of Albert Einstein:

"An appreciation for the methods of science is a useful asset for a responsible citizenry" (Isaacson, 2008, p. 6)

Accordingly, I am interested in advancing my research agenda in collaboration with student mentees. Based on my experience as a research mentor, undergraduate advisees are particularly well-suited to assist with data collection and study logistics. Concurrently, graduate students benefit from managing research projects and disseminating study findings through conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications. Pedagogically, I have found robust, mentored research experiences promote community engagement and the applicability of public health science to solving complex social problems.

Pedagogical Musings

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

Creating leaders. This time-tested behavior change principle resonates in the classroom. Effective preparation extends beyond imparting content; it aims to equip students with the skills needed to apply acquired knowledge to real-world challenges.

Actualizing potential. Ultimately, I believe that students pursue higher education to discover fulfilling careers that imbue their lives with meaning and purpose. After obtaining my bachelor's degree, I spent five years employed 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 my course learning objectives while fostering skills students require 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.

Reciprocal growth. My teaching 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. Following each class I teach, I diligently reflect on the feedback provided by students, peers, colleagues, and mentors, in my ongoing quest to become a more effective teacher. I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to ameliorate my teaching philosophy in new environments and with diverse audiences of students.

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