

Philosophy of Teaching

In accordance with and in support of the UIW mission and vision, I believe in and endeavor to practice good (quality) teaching.

Harvey and Knight (1996) identify the following meanings attributed to quality:

- quality as *exceptional*, i.e., exceptionally high standards of academic achievement;
- quality as *perfection* (or consistency), which focuses on processes and their specifications and is related to zero defects and quality culture;
- quality as *fitness for purpose*, which judges the quality of a product or service in terms of the extent to which its stated purpose—defined either as meeting customer (student) specifications or conformity with the institutional mission—is met;
- quality as *value for money*, which assesses quality in terms of return on investment or expenditure and is related to accountability; and
- quality as *transformation*, which defines quality as a process of qualitative change with emphasis on adding value to students and empowering them.

The indicators of and practices associated with my commitment to quality and on which I focus my practice can be summarized below (in no particular order):

- Understanding my learning philosophy (Weimer, 2014).
- Responds to the needs of the students (is situational) – (Grow, 1991)
- Varied approaches and styles (Venkatech et. al., 2013), moving from pedagogical to andragogical (Grow, 1991)
- Considers the range of learners (Knowles, 1990)
- Responsiveness to student culture – cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2000)
- Purposeful instructor and student activity (Jackson, 2002)
- Meaningful formative assessment and timely feedback (Yorke, 2003)

Recognizing the practice of teaching integrally involves learning for both instructor and students, it is imperative that I understand how I learn in order to understand my usual approaches and assumptions (bias) and endeavor to explain and demonstrate my *learning philosophy* and to provide alternative instructional approaches for my students reflective of their differing philosophies. This consideration of philosophy is not the same thing as the common and popular notion of “learning styles” for which I have found little significant empirical support and instead reflects the diversity of epistemological perspective possible for my students reflecting their individual and social identities (self in cultural context).

It is clear to me the teaching activity cannot be considered separate from the mechanisms of learning. Learning involves active engagement on the part of the learner which can be influenced but not dictated by instruction or the teacher. Most academic learning is an iterative process and depends to a significant degree on repeated student interaction with the content. This means, at a minimum, teaching success depends on both the quality of the instruction and the appropriately applied effort of the student(s).

Students come to class with a diversity of purpose and *needs* irrespective of the course description, curricular intention or presumed immediate or long-term career objective(s). Further, it is clear that purpose can evolve or develop as a consequence of course participation. This and my philosophy of learning which (among other things) predicates “new” learning (possibility and facility) on experience-based perspective (“old” learning) which results in the construction or modification of informational schema. This “philosophy” is based on the notion that self-awareness is manifest in “stories” rather than merely “information”.

My perspective on teaching and learning leads me to recognize that diverse classrooms require *diverse approaches* to instructional delivery. This is evidenced in my class by a variety of practices including but not limited to: lecture, team learning, individual laboratory and research, face to face, online, independent learning, self-directed instruction, and collaborative assessment. This variety of approaches requires that students become aware of the differences between *pedagogy and andragogy*. I try to explain, demonstrate, and model those differences holding them and myself to greater expectations for self-directed learning. It is in this way primarily, that I seek to accommodate the broad **range of learners** for whom I have been given responsibility and for whom one-size most definitely cannot fit. Helping students understand that their differences will be accommodated and require different instructional processes and products and that while course and program SLO’s may define a common expectation for performance (skills and knowledge), the mechanisms by which these penultimate goals will be achieved, and the related artifacts will most likely have to be different from student to student. This principle and attitude move students away from considering grades from the perspective of comparison to and/or competition with class and program mates and towards an understanding that they are intended to reflect an *imprecise measure* of their achievement of course and program learning goals.

Culturally responsive practice (CRP) is essential for maximizing instructional support for learning. While in the past students were required to conform to the culture of the teachers and their reflected perspective on the content, this is an injustice to both students and the content of the discipline. CRP is:

“not a state at which one arrives; rather, it is a process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. It is a sensibility cultivated throughout a lifetime. Cultural competence requires awareness of self, reflection on one’s own cultural position, awareness of others’ positions, and the ability to interact genuinely and respectfully with others. Culturally competent (instructors) evaluators refrain from assuming they fully understand the perspectives of stakeholders whose backgrounds differ from their own. Cultural competence is defined in relation to a specific context or location, such as geography, nationality, and history. Competence in one context is no assurance of competence in another. The culturally competent (instructor) evaluator (or evaluation team) must have specific knowledge of the people and place in which the evaluation is being conducted — including local history and culturally determined mores, values, and ways of knowing.

The culturally competent (instructor) evaluator draws upon a wide range of (andragogical) evaluation theories and methods to design and carry out (instruction) an evaluation that is optimally matched to the context. In constructing a model or theory of how the (student) evaluand operates, the (instructor) evaluator reflects the diverse values and perspectives of key (student) stakeholder groups.” (Adopted from, AEA Statement on Cultural Competence, 2011, p. 3)

There are three components that comprise an outcome-based approach (*purposeful instruction*) to learning (Jackson, 2002, p. 142):

(a) an explicit statement of learning intent expressed as outcomes which reflect

educational aims, purposes and values

- (b) the process or strategy to enable the intended learning to be achieved and demonstrated (curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment, and support and guidance methods); and
- (c) criteria for assessing learning which are aligned to the intended outcome.

My teaching is intentionally designed and implemented to be reflective of this purposeful, outcome-based approach. Spady's "OBE Paradigm" (1994) is based on three premises and four principles.

The premises are:

1. All students can learn and succeed but not on the same day and not in the same way,
2. Successful learning promotes even more successful learning; and
3. Schools control the conditions that affect directly affect successful learning.

The four "power principles" are:

1. Clarity of focus on culminating outcomes of significance,
2. Expanded opportunity and support for learning success,
3. High expectations for all to succeed, and
4. Design down from your ultimate, culminating outcomes.

Spady's outcome-based education paradigm includes two approaches: "traditional/transitional" OBE and "transformational" OBE. The traditional/transitional approach "...emphasises student mastery of traditional subject-related academic outcomes (usually with a strong focus on subject-specific content) and some cross-discipline outcomes (such as the ability to solve problems or to work co-operatively)" (Killen, 2000, p. 2). In contrast, the transformational approach "...emphasises longterm, cross-curricular outcomes that are related directly to students' future life roles (such as being a productive worker or a responsible citizen or a parent)" (Killen, 2000, p. 2). My goal is to include both approaches while emphasizing the latter.

While meaningful contributions to (program) curriculum involves more than a course-based focus, an instructor's potential to impact on program level outcomes is depended on the "cooperation" of his/her involved colleagues (internal and external). One important implication of this is that the process(es) involved take time to evolve and find consensus support. Regardless, quality instruction depends on the curriculum context or framework within which it is situated. This means that it requires an understanding of and support by design for the program level student learning outcomes (SLO's). Student achievement is facilitated by instruction, for the most part, by **meaningful and timely feedback** and scholars progress through gradual approximations of knowledge, understanding and skill. This requires multiple demonstrations of various types which are critiqued and provide scholars with a frame of reference which supports current learning and guides future effort. This feedback is provided both publically and privately by multiple means by both instructor and scholar peers. This (formative) feedback is intended to provide actionable information which seeks to improve learning and performance. Summative feedback is of limited utility to the scholar and is provided of necessity as a record of cumulative performance as required by the system of higher education in this country. However, this feedback does not typically provide much, if any, information for improvement and reflects only indirectly if at all, learning but instead, compliance with and demonstration of success with instructor devised "tests". This one reason that all students in my class are expected to self-assess and report on their scholarship in terms of course goals and that this information is included in my assessment for grading purposes.

Finally, in the interest of quality, my teaching seeks to reflect consistency with my philosophy, University values and activity leading to achievement of course and program level outcomes. This practice is characterized by expectations for exceptional performance from myself and my students which seeks as defining characteristic, transformative experiences which prepare the scholar with state-of-the-art skill and knowledge and prepares him/her to master future developments in the field as best fits his/her purpose or position. In relation to this, one measure of my success will be the sense of benefit my students realize at the conclusion of the course – that they more than got “their monies worth.”

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