MY Teaching Philosophy

By

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From the beginning of my academic career, teaching has always been one of the important parts of my academic duties, and my teaching philosophies develop over time. I agree with Worley (2001) that there is a difference between effective and great teachers. He argues that while effective teachers are skilled, great teachers have a mission, a teaching impulse, and a vocation to teach. Being a great teacher is my underlying motivation as a good teacher. Good teaching goes beyond just learning design, and/or just interactions with the student. It avoids teaching paradigm where the teacher only pumps out knowledge to students without knowing the needs for students (lecturing students without building on their prior knowledge) and without their active engagement (instruction paradigm). Moreover, learning environment should be such that it promotes diversity and positive learning. In this paper, I will attempt to describe my teaching philosophy from the good teaching perspectives as described above.

My teaching philosophy builds on learning paradigm where the educator provide knowledge that builds on prior students' knowledge, and through guidance and actively engaging students for facilitation of optimal student-learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). I believe that all students are unique and must accordingly have a stimulating educational environment for fostering optimal learning. It is my desire to create this type of atmosphere where students can meet their full potential. My goal is to shift the focus from what we as educators should do to what the student should do, so that learning occurs by building on prior student's knowledge, in a safe environment.

The point of departure in my teaching and learning process is that education should be open for allowance of flexibility that gives opportunity to the learners to think critically and learn things according to their own curiosity and interest. Therefore, as a teacher, I must use a variety of strategies in order to make the teaching learning experience an exciting one; and thereby encourage student motivation for their active engagement in the course. But more so, as a teacher, it is important for me to knowing my students first. This will influence the learning content of the course and what learning activities to engage in order to match the students' needs. Besides, such learning design, as Bjørndal & Lieberg (1978) and Biggs (2014) argues, also portrays that the content, the subject itself, will likely influence the learning objectives, learning activities and forms of assessment; and this can have an impact on the leaning activities to engage for enhancing optimal student learning.

To achieve this, my teaching and learning process will be facilitated with different learning designs with focus on the alignment between learning outcomes, learning activities and forms of assessment for students' learning. Such a constructive alignment can be implemented using e.g., either the didactic relational model or ASSURE, which is an acronym for: Analyse learners, State standards & objectives, Select strategies, technology, media & materials, Utilise technology, media & materials, Require learner participation, Evaluate & revise (Schneider and Preckel, 2017). Basing on one of the models, I would facilitate student learning process by active engagement of students. To achieve this, I would first conduct Diagnostic assessment of the student's prior knowledge and skills, then develop the course's learning-content and engage learning activities based on the assessment. As the course progresses, especially at the end of the course workshop, a Formative assessment will be made for student feedback and course-amendment for enhancing students to adjust and clearer understand what they still need to learn. Finally, Summative assessment will be given to test whether students have acquired the intended knowledge, skills and competencies. Such a facilitation-process would equip me and students for further improvements in the next semester course. I believe such a meaningful learning alignment provides a big

picture that enables the formulation of a holistic plan that is capable to optimally enhance students' learning opportunities. In so doing, the educator is able to thoughtfully prepare and organise the course with clear course objectives and requirements. Such a heart of teaching learning philosophy enables nurturing students and teaching them in a way that creates passion and enthusiasm in them for a lifelong learning (Duke, 1990); And more so, empowers both teachers and students to 'not mindlessly follow routines but intentionally engage in educational practices to attain their goals' (Schneider and Preckel, 2017).

While my philosophy of instruction continues to develop (like most teachers do), three essential elements seem most pertinent. These include the nature of teaching, the orientation for teaching, and the role of communication in teaching.

Much as one must be motivated to teach, one also needs a sense of place as a teacher. For me, this sense of place is best described in terms of my instructional stance that may be summarised as student-centered and process-oriented as follows:

1. While I must protect time to accomplish the many other tasks that attend the work of the professoriate, I strive to be authentically "present" when students come to my door.
2. Not only do I consider myself student-centered, I am also process-oriented. Evaluations for student involvement and participation steer me as an educator. I believe that an instruction begins with student needs and develops courses, assignments, and assessments, which speak to these needs while remaining open to adjust methods and schedules to ensure measurable and genuine student learning. Such a process acts as my steering wheel i.e. where the teacher is practically guided by prior-student knowledge, or student questions, problems and interests that they bring to the classroom/workshop, which in turn, enhance student motivation to learn, while giving sufficient room for the teacher to make critical curriculum decisions. Such a process orientation helps set the stage for a negotiated classroom which has the advantages of affectively motivating students while, at the same time, modelling for them aspects of the larger democratic process with which an educated and functioning citizenry must be acquainted.

Teaching example

For example I recently administered a course on Library research skills (LRS) for the second-year dental hygienists' students. Rather than turn first to content experts or my own preferences, I sat down, at the end of the class-workshop, and discussed with students who participated the course to find out their perceived needs for my guidance to preparation of the similar scheduled class in the next semester. In doing so, despite the fact that these were not part of the group with whom I am supposed to meet next semester[1], I am guided to draft a course that addresses the needs of students as well as my own preferences for content; But more so, facilitating teacher – student communication for student motivation to learn.

Reflection on my teaching example

I believe that teaching is communication. To study communication in the classroom is to study education holistically and essentially. For no matter how sagacious the teacher, as Worley & Chesebro (2002) argues, if he or she does not interpersonally connect with and effectively interact with students, learning will, to a degree, be less than it could and should be. And communication is central to this transaction. If one is to motivate students in his or her teaching, one must focus upon communication for teaching is communication.

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[1] In this course I only meet students once, and never again, hence my resolution.

Development of my teaching

Based on my reflections and experience as exemplified above, motivating students to learn, especially when it comes to classes where no evaluation in terms of final exams is administered for grading students' learning, can be challenging. Despite the fact that university students, especially at BSc level frequently lack the Library research skills (LRS) required to do a college-level research paper, students are usually not really motivated for their engagement in learning library research skills (Small et.al., 2004; Small, 1998; Hayes, 2001; Kilcullen, 1998). This, according to my experience, is due to the fact that there are no exams for grading them (pass or fail), as it is with other classes they attend. Nevertheless, the role of teacher to motivate students is one of the fundamental responsibilities for engaging and activating students learning. Hence in LRS courses, student motivation involves more than just teaching information literacy skills so that students can complete assignments or solve information problems (Charles Hayes, 2004). In my LRS course teaching, a flipped classroom model strategy, among other strategies, where students are supposed to view my video lectures and send me questions or issues or comment related to the video, prior to our physical or virtual meeting, will be used to cater for the student motivation problem. Basically, the students' questions, issues, and comments that they send to me will govern what to emphasise on during the workshop meeting that follows.

Moreover, learning environment should be such that promotes diversity and a positive learning environment. In my case, this would mean providing students with favourable atmosphere, which include clean, comfortable, and bright room, where the setting favours both teachers and students in order to foster students' engagement in class discussions and/or activities (Marton, et. al., 2004). The environment should be conducive enough to trigger students' liberty in expressing their ideas and views freely. I presume that fostering of enabling "Teaching Learning Environment" is also one of the things that can lead to a positive change in teaching my LRS course, in order to stimulate student motivation in learning.

My philosophy of education, as indicated in my introduction herein above, is that all students are unique and must have a stimulating educational environment where they can grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. It is my desire to create this type of atmosphere where students can meet their full potential. I will provide a safe environment where students are invited to share their ideas and take risks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my teaching philosophy is that: To teach is to fulfil a mission. To teach is to center upon students and orient towards a process informed by students. To teach is to communicate. These three simple statements when blended together inform, direct, and substantiate my teaching. They encapsulate my self-understanding of what it means to teach. But more so, teaching should happen in an environment that promotes diversity and positive learning.

I believe that there are five essential elements that are conducive to learning. (1) The teacher's role is to act as a guide. (2) Students must have access to hands-on activities. (3) Students should be able to have choices and let their curiosity direct their learning. (4) Students need the opportunity to practice skills in a safe environment. (5) Technology must be incorporated into the school day.

In my teaching, I will incorporate hands-on learning, cooperative learning, and individual work that engage and activate students learning, through media, virtual or physical workshops or in a normal class setting.

While my philosophy of instruction continues to develop, like most teachers, four essential elements seem most pertinent. These include the nature of teaching, the orientation for teaching, and the role of communication, and environment in teaching.

Finally, the following is my example of how my current course about Library research skills could be incorporated across multiple disciplines at the department of clinical dentistry.

In this course I would like to make students clearly understand and learn about where, why, how to find, search, and use literature for their academic assignment/thesis writing, in an interesting manner for their active and enthusiastic engagement.

Specifically, my goals for this project are:
1. Introduce students to the University Library website, including Oria, so that they know which databases or website to use for the information they need during their academic life at UiT.
2. Teach students how to systematically come up with a search question that will help them to formulate the keywords for literature search, and how to conduct a systematic literature search in a database and find the literature for use in writing their assignment and/or thesis.
3. Teach students how to use literature-source, cite and how the reference list is made in writing their assignment and/or thesis, using the APA 7 Reference-style.

Overall goal is:
To make students clearly understand and learn about where, why, and how they can search, find and use literature for academic writing.

Implications for my teaching:
Usually, students are not really motivated for their engagement in learning such library research skills, due to probably the fact that there are no exams for grading them (pass or fail), as it is with other classes they attend.

As such, I would like to engage some pedagogical skills that might probably encourage student motivation for their active engagement in the course and thereby probably improve their learning in academic library skills.

A brief description of what I specifically plan to do:
Make a video for each of the three parts, and let students see the video on their own time, but more so, tell them to write down questions, issues, or comments they can have, based on the video they have seen.

During the period when having the class meetings with the students, me, with one colleague (as my colleague peer-evaluation), will be present with students where we will have the following session-plan:

Del 1: Plenary Q & A session based on all 3 parts of video-lectures/ demonstrations

Break for 15 minutes

Del 2: Group work– Working with the assignments in groups (3 to 4 pers. / group)

Break for 15 minutes

Del 3: Group presentation in plenary

Evaluation: Students' evaluation online (using e.g., Kahoot or Mentimeter) after the last class/workshop

End of the course session!

Note:

The evaluation of the course in summation will notify my achievement (if my goal is achieved or not).

- Evaluation will be based on Self-reflection and feedback from students and colleague(s).
- Team member/colleague will be available during the class/workshop meeting for peer-evaluation.
- The plan and result of the course evaluation will be presented e.g., at my institute meetings, such as at my research group meeting for further improvements, so that I can develop further as an educator

The UNIPED course has inspired me in further developing my pedagogic skill, especially in how best I can facilitate the courses I give, so that the students (including those with the lowest level of knowledge) are able to have the enthusiasm to be actively involved, engaged, interested in the course-work, and thereby my contribution to making students learn and reach their goal(s) for their attendance in my classes (or my supervisions).

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