Exemplary Teaching Practices and Philosophies

Grady Roberts

I am a teacher by choice. As a teacher, I am not the possessor of all knowledge, but rather a more experienced learner. Learning is a never-ending process that liberates, empowers, and provides freedom. Every student can learn; however it cannot occur unless the student is willing. I believe learning can occur without teaching, but teaching has not occurred without learning.

I believe that each student has a unique background and set of experiences that enriches the learning environment. I believe that each student has a certain level of prior knowledge and capacity to learn. It is my role as a teacher to use in-depth knowledge of students and subject matter to facilitate meaningful, practical, and relevant learning activities in a student-centered, experience-rich environment that maximizes student learning. Although I expect mastery of the content, I believe that equipping students with the skills to continue learning after they leave my class is more important.

As a teacher educator, I believe that it is my responsibility to model effective teaching. It would be a great disservice to instruct students about effective teaching methods but model ineffective practices in my classroom. Further, as a group with effective teaching insights, my students possess critical skills with which to examine my teaching actions. If I am to be effective in providing constructive feedback to them, I must “practice what I preach.”

I believe that teaching effectively is not a static target, but rather an ever-changing process that must meet the needs of students. As such, I believe it is important to engage in activities to continually develop both my teaching skills and my professional knowledge.

Teaching Methodology

I strive to be clear in what I teach, utilize a variety of teaching methods, be enthusiastic about what I teach, conduct my classes in a business-like manner, and provide students an opportunity to learn. In each course, I begin by developing an understanding of the students in the class. Once I have an understanding of my students, I select student-centered learning activities designed to meet course objectives. I regularly use the following learning activities:

- Lecture/Discussion – to introduce new concepts and ideas
- Case Studies – to apply concepts and build critical thinking skills
- Socratic Questioning – to help guide students in constructing their own knowledge
- Inquiry – to allow students to gather their own information
- Reflection – a variety of activities (journaling, self-reflection, etc.) designed to help students create cognitive connections between new and existing knowledge
- Projects – to give students an opportunity to apply concepts
- Presentations – to give students the opportunity to express their knowledge orally
- Demonstrations – to show students how to perform a certain task

I teach several courses that focus on teaching methods. My approach to teaching these classes is a little different than my focus in other classes. My approach is to teach a new teaching method by modeling that teaching method. For example, I teach the demonstration method using a demonstration. I will use an unrelated task like “tying a tie” to model effective and ineffective ways to conduct a demonstration. As another example, I teach the inquiry method using inquiry. Inquiry is an inductive approach, so I typically pose a question like “what is inquiry-based instruction?” and then facilitate a learning process by where students discover and report their findings. I have found that these strategies are very effective.
Approach to Teaching

I began my journey with formal education when I began pre-school in 1973 and that journey is still going. I am now entering my 36th year being involved with publicly funded formal education. I grew up in a military family and moved frequently. Consequently, I attended nine different schools from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade. That experience allowed me to see a wide variety of approaches to education. As an undergraduate, I majored in agricultural education and earned my teaching certificate. I then spent 10 years teaching middle school and high school students. I earned my master’s degree as a part-time, distance education student. I then earned my PhD in a full-time program as a graduate assistant and began teaching in higher education. I have taught children as young as 11 year old 6th graders and as old as mid-life doctoral students.

Throughout this journey, I have learned three things that have served me very well. First, every student is an individual and has his or her own previous experience, motivation, and needs. There is no such thing as an “average” student. Second, students are becoming much more involved in the learning process. Advances in educational technologies and the explosion of the Internet give students multiple sources for information and multiple modes of receiving information. Teachers cannot just be the “sage on the stage” and present themselves as the single, all-knowing source of information. Third, effective teachers must continually update their technical and pedagogical knowledge. What I know today could likely be outdated next week. If I rely solely on what I learned while in graduate school, I am doing a disservice to my students because I am not helping them learn the most recent and relevant information.