

PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING AND TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Role of the Educator

American educators have been labeled *bankers of knowledge* -- simply depositing information into learners to be withdrawn when needed. The label ceases to exist among those of us whom consider ourselves *directors of the learning process*. As a *director*, I create an environment for learning that stirs their emotions, and leads them through critical thinking processes that, ultimately, become integral to their retention, life-long learning, and transfer of learning. Effective teaching, for me, requires that I plan, prepare, and present not only the content, but the environment in which the content is most deeply absorbed into the soul of the learner.

To summarize my approach to and goals in teaching: My goal is to set the stage for directing learners into a new phase in their lives. I believe that professors play a significant role in preparing students for life; we influence their acquiring post-graduation employment, earning a living, contributing to society by assuming civic and social responsibilities, constructively engaging in leisure and avocational activities, and improving society for the benefit of future generations. Through my behaviors -- enthusiasm, clarity, variability, business-like behaviors, and opportunities for students to learn, and to demonstrate that they have learned (Rosenshine and Furst, 1971) -- students' lives are changed. Let me share my belief in and implementation of my teaching behaviors as a means of crystallizing my teaching philosophy.

Essential Professor Behaviors in Learning Environments

Enthusiasm

Definition - Rapturous interest or excitement; Ardent fondness, eagerness, zeal. From the Latin *enthusiasmus*, inspiration.

I believe a goal for is to hear and see expressions of enthusiasm **inside** the classroom when the teacher has stimulated the learning situation to the point of excitement over the subject matter.

I believe that enthusiasm is evidenced through love for the subject matter, concern for the well-being of students, frequent use of students' names, conscientious efforts to call on every student during every class session, and willingness to smile directly at students often. Enthusiasm can be heard through voice inflections, and can be seen through purposeful pacing throughout the class environment, and meaningful hand and arm gestures.

Clarity

Definition - Clearness, lucidity. From the Latin *claritas*, clear (Morris, 1979, p. 247).

I believe that when a professor purposefully chooses and employs a particular method or technique of teaching, it makes the content, at once, simpler for the learner to grasp. A master teacher possesses the capacity and ability to take the very complex and make it simple.

Clarity must be present in the obvious organization and thus natural flow of the course content. Clarity is also evident in the structured format of a course and the structure of each class session; both must be well-thought and detailed. Preplanned lead-questions and masterfully planned interim summaries lend themselves to evidences of clarity.

These techniques offer application to that which has been heard and provide staging for that which will be discussed. Clarity is enhanced by stating or writing the day's

objectives on the board, and by using interest approaches or other types of “opening-class-anticipatory-set” to persuade students that the information about to be discussed is important and necessary.

Variability

Definition - Liable to change; Tending to deviate from an established type. From the Latin *varians*, vary (Morris, 1979, p. 1416-1417).

I believe that students are exposed to modern technology on an hourly basis and are entertained daily by bright lights, flashing symbols, loud music--and that classroom teachers are expected to offer the same stimulation during class sessions.

Variability is accomplished through using discussion-method teaching techniques and by systematically arranging the furniture in the learning environment to be conducive to engaging students in the content. Role playing adds variability to the classroom and encourages students to engage the content at higher cognitive levels. Effectively using a variety of visuals such as colorful overhead imagery, PowerPoint, handouts, and live webcasting promotes change-of-pace and thus, interest and motivation. Moving students in and out of their seats to the classroom writing surface, overhead, or computer station helps them remain physically alert, and therefore, more mentally alert. Variability often translates into creative presentations which are fun and exciting for students.

Business-like behavior

Definition - Methodical, systematic efficient; purposeful, earnest. From the Old English *bisignis*, care (Morris, 1979, p. 180).

I believe that business-like behavior is operationalized as *professionalism*; arriving for class ahead of schedule, preparing for class, dressing appropriately for the occasion, using only words that are appropriate for an English composition, presenting oneself competently and confidently, and using class time efficiently and effectively are evidences of role modeling business-like behaviors in class sessions. Listening to student comments and addressing their comments positively also reflects business-like behavior.

Opportunity to learn

Definition - Opportunity - advantageous combination of circumstances. From the Latin *opportunitas*, opportune (Morris, 1979, p. 922). - Learn - To gain knowledge, comprehension or mastery through experience. From the Old English *leornian*, learn (Morris, 1979, p. 744).

I believe that the power to think and solve problems should be the student outcome desired by professors.

Opportunity to learn is packaged in in-depth interactions between students and professors; participation must truly be encouraged and expected. Quiet time (to think, write, or reflect) must be provided. Problem-solving, group interaction, and cooperative learning must be practiced in the current learning environment to prepare students for “team-concept” work environments. Students must be expected to come to class prepared; meeting that expectation must be rewarded. Reaching the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels of thinking must be planned-for and carried-out. Professors must provide opportunities for students to let the professor know that they have indeed grasped a new concept--short quizzes, trial discussions, interim summaries, and one-minute reports are techniques that accomplish this goal. Teaching the most current content is necessary for placing students on the cutting-edge of new information and technology. Two reflective questions that professors must ask at the end of the session, “Did I provide

every opportunity for the students to learn today?”, and “Did I give the students the opportunity to show me that they had learned today?”

Interim student evaluations, at the midpoint of the quarter, are my most useful tool for asking students if the teaching behaviors that I believe-in are *coming to life* in the classroom. By gaining valuable immediate insight into students’ engagement and retention, I can modify the learning environment accordingly, thereby regrouping and refocusing without sacrificing a students’ opportunity to learn. My competence at managing the environment is reflected in my analysis and subsequent implementation or lack of implementation of the students’ requests. For example, two years ago student interim evaluations were riddled with a complaint regarding my requirement that they read both a textbook chapter and an article for each twice-weekly class session, followed by a 15-point *reflection* of those readings immediately upon arriving at the class session. After pondering their complaint, my analysis and subsequent feedback to the students was, “I hear you, but this is a 5-credit hour course at the end of your junior year in college and the course prior to your major capstone field experience. In addition, I have carefully chosen each reading as a foundational element to improve your practice in your chosen profession. Therefore, I appreciate your candor, but I am not changing the requirement because it is in your best interest that you complete the readings as originally planned. I will, however, point-out to you, in the class session prior to completing the reading, my rationale for requiring the reading selection”.

I constantly use student feedback to modify my content delivery and learning environment. I was thrilled this fall, after teaching and modifying Agricultural and Extension Education 585, Program Planning, since 2002, to receive a 4.9 on a 5-point scale on the Student Evaluation of Teaching. Modifications such as adding an authentic assessment, using student-centered test development, using music to set the learning environment, deleting a topic deemed by the students as irrelevant and replacing it with one that students indicated had been experienced more readily during recent on-site public school experiences, and offering the course in a non-traditional delivery format, aided in increased student engagement, and enhanced professor-student, formal and non-formal interaction.

In our book, “Methods of Teaching Agriculture” (Newcomb, L. H., McCracken, J. D., Warmbrod, J. R., & Whittington. M. S., 2004, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Publishers, Inc) that researchers reported as the most frequently used textbook in college teacher preparation courses in colleges of agriculture in American (Ball & Knobloch, 2005), we discuss the importance of keeping course content current. My course content is kept current primarily through research, including my own. Through my line of inquiry in cognitive levels of teaching and learning, I have learned to use discourse, group and individualized teaching techniques, and question types to engage learners at higher levels of cognition. For example, much lecture (a lower cognitive technique) has been replaced with purposefully pre-planned activities using open- and rhetorical-type questions (higher cognitive activities). Workshops and seminars offered through the college and my professional organization also contribute to updating and modernizing my course content. At a recent faculty development workshop I saw a presenter use a technique for including students randomly, but fairly to generate discussion; I implemented the strategy in my

next class session. Last fall, a presenter at a workshop used a feedback technique following an in-class student group discussion activity that worked so effectively, that I now use it as a routine component of my methods of teaching course.

My teaching responsibilities at three universities, beginning in 1991, have included teaching the methods of teaching courses, and supervising undergraduate students during their teaching field experiences in public schools. On-site supervision of students who are preparing to be teachers includes observing their teaching, critiquing their ability to engage learners and enrich the learning environment, and then providing substantive formative and summative feedback designed to improve learning. Because improving teaching and learning is my passion, I have been invited to present college-wide faculty teaching workshops at the Universities of Illinois, and Arizona, and at a quad-conference on teaching improvement for faculty at the University of Michigan-Flint, Kettering University, Baker College, and Mott Community College. My expertise has been sought for curriculum writing projects. The most recent curriculum project was a six-year intensive national project to create, write, pilot, release, and implement LifeKnowledge, a middle school/high school leadership curriculum provided to over 6,000 rural high school agriculture programs across the country. In addition, my expertise has been sought for three consecutive years as an invited lecturer for the Lilly Conference on College Teaching. This year I will be presenting the university-wide, John Burns teaching symposium at Texas Tech University, and the teaching development workshop at the national conference of the American Association for Agricultural Educators.

Finally, because I am preparing teachers, I want to provide opportunities during class sessions for students to become increasingly more comfortable in front of the classroom across the duration of the term. I therefore created, for example, a class session in which students learn the steps in properly presenting a demonstration, followed by time in-class to work with a partner for planning and presenting a simple demonstration. Later in the week, two consultants with expertise in science standards for grades kindergarten to fourth grade, spend an evening applying science standards content to the previously learned demonstration technique. The final component of the learning experience is an authentic, contextual assessment, including a peer review process, in an elementary school classroom (a partnership with Tyler Run Elementary School). A second example of an innovative learning experience that provides variety and creativity, is our dairy field day, a partnership with the first grade teachers and students from the Columbus School for Girls. Given that problem-solving teaching encourages higher cognitive processing, and that hands-on learning engages the psychomotor modality, this partnership activity provides the best possible authentic, contextual learning experience for the pre-service teachers and the learners. Students in the methods of teaching course create and plan lessons for their laboratories throughout the quarter focused on the upcoming dairy field day. The college students eventually teach the elementary students first at the Columbus School for girls campus, and then at the OSU dairy farm when the first graders visit us on a field trip. According to Reardon (2004), situations like this bring higher thinking processes, creativity, and problem solving to life in learning environments.