

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy likely emerges from a fortune-telling mother. I was having dinner with my family, discussing future plans, and she spontaneously said to me, “You should become a teacher. You’d be so great at it!” I responded with skepticism. My career plans did not include being an academic. Two years later, I entered my first teaching assignment. It proved to be a test of my mother’s words. I began pondering over pedagogical approaches, thinking about how my students could become independent learners, and perhaps losing sleep thinking about what students were getting out of my class. The early formation as a teacher has become a philosophy. I identify with constructivist and social-cognitive methods of learning with students that help them to become self-regulated learners (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Piaget, 1964; Zimmerman, 2008). I see my teaching philosophy around three points from these teaching methods. Students construct meaningful experiences, come to appreciate their personal learning and motivational history as they create new learning structures, and they engage in active learning.

Constructivism and Story-Telling

The classroom is a place for students to construct knowledge. Student learning occurs both by bringing their meaningful experiences to personally relevant information, adapting their current thinking to fit with new conflicting information (Piaget, 1964), and by being guided to achieve a higher level of development in their learning (Vygotsky, 1978). I use story-telling as an approach to promote constructivism. Students often learn through case studies in my courses. After they can describe what they have observed in the cases (either by watching or reading), I have the students apply developmental and social science principles. I guide the student to attach a theoretical application or principle to what they have witnessed with the case. I also invite the students to share and relate it their personal experiences. I also have students write about a psychological theory that applies to their own childhood past. Taken together, case examples and personal experiences with psychological application meet the goal of learning concepts in a self-regulated way. It achieves this by motivating the student to feel autonomous with their learning and apply the knowledge to other situations (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010; Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, & Willingham, 2013).

Learning through Self-Regulation

I believe that “the one who does the work does the learning” (Doyle & Zakrajsek, 2013, p. 7). Through my research, I borrow from the scholarship on self-regulated learning. Learning to self-regulate academically involves planning, evaluating, and reflecting on one’s learning processes (Zimmerman, 2008). Modeling is used to teach students each part of self-regulated learning with assignments in how to write research papers, read research articles, and develop research questions. Planning may involve demonstrating how to structure a draft or read a text. Evaluating may involve giving low-stakes assessments with feedback to evaluate comprehension. Reflecting involves written reactions to texts and student-generated questions. I also assign a biographical essay and analysis of a childhood memory, case studies to analyze, and journaling assignments that have the goal of increasing reflection. I aim to develop students’

reflective processes through my course objectives so that students take an active role in their learning.

Active Learning in Class

I have also developed my teaching pedagogy around active-learning (Bain, 2004). I use a mixed approach of lecture and active inquiry-based approaches. When I teach research methods, I have students examine data for assumptions, and test their inferential skills prior to introducing new technical concepts. I use exercises that emphasize the importance of examining data carefully and appropriately. I also hold class discussions on research articles that students present like it is done in a conference symposium. When I lecture, I teach my expertise actively. For example, in my own line of research. I get students to do interactive polling about how much they use self-talk, and we compare their answers to my dissertation data. I also show videos of children and teens engaged in private speech during tasks, and class time is spent discussing what self-talk is, and what areas of cognitive development are associated with the development of self-talk. I invite students to describe what they see, conceptualize self-talk with working definitions, and operationalize variables to perform naturalistic coding. In this type of classroom, students actively learn and are part of the larger academic community.

Classroom as Community

Student learning, whether it be about self-regulation or active inquiry, also engage in debate and cooperative activities. I promote collaboration through student workshops on projects. Students from multiple backgrounds and competencies provide feedback on their peer's progress through draft reading, project outlining, and research collaboration. Finally, I promote access to students in the academic community by making my work open to collaboration with them. Although only some students will independently pursue research projects, I open myself to students' interests in research they are motivated to perform. I invite students to come into my office hours to discuss research, and if interested, to pursue independent study that leads to their own scholarship and scholarly products.

Reflecting Back and Looking Forward

I reflect back at times on the family dinner conversation about my future in teaching. I think that great teaching, as Ken Bain (2004) states, is like a dinner table in which you invite students to collaborate. I take this idea even to the final, which is often an experienced-based reflection in lieu of a multiple-choice exam. I am looking for ways to improve the learning design of my courses. I plan in future to make use of learning science modules that enhance my interactions and assessments of students learning in situ (in the classroom), to apply my teaching methods to online and asynchronous environments, and to attend future teaching conferences to develop my own demonstrations and proposals and my own courses. Teaching today must be precipitated by ongoing scholarship, and it is important that it is enhanced by scholarship to make learning accessible to students.

References

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