

Teaching Philosophy Statement

Abstract

The main purpose of a university is to be a successful learning and training environment for students' lives and careers. In my teaching, advising, and mentoring, my philosophy on achieving this is to help students learn and creatively apply what they learn as part of a collaborative learning community. Facilitating such a community is challenging but rewarding, and requires consideration of the multiple intelligences of students. As an instructor, I must know my students, grade fairly and consistently, provide useful feedback, show respect for their concerns and ability to learn, be a good mentor, know my limits, know and be true to my teaching philosophy, and reflect on and measure the effectiveness of my teaching. I employ multiple strategies in teaching—including in-class discussion, Q&A, group activities, quizzes, and papers—focusing on strategies aligning best with the course objectives, students, and learning community. I greatly value helping students share, apply, and create knowledge for passing a course and in their lifelong experiences and careers.

An Effective Learning Community

The main purpose of a university is to be a successful learning and training environment for students' lives and careers. In my teaching, advising, and mentoring, my philosophy on achieving this is to help students learn and creatively apply what they learn as part of a collaborative learning community. I have experienced and helped facilitate many such learning communities during my time as a student and teaching assistant, experiences I am thankful for. Focusing on facilitating collaborative, community-based learning lets students of many intelligences and personalities develop, share, and apply their knowledge of a subject. Since collaboration is very important for librarians and information professionals, stressing creative and collaborative knowledge sharing, creation, and application within—and beyond—a learning community will prepare my students for wherever their careers may take them.

Facilitating an effective learning community, in light of the multiple learning styles of a diverse range of students and in the context of students' other communities (see Kazmer, 2005), is challenging but rewarding. The learning process differs for every student, depending on which of Gardner's multiple intelligences (see Smith, 2008) they are strongest in. Learning—and motivation for learning—occurs differently in different situations for the same student. Most students will be motivated best by and learn best from a combination of approaches drawing on their multiple intelligences. Such a view echoes the multiple intelligences of the patrons, users, and clients whom information professionals will serve in their careers. Of course, I try to avoid overwhelming students with too many ways of learning the material and keep all strategies, materials, and assessments aligned with the learning objectives for the course.

Effective Teaching and Facilitation

Effective teaching and facilitation of a learning community requires that I know students' learning needs, backgrounds, learning styles, and motivations. I must apply fair and consistent grading; tailor rubrics, feedback, and assessments to the class and the assignment topic; and answer any questions students might have about their grades. I must show respect for students; their various concerns, issues, and problems; and their ability to learn the material being covered.

I must be a good mentor for students and foster learning through mentor-mentee-style relationships with students. I must know my limits: when to send students elsewhere for help and advice, how much grading and other teaching activities I can manage to complete, and what I know less about. Finally, I must be true to my own beliefs, ideals, and thoughts in teaching.

I measure the effectiveness of my teaching in three ways. First, I self-reflect on my own experiences (past and present) in learning communities, focusing on the relation of my experiences to my teaching philosophy. Second, I reflect on how students met the course learning objectives, considering their grades for assignments, participation, etc. and how they responded to feedback on assignments and assessments in this reflection. I also consider the nature of the collaborative learning community they were a part of. Finally, I also obtain direct feedback from the students on their judgment of my teaching effectiveness during and after the course. This includes treating disruptions to the community and criticism of my teaching seriously and constructively, as opportunities to try a different approach to reach students who prefer a different teaching style that better taps their motivation.

Teaching Strategies

The strategies I aim to implement to help students learn and to facilitate a learning community necessarily vary from class to class, but there are many commonalities. While I cannot possibly address every possible learning style, intelligence, or strategy in any given week, session, or semester, I try to use multiple methods and strategies, focusing on strategies aligning best with the course objectives and purpose, students, and learning community within the constraints and context of course structure, time, and other resources.

To successfully facilitate student learning and a learning community, I often employ in-class discussion of readings, question and answer sessions, small group critical thinking activities, and online asynchronous discussion of and reflection on concepts and ideas. I also include quizzes and papers to test students' ability to synthesize existing knowledge and create new knowledge. I provide assessment and feedback to students tailored to the assignment, course, and situation, telling them what they did right, what they did wrong, and how they can improve in the future. I expect and hope students want to learn and to be at least a small part of the learning community.

Of course, different courses and teaching situations require different strategies, techniques, and assessments. In an undergraduate course, I would emphasize quizzes and similar tests to check student progress throughout, giving students quick and understandable feedback that lets them know where they are at in the course. In graduate courses, I focus on having students share, apply, and create knowledge through discussion and writing assignments, with feedback steered towards encouraging individual and community-level knowledge creation, sharing, and application. In required courses that build key competencies in information professionals, I apply a narrower focus on having students achieve specific objectives, skills, and knowledge. In elective courses there is freedom to explore concepts and ideas with unique, tailored strategies and activities. In all types of courses in the future, I also want to include interactive learning through new information and communication technologies, to fully involve and engage students as part of a collaborative learning community.

Conclusion

As an instructor, my philosophy is to value, support, and facilitate a collaborative, community-based learning environment using the most appropriate direct and indirect strategies within a structured and focused course. I enjoy having students grasp concepts and apply them creatively to new and exciting situations, to have them share, create, and apply knowledge in class and beyond. I greatly value the university environment as a collaborative and creative learning community, the experience of building and being part of such a community, and helping students learn and apply what they learn in my classes in their lifelong experiences and careers.

References

- Kazmer, M. M. (2005). Community-embedded learning. *Library Quarterly*, 75, 190-212.
- Smith, M. K. (2008). Howard Gardner, multiple intelligences, and education. In *infed: The informal education homepage and encyclopedia of informal education*. Retrieved from <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm>