

Teaching Philosophy

Afsaneh Motamed-Khorasani

Department of Physiology
The University of Toronto

Conceptualization of Learning

Learning occurs when the students are exposed to the new material. Each individual has a differential preference for the way of presentation in order to pick up an optimal portion of the newly presented material. So it becomes of utmost importance to use as many different methods of material delivery. Tests are basically a method to assess the level of learning amongst a group of student and there is not a major value in it in terms of learning process. The focus of learning should be more on completion of complex projects that consolidate large areas of the material being covered. The key to an efficient learning process is to ignite the fire of a desire in the student to pursue the material further than what is covered in the limited time of the lecture. Potentially, the desire to better understand the world can be kindled in all students. Once ignited, this desire can intensify. Often, the first spark is lit when students realize the value of what they are learning.

It is also important to foster critical thinking through questions posed and discussed in class, to facilitate the acquisition of life-long learning skills, and to develop problem solving strategies. The structure of projects should lead to improvement of social skills. Projects that require classroom presentations can improve speaking skills and professionalism. Those done by groups of students can teach them how to get the best work from each member and the fine art of diplomacy. Finally stressing the use of learned ideas in new situations is essential. By using information, students should be able to apply what they have learned to new life or learning situations. Transfer of this sort is what really determines what has been learned.

How to Facilitate This Process

In order to aid students in reaching the desired learning goals, the teacher should act as a guide, pointing students in the direction they should go to find answers and solve problems by providing them with the essential information they need to do so. They should also act as advisors or facilitators, especially in the university setting. Students at this level need input and more assistance in deciding on courses to best reach their personal academic and career goals. Instructors should help these students in making important decisions in these areas. Students also need to feel comfortable approaching their instructor for discussion outside of class. By instructors acting as mentors and friends to students, the students can begin to make professional contacts, find professors to aid in career plans and use for recommendations, and have an academic source to call upon when stresses of classes begin to be overwhelming. Instructors need to make education as enjoyable and beneficial as possible to for students. By teachers acting in all of these manners, a student's education will be more complete and enjoyable than one in which a student only sees the teacher in the classroom.

Goals for Students

Teachers should set specific long term goals for students, allowing students to work towards goals over time. As a part of this, intellectual development of each student should continue over time, allowing students to use what they are learning later in life. It is also the hope of all teachers that students will develop an interest in the subject area being taught. Although this does not occur in all cases, students should at the very least develop an appreciation for the subject and the material being taught in the classroom.

Conceptualization of Teaching

Teaching is a privileged position that demands humility as much as respect. It is crucial for teachers to recognize the power inherent in their role and are self-reflective about their actions. Transformative learning is a reciprocally educative endeavor, informative and uplifting for teachers and students alike. It is about opening hearts and minds and changing lives for all those involved in the process. Transformative learning is most likely to occur when students become personally engaged with the material and perceive the subject matter to be directly relevant to their own lives.

Understanding the diversity of learning styles and student experiences is key to enhancing this engagement. The process by which one works to stimulate student engagement is unique to each individual and classroom. While students must ultimately take responsibility for their own learning, a teacher can often inspire their desire to learn. Learning about the students and listening to their experiences can help to reconsider ways of making course material relevant and fostering critical thinking skills. In my view, teaching is not about instructing or imparting information to students as if their minds were waiting to be filled with my knowledge. Rather, teaching is igniting transformative learning, empowering students to take responsibility for their learning, inspiring courage to grow intellectually, cultivating curiosity, providing opportunities for developing relationships, clarifying values, uplifting the spirit and igniting action.

Goals for myself as a Teacher

I embrace teaching as an opportunity to inspire and empower. As a teacher, it is my goal to enhance students learning as a transformative experience. Ideally, I want students to feel personally changed by their participation in a course I am teaching. While my teaching objectives vary, depending upon the course level and content, my philosophy serves to inform my practice. I create a learning atmosphere by using a variety of teaching methods such as group projects, videos, computer and internet resources, and in-class demonstrations.

In designing course format and evaluation requirements, I strive to optimize student engagement and success. I am passionate about finding the most effective ways of stimulating and sustaining intellectual growth among my students. Learning is a complex process that is individual, content and context specific. As a teacher, I am attentive to these factors and work to be flexible, adapting my approaches according to the needs of learners, subject matter and setting. Personal interaction with the student is an important factor in teaching. I make myself available outside the classroom by encouraging students to come to office hours, I schedule one-on-one appointments whenever necessary in addition to office hours if students have conflicting schedules, and I use e-mail extensively to communicate with my students. Also to help students think logically and insightfully, I present the material in an outline form and provide appropriate historical and current research to support what I teach.

Moreover, I am interested in using technology to advance my teaching skills as well as facilitate learning in and out of the classroom. In such a rapidly advancing society, I believe it is critical for me to keep pace with developments in technology. This can be reached through classes as a part of a continuing education program, receiving regular input from students and consistently attempting to improve the teaching style, or trying new ideas or strategies on regular basis. Besides, development of computer programming skills has allowed me to provide students with a web site that contains class resources such as quizzes, review sheets, and links to reliable web sites for exploring interests in various topics related. Finally, I believe that teaching should be fun, for the students as well as the teacher. A boring lecture can douse the flames of anyone's fire. When preparing a lecture, I consider how to make it fun for myself and it often translates into fun for the students.

Rewards

Teaching is the opportunity to learn from the students. It is possible to do so through their questions, observations, and challenges. In the best universities, the faculty should grow as fast as the students do. I hope that by my contact with sharp, young minds, my own mind and those I teach will be kept forever young. To me the best reward for a teacher is to witness the students realizing dreams that might have been beyond their reach if not for the mission of a dedicated teacher.