

Philosophy of Education

I feel that education at the college level should be focused on improving the reasoning and critical thinking skills of students. Part of a teachers responsibility is to provide students with the background knowledge needed to solve problems, but educators should also help students build confidence in their ability to use the things that they have learned to tackle difficult, ill-defined “real-world” problems. In order to do this, students need to be more active in the classroom, and be given many opportunities to apply their fundamental knowledge of a subject matter to solve more realistic or authentic problems.

Modes of Delivery

To create critical thinkers and students who draw conclusions and solve problems based on available data and resources, teachers need to get away from the front of the classroom. Traditional lecturing can be integrated into a course to supplement discussions and to provide an overview or review of important concepts or theories, but it should be kept to a minimum (less than 25 to 30% of class time). It is vital to get students involved in the learning process by handing over some of the responsibility of teaching to the student. Students can learn from each other. Therefore, group activities, in the form of both projects and collaborative learning activities, should be incorporated regularly into the course to spark discussions and to encourage peer-to-peer interactions. I feel that presenting small groups of students with challenging classroom exercises two or three times weekly is also important in developing their problem solving skills. In a course with fewer than 15 or 20 students, whole class discussions can be used to examine ideas and address questions. Each class period should include at least 15 minutes (about 30%) of open discussion for problems students might be having with course material or a topic from a pre-assigned reading or activity. Students should be encouraged to ask questions of the teacher, as well as other students at anytime during the class period. Thought questions, case studies, example scenarios, etc. should comprise at least 30% of class time, so students can build their confidence in applying what they know to tackle related problems.

Motivation of Students

To be motivated, students need to feel that what they are doing relates to the bigger picture of his or her life/career. Therefore, discussions, exams, and activities should be designed to develop the skills they will need in the work force. Since many companies value both teamwork and self-initiative, I feel it is important to have students practice using what they know to solve challenging problems by both pooling their knowledge as a class and by individual applications. Students should be made aware, up front, of the course goals and the need for developing their problem solving skills. They should also be asked what they would like to learn or walk away from the class with. Students will feel more motivated to study and learn if they have some control of what they learn and how they learn it.

Attendance policy, quizzes, and assignments graded based on participation also help to motivate students to stay involved in the course. By giving unannounced quizzes on reading material, students are more motivated to prepare for class.

Assessment of Student Learning

Exams, projects, notebooks, and quizzes can all be used to assess student learning. However, I feel these items should be geared more towards an overall understand rather than a regurgitation of facts or details. Therefore, when assessing students, focus should be placed on their approach to a problem, rather than their exact answer. While the correct solution to a problem is important, in many cases it is not the most important aspect in the learning process. A student should understand *how* to arrive at a reasonable answer when faced with a problem. They should be able to think through the problem and make reasonable assumptions if they are lacking in information. By building and testing these skills rather than testing the memorization of facts or equations, we are teaching students to trust their insights and judgments. This will help prepare them for the work force, where information is often lacking or hard to find.

Assessment tools should be designed to ask the students their opinion on a subject or topic rather than to repeat mine; and they should push them to use what they know to figure out what they don't know. In other words, exams should be treated as self-teaching tools. If a student is unhappy with their performance (grade) on an exam, they should be provided the opportunity to re-communicate their thoughts and ideas to me verbally as many times as necessary until they understand and can convey to me what the exam intended for them to learn. Therefore, their exam grades are open for continual improvement. It does not matter to me how fast they learn something, what is important is that they learn it.

Attendance

When focusing class time on discussion, group activities, and thought questions, attendance is very important. Therefore, class attendance should be mandatory and unexcused absences should reflect negatively on the student's grade. In courses composed solely of lectures, attendance may not be as important. In this case, borrowing another student's notes can somewhat make-up for the lost class time. However, when the period is spent actively interacting with other students and the teacher, as well as examining thought-provoking problems, the student that misses the class, misses much more than just notes.

Conduct

Academic integrity and honesty policies should follow those set forth by the educational institution. However, I believe an important role of the teacher is to create situations in which students choose not to "cheat". Assignments should be thought provoking and unique, changing according to class interest and skill level. By continually improving a course from year to year (and changing course material), fewer resources are available to a student who chooses to be dishonest. Also by not holding students to rigid, inflexible grading criteria, they do not feel "forced" to take drastic measures to succeed. By allowing students to improve upon exam grades, some of the pressure of "get the grade" is removed. This allows them to concentrate more time on understanding the material.

Harassment, intimidation, and disrespect should not be tolerated in the classroom. By disrespect, I do not mean to authority, but to an individual. On a personal (human) basis,

both student and teacher should respect each other's individual views, culture, and feelings. Comments or actions that serve to demean another should not be tolerated. Those that cross the line by using words or actions to degrade or harm another should be provided one warning to change their behavior. If they repeat the offense, they should be removed permanently from the class (or school) with a failing grade.

Late or Missing Work

Without an appropriate excuse, no late work should be accepted. It is important for students to be able to recognize and meet deadlines. They exist everywhere in our daily lives and will be present in their future job. Therefore, it is important for students to learn how to budget their time in order to meet those deadlines.

Learning differences

Students learn differently. A teacher should be cognizant of learning differences among students and design their courses to include several learning techniques, such as hands-on demonstrations, discussions, group work, and problem based activities. By mixing up the mode of learning, you increase the likelihood that student will understand the idea or concept you are trying to convey. I feel strongly that a teacher should encourage students to seek help from other classmates. Another student might be able to explain a concept in a different manner than the instructor, and in a way that the student can better understand. In addition, when working one-on-one, whether with the instructor or another student, the concept can be explained in a variety of ways (hand signals, drawings, relationships, etc). In other words, the explainer can gauge how well what they are saying or describing is being received by the student and can alter their explanation based on the student's reactions.

In summary, education should place more of its focus on the application of knowledge rather than the memorization of facts. The college teachers job is to improve and build on a students skills and knowledge to help prepare them for their future career. By teaching a student how to think and attack problems, they walk away with the skills needed to solve any problem, not just the ones that they practiced in class.