

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AT THE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Education at the college level is an ever-increasing requirement for obtaining a respectable position in the job world. But the philosophy concerning how to properly educate students in order to prepare them for the job market does not seem to be a well established one. There are several methods for teaching students, as well different ways to assess student's performance and progress. Unfortunately, it seems that an agreement on what is the best way to teach and provide feedback to the student cannot be reached. This paper provides my opinion on how to properly educate students in order to maximize learning and retention of information, and also how to effectively provide feedback on students' performance in order to avoid the "do just enough to make the grade" attitude. This, of course, is the opinion of a student who has experience being taught, not the opinion of a professor with experience teaching.

MODE OF DELIVERY

The most important aspect of teaching a course, in the mind of the teacher, should be how to most effectively deliver the information which will allow *all* of the students to learn and hopefully retain the information for future use both during and after college. Simply telling the students what they will be expected to learn and lecturing for an hour three days a week will only result in boring the students and regurgitated information on tests. One needs to adopt a teaching method that results in the students being actively involved during the class, and actually using some form of a thought process other than the retrieval of memorized information when being tested.

In my opinion, there should normally be some form of lecture in every class. But not a lecture that lasts the entire class period. A short lecture (5 to 15 minutes) at the beginning of the class will organize and jump start the students thoughts onto the topic of the day's class. Any longer than 15 minutes, and minds will begin to wander.

After the initial lecture, the focus needs to shift from the teacher to the students. The key is to keep the students attention throughout the remainder of the class period. To accomplish this, it depends on the type of material being covered in the class. Discussions of readings, question and answer sessions, working out examples on the board, and simulations and games are all good ways to keep the students involved. Depending on the size of the class, dividing the students into pairs/teams will provide an environment that more readily promotes discussion.

By delivering information by different methods (lectures, discussions, simulations, etc.), the instructor is able to reach all students, whose capability of learning differs. Some students may learn better from reading and writing notes. Others may benefit more by seeing a concept demonstrated. And other work better in teams. The instructor must realize that it is more important to attempt to reach all

students in the class than to simply try to teach the class in a way that is easiest for the teacher.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

The subject of how to assess student performance is a difficult one. Grades or no grades? Employers like to see grades on transcripts and resumes in order to be able to sort prospective employees. In turn, students want good grades in order to get good jobs. Therefore many students are more concerned about what they need to do in order to get a good grade, and less concerned about actually trying to learn material for the sake of learning. There needs to be a happy medium where the students and employers have the traditional grades to look at, but at the same time have learning be the driving force of the student. To do this, I feel that there should be a mid-term evaluation of every student in order to inform them of how they are doing and what areas they need to improve upon. Grades cannot be only based upon homework, tests, and attendance. There needs to be assessment of performance that is not reflected by what a student can memorize and regurgitate on a test, such as class participation and teamwork cooperation, if applicable. The evaluation should also include a one-on-one meeting between the student and teacher for discussion. By the end of the term, if the student doesn't show improvement or at least demonstrate effort to improve, the grade should reflect so. But an evaluation should also be conducted at the end of the class to discuss with the student why he or she received the grade they did. Of course this might not be possible with large classes, but in smaller classes (less than 50 students) this will provide for a stronger teacher/student relationship.

Grading on a curve only pits students against each other and should be avoided if at all possible. If performance on exams is so varied that a curve might be considered, the teacher needs to re-evaluate his or her teaching methods in order to reconcile that next time. There should be no excuse for students failing a course. If a student doesn't learn enough of the material to pass, then the teacher's delivery method needs to be questioned.

INSTRUCTOR RESPONSIBILITY AND MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS

The students expect the instructor to teach them. A teacher needs to respect that, and do everything he or she can to meet those expectations.

There is nothing more frustrating than attending a class where the teacher looks down at the students and portrays an attitude that this is a waste of time for him or her. No matter how the class is taught, whether using lectures, discussions, simulations, etc., enthusiasm of the teacher is a must.

One question that a teacher must be able to answer, even if it is not asked, is "Why do we need to know this?". If students understand the importance of the information they are learning, the probability of them retaining the information increases. This becomes especially important at the junior and senior level.

These students are beginning to think about the jobs in the real world, and they don't want to waste their time learning information that they deem useless beyond college.

I feel the best way to encourage students to learn and not just memorize is simulations and demonstrations. Getting the students involved and essentially getting them to teach themselves through this type of active learning not only keeps the students from being bored in class, but if done right, results in the students having fun. If it is fun, it keeps the students' interest, and they want to continue the learning.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

As the Instructor has the responsibility to teach, the students have the responsibility to be willing to learn. How to enforce this is unknown to me. The only way to try and ensure this is proper motivation of the students, which is discussed above.

CONDUCT

The conduct by both the instructor and the students is extremely important for the existence of a positive learning environment. Intimidation by the instructor can be warranted in some situations, but it cannot be viewed as a simple means by the instructor to get what he or she wants. Abuse of power by the instructor conveys the attitude that the instructor feels above the students. On the other hand, an instructor that is timid and doesn't express a certain level of expertise of the subject can be viewed as not knowing how to teach. Assertiveness and enthusiasm must be present in the instructor's attitude, and a friendly and approachable disposition is a definite plus.

The conduct of the students is also something that has to be under control. At the college level, students are considered adults. To a degree, they need to act like it. They are preparing for life in the "real world", so they need to understand that there are certain things that will be expected of them. The instructor is the authority in the classroom, and the students need to respect that. Deadlines and performance expectations are set by the instructor, and the students need to do their best to meet those goals. And, just as in the job world where attendance is required, this should also hold true in the classroom. Skipping class because of fatigue or non-valid reasons should not be accepted, and such conduct should be represented in the students end grade or other assessment.

Cheating, of course, should not be tolerated. The instructor needs to identify what is to be considered as cheating. I am a firm believer in teamwork and open-book/notes exams. In the professional world, if you cannot remember how to do something, you are not going to just take a stab at it and hope you do it right. You are going to go to available references in order to make sure it is done correctly. But direct copying of someone else's homework or exam is not considered ethical referencing, and should not be tolerated.

CONCLUSION

As previously stated, the opinions stated in this paper are those of a student, not a teacher. Therefore there was a tendency to emphasize teaching methods that I feel would benefit myself as a student. It must be realized that different students learn better from different methods. And it must also be noted that an active learning style of teaching cannot really be implemented across the board for every subject. There are some subjects that cannot be taught in a timely manner without the use of lectures. In the end, it is up to the instructor to do his or her best to determine the best method to deliver the information that the students need to learn.