

Sample Personal Working Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

Role of an Instructor

The process of teaching is a cooperative agreement between the teacher and the learner. It is a teacher's responsibility to lay the foundation that gets students enthusiastic about learning and about their profession. Instructors should encourage students to have vision, help them realize their full potential, and challenge them to become the best that they can be.

My approach in dealing with students is to believe in them; care about them; expect their best; be demanding, yet fair; praise their achievements; model behaviors such as taking pride in every endeavor, possessing a positive attitude, and realizing everyone has something to contribute. Teaching students to be healthy skeptics, arming them with tools to be proficient decision makers, and challenging them to accept responsibility for their actions are necessary. Encouraging open-mindedness and discouraging the urge to over-generalize based on an N of 1 are crucial. Setting an example via modeling is a potent influence. I have heard a tutor's role described in three phases: 1) modeling; 2) scaffolding; and 3) fading. I think this applies to mentors as well where one first provides the demonstration (planned or not), then the protégé attempts the behavior with support, and finally the mentor fades to the background to let the protégé apply the lessons learned. I believe this holds true with all levels of students and in mentoring junior faculty members.

Too often in health care professional curricula, we only promote the investment benefits of our educational programs. We also need to consider the consumptive benefits, the non-monetary effects resulting from the satisfaction derived from the educational process, or from having an education. Contributing to students' professional growth and development is part of providing a professional education. I encourage students to pursue a variety of extracurricular activities as well as attend state and national conventions and support their activities at these meetings. Our obligations as educators extend beyond the classroom and include responsibilities such as advising, mentoring, and career counseling. I believe as John F. Kennedy once said, "The exemplary teacher instructs in realities and suggests dreams."

Relevant Content

Foremost in my mind is that the end goal of most of our graduates is to practice their chosen profession. I maintain my professional licensure and keep in touch with practice issues via participating in state and national professional practice meetings, interacting with practitioners, and attending continuing education programs on new therapeutic modalities. Student learning is enhanced prior to testing by working through applications in class as well as by homework assignments. For example, homework problems based on inquiries from practitioners in the state to demonstrate relevance. I also use contemporary articles and abstracts to relate to important social and public health concerns and professional responsibility.

Knowledge of one's subject matter must be conveyed to students in terms they can comprehend and with applications they will find useful. A balance must be achieved between having a positive attitude and helpful approach with students versus "spoon-feeding" them content. Because biomedical knowledge is expanding so rapidly, we must adopt new ways of teaching and learning in health professions education. Active participation via the stimulation of critical thinking rather than passive receipt of fact-based lecture material is required. Testing procedures must apply this same rationale. The overall goal must be to prepare students for a lifetime of evaluation and decision-making in the healthcare setting.

Educational Process

*"Tell me and I forget
Teach me, and I may remember
Involve me, and I learn."
Benjamin Franklin*

My philosophy about teaching and learning evolves from the above quote from Benjamin Franklin. Learning should be a dynamic undertaking; teaching should engage the student well beyond the classroom. Teachers should be advocates of learner-centered teaching, allowing students to play an active role in the learning processes. It is my belief that learner-centered teaching can help the individual take abstract concepts and principles and apply them to real situations. In addition, learner-centered teaching nurtures life-long learning habits.

It has been documented that all learners have preferred ways of taking in information that they want to understand and learn. Some people prefer to see information (visual), other to hear it (auditory), and still others to experience it through muscle movement (kinesthetic). People also tend to have a favored learning style. They have a certain way that they like to have information organized and presented to them, and they also like to interact with information in certain way. I use an assortment of instructional methods and assessments in my classes in an attempt to accommodate these various preferences and learning styles.

It is my experience that appropriately designed classroom teaching and learning fosters team development skills. Group-centered teaching is a way for students to develop skills in team dynamics, leadership, and problem solving. In my classes, I assign at least one group project, which generally takes the students several weeks to complete. This encourages them to learn how to manage their time, foster group cohesiveness, and work effectively in a team.

Professional Development and Commitment to Scholarly Teaching

Good teaching is an acquired skill that needs to be evaluated and updated on a regular basis. I strongly believe that we as educators must carefully reflect on our old models and make appropriate changes to continue to develop our teaching abilities. Therefore, I attend teaching and learning conferences/workshops to continuously become skilled in new concepts and techniques that can be applied to my teaching.

Faculty members and administrators alike are increasingly coming to the understanding that faculty must demonstrate a scholarly approach to their teaching. This approach begins with the ability to communicate knowledge of their discipline, remembering that communication requires that the message be understood, not just delivered. A scholarly approach to teaching, I believe, is much more than delivering content. A faculty member must use the education literature and the work of those in our field that contribute to advancing our understanding of the teaching/learning process. From this literature, I have learned that a number of factors can contribute to effective teaching; this is the so called pedagogical knowledge: **how** to teach and **what** to teach. Some examples include communication and organizational skills, respect for students, techniques for delivering material, facilitating student achievement of stated desired outcomes, and the ability to construct fair and reliable examinations.

I am open to and, in fact, seek external critique of my performance as an educator. I also reflect on what I discover about the teaching and learning process, study the impacts of my carefully designed teaching and learning opportunities, and submit my work for public review and use. I am gratified that within my discipline others have used my work to build their own line of inquiry.