

Online Teaching Philosophy

Approach to Assessment

Teaching Online Q & A

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Online Teaching Philosophy

I teach because I want to inspire people to explore the world around them. It may be that I'm selfish: I find the world endlessly interesting. I love learning and discovery, and I want others to feel the same excitement I feel when I learn something new or discover a connection I never saw before.

I believe people want to learn and like to learn. My job is to exploit this innate desire to learn and set it on fire; to turn *want-to-know* into *need-to-know-more*. Learning is personal, active, fun, exciting, and addicting! I believe we do ourselves an injustice when we think of learning as something confined to a designated space and time, something that happens formally, or as difficult, abstract, tedious, or anything but fun. My goal is to create inspired learners who know that one only needs to pay attention, listen, look, and wonder to learn everywhere all the time.

I believe people learn best when they are able to make clear connections between what is being taught, what's meaningful to them, and what they already know. The online learning offerings I create are designed provide multiple paths to a single destination and to support the learner as s/he follows a path of discovery. McTighe (2010) explains "teachers are coaches of understanding, not mere purveyors of content or activity. They design for and support 'meaning-making' and 'transfer' by the learner; and adjust to achieve intended results." As the instructor I act as guide, mentor, and coach.

I believe enthusiasm is contagious. The instructor who comes to class beaming with enthusiasm for the subject is notable: students know immediately if the instructor is fired up or bored with the course and just going through the ropes. The enthusiastic instructor knows s/he will only tap a small portion of what there is to be learned about a subject, and uses that to open door to possibilities for students will discover.

I believe that good instruction means letting things happen. By this, I mean creating an open learning environment that fosters both critical and creative thinking. Connecting course content to real-world, real-time occurrences, helping students learn to seek out analogies, setting up dialogs and debates, and inviting new interpretations of course content stimulate integrated thinking. I believe that when instruction is personal it's pertinent.

I believe it is the instructor's job to create online learning environments that are supportive, complete, well-structured, and provide a secure place for learning. I believe in setting students up to succeed. When a student opens a course for the very first time s/he should find everything needed to progress through the course. In addition to course content, students should have a guide to working the course, institutional resources and policies, a thorough course guide or syllabus, and course orientation activities. While in the course, students should feel secure, free to question, and be respectful of one another. Course language should be free of jargon, as jargon creates insiders and outsiders. All course participants should speak and understand a common language, and when asked, be able to express their thoughts to a 6th-grader.

Approach to Assessment

How do we know they know? Learning does not have to be painful, and in turn, assessments don't have to be tests. Course design that includes many opportunities for students to apply knowledge to real-world situations allows the instructor to gauge students' knowledge acquisition. For example:

- Scenarios and case studies: students solve a problem or identify what went wrong that resulted in the conditions present in the scenario.
- Peer-review: students review the work of their peers and provide feedback, suggestions, and support. This process requires students to articulate what they know and effectively teach it to one another.
- Group work: students work together on large projects. All participants sign a team agreement, which outlines each person's roles and responsibilities. Teams submit progress reports, which indicate progress as well as identify team members' short-comings and the need for remedial teaching.

Formal assessments that include open-ended questions requiring students to analyze, critique, synthesize, summarize or apply information reflect student's ability to integrate course material. Reflection activities help students personalize new knowledge. At the conclusion of Learning groups, students may be asked to respond to a specific reflection question designed to apply new knowledge to a real-world situation or opportunity. Assessment activities that require personal reflection and original thinking which integrates multiple facets of the instruction are effective strategies for curbing plagiarism and cheating.

Teaching Online Q & A

Social presence has been found to increase learning in online environments. CITE What are some strategies for developing social presence?

At the onset of class, students and the instructor complete a get-acquainted activity. The activity is designed for participants to reveal some pieces of personal information, for example, where they are from, what they like to do in their time off, where they attended school, career goals, and so on. In a discussion forum, participants are asked to respond to one another by asking questions and sharing common interests or experiences. This strategy is effective in developing participants feeling of shared interests and rapport.

Early in the course and in succeeding weeks, students and the instructor communicate via audio and video. Seeing people and hearing their voice helps students and the instructor relate to each other as real people. Steven Aragon (Aragon, 2003) believes using audio helps to create social presence by reflecting the emotions of the instructor to the students and in turn provide the students an opportunity to do the same amongst their peers. The use of audio has also been attributed to student's perceptions of the "human-ness", attentiveness and increased caring on the part of the instructor. (Borup, West, & Graham, 2012)

Small group work and team projects are effective ways for students to know each other personally and build relationships. Team projects that require synchronous online meetings help students understand each other's lives outside of class, from the dog barking in the background to the child asking for a snack.

Teaching presence is another important element of online learning. How can I develop teaching presence without spending an extreme amount of time in my class?

It's important that instructors honestly appraise how they interact with students. Everything the instructor does, from the look and structure of the course to their syntax when responding to questions reveals his/her attitude toward students. The online environment is far different from the classroom: without body language, tone of voice, and persistent face to face contact, students respond to what they see on the screen. It can be an unforgiving environment! For this reason, online instructors must be particularly mindful of their communication.

Boettcher and Conrad (Boettcher, 2010) tell us "Clear and unambiguous guidelines about what is expected of learners and what they should expect from an instructor make a significant

contribution to ensuring understanding and satisfaction in online courses.” Providing clear and thorough instructions and expectations helps students know exactly what to do and how to do it. Being reliable and consistent in communication builds trusts and a secure learning environment. Designing a course that is easy to navigate supports student in knowing where they are in the course

One of the most effective means of developing strong teaching presence is to interact with students personally, thoroughly, and consistently. Address each student by his/her name. Provide personal feedback on each assignment: give specific feedback on each portion of the assignment per the rubric. As the instructor, you’re tasked with interacting personally with each student and attending to their individual learning needs! It takes time, but once you develop a system, you might have a couple of days off each week!

Peer-teaching is a valuable way to both develop social presence and expand the online learning environment. What are some of the ways we can use peer-teaching?

Discussion threads are a great way to use peer-teaching. Requiring students to ask each other questions and provide an answer helps broaden their grasp of concepts. Peer review activities require students to review the course material and rubric in order to review each other’s work. Role-playing activities in which students have to teach each other are effective and can be fun, if the activity has an interesting premise!

References

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