

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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The discourse below embodies my teaching philosophy, values and course specific methods of achieving them. To provide structure to the statement, the arguments are listed under appropriate headings.

Why I Teach

My teaching philosophy revolves around passion and a powerful relationship with students in a dynamic environment. I believe that passion constitutes an essential element of teaching and learning. Teaching with passion provides the opportunity to instill passion in learners in a manner that will direct them to actively engage with the subject matter. A supportive learning environment further facilitates interaction, negotiates understanding and guide learners through shared concepts establishing discourse to implement an optimal thinking and learning framework.

Teaching is therefore not only about the learning; it is also all about the people, embracing the special relationship between teacher and student working “together towards a powerful shared understanding” (Jacobs & Gravett, 1998).

When teaching programming and mathematics, it often becomes necessary to break down negative perceptions that obstruct understanding and deep learning. A deep learning approach (as mentioned by Pellegrino, Chudowsky & Glaser, 2001) that centres on the student’s understanding and active interest in the course and its content is fundamental in achieving this. I believe that it is important to creating a supportive space where active learning can take place to shape the way students think. It is a space where I as a teacher expect students to assume increased responsibility for their own learning, moving from a controlled learning environment to become reflexive, self organised learners embarking on a journey of life long learning.

The Challenges of breaking down barriers in my lifelong venture of teaching and learning has been an energising and stimulating experience. It focussed on the building of relationships, the breaking down of barriers and the meeting of challenges. Several fundamental practices have underpinned this strategy during my years of teaching; some of which are reflected in the seven principals of Chickering & Gamson (1987) for good practice in undergraduate education.

The Challenges of Breaking Down Barriers

Motivate students by demonstrating enthusiasm and passion: I have found that a demonstration of enthusiasm and passion can become the driving force that will enable students to rise to the challenge.

Ensure that students are committed: I believe that a teacher should intentionally strive to inspire learners and encourage commitment by showing commitment. This sometimes necessitates that I walk the extra mile and it always requires students to meet high expectations and strive for excellence. *“Education is the greatest engine of personal development.....It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another”* (Nelson Mandela).

Establish open communication: Not only should I be approachable but I should also respect and understand the students’ viewpoint. It makes a significant difference to show

students that you care, to know them by name and to be aware of their personal achievements or the issues they struggle with. Praise and giving support when needed are always appreciated.

The information age we live in and all the mechanism available for communication creates expectations of instant responses. It is necessary to comply to this if at all possible. An instant reply to an email late at night never stops to amaze the recipient student.

Disciplinary Challenges in IS

Be open and frank about what you know and what you do not know: I have found that students always appreciate a sincere attitude and an in-depth search for better and more efficient solutions to a current issue. I believe that the confident teacher, who has internalised the subject material and uses convincing arguments in conveying the course content, have the best chances of achieving success.

Take extra time in designing course material: In the fast changing Information Technology environment it is important to keep up with and implement changes to the environment and development platforms the moment they become available. The time it takes to search for, design and construct real world case studies, relevant to the problem to be solved, is worth the effort when students can identify with them and have fun in finding proper solutions. It is my quest as a teacher to ensure that case studies used, always reflect current information, are innovative and carefully designed to compel students to the implement the required concepts.

My philosophy in practice in IS: It is well known that students experience significant difficulties in learning to program and in mastering fundamental coding concepts (Bergen & Reilly, 2005; Simon, Fincher & Robins, et al, 2006).

These issues are often more prominent in the Information Systems (IS) discipline, since in-depth coding courses, exposure to low level programming languages and rigorous algorithmic approaches do not normally form part of the typical undergraduate IS program. IS students frequently lack the knowledge of basic principles that could provide a foundation for better understanding of coding in general. In addition they struggle to understand the abstractions that are required in the Object-Oriented (OO) environment.

It is beneficial to implement methodological (learner-centered) strategies to overcome barriers that might prevent students from solving problems effectively. Keller & Concannon (1998) defines problem-solving as a vital but basic life skill that entails the solving of new problems in terms of analogies of previously learned procedures. The secret of real understanding lies in translating a complex problem into a simple, easy to understand an intuitive solution.

The capstone course of the IS major includes a group project as a main deliverable. These group projects implement a methodological strategy using a step by step method to assist students in solving their business problem. Students are guided to transcend through three iterations where they at first follow a rigorously defined step by step process to develop a small system. A second system is developed using the same process, but with almost no help. The student teams are finally expected to develop a real life system that not only exhibits a synthesis of knowledge and skills obtained in the previous iterations, but also illustrates innovation and creativity.

This transcendence from being guided to taking the lead defines an evolving education that moves from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence through conscious

competence until unconscious competency is finally reached. I thus agree Biggs (1993) that a fundamental task for me as a teacher is to encourage the engagement of students in learning activities that will heighten their enjoyment and achievement levels, thus resulting in deep learning.

Comprehensive assessment: It is my belief that assessment supports instruction and learning and provides valuable perspectives on student achievements while supporting a core set of learning goals. To this end a suite of instruments has been developed and refined over the years providing students the opportunity to reflect and transcend on the one hand and the teacher the information to evaluate if teaching strategies were effective on the other.

Conclusion

In conclusion it suffices to express a firm belief that mutual respect and trust are vital elements underpinning a relationship with students. These elements provide a solid foundation for the learning and teaching environment and help to create a positive vibe towards learning. “Hard work” or rising to a challenge becomes a natural part of the equation, despite the time and effort it takes.

References

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