

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

In my opinion, good teaching consists of inspiring students to learn about the issues that interest them and motivating them to find answers to their questions. Saint-Exupéry stated it best: “You can teach men to build ships by logging trees, building a timber-construction and assembling timber to the frame – or you can teach them the desire for the sea and the endless horizon!” In order to motivate their students, professors should aim to understand them and then relate the concepts of the courses they teach to their students’ lives. These connections are easy to establish in the field of Applied Psychology where students are generally very interested and eager to discuss and explore the issues.

I also follow Lave & Wenger (1991) who argue that learning is a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs. According to them, social interaction is the critical component of situated learning, and learning advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge. Students should form “communities of practice” in which they learn, work and solve problems. In essence, communities of practice are groups of people who share similar goals and interests. In pursuit of these goals and interests, they employ common practices, work with the same tools and express themselves in a common language. Through such common activities, they come to hold similar beliefs and value systems.

Consequently, I think that teaching should encourage the formation of small teams and enable students to actively transform the content of the course into their own approaches. In so doing students learn to collaborate, become more open-minded and accept different points of view. In a diverse environment with students coming out of different ethnic and economical backgrounds, it is particularly important to overcome possible prejudices and to learn from the diversity of “voices”. Learning and knowledge acquisition take place through the confrontation of diverse perspectives, and their partial integration into one’s own system of knowledge, values and beliefs. Universities and teachers have the task of facilitating this process through the offering of knowledge-sharing methodologies and role model behavior. In this context, learning is not a one-sided process but rather a dialogue through which both sides profit.

A further goal of education, helping students sift through the overload of data and information that surrounds them, develops the student’s ability to evaluate data and contextualize information to transform it into knowledge. I think it is important for students to acquire new knowledge actively by discussing and transforming the content of a course into their own approach, or by applying the learned knowledge to address a problem. In order to facilitate this process, I believe that professors should behave more as team leaders than as a teachers in the classical sense. The process then becomes one of organizing, motivating and problem-solving. The final product of this process is students who are challenged to explore their limits, develop their creativity and facilitate critical thinking.

References

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning*. Cambridge: University Press.