

My early educational experience was quite ordinary. I did fairly well in grade school but never really appreciated learning until I was in college. The “light bulb” in my head turned on rather suddenly when I enrolled in a communications course in my sophomore year. I realized that I was energized by content that I genuinely had an interest in, and by a professor that had that same enthusiasm and curiosity. This stuck with me through my educational pursuits, certification programs, and three master’s degrees.

In researching teaching and philosophical approaches, I found a few references to journal articles by Marton and Saljo on qualitative differences in learning and fostering deep learning. This research confirms my own experience that true, quality learning occurs as the result of intrinsic motivation. Simply memorizing facts without deeper contemplation only provides for superficial accomplishment [Marton and Saljo, 1976]. I wholeheartedly agree that only a deeper learning approach, which is student-centric and fulfilling, will turn on the proverbial light bulb with students. There is a difference between real connection and learning and just reflecting rote material. I want to foster a genuine and meaningful, feel-good, and energizing effect in acquiring knowledge and learning new information. To facilitate this approach, my teaching philosophy focuses on engagement, real world connection, feedback, and encouraging self-directed learning.

Encouraging engagement

I believe the first step in engagement is to display my own excitement for new material openly and sincerely. Years ago, in college, my first communications professor demonstrated real interest in the communication process, and it could be easily heard in his tone of voice and seen in his body language. That excitement spread like a virus among class participants who mimicked the positive emotion set forth. My teaching style will consider both verbal and non-verbal communication, and demeanor when discussing content. It is observed by students and retransmitted.

While collaborative learning and small group activities are widely used in educational settings for the benefit of peer perspective, learning team skills, and understanding opportunity; I focus considerable attention on individual connection with students as well. My experience on boards, non-profit associations, and service club organizations has taught me that there is no easy one-swipe way of making meaningful connections and I truly believe that simply taking time to discuss material with students facilitates their understanding and motivates them. There is no replacement for one-on-one interaction and confirmation that learning has taken place.

My considerable background and experience with technology assists with teaching and I can draw from many alternatives if they help prove points and make material relatable. There are also plenty of opportunities for students to use technologies that they are accustomed to and work with every day. Working with familiar tools allows students to feel free to ideate and focus on the content and not the “how” part of learning.

Revealing connections with other disciplines and actual applications

I possess a lot of professional and educational experience, and I am in a field that adapts quickly to new innovations. I have worked in technology and business spaces for many years and am eager to share those experiences with students. With my background, I can relate educational curriculum to real world practice, and this translates into interest by students as my own excitement leads investigation. I believe that learning must demonstrate some product back to those investing in it.

One of my favorite things about learning is that I can witness how concepts can improve processes, situations, workflows, and products. Not only is realizing concepts part of real applications, but discovering these connections is self-perpetuating in that understanding the use in-turn drives curiosity in learning more. Students must realize concepts at work and not just rote memorization for knowledge to stick with them.

Consistent feedback

At heart, I am a communications scholar and some of the most important parts of the communication cycle take place in feedback. Not only is overt feedback important but reinforcing concepts and correct perceptions in subtle everyday language is necessary to support learning. Open and honest discussions must take place often and be critical, when necessary, but not overly discouraging. A teacher should lead a classroom but not dominate it with their own personal agenda. Investigating ideas and thoughts about material together with students and guiding them through exploration yields many dividends.

Inspiring self-directed discovery

A teacher should not consider the time spent with students as a finite, limited engagement. Even after a course is completed a teacher can still positively affect students' interests. At the end of a course students should be accompanied by encouragement to continue discovery and asking questions. Even in areas outside of the immediate curriculum taught. Demonstrating the joy of knowledge inspires others to take additional action and continue to study. Showing students how different disciplines interconnect and how learning is compounding in nature provides lifelong motivation. Each teacher that can provide this kind of inspiration adds to a person's interest in learning. A teacher can exemplify how the pursuit of knowledge and information is self-fulfilling and just feels extraordinary.