



Personalizing Pedagogies: Taking Advantage of the Variety of Teaching Gifts

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Rev. October 30, 2007

Introduction

New applications of information technology have provided a variety of choices not only about what is taught and learned, but also about how it is taught and learned. During recent years, there has been much excitement about the new opportunities to use information technology to meet the varied needs of learners more effectively. Individualization, learner-centeredness, anytime/anywhere/anyone education are admirable intentions. But there is a fascinating oversight at the center of the movement that has individual differences among learners as its core premise:

Why are individual differences among faculty ignored?

Weren't most faculty members students earlier in their lives? Does the aging process effectively diminish differences among us? Are faculty members self-selecting to such a great extent that variety among them is negligible on most important dimensions? I doubt it. Consider some of the many ways in which faculty members can be effective teachers. It would be absurd to expect anyone to be a highly skilled teacher in more than a few of them. See "Good Teachers & Good Teaching"
<<<http://www.tltgroup.org/PersonalizingPedagogy/TeachingGifts.htm>>>

Chickering and Gamson's *Seven Principles of Good Practice for Undergraduate Education* were derived from available research, very little of which examines differences among faculty. It is time to take that next step. Many institutions have recently made commitments to engage most of the faculty in improving teaching and learning with technology; most faculty members have already begun using applications of technology in their day-to-day correspondence, research, and course preparation; and many faculty have also begun to use some of these tools to enhance courses. ***Just as new applications of technology have made it possible to consider more realistically and intentionally different learning needs, so has it become possible to enable faculty to use their own different gifts and accomplishments more effectively to improve teaching and learning.***

In the long run, technology can be used to achieve a deeply respected old goal in a new way. In addition to matching learners with teachers and learning needs with teaching abilities, we can also use new technology options to engage each with the other more meaningfully and with greater mutual satisfaction. By examining and respecting differences in both groups and finding technology applications that fit, we can achieve more satisfying and cost-effective education.

This shift can be a re-orientation, a set of modest corrections - not a reversal or refutation of the movement toward learner- and learning-centeredness.



Teaching Gifts: Good Teachers and Good Teaching

There are many different kinds of good teaching and good teachers. Most faculty members can use or exemplify only a few of these at a time. That is usually enough.

Keep trying

See every new academic year, every new course, as an opportunity to improve your teaching and your students' learning. [And take pride in your previous efforts and accomplishments.]

Organize subject matter effectively

Use your scholarly expertise to organize the content of your course(s) in ways that reflect the structure and methodology of your discipline. Use your instructional expertise to select teaching/learning resources to support your decisions about content.

Connect with students

Enable students to feel more fully a part of the institution or community. Engage students' interest and energy on a personal level. Demonstrably care about the students as learners and human beings.

Solicit and use feedback from students

Collect information via 'classroom assessment,' anonymous online surveys, listening to students, and other techniques for getting a clearer picture of learners' progress and reactions. Use as much of that data as you can - consistent with your own principles and your institution's educational mission.

Use media

Use different media skillfully to create and offer effective communications.

Use principles of good 'instructional design'

Know and use well-established 'instructional design' principles for planning, testing, and improving entire courses or individual learning modules.

Create a 'safe' environment

Help students overcome their fears of learning, of school, of teachers, of competing for attention in a classroom, of failure. Convey and engender confidence in students' abilities.

Be charismatic or entertaining

Engage students' attention and focus their energy through presentations that are dramatic, humorous, and intellectually stimulating. Build students' interests in the course and the subject through their interest in you as a performer, professional, and person.

Be an attractive role model

Serve as a role model - personally or professionally - by demonstrating depth of mastery, wisdom, knowledge, skill, character, and enthusiasm for the subject and profession.

Work with different-sized groups

Work effectively with students in small, informal groups or one-to-one. Skillfully generate and guide discourse with and among learners via face-to-face or online sessions. Ask provocative questions that engage learners intellectually.



Develop self-study materials

Create self-study materials that enable learners to progress at their own pace and assess and demonstrate their own progress.

Select cost-effective teaching combinations

Understand enough about teaching, learning, and technology to decide when and how to use the following techniques most cost-effectively: face-to-face time; synchronous interaction at a distance; asynchronous interaction at a distance; and independent learning options.



Principles for Personalizing Pedagogies

Here is a first draft:

1. Support variety in good teaching, teachers, learning, learners.

Not every pedagogical principle works for every teacher or student. Nor does every means or topic of instruction. Different learners and teachers have different purposes, needs, and gifts. Information technology can support many different kinds of learning and teaching.

2. Match learners' needs with teachers' gifts and vice versa.

How can FACULTY MEMBERS find and use the combinations of teaching approaches and technology that work best for themselves and for their students? How can information technology be used to help match learners' needs with teachers' gifts?

3. Exploit media, increase connectedness.

Every medium can limit or extend our ability to perceive others' characteristics and to reveal our own. Every medium favors some kinds of communication over others. Which media and which technologies are best for connecting which kinds of teachers and learners more deeply, effectively under what circumstances?

4. Use technology to enhance, not undermine, personalization.

Technology, especially information technology, can be used to individualize instruction and make it more interactive - and to foster more direct, personal connections between teachers and learners. Technology can also be used to standardize instruction and separate teacher and learner from each other. How can we increase the personalization of pedagogy when appropriate? [Without diminishing respect for de-personalized instruction when it is effective.]

See also "Fundamental Questions"

What do we most want to gain? What do we hope not to lose?

<http://www.tltgroup.org/FundamentalQuestions.htm>

See also "Seven Principles"

Arthur W. Chickering and Stephen C. Ehrmann have written a valuable, widely-used article, "Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever," suggesting ways information technology can support the application of the Seven Principles.

<http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/seven.html>.

Can you help identify technology applications to support the kinds of good teaching described above?