

Excellent teaching practice and learning environment

practices and conditions for above par student development

Excellent learning

optimal individual development

Development of teacher

Excellent teaching evolves from conscious development in these areas:

Understand students

- Know what is going on in students minds. Care about what students are thinking & seek ways to find out. 'Love of knowledge is not enough'
- Know similarities and differences between students ('Every student is like all, like some or like no other student') and adapt accordingly
- Understand the development of the student (e.g. his/her strategies)

Attuned presence

- Enthusiastic and credible ('the message should mean something to you')
- The teaching is relatable and close to oneself (e.g. using anecdotes)
- Being confident and stress tolerant helps (grows also with experience)

Role as coach

- Believe people can change. Be aware of influence you have. Have an open mind and dynamic view (seeing growth and capacity/potential)
- Focus on here and now and intervene when necessary
- Facilitated by knowledge and mastery of oneself (ask feedback from colleagues and students) and knowledge of psychology

Learn about learning

- Basic knowledge of the domain of learning theory (e.g research findings)
- Know how the brain works and how information is processed (e.g. effects of auditory learning, testing effect, multitasking, ... etc.)
- Be a reflective practitioner: plan courses with a focus on learning, ask timely feedback, experiment and evaluate, read relevant literature

Implement and share

- Regularly follow training/seminars on subject as well as teaching matters
- Implement effective practices you learned about in your own teaching
- Share your findings and expertise with colleagues (culture of innovation)

Feedback

Frequent feedback, both between teacher and student(s) and between students, on the activity at hand and its context is crucial in guiding the learning. It maintains motivation and increases engagement

Student engagement

Engagement through activity is key to excellent teaching and learning ('active attainment'). It involves deep processing, thus transferring learning to long term memory

Student motivation

Motivation enhances willingness to invest in the learning process. 'If motivation is gone, the fundament of education is gone'

Student centered learning environment

A number of conditions facilitate excellent learning:

Attention to the individual student

- The voice and needs of the student is listened to
- Sensitivity to students' individual differences and similarities (background, interests, goals, needs, starting point). This leads to fitting challenges for the students and their feeling special
- The student is given a sense of autonomy and ownership
- Students' interest is triggered (e.g. by using real life problems, dilemma's or video clips/cartoons, whilst staying close to their world)
- Steps in development are made visible, insight in process is given

The learning is (inter)active

- Many interactions occur between teacher and students and among students (yet sufficient time is left for self-study)
- The learning is active: make students do things, e.g. explaining in a video, performances, exhibits, bring stuff, or traditional exercises
- Group discussion/work is used to learn from others (perspectivism)

Process oriented teaching

- Teaching itself is process oriented (consisting of steps towards end)
- The rationale for teaching choices/interventions is explained
- The teaching has a meaningful goal and a memorable conclusion
- The conditions fit the teaching method (e.g. small groups for PBL)
- The setting is adaptive, it changes to keep its effectiveness

Safe and open atmosphere

- The environment is safe, for both teachers and students. Formative feedback is used, understanding is sought and trust is built
- The atmosphere is open, positive and fun. Diversity is valued
- The setting is inquisitive ('It's human nature to explore things')

Development of student

Knowledge, self-knowledge, competency and personality are outcomes of the learning process. The student works according to an individual plan with certain milestones. 'Excellence' means getting most out of every single student, with the awareness that this potential is not fixed in time.

Skills, attitudes and knowledge are acquired in the process of active knowledge construction:

Student's skills

- Questioning
- Expressing
- Reflecting
- Arguing (defend position)
- Searching & selecting sources
- Integrating, interpreting & evaluating
- Explaining
- Independent thought, critical thinking

Student's attitudes

- Constructive approach
- Openness towards others
- Inquisitive

Student's knowledge

- Learning about topics and subject matter

Learning centered teaching strategies

These are (elements of) highly effective teaching methods:

- Learning involves associating existing knowledge with new. Therefore start teaching by identifying what the student knows (e.g. by asking questions). This reveals the knowledge gap and triggers the need for cognition
- Learning consists of moving knowledge and skills from short term to long term memory. This is achieved by making the learning active and meaningful (e.g. let students create their own learning experiences)
- Stimulate analogue reasoning (the essence of learning), e.g. using stories and metaphors. Give or ask students two examples to illustrate a point, best from two different domains. This enhances understanding and insight
- Involve coaching activities (e.g. teach strategies to acquire knowledge). Make it personal, use an individual plan
- Well thought-out course design: link the instruction(s) to a meaningful goal, as a sequence of coherent building blocks/experiences, begin with the end in mind. Unsettle students' assumptions, but supply them with tools too
- Involve other modalities such as a visual learning (e.g. picture in mind) or the senses approach (e.g. using movement (embodied cognition) or auditory learning)
- In Learning by modelling students learn by being shown and practicing (e.g. using movies or performing role play)
- Problem Based Learning (PBL) using small groups to discuss and work together in person, as to learn from one another (perspectivism and critical thought). Project -, case -, and inquiry based learning are similarly activating
- Reciprocal teaching involves students becoming teachers. By explaining they enhance retention and insight
- Interactive teaching: ask each student the take home message, what the muddiest point was and what he/she wants to know more about, and use this feedback for co-construction of the next class
- Flipping the Classroom in which the surface learning takes place at home prior to class. In class deep learning
- Both virtual and physical aspects in Blended Learning inform one another. The specific learning goals should guide choosing when to use what (activity, location, technological aids, etc.)