

## Learning is More than “Just Methods”

Linda Cannell, BH Carroll Colloquium, 2015

“What we learn is in large part a function of how we learn it”.<sup>1</sup>

One of the tough parts of teaching is making choices from among the hundreds of “methods” that are available. Some who are new to teaching and that which influences significant learning, may focus on a handful of comfortable approaches—often reflective of how teachers prefer to learn, or how they were taught. Clearly, for most/all of us, education is more than “just methods”. Our challenge, then, is to understand factors that influence *learning*—and how; and to make sensible choices about how to engage learners.

Obviously, the longer you are a teacher the more learning approaches you will have at your fingertips; and there seems no end of books, articles, Internet resources, and more, that describe methods. The mass of information can be counterproductive—who wants to wade through it; and faculty whose primary discipline isn’t education are unlikely to initiate a search through the mass for something suited to their discipline.

So, how can we deal with this problem? Two relatively simple suggestions:

1. One of the responsibilities of the academic dean is professional development of faculty. Since most faculty don’t have the time or inclination to study education resources, try something like the following:

- Provide opportunities for faculty to share *their* teaching and learning practices and ideas: design a faculty meeting around sharing of effective practices; set aside a “slot” in the weekly schedule for faculty to voluntarily come together over refreshments, of course, to share what they have been doing.
- Purchase accessible books on teaching and learning and place them in the faculty lounge. Invite faculty to browse the collection, try a couple of ideas, and share the results. Let them take a book (without cost) if they find it useful—and replace it.
- Invite faculty to pair up—to visit each other’s classes, to plan together, to review each other’s teaching.
- Someone with expertise in instructional design creates a learning experience and invites a faculty member to try it. Promise the faculty that they will never be placed in an embarrassing situation.

2. As a teacher, think in terms of a handful of categories that are consistent your value commitments and perspectives on learning and human development. Methods will fit more than one category to be sure; but having the categories in mind may trigger a memory of methods, suggest new ideas, and more importantly, stimulate variety in the ways you engage learners. Here are some categories:

### It’s as Simple as Breathing!

At its simplest you can think of teaching and learning as a rhythm—a rhythm that is as necessary for learning as breathing is for living.

**Perceiving** (breathing in—acquisition of information) includes observing, hearing, reading, memorizing. You want learners to perceive effectively—in other words, you want something better than “in one ear and out the other”. So, what can you do to stimulate *attention* to what a learner is observing, hearing, or reading? What can you do to assist memorization of facts or concepts that you believe are *essential to continued learning* in a subject area?

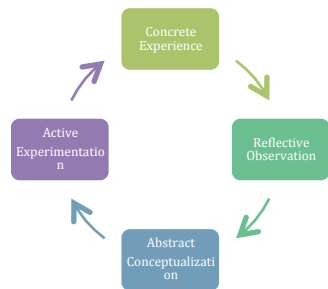
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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Applebee. 1996. *Curriculum as Conversation*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1996), p. 62

**Processing** (breathing out—processing of information) includes reflecting, connecting, deciding, feeling, valuing, practicing. You want learners to do more with information than to store it or regurgitate it. So, what will you do to help learners internalize meaning and responsibly apply what they are learning?

### Kolb's Categories of Experiential Learning

Kolb uses four categories to describe the acts of learning.<sup>2</sup> The categories are interconnected and nonlinear. Kolb's point is that learners need experience in each category for holistic learning.



*Concrete Experience.* Doing or having an experience.  
*Reflective Observation.* Reviewing or reflecting on the experience.  
*Abstract Conceptualization.* Concluding or learning from the experience.  
*Active Experimentation.* Planning or trying out what you have learned.

### Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning, and Its Revisions

Bloom is the old standby, but still helpful.<sup>3</sup> He proposed that teachers can “touch” learners only in three domains—with overlap among the domains inevitable: Cognitive (information recall, increasingly complex understanding), Affective (attitudes, feelings, believing, valuing), and Psychomotor (skill, purposeful action, application, practice). His intent was to develop a “taxonomy” (e.g., classifying the parts that make up thinking, valuing, acting) to assist the development of learning intentions for each domain. He managed two taxonomies in collaboration with others, but a taxonomy for the Psychomotor Domain was left to others. His work has been recast into countless formats and teaching tools.<sup>4</sup> In education, the Cognitive Domain with its taxonomy (six levels of mental activity) has been the most commonly applied—which tends toward an unfortunate dichotomization of learning into cognitive (intellect), and everything else. A description of the three Taxonomies is available at the Colloquium website. You can access an image of Anderson and Krathwohl’s<sup>5</sup> revision of the Cognitive Domain at the Colloquium website.

**Bottom line:** A taxonomy shows the complexity of the particular domain. A teacher familiar with the levels can design questions and activities that will actually shape a learner’s level of thinking or responding. The three Domains tend to “bleed” into one another which argues for attention to all three domains in the design of instruction.

3. Several “models of teaching/models of learning” are available. Perhaps the most common is Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun’s, *Models of Teaching*.<sup>6</sup> I have adapted their categories as follows:

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from David Kolb. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1984. More complete description is available at the Colloquium website.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*. (New York: David McKay, 1956); David R. Krathwohl and Benjamin S. Bloom and Bertram B. Masia. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook II: Affective Domain*. (New York: David McKay, 1973); E. J. Simpson. *The Classification of Educational Objectives in the Psychomotor Domain*. (Washington, DC: Gryphon House, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps most useful are the charts of verbs and questions aligned with each stage. Examples are available at the Colloquium website.

<sup>5</sup> Lorin W. Anderson, and David R. Krathwohl, et al.. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Longman, 2001

<sup>6</sup> Bruce R. Joyce, Marsha Weil, and Emily Calhoun. *Models of Teaching*, 9th [and latest] edition. (Buffalo Grove, IL: Pearson, 2014).

**Basic Information-Processing.** Teachers structure and present material in such a way as to promote understanding (e.g., use an advance organizer before a lecture). Teachers help learners to . . .

- Memorize and recall effectively. Manipulate objects as an aid to memory.
- Attain basic concepts through developing basic skills of thinking.
- Develop and work with concepts through non-print approaches (pictures, stories).
- Think inductively.
- Engage in Inquiry—learn how to collect and verify information, develop researchable questions, see patterns and themes.

**Cooperative, or Social Learning.** Teachers facilitate the development of the group/team and the skills of group interaction and cooperative learning.

- Learners explore problems, issues, subject matter through group inquiry. Individuals learn to assume responsibility for certain aspects of the group's behavior, contribute to the group's performance, learn to respect and enhance the abilities of others in the group.
- Learners engage in role plays or simulations. They probe an issue, event, or subject matter through the use of a brief "enactment" or more involved real-to-life simulation. Participants learn from reflection on their own responses and the responses of others.
- Students are given case studies or problem statements of issues that affect groups, organizations, communities, nations. These problems can only be resolved through mutual inquiry into values, resolving conflicts, clarifying assumptions and presumptions.
- In "learning lab" experiences (where behavior is observed and then debriefed) participants learn the skills of analysis of group and organizational behavior, adapting to change, resolving conflict, communication, working with people.
- Participants engage in ethnographic or qualitative inquiry where, through interview and participant observation, they discern the character of organizations, groups and cultures.

**Personal Models.** Teachers focus on the personal development of the individual. The instructional approaches are grounded in the understanding that issues related to human development (e.g., self concept, maturity, ability to relate to others, and so on) affect one's capacity for learning.

- The teacher becomes a "counselor" who helps learners understand themselves, clarify their personal goals, accept responsibility for their growth and activities.
- Learners share in the development of the classroom environment and learning experiences. The teacher facilitates discussion and interaction in these meetings and leads the group to reflect on the quality of their interaction.
- Learners are involved in experiences designed to enhance their awareness of other perspectives and points of view. They learn to generate fresh approaches to problems, engage in creative writing and speaking, and work together on tasks that require different perspectives to be resolved.
- The teacher is typically non-directive.

**Behavioral or Structured Models.** Based on one's capacity to learn and modify behavior by responding to tasks, circumstances, and feedback.

- Explicit, direct instruction through lecture and/or demonstration.
- Mastery Learning or competency based instruction. Students learn at their own pace. The teacher specifies learning goals, learning activities, and provides opportunity for self-evaluation. Competencies for particular tasks or work are specified. Assessment is based on "mastery" of the task to specified criteria.