

ASPECTS: Sample essay; score="5"

My role as a TA within the Educational Psychology department offers occasional opportunities to teach the ALD 320 course (Cognition, Human Learning & Motivation).

After attending the "Leading Effective Discussions" series I formulated, implemented and assessed the following lesson plan which I would like to share as an example of how my pedagogical understanding has developed since attending the three ASPECTS sessions.

Comment: Central thesis statement

"Designing Effective Discussions" and "Promoting Active Learning" have particularly influenced my approach to teaching material from the ALD 320 course textbook (*Human Learning* by Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, 2004). From them I learned two invaluable ideas – Bloom's Taxonomy and its role in generating questions at different cognitive levels, and the "guided lecture", which splits material into 15 minute "mini-lectures" with opportunities for students to discuss and elaborate upon their notes in between.

Comment: Uses appropriate terminology

I formulated the following lesson plan for teaching Chapter 13 of the course textbook, because the *mode* of teaching so perfectly illustrates the subjects being covered, namely: metacognition, self-regulated learning, and study strategies. Bearing in mind that each lesson is 75 minutes' long, I prepared two discrete 15-minute talks. As demonstrated in the "Promoting Active Learning" session, I asked students to take no notes during each "mini-lecture" but simply attend to what I was saying. In order to make the material memorable I tried to bring it to life by relating it to the students' own experiences. Ormrod talks, for example, about the time she and her son were attending an art history course together and how they constructed a time line to better organize and understand

Comment: Applies to the discipline & content

Comment: Specific application of guided-lecture; 1<sup>st</sup> Core session

ASPECTS: *Sample essay; score="5"*

different cultural developments spanning 7,000 years. I encouraged students to think about similar devices they've used in classes throughout their own educational experience.

After each "mini-lecture" the students were given five minutes to jot down everything they could remember. After that, the 60-strong class was divided into 15 groups of four students and instructed to discuss their notes among group members - the idea being to compare and elaborate upon what they had just learned. This group discussion lasted ten minutes, making it an equal length of time that students actively worked *with* the material as they did listening to a lecture *about* it.

At the conclusion of both "mini-lectures" and discussion periods I assigned each group a "higher order" question related to the chapter content. They were given the final 15 minutes of class time to reflect upon and discuss among themselves the answers to questions such as:

{ "For what kind of subjects might you use the mnemonic strategy called 'verbal mediation' – and why?" (Application).

"How might 'illusion of knowing' affect your ability to learn?" (Analysis).

ASPECTS: *Sample essay; score="5"*

“What differences in study strategies might you see between a student who, epistemologically, thinks of knowledge as a set of isolated facts versus one who thinks of knowledge in terms of interrelated ideas?” (Synthesis).

and

“If you were advising another student on preparing notes that will facilitate retention and retrieval, what three things would you recommend they do— plus three they should not do - and why?” (Evaluation).

Comment: Uses concrete examples

As others have articulated since Benjamin Bloom devised his taxonomy in the mid-1950s, it is only by encouraging students to move beyond the levels of knowledge and comprehension that we can help them develop critical thinking skills and apply that learning, not just relate it back parrot-fashion.

Comment: 2<sup>nd</sup> application—Bloom's

However, active learning does not stop at the end of class. Participation in Blackboard's “Discussion Board” facility is mandated for ALD 320 and students are encouraged through bonus points to reinforce the learning they've already experienced by debating the “higher order” questions on-line. In this way, students get the opportunity to share with other groups their understanding of the different cognitive-level issues.

Comment: Could this also be part of the assessment process?

The outcomes generated by this lesson plan are manifold:

- a) Students are encouraged to actually listen to a lecture/presentation rather than busy themselves with writing notes.

ASPECTS: *Sample essay; score="5"*

- b) By planning the content to be as authentic as possible (i.e. related to real life experiences) I help facilitate the students *remembering* what they have heard.
- c) The resulting notes are enhanced by the collective elaboration process – something that rarely happens in a traditional lecture situation.
- d) Students are exposed to “higher order” questions that encourage them to think beyond the usual knowledge and comprehension levels.
- e) The use of Blackboard’s Discussion Board facility means that students who tend not to speak up in class or who dislike presenting in front of everyone don’t have to do so. }

Comment: Nice internal summary.

But where does the assessment piece fit into all this, given my attendance of “Assessing Classroom Discussion”?

That session caused me to think about the importance of conducting systematic classroom assessment and, in particular, ways in which one can devise feedback devices to more clearly evaluate the learning taking place through discussion. I had never given this much thought before – believing, somewhat naively, that developing innovative teaching methods would be enough. I now realize that exemplary teachers constantly strive to find ways to *assess* the efficacy of their instructional approaches.

ASPECTS: *Sample essay; score="5"*

So, the “aha” moment for me - with respect to this session’s contribution to *my* learning - was a deeper appreciation of using assessment to gauge one’s teaching effectiveness. How specifically is that done within ALD 320? The feedback device which I now apply to this course is as follows:

This course has been designed so that students can receive up to 180 points over the semester by taking part in six 30-item multiple choice quizzes available via Blackboard. The way these multiple choice items are constructed allows for two types of assessment in my view.

- a) It allows me to determine whether the students know and understand the material, as demonstrated through their answers to questions such as: “The phonological loop is a concept used to explain which of the following?” or: “From Vygotsky’s perspective, what important role does inner speech play?”.
- b) I can also discern the proportion of students who are struggling to correctly answer different cognitive level questions. Blackboard’s Control Panel allows me to isolate quiz questions that are generating the highest amount of wrong answers in order to reflect upon how that material was presented in class and whether there is a pattern which suggests, for example, that questions written at the application and analysis levels of Bloom’s cognitive taxonomy are causing students more difficulty than those written at the knowledge and comprehension levels.

Comment: 3<sup>rd</sup> Core session—focused application

Before taking the assessment piece of the “Leading Effective Discussions” series I had never considered the value of going back over the quizzes to identify where and how in-class instruction might be improved. Now, however, I regularly assess whether there is a

ASPECTS: Sample essay; score="5"

need to focus on giving students more active opportunities in the classroom – or through the Blackboard Discussion Board - to practice translating course material into deeper understanding.

In conclusion, I believe that attending this ASPECTS series has significantly improved my teaching effectiveness in terms of the way I utilize Bloom's taxonomy and the "guided lecture" format in the design and implementation of classroom-based activities.

However, I've also come away with a deeper appreciation of how to assess what I am doing in light of the ultimate goal of teaching: to ensure students learn.

Comment: Shows connection among the themes

Comment: Strong conclusion

Ends

approx. 1200 words

In addition to the comments above, this paper was clearly written with ideas expressed coherently. There was an absence of problems with grammar, mechanics or spelling. Paragraphs were well organized and supported the thesis. In general, the writer showed a strong grasp of the content and effective applications to her teaching.