

Diversity in classroom dynamics education essay



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This paper explores the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom and how their methods and behaviors impact their students, and classroom dynamics. Joan Gorham (1999) suggests that students have varying expectations of learning. It can also be argued that it is not simply a matter of exposing the different learning styles of students, but the effectiveness of teachers' methods must be analyzed in order to develop better course curriculum (Nussbaum 1992). This paper examines what should be kept in mind when developing and delivering curriculum or instruction, as well as the mindset and attitude of the students who the instruction is being developed for. Special attention is paid to Ralph Tyler's four fundamental questions that should be answered when developing curriculum and the methods and procedures involved with determining student learning styles. Gorham indicates that Ralph Tyler is considered to be the father of the instructional objective, and he lists these four questions in his book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, 1949.

Diversity in Classroom Dynamics:

Article Review

“ Students, come to us with differing expectations and needs, differing orientations toward education, differing baseline skills on which to build and differing ways of processing information” (Gorham, 1999, p. 257). It can be argued, that in order to better understand the diversity in classroom dynamics, one must first realize that students learn differently, and they will generally have differing expectations of the outcome of a class. To further research this principle, Joan Gorham, in her article *Diversity in Classroom*

Dynamics, looks at Ralph Tyler's four fundamental questions that should always be looked at when developing instruction. First, the course or instruction being developed should seek to attain some specific outcome. Second, experiences should be provided to attain this outcome. Third, these experiences should be effectively organized, and fourth, some sought of method should be setup to determine whether or not the outcomes are being attained (Gorham, 1999). Answering or defining the first question or statement should not be done lightly as it forms the basis for the other three questions; it matters mostly because the other three questions would not be answerable without visiting the first. It is also important to note that teachers have to realize that each group of classes should be treated differently but at the same time their instruction should be developed to offer some measure of advancement for all students regardless of differences in learning styles. In essence, a course offered at the freshman level should have its outcomes, experiences, organization of these experiences, and the method(s) used to validate the frequency of achieving the outcomes be more centralized and less focused than those of a upper level communication elective (Gorham, 1999, p. 258).

In order to achieve a specific set of outcomes, teachers have to approach lesson plans with an open mind. They must realize that they should always have flexible expectations of students in their classes, as not all students are adept at learning course material, the way originally planned by the teacher. Teachers should also realize that many students only enroll in specific classes either because it is mandatory, or they may have heard that the workload is considerably less than other similar classes. Nevertheless, most

students are “ pragmatic, approaching courses as consumers who expect to get what they pay for” (Gorham, 1999, p. 259).

To understand the true nature of the expectations of students, Gorham has categorized students into three main categories. First, those students who expect to learn a lot from a class regardless of the grades they get are classified High LO/Low GO. Second, those students who care more about grades than actually learning a lot from the class are classified as Low LO/High GO. Finally, those students who have a balanced expectation of attaining as much knowledge as possible and achieving high grades from the course are classified High LO/High GO. Although students can be categorized in this way, one should not forget that student learning styles will play a critical role in determining how the student will carry out the purpose of each specific category. “ Learning styles have been defined as the cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to learning environments” (Gorham, 1999, p. 261). Gorham also mentions Curry’s analysis of various learning style models, McCarthy’s classification of information processing types, and Witkin’s field dependence-independence continuum in an attempt to further analyze various student learning styles (Gorham, p. 262-3).

Despite the various methods of analyzing how students learn, and what influences their moods and expectations inside the classroom, there are some impediments to learning that must be acknowledged. The primary impediment to high learner input is anxiety; “ in high stressful situations individuals undergo physiological changes and adaptive responses that hinder their ability to manage the situation; they respond so strongly to the

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stress that they cannot respond appropriately to the task at hand” (Gorham, 1999, p. 264-5). Termed high communication apprehensives (CAs), are individuals who develop varying levels of anxiety whenever they have to communicate in public, or in the front of the class. They tend to shy away from the spotlight, prefer large classrooms with little or no student to student interaction or student to teacher interaction. Gorham indicates that teachers should be aware that “ one in five students will experience anxiety that goes beyond manageable stage fright” (Gorham, p. 265). Despite this impediment, there are treatments such as cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization, and skills training that can help to reduce the levels of anxiety that CAs are affected by (Gorham, p. 265). However, teachers should keep in mind, that regardless of the treatment available, and the appearances of overcoming these impediments, students can still be highly vulnerable when their performance has to be evaluated.

The diversity amongst the various learning styles today, make it nearly impossible for teachers/instructors to develop finite curriculum for their classes. Curriculum and instruction should always be flexible, to allow for changes based on the mood of the class, the expectations of students, and the learning styles and attitudes of each student in the class. However, it is not only up to teachers to develop proper instruction that caters for various learning styles and categories. It is also up to students to keep open minds and avoid having extremely high expectations of teachers. Nevertheless, if the goal is to achieve a meaningful impact of students’ modes of communication, teachers will continually have to be creative in their methods of developing and delivering instruction.