

Promoting Change in Learning Enhancement and Instruction: Anthony Grasha's Integrated Model of Teaching and Learning Styles

Promovendo a mudança na aprendizagem e na instrução através dos estilos de ensinar e aprender: o modelo integrado de Anthony Grasha

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Abstract

Grasha's Integrated Model blends teaching and learning styles to qualify instruction. The fostering of this change entails recognizing that teaching styles affect the learning styles students develop. Thus, classroom conflicts owing to incompatible styles can be tackled by having instructional concerns meet the learners' views on content and instruction.

Key words: Teaching, learning styles, change, instruction.

Resumo

O modelo integrado de Anthony Grasha combina estilos de ensinar e estilos de aprender com vistas a qualificar a instrução. Promover esta mudança acarreta o reconhecimento de que os estilos de ensinar afetam os estilos de aprender que os alunos desenvolvem. Tendo em vista os conflitos de sala de aula advindos da incompatibilidade entre esses estilos, o modelo propõe que a instrução deve voltar-se para as percepções dos alunos sobre o conteúdo e a instrução em si.

Palavras-chave: Ensino, estilos de aprendizagem, mudança, instrução.

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INTRODUCTION

This workshop is meant to enable its participants to learn more about themselves as teachers, the factors that influence positively or negatively in the attempts to promote change in their instructional practices, and how an integrated model of teaching and learning style to *teach for learning* can be used. It will examine the notion of style, the interaction of teaching and learning styles in instructional dynamics, the importance of self-reflection in the process of change, and how an understanding of style informs the selection of instructional strategies that enhance learning.

To begin with, style is weighed beyond the ordinary grip of a set of unique personal qualities. Such qualities encompass our preferences for certain instructional processes and stand as marks of our effectiveness in the students', administrators', and peers' eyes. As long as style is an attribute teachers and students bear, the qualities that the learners possess should not only be taken into account as a variable, but also considered as part of the instructional dynamics. There is, thus, an interaction between our styles as teachers and the students' styles as learners taking place in the classroom practice, and any attempt to implement changes in instructional processes should reckon with this interactive dimension.

As far as change is concerned, a stage of self-reflection and understanding of where we stand must be completed so that we can advance in one direction or another. The desire or need to change is not enough to ensure its achievement. Change is a process and, as such, the factors that facilitate and hinder its development must be faced.

Once we are willing to engage this process, after we determine where we stand in the cycle of change in teaching we have to consider ways to think and behave that promote the development of our skills as teachers as part of our effort to change. Our thoughts, behaviors, and the selection of particular instructional methods should be underpinned by an explicit conceptual rationale so that change can be effectively implemented and the desired advancement achieved. In other words, we should be

committed to a philosophy of teaching that can be successfully applied in our classrooms.

Anthony Grasha's Integrated Model of Teaching and Learning Styles examines the relationships among these two categories of styles and a third element, classroom processes. These three elements are seen as interdependent. Whatever the element selected, it is bound to bear an impact on the other two, so much so that the use of one certain teaching style in the context of one specific teaching method encourages and reinforces one set of learning styles rather than another. If we want to encourage active and collaborative learning and critical thinking, we cannot overlook their mutually constitutive dimension

1 THE NOTION OF STYLE

Starting from an understanding of style as a set of personal characteristics may lead us into the condition of having to describe potentially as many different styles as there are teachers, and this cannot be studied systematically. Grasha chooses to survey what personal qualities and behaviors faculty members' share in order to categorize specific types of teaching styles. This enables him to examine how particular characteristics affect students and their ability to learn.

Various approaches to identifying the elements (common features) of style have been developed and produced implications for the practice of teaching. They draw on many different aspects. The list that follows presents these aspects and what is central to each one to define style: patterns of classroom behavior - focusing on the actions teachers employ; the qualities that endear respected teachers; teaching methods - as to the degree to which teachers' actions reflect risk, attitudes, and values regarding active learning; common behavior associated with effective teaching - including the organization of information, enthusiasm, and ability to establish rapport; the roles teachers play to execute instructional methods - the combination of consistent patterns of thoughts and behaviors with those prescribed by specific classroom methods; personality traits - interests,



attitudes, ways to gather information and make decisions and the need for order and structure; archetypal forms - the relational dimension as central to the teaching act; and metaphors for teaching - basic representations of the teaching-learning process.

Despite the variety of approaches none stands as a satisfactory way of defining teaching style. Each of these perspectives adds a differential insight to our notion of style. Based on this we can assume that among the elements of style we can point out: the teachers' ability to provide intellectual excitement and to develop interpersonal rapport with students; successful combinations of personal characteristics and instructional practices; the organization of information and the supply of order and structure the students need to learn; the particular instructional process associated to the effort towards promoting active learning; the roles adopted in response to the needs of the classroom environment; the degree of interaction between teacher and student reflecting the stage of growth leading from dominating interactions to sharing and discussing information; the particular needs, attitudes, values and beliefs reflected within the learning-teaching metaphors as a conceptualization of principles guiding the actions of teachers .

Any of the current formulations of style are largely descriptive of the teachers qualities or of what they do in the classroom without entailing the specific actions someone might take to adopt, enhance, or modify the style they already possess. How to make changes, and the variables one would have to take into account to do so are not part of these models.

2 CHANGE AND THE INTEGRATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING STYLES

Without discounting the contribution of these models for understanding teaching style, Grasha moves forward to tackle the issue of modifying and changing one's style. In his model, it involves attending to at least three stages: developing a better sense of "*Who I am*

as a teacher and what I want to become."; making our teaching philosophy explicit; adopting a model for implementing change. Any attempt to consider changes in our styles as teachers encompasses the issue of the role of the student in the teaching-learning enterprise.

Information about teaching style is, thus, one-half of the task. Just as professors have preferred ways of teaching, students have developed similar preferences for how they wish to learn, or learning styles. Learning styles refer to those "personal qualities that influence a student's ability to acquire information, to interact with peers and the teacher, and otherwise participate in learning experiences" (Grasha 1996: 152-153)

It is not difficult so see that both learning and teaching styles shape the encounters students have with teachers. Owing to a higher position in a hierarchy, more of the teachers' needs are met. To get what they want, students typically resist a style of teaching, pretend not to resist, concoct rationale arguments to justify being treated distinctively, or even confront teachers with examples of how their needs are being overlooked. One way we can deal with this unbalance in terms of the satisfaction is by accommodating variations in students' styles in our teaching. This move encompasses acknowledging the styles of students and acting upon them.

Discrepancies between teacher and student styles often give rise to conflict, tension, and misunderstanding. We should not take the fact that people are different as too banal a source of problems, and therefore refuse to take it seriously. Rather, the failure to acknowledge and understand differences and the lack of willingness to accommodate variations in personal qualities is what causes problems. The most typical tendency evidenced when problems arise is to equate difference in terms of positive and negative aspects. The result is that differences between students are translated in terms of good and bad, with a perception that one person is somehow superior to the other. Faculty not often recognize their share of responsibility in the classroom interaction instead of blaming students for all the difficulty.

Effective teaching clearly involves accommodating differences in style as well as



purposefully creating discrepancies to enhance the way faculty teach and students learn. This cannot be done without a frame of reference that bears compatible descriptions of the styles of teachers and students. Grasha's Integrated Model attempts to meet several goals: describe teacher and student styles; illustrate how they interact; prescribe steps faculty can take to enhance and modify instruction to accommodate student styles. Besides allowing us to describe teacher and student styles, it suggests conditions under which certain styles will be effective and what must happen for them to change.

3 LEARNING MORE ABOUT YOURSELF AS A TEACHER: "WHAT'S MY STYLE?"

The first stage in obtaining a new perspective - one that contemplates change - on our teaching style is self-reflection. This process involves gaining insight into underlying attitudes, values and assumptions about teaching and learning. This may entail challenging long-held beliefs about ourselves, our students, and the complex processes of teaching and learning. Self-reflection aims at learning from our experiences in order to make ourselves better teachers. It is precisely such a critical internal debate and analysis about our instructional processes what characterizes teachers as problem solvers rather than as technicians who wait for researchers or legislators to tell them what to do in their classrooms. It is also the most difficult task we try to do as teachers, as long as we are forced to compare our style to a divergent role model in the search for what elements to change and to inspect the values that affect our ordinary classroom behavior. In order to investigate these values, we are faced with the uncomfortable situation of formulating imaginative questions for which we have no easy answer, such as "Who am I?" or "What do I want to become as a teacher?"

People who are successful in making changes in their lives typically display three characteristics: they try to learn from their mistakes, they do not blame themselves or overly

chastise themselves for slow progress or relapses to older ways of doing things, and they fall back into the contemplation stage to think things over and to decide how to try again in the future. Our capacity and willingness to change should also be brought to analysis in a process of self-reflection, as well as specific objectives to pursue, personal qualities we wish to develop, or perhaps instructional processes we want to use. These factors among others should constitute a conceptual base for our teaching styles.

Developing a teaching style, like scholarship, should bear intellectual substance and be based on an explicit philosophy of teaching. This should act like a roadmap and help to guide our thoughts, behaviors, selection of particular instructional techniques, and our general outlook on who we are and what we want to become as teachers. Both the content that we teach and the selection of particular teaching methods should be based on scholarly research and inquiry subsumed by a philosophical, theoretical, and empirical base. In much the same way, the selection of our styles as teachers should be embedded in a conceptual context that includes principles of teaching and learning. This intellectual base would guide the selection of objectives, the instructional methods employed, and the desired outcomes. Our course goals, the corresponding methods used to help achieve them, and evaluations of the outcomes produced are interconnected.

4 A CONCEPTUAL BASE OF TEACHING STYLES

The importance of focusing on the components of our conceptual base for teaching is that we gain a somewhat different perspective on why we teach as we do and we might discover that some aspects are better developed than others.

a - Personal assumptions and definitions about teaching and learning: regardless of the source of our assumptions, they play an important role in how we design and implement a variety of classroom processes. Like a double-edged sword, they may lead us

to explore alternate ways of teaching on one hand or to rigidity on the other. In the latter case our assumptions may prevent us from examining other points of view.

b - Formal principles of teaching and learning: Theories of learning, models of teaching style, models of learning style, views of human nature. The major way people in any discipline encounter the scholarship in their area of interest is through their graduate training programs, but most of those finding jobs in higher education have had little formal training in teaching. This lack of training helps explain why most faculty are not familiar with the literature on teaching.

c - Guiding metaphors for teaching: Our guiding metaphor summarizes in a distinct and highly memorable word, phrase or image our personal model of the teaching-learning process. Subsequently, this personal model intervenes in all of our decisions about how and what to teach. More than figures of speech they influence the patterns of thought and actions we employ in all aspects of our lives. By becoming aware of them we can decide whether such views are sufficient or whether they must be changed. In short, becoming aware of our conceptual base would help us challenge our personal beliefs about effective instructional processes, leading to the realization that some of what we do lacks a conceptual justification or is at odds with our philosophy of teaching.

5 THE ELEMENTS OF THE INTEGRATED MODEL

a - Teaching styles are seen as a pattern of needs, beliefs and behaviors displayed by faculty in their classroom. The qualities pervasive across a variety of disciplines suggest five teaching styles: Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator - each of which bears advantages and disadvantages for teachers. They are not isolated qualities that affect only a few teachers and they interact in predictable ways with the learning styles of students, what helps us to understand the

nature of teacher-student encounters. "Like colors on an artist's palette", (Grasha 1996: 153) the five teaching styles can be blended, and Grasha's research showed that they combine to form four clusters. Classroom observations suggested that there were instructional strategies associated to each cluster.

b - Like the five teaching styles, the learning styles are best seen as a blend, and it is typically the dominant qualities what is visible in class. In order to ensure that our instruction acknowledge the diversity of learning styles we need to consider that they are susceptible to situational influence like other personality characteristics. There are three options for dealing with them: to accommodate particular styles, to provide creative mismatches in the students' styles, or use instructional processes that do both. One way to match, mismatch, or provide variety is to ask how course goals can be achieved by encouraging different learning styles.

c - In order to effectively employ various styles of teaching we should take into account the teacher's sensitivity to learning styles, the capability of students to handle course demands, the need for teacher to directly control classroom tasks, and the willingness of teacher to build and maintain relationships. Modifying our style of teaching demands the attention to the compatibility of proposed modifications with our values and beliefs that hinder change, where we stand in the cycle of change, and the tuning of the proposed change with our philosophy of teaching.

6 MANAGING INSTRUCTIONAL CONCERNS WITH STYLE

Despite the way they teach, college faculty must be concerned with helping students acquire and retain information, concentrate and attend to course material, think critically, become motivated learners, and become self-directed learners responsible for their learning. The acronym OSCAR summarizes the five principles of learning that



help us integrate several of the specific actions faculty can take to accomplish their task, along with the major concepts of the integrated model:

Organization and structure: helping students organize the way they think. Prequestions help them focus on important points, and asking them to develop outlines, flow charts, or diagrams help them to organize and structure information.

Stimulate imagination: both verbal and imagery codes are deployed to hold information in our memory system. The more concrete the information, the more likely that both codes develop well. Using metaphors, evoking mental images of concepts and using vivid examples to illustrate points ensures a backup memory code if the verbal one is not available.

Concrete examples emphasized: anything that students can see, hear, touch, and otherwise experience enhances learning. Concrete examples bring abstract concepts to life for students. By stimulating different sensory modalities, the type of information that can be used is increased, what makes course content memorable.

Applications developed: placing information in a broader frame of reference shows what things can become besides telling what they are. Having students develop applications motivates them, helps them think

critically, and encourages self-directed learning.

Repetition and redundancy: repetition should be provided not only in the course of a class session, but also in different contexts, so that students can see for themselves how concepts occur in more than one situation. Having students develop different contexts in which course concepts are likely to occur encourages the repetition of the information.

Employing the principles of OSCAR effectively encompasses using various blends of the teaching styles in the integrated model. Hopefully, we may become OSCAR winning teachers after all.

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