

Defining and Implementing a Teaching Style

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Abstract

Classroom teaching-learning procedures have been guided by the following terms – teaching models, teaching strategies, teaching styles, teaching methods, teaching behaviors, teaching techniques, etc. Each of these terms offers recommendations about how to structure the teaching-learning interaction. These terms are generally presented as separate and unique guidelines – each unrelated to the other and each in competition with the others.

This paper will offer a definition that unites these terms and presents a guide that can assist in rapid identification and structuring of the sequence for implementing various teaching and learning options

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After reviewing the literature for data that clarified the specific definitions and distinct purposes of the terms *teaching models, teaching strategies, teaching styles, teaching methods, teaching behaviors, teaching techniques*, I decided NOT to present the comparative findings.

In summary, I found that:

1. These terms are common, frequently used, and often interchanged in our professional literature
2. These terms are not in competition, but rather used as synonyms
3. These terms are used to offer recommendations about *how to structure the teaching-learning interaction*

However, the data did not support any consistent or precise definition for these individual terms; rather the definitions of these teaching options (methods, style, strategy, etc.) were arbitrary and personalized according to each author's usage.

The definitions of these terms were descriptive comments rather than a precise interpretations of meaning. Three descriptive definition examples are:

1. Joyce and Showers state that, "a model of teaching is a description of a learning environment."¹ Additionally, "Models of teaching are really models of learning. ... *In fact, the most important long-term outcome of instruction may be the students' increased capabilities to learn more easily and effectively in the future, both because of the knowledge and skill they have acquired and because they have mastered learning processes.*"²
2. Under the heading *Teaching Thinking Strategies*, Bellon, Bellon, and Blank state, "Strategies are mental processing techniques that can be taught." A collection of processes were offered ("memorizing,

¹ Joyce, B. and Weil, M. *Models of Teaching*, 5th edition, Simon & Schuster, Co, MA, 1996, p.11

² Joyce, B. and Weil, M. *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base*, Merrill of Macmillan Publ, Co, NY, 1992, p.413

elaboration strategies such as paraphrasing and summarizing. . ."), but no details were provided for the meaning of the word strategy.³

3. Good and Brophy state, "A method is most effective when used as part of a coherent instructional program that is *goal driven*—designed to accomplish clear goals that are phrased in terms of student capabilities to be developed."⁴

These statements explain the process of teaching rather than defining the expectations of teaching itself. Within the literature reviewed, descriptive rather than prescriptive definitions were offered. Therefore, I propose the following prescriptive definition:

A teaching style (method, model, strategy. . .) is a plan of action that defines the behavior of the teacher and learner for the purpose of accomplishing objectives in subject matter and behavior.

It has been observed that major misinterpretations often occur when defining professional terms. Misunderstood terms shape unreliable belief systems and errors in implementation practices. The following are possible misinterpretations that can result from the definition of a teaching style just provided. Misinterpretations can lead one to believe that:

1. By identifying different objectives, different teaching styles are created
2. By designing different activities, different teaching styles are created
3. By stating a philosophical intent or current jargon, the lesson will automatically represent the new expectations (plan of action—cooperative learning, constructivism, whole language, learner centered, concept attainment, indirect teaching, lecture, guided practice, teaching for understanding, teaching by invitation, multiple intelligences, etc. (By attaching a different name to an activity it is assumed that a different teaching style is activated.)

Misunderstandings occur when one fails to realize that teaching is:

"governed by a single unifying process: decision making Every act of deliberate teaching is a consequence of a prior decision. Decision making is the central or primary behavior that governs all the behaviors... " (Mosston, 1966, 72, 81, Mosston & Ashworth, 86, 90, 94).

It is not a function of a philosophical approach, isolated objectives, jargon, or content guidelines that first determine a teaching approach. Rather a teaching approach is determined by the primary factor that fosters the teaching-learning relationship—decisions. Skill in the following three areas is necessary when determining a teaching approach:

1. The ability to identify the various decisions using specific names
2. The ability to identify "who is making which decisions about what, when"
3. The ability to identify the implications of the relationship as they relate to a specific decision category - then as they relate to its philosophical approach, objectives, jargon, and content standards

Maintaining congruence between the behavior intentions of a *teaching style, strategy, method, or model* and the actual decisions made by the teacher and learner IS the primary issue in ANY aspect of designing, implementing, researching, or assessing teaching-learning events.

³ Bellon, J., Bellon, E. & Blank, M. *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base*. Merrill of Macmillan Publishing Co. New York 1992, p 413.

⁴ Good, T. & Brophy, J. *Looking in Classrooms* 7th edition. Longman of Addison Wesley Longman, Inc. New York, 1997, p 359

There are many approaches for determining the teaching style. Two are:

1. To identify generalized behaviors (the actions, the interactions) of the teacher and learner. These behaviors intrinsically represent a "decision category" and a corresponding set of objectives. (In order to assess the *action*, an understanding of the "decision categories" is necessary.)
2. To identify the individual decisions (the analyzer must be proficient in understanding and knowing the various decisions -- the *anatomy of any style*, "the conceivable categories of decisions that must be made in any teaching-learning transaction."⁵ Assessment can then occur according to the corresponding decision category and its implications.

Realizing the essential contribution that decisions make in our understanding of teaching options, I added the following clarification to the definition of a teaching style:

A teaching style (method, model, strategy) is a plan of action that defines the specific decisions of the teacher and the learner for the purpose of accomplishing objectives in subject matter and behavior.

Note that there appears to be agreement within the profession that multiple yet *DIFFERENT*— teaching styles do exist. Accepting that this position is true, then, according to the definition of a teaching approach, each distinct teaching style must represent a *different* plan of action that defines *different* behaviors (decisions) for both the teacher and learners for the purpose of accomplishing *different* objectives in subject matter and behavior.

The Spectrum identifies 11 **landmark** teaching styles. . . Why landmark?

Although it is theoretically possible for each and every decision to be a different learning experience, Muska Mosston discovered that by shifting only one decision at a time a different, a (sign)ificantly different teacher-learner relationship did not occur. Although each decision needs to be *learned*, *practiced*, and *internalized*, it did not theoretically follow that every possible decision represented a different teaching relationship. The unique feature of the Spectrum is Muska's identification of the "categories of specific decisions" that determined (sign)ificantly different landmark teaching-learning relationships.

Each of the Spectrum's teaching styles depicts a cluster of specific decisions; each decision cluster fosters development in a different set of human attributes⁶ (objectives). These human attributes (educational objectives) are the *characteristics* which humans *learn* in order to be functioning human beings. These human attributes are the substance of education.

The clustering of decision in each of the Spectrum's teaching styles produces a *categorization system of human behavior*. The Spectrum is not a closed system. It is possible to create a wide vista of teaching-learning options, by identifying the primary decisions within each style and understanding the potential combinations of decisions. Collectively the Spectrum's teaching styles and its possible combinations embrace the possible range of human behavior options. The simplicity or the complexity of any teaching-learning transaction can always be decoded for its educational value and consequences to learning by identify the decision relationship among the teacher, the learner, and the content.

How does one analyze a classroom teaching experience to determine the teaching approach and the learning implications? The following is a guide to identify the decisions, the objectives, the essence of the

⁵ Mosston & Ashworth. The Spectrum of Teaching Styles From Command to Discovery. Longman Publishers New York 1990,p4.

⁶ Human attributes refer to the Developmental Channels as presented in the Spectrum.

teaching-learning relationship. Its intent is to focus on the generalized behaviors (the action and the interactions).

IDENTIFICATION OF CLASSROOM TEACHING STYLES

As Delineated by THE SPECTRUM OF TEACHING STYLES

Name:

Directions: To identify the Teaching Style, record by checking the classroom action as it relates to:

1. Subject Matter expectations - Reproduction (Memory processes) or Production (Discovery processes)
2. Learner expectations in the task

Each time the task changes (cognitive process), re-examine the expectations to determine if a different teaching style is employed. The intent of this analysis is to quickly determine the overall teaching style in use. The fidelity of the teaching style is not determined by this analysis tool. Note, expectations may or may not be stated. Observe the students to determine the specific "behaviors" expected.

Expectations:

Subject Matter Criteria which Identify Reproductive Tasks..

... Any of the following four criteria represents Reproductive Tasks...

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Content that is delivered is to be replicated or listened to by the learners... | A correctness exists in the subject matter task... | A model serves as the desired performance outcome... | Memory cognitive operation (s) elicited ... | Other. Can be passive or active. |
| | | | | |

Behavior Criteria which Indicate the Particular Reproductive Teaching Style...

... Identify the way students are asked to be involved in the subject matter...

| | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| Behavior: . Synchronized . In Unison . Choral Responses . Stimulus immediate response . Behavior follows a cue or signal and performance to following a specific pace and rhythm | Behavior: . Practice time and . Receives feedback (When and if feedback is offered it is by a skilled source: either the teacher or a peer) . Practice can be individual or in groups OR Any classroom interaction seeking "correct answers" (Guided practice, Question and Answer Lessons, Reviews, "Ditto's", Opinion or Review Discussions; Lectures; Station/Centers Films; Share Time activities, etc.) Any "Listening" task | Behavior: . Partner practice with . Learner feedback following teacher prepared criteria and with . Opportunity for partners to switch practice and feedback roles (both learners engage in: . practicing the task while receiving immediate feedback and . practice offering immediate feedback using a prepared criterion) | Behavior: . Practice time and . Engages in self-evaluation . Criteria is provided or identified by the teacher . Practice and checking can be individual or in groups... A prepared or established criterion serves as the source for checking answers. | Behavior: . Practice time . selects entry level among various levels with different "degrees of difficulty" for an individual practice and . Engages in self assessment and . Opportunity to adjust task selection if too difficult or not difficult enough All learners are engaged in the same task but practicing at different levels of difficulty which they have chosen |
| Command Style A | Practice Style B | Reciprocal Style C | Self Check Style D | Inclusion Style E |
| | | | | |

Expectations:

Subject Matter Criteria which Identify Productive Tasks...

...Any of the following four criteria represents Productive/Discovery tasks...

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Subject matter is discovered ... | A "correctness" exists in the subject matter response, but the delivery process shifts to discovery. The concept is stated (discovered) by the learner | Discovery cognitive operations elicited (State the question asked: | Feedback is neutral for individual responses Value feedback may be given for |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|

| | | | |
|--|---|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | (convergent discovery thinking) OR A "desired correctness" is not anticipated, but rather the production of multiple discovered responses within a particular question (cognitive operation) are elicited..(divergent discovery thinking) | " _____ _____" | the process engaged in Other: |
| | | | |

Behavior Criteria which Indicate the Particular Productive Teaching Style..

... Identify the way students are asked to be involved in the subject matter..

| | | | |
|---|--|---|----------------------|
| <p>Behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Engages learners in a series of sequenced questions, each logically designed to elicit A "correct answers" which leads the learners to discover The predetermined target <p>The target can be a concept, principle, rule, relationship – the target cannot be a date, a name, a vocabulary word or a remembered fact. If the learner knows the target BEFORE asking the questions, the experience is not discovery.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . most desirable with one student . can be implemented with more than one | <p>Behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Engages learners in one question that requires logical, connected, sequenced "thinkin" in order to discover a predetermined target. . Additional questions are not provided each learner "figures out"/discovers THE answer without assistance. | <p>Behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Engages learners in A question that triggers a specific discovery cognitive operation <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . each learner produces multiple "discovered" responses. Learners' responses will differ <p>Name the Dominate Cognitive operation:</p> <hr/> | <p>Other:</p> |
| Guided Discovery Style F | Convergent Discovery Style G | Divergent Discovery Style H | |
| | | | |

The foregoing chart assists in identifying the *teaching style* by focusing on the generalized behaviors (the actions and interactions) of the teacher and learner. All behaviors intrinsically represent one of the *landmark decision categories* and each decision category features a corresponding set of human attributes (objectives) to be exercised. Identifying the "kinds" of generalized behaviors that occur in the classroom is critical for determining the "range" of educational experiences learners receive. Educational experiences are always expressed and assessed in terms of different human attributes. This chart and its analysis does not seek to determine the fidelity of the decisions to the Spectrum's landmark teaching styles. It merely connects the generalized behaviors to one of the landmark teaching-learning possibilities. Implications can then be made within the decision structure of the *landmark* teaching style.

A different chart is necessary if the intent of the analysis is to determine the **fidelity of the decisions** to a particular teaching style. When focusing on the specific DECISIONS, it is possible to address a variety of issues about behavior -- its intentional or haphazard development, its range in offering experiences in a variety of decision possibilities, its sustained emphasis, its appropriateness to content, its developmental channel emphasis, its consistency and fidelity to acquisition of human attributes, goals, and outcomes, etc.

Adding a decision focus into the analysis of classroom events, expands the opportunities to evaluate learning and what is learned.

One of the premises of the Spectrum is the efficacy of deliberate decision making. Deliberate articulation and sustained involvement in making a variety of specific decisions are mandatory if learners are to become cognizant, skilled, and competent in the process of decision-making. At some point within the evolution of educational priorities, decisions will become a focal point and each decision will gain its place of importance as it contributes to learning - to human development.

Structuring a Teaching Sequence

When designing, implementing, or assessing a teaching style, it is possible to "identify" the plan of action, the objectives, and implications to learning in a selected teaching style (*method, strategy, model*). All teaching options have common characteristics:

1. They are executed within episodes—a period of time within which the teacher and the learner are engaged in the same teaching style, going toward the same objectives ⁷.
2. They share common expectations
3. They share a common sequence

All teaching styles have a beginning and an end. Although a primary teaching option may be sustained throughout the day(s), a series of events always occur within the classroom and each event is represented by its own expectations to content acquisition, to a relationship/interaction between teacher and learners, to management of logistical events, and to a time frame. All of these expectations reside within any and every selected teaching option.⁸ When any of these variables changes, the teaching event (the episode) ends and a new one begins. The next episode may or may not represent the same set of expectations the same teaching style. Therefore, when analyzing teaching it is necessary to view the events within their prescribed episode.

The following chart depicts the sequence that is always present (deliberately, haphazardly, or by default) in every teaching episode.

Teaching Style Sequence – A Teaching Episode

| | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | Delivery of the three expectations (they may occur in any order) | Each expectation can be delivered: 1. Deliberately, 2. Haphazardly, 3. By Default |
| | a. Subject matter presentation | |
| | b. Behavior | |
| | c. Logistics | |
| 2. | Questions for Clarifications | |
| 3. | Action, Task Engagement, Task Performance | |
| 4. | Feedback (can occur at any time) | |
| 5. | Closure | Indication an end to the episode |

⁷ Mosston & Ashworth. The Spectrum of Teaching Styles From Command to Discovery. Longman Publishers, New York 1990, p32

⁸ In the Spectrum language this comment can also be expressed by saying that all episodes include the three sets within the Anatomy of any Style—preimpact, impact, and postimpact. The decisions within these sets may be intentional, haphazard, or implied.

Every teaching event (teaching episode) in almost all teaching styles benefits from awareness of this sequence and knowing when to follow it deliberately, haphazardly, or when to ignore various sections. The data collected from this sequence can be examined from one of two perspectives:

1. Identification of generalized behaviors or
2. Identification of the individual decisions.

The conclusions and implications drawn from the data will either clearly reinforce or deviate from the essence of teaching:

To identify a plan of action that defines the specific decisions of the teacher and the learner for the purpose of accomplishing objectives in subject matter and behavior.

In conclusion: Practice observing classroom teaching by focusing on *episodes*. Observe the *teaching style sequence*. Then make conclusions about the plan of action, the specific decisions, objectives in subject matter and behavior. Identify the degree of deliberate delivery and accomplishment within the teaching-learning relationship. Then compare the range of human attributes that are experienced in the classroom to the range of teaching options that is theoretically possible.

The more precise a definition, the more able we are to identify *it* when we see *it*.... and the more able we are to know why *it is* effective or why and when *it isn't*. Such is the goal in offering a more prescriptive definition for the frequently used terms which represent the possible teaching-learning relationships within our profession. Fundamental concepts need uniform definitions.