

Philosophy of Teaching Statement

The TEACH Project believes teaching and learning is a collective enterprise, where participants are actively engaged in discovering, critically analyzing and applying new knowledge and skills. We ensure that all professionals we recruit to join our faculty are oriented to, and comfortable teaching in, an instructional context that emphasizes constructivist, adult learning approaches and best practices in interprofessional education (IPE) and collaboration (IPC).

We apply constructivist pedagogy by shifting from teacher-centred, didactic instruction to student-centred, applied learning. This means engaging participants' knowledge, skills, experience and assumptions as adult learners, and creating learning opportunities for applying old and new knowledge and skills to real-life clinical issues and dilemmas. Constructivism describes a range of teaching/learning approaches which have at their centre two main principles:

1. Learning is a process rather than an event, in which learners construct (versus acquire) new knowledge and skills
2. Teaching involves supporting that construction, as opposed to lecture based imparting of information or knowledge.

Viewing education and learning as processes (as opposed to outcomes) has direct practice implications. The emphasis is on the learner as an active creator or discoverer of context-relevant skills and information. Some examples of the ways in which a constructivist philosophy is woven into TEACH courses include:

Reciprocal teaching, where the faculty's role is one of coach or guide. Small group case examples and role plays are set up and debriefed by course faculty, with different roles assigned within small groups (e.g., practitioner, patient, coach). Faculty circulate through the room to answer on-the-spot questions, but the applied learning happens in peer-to-peer collaborative interaction. Large-group debriefing facilitates sharing among and between small groups about lessons learned, strengths and areas for further development, as well as the additional questions generated by the activity.

Problem-based learning (PBL), which poses real-life, authentic problems, and asks learners to discover and develop knowledge and skills through the group process of conceptualizing the salient issues, identifying relevant knowledge domains, and applying new knowledge to resolve the problem. This approach is meant to support students in developing critical thinking, reflection, collaboration and knowledge acquisition. Complex case examples and discussion, shared through live or video demonstrations, are examples of how this type of learning is integrated into TEACH courses.

Curriculum development based on student query, which acknowledges that students learn more by formulating questions than by answering them. In this model, students are asked to critically engage with course material by posing questions that further group reflection and debate. For example, participants are encouraged to write down questions and then pose (and respond) to these in a large group “Q and A” session that integrates learning across a range of content areas.

The cultural embeddedness of learning, using the methods and framework of cultural anthropology, is a more explicitly post-modern approach used in TEACH, where learning is understood as context-dependent, and different ways of knowing are acknowledged and valued. For example, in the Aboriginal Tobacco Interventions course, participants learned about culturally specific ways of understanding commercial tobacco use and intervening through: story-telling by Aboriginal Elders, group drumming circles, and teachings from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.

Similar to – and overlapping with – constructivist approaches, adult learning theory also informs our approach in TEACH courses. The model assumes that learners are self-directing, that adults bring a greater volume and different quality of experience than younger learners, that adults are motivated to learn by a need for information or knowledge related to some aspect of their lives, that their perspectives on learning are life-centred, problem-centred or task-centred, and that their motivation is primarily internal.

Finally, TEACH courses are informed by the principles and spirit of interprofessional education and collaboration (IPE and IPC). We recognize that

practitioners are at their most effective when they operate in interdependent teams characterized by knowledge of the roles of others in the team, excellent communication skills, and attitudes that are respectful and trusting of other team members. IPE is infused throughout our courses by actively reaching out to practitioners from over 15 disciplines as participants; modeling IPE and IPC through an interprofessional faculty; promoting group learning and networking among practitioners and faculty; and developing and sustaining an ongoing interprofessional community of practice in tobacco cessation treatment. We are consciously non-hierarchical in sharing knowledge and skills from different professional practice frameworks, meaning that no one approach is privileged above others. Rather, a rigorous critique and reflective practice orientation is promoted in discussing evidence-based practice guidelines and real-world implications.

The title of a 1971 book by Robert Wees, *Nobody Can Teach Anybody Anything*, has as its premise in the notion that learning is a volitional act. Only the learner can decide for him/herself to incorporate new knowledge and skills. Similarly, our underlying goal in each TEACH course is to inspire curiosity, interest and self-awareness with respect to gaps in knowledge/skills, as well as to provide learners with concrete strategies for accessing new and current knowledge, and applying this to professional practice. In our experience, practitioners who are passionate about a subject will go to great lengths to succeed in mastering even the most challenging skills. Therefore, a positive culture of learning, characterized by a willingness to take risks, to make mistakes, and to explore, yields positive learning outcomes.

Reference: Herie, M. (2005). Theoretical perspectives in online pedagogy. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 23(1-2), 29-52.