

Overview of the Teaching Institute

The activities and accompanying resources of the Institute provide participants with a greater understanding of Process Education and key educational processes (learning, teaching, mentoring, curriculum design, and assessment). Numerous tools and techniques are introduced to help faculty facilitate students' skills with respect to critical thinking, real-time assessment, cooperative learning, journal writing, guided discovery learning, and problem solving. In addition, techniques for self-assessment, constructive interventions, and peer coaching are introduced.

Teaching Institutes are designed so that participants learn by doing. By experiencing process-oriented learning environments from different perspectives, including that of a student, participants gain a greater appreciation for the efforts required, the benefits gained, and the manner in which students learn. During the Institute, participants are encouraged to take on a high degree of learner ownership, just as students are expected to do.

Throughout the Institute participants are challenged to think about their role as educators and their own philosophy of education. Participants should analyze, assess, and determine which ideas, concepts, and practices are most relevant in their specific contexts, realizing that implementation of the philosophy of Process Education will be different for each person. What's important, is that participants take full advantage of this unique opportunity to better themselves as educators and learners.

Guided-Discovery Learning

In a process-learning environment it is important that students access appropriate information through suitably designed conceptual models and methodologies to discover and construct knowledge themselves. Discovery-based learning and applied critical thinking are inextricably linked. The key is that students are allowed to be the active agents in the learning process. One of the primary statements in a process classroom is "try it!" While it is tempting for faculty members to switch to "explanation mode" by answering a question with an eloquent, informative response, students will benefit more from a facilitator who stands back and encourages or challenges them to discover an answer on their own.

Many Institute activities are designed according to a learning model that incorporates a guided-discovery approach to learning. Participants can expect to learn by inquiry and discovery. However, unlike open discovery or research, the activities follow a more structured approach with objectives, criteria, plans, and critical thinking questions. Critical thinking questions are a key component to guided-discovery learning. It is our contention that learning involves critical thought, and that the level of understanding (of new content) is associated with the level of critical thought applied.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a structured process in which a team masters the learning objectives for a defined activity. Certain activities during the Institute are performed in cooperative groups. Cooperative learning affords the opportunity to develop numerous skills associated with communication, teamwork, and assessment. The best way to master cooperative learning techniques is to practice them from the perspective of a learner. During activities that involve cooperative learning, team roles will be utilized to increase individual accountability and overall performance outcomes. Participants have the opportunity to experience and practice different roles throughout the Institute.

Affective Issues

The demands on student performance in a process class are greater than the performance requirements for a traditional lecture course. Learner ownership is greater, teamwork is often required, various forms of journals are kept, self-assessments are made, and so on. In a similar manner, the demands on participant performance in a Teaching Institute are higher than those of participants at conference presentations and workshops. Increased demands on individual and team performance do result in the emergence of affective issues.

Learning environments where self-growth is desired and performance expectations are high tend to bring out affect issues that might otherwise stay hidden. In these types of situations, learners and participants must commonly deal with emotions such as uncertainty, anxiety, confusion, and a sense of being overwhelmed. During the Institute, it is common for participants to experience some degree of frustration; some may even ask if there is a purpose for their discomfort.

Realize that one source of potential discomfort comes from the fact that participants typically play three different roles during a Teaching Institute. These roles include: (1) learners who are trying to gain a better understanding of Process Education, (2) educators who are trying to transfer specific techniques to their own courses, and (3) researchers who are constantly evaluating the content presented during the Institute to determine what merits their future attention. In addition, these roles are played while participants are performing in learning activities, many of which require teamwork and attention to specific team roles.

The environment of a Teaching Institute typically leads to some degree of frustration at some point. Some of the causes for frustration of participants include:

- Experiencing an active learning environment from the perspective of a learner (with all of the success and frustration that active learners experience)
- Having to perform and work within a cooperative team
- Dealing with the high level of self-assessment that is required throughout the Institute
- Having to perform in public (among peers) with explicitly defined performance criteria
- Coming to the realization that the role of a faculty member in Process Education offers many new challenges and opportunities
- Lacking proper preparation for an event of this nature
- Handling the amount of ownership and responsibility that is shifted to Institute participants
- Juggling three roles simultaneously during the Institute—that of learner, teacher, and researcher

Journal Writing

Group and individual journal writing provide learners with an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned, to articulate and generalize concepts, and to learn from problems or difficulties that they have encountered. Journaling also provides a convenient method for developing critical thinking and written communication skills. Journal writing will be utilized throughout the Institute as a means to document both content and process issues, as well as to enhance structured reflective thought, assessment, and self-assessment.

Self-Assessment

A main goal of Process Education is to facilitate student growth by focusing on the improvement of a set of learning skills. Since self-assessment is so essential for growth and improvement, it will be emphasized during the Institute. Strong self-assessment skills are essential for a student to become a self-grower. A key

characteristic of a self-directed learner is the ability to differentiate between “thinking he/she knows” and “knowing he/she knows.” A self-grower does not rely on the instructor to validate and assess the accuracy and quality of his or her learning. To encourage self-assessment, a facilitator needs to establish an environment where self-assessment is safe, achievable, and valued.

Final Thoughts

To gain the most from this experience, participants should (1) put themselves in the role of students with a high degree of learner ownership, (2) continually assess and decide throughout the Institute what will work best for them and their students, based on their context, and (3) develop an implementation plan and follow through with the plan after the Institute.