Philosophy of Learning

### Learners

The learner is most central to the process of learning. It is their motivations, backgrounds, contexts, and experiences that must first inform the structure of the learning environment and the approach taken in the learning process. In addition, it is their work which brings about learning. The instructor’s role, then, is to provide and maintain an environment that is safe and welcoming for learners from all contexts and to invite learners to engage in doing the work of making sense of the domain of study. In my courses, this happens both synchronously and asynchronously as learners work with each other and with me to explore ideas and competencies through various media channels and then reflect on their process and its outcomes.

### Influences

My philosophy and practice of teaching and learning is informed by the work of several historical and contemporary scholars and practitioners, including social constructivists like Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, as well as more contemporary scholars who have advanced the Community of Inquiry model (Vaughan et al., 2013). While it seems obvious that learning can happen in a self-directed manner and with little synchronous interaction, I believe that learning can be enhanced in social contexts and through meaningful dialogue and interaction with experts, other learners, and various texts and media. It is through this discourse, whether synchronous or asynchronous, that learners are able to make sense of the domain, or, as appropriate, to conceive of and interrogate knowledge that emerges from the discourse. In my experience as a teacher and a learner, one barrier to rich learning experiences is feeling isolated when you would rather be in community. One structure I encourage, but not require, for those who desire to work with others in an online modality, is learning pods, which are groups of 2-4 learners who meet regularly to review each others’ work, ask questions, and get clarification about both course logistics and the content domain.

### Openness

I believe in the value of openness in education, which is enacted on several different levels, including *participation*, where barriers to access learning opportunities are removed and learners are invited into the community as contributors. The ability to participate in scholarly discourse has historically privileged those in western and European countries, but by opening avenues for those in the global south, more diverse views and ways of knowing are given voice. This is a critical component of the goal of realizing greater degrees of justice for those who have been excluded (Lambert, 2018). Irvine’s (2009, 2020) idea of multi-access learning environments are examples of models which allow for learners to customize the modality through with they engage in learning environments, thus increasing access to those who have particular requirements. Openness is also enacted in *pedagogy* where learning activities are enhanced by the *permissions* applied to open licenses that allow and encourage remixing, revising, reusing, retaining, and redistributing resources (Wiley, 2017). Openness is encouraged by institutional *policies* that remove barriers to access for learners. These policies can reduce costs, expand admissions, and allow for flexibility of participation. Finally, openness is enabled by open *platforms* which allow and encourage learner agency and ownership over their own work.

I strive for openness in my teaching and learning by publishing the vast majority of my work online and under a Creative Commons Attibution-Share-Alike license. You are invited to see examples at [grav.madland.ca](https://grav.madland.ca), [teaching.madland.ca](https://teaching.madland.ca), [edtechuvic.ca/edci335](https://edtechuvic.ca/edci335), [edtechuvic.ca/edci339](https://edtechuvic.ca/edci339) and [multi-access.twu.ca/tone](https://multi-access.twu.ca/tone). I practice openness in my courses by ensuring course policies are flexible to allow for learners to participate despite barriers due to their personal context, ensuring course materials are openly available, inviting learners to share their contributions in public, and to influence the direction of course assignments and expectations to suit their contexts.

### Innovation and Disruption

Pedagogical practices are ripe for disruption in higher education. It is no longer sufficient to ‘cover’ content and expect learners to repeat back what they have learned. Citizens in the 21st century require competence in collaboration, divergent thinking, empathy, and communication (Broadfoot, 2016; Timmis et al., 2016). Standard didactic teaching methods are poor media for engaging learners in truly transformative learning experiences, and popular methods of assessment, like selected-response tests, are becoming less capable of providing meaningful information about learners’ affective competencies. Add to this the influence of digital technologies like blockchain, machine learning, or virtual/augmented reality in society which have yet to significantly impact practices in higher education, and there is growing need to research the impacts of these technologies on pedagogy, assessment, credentialing, and accountability (Pellegrino & Quellmalz, 2010). Impacts extend also to teachers and learners as people who are members of increasingly digital societies. The growing backlash against machine learning-driven algorithmic proctoring among learners should be taken as a signal that higher education must take the lead in thinking about the ethics of technology use in learning.

### References

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