



Anyone Can Teach

Moodle LMS Rubric Modularization Learning Objectives Constructivism Bloom's Taxonomy Assessment Blackboard LMS Course Design

In my final year of my doctoral program at Penn State, I was contemplating a career as a college teacher and concerned that I knew nothing of the formal process of teaching. I identified a graduate level course on college teaching in the education department, but was quickly dissuaded by my doctoral committee with the pronouncement, "*Anyone can teach*". I should have known better, having experienced more than a few awful college teachers in my undergraduate years.

My graduate program prepared me well in my chosen field of study, and gave me the requisite skills to survive as a researcher. What I didn't learn in grad school was how to organize a course, create an outline, write a course plan, a lecture plan, how to make best use of a textbook, how write midterms and final exams, how to grade, and how to know if you have succeeded at any of the above. They gave me a sword and a shield, but not a map or a field guide. I was on my own.

My first teaching job was at Colgate University. The students were highly selective, eager, serious, and curious about everything the world had to offer. Most of the faculty there were exceptional teachers. My department chair and faculty mentor gave me one simple and useful rubric for classroom work: Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them. Otherwise, he assumed, as did others, that "*anyone can teach*".

My teaching load required five new course preparations in my first year. I relied heavily on textbooks, which were a godsend of material organization. I struggled mightily with course organization, writing exams and worst of all grading my own exams. I learned in time that your students would tell you in a variety of ways whether your lectures are working, or not. I learned from grading my own exams what knowledge I had successfully imparted in my classes and where I had failed miserably.

I had yet to discover learning objectives¹, modularization, and exams that teach and guide the absorption of knowledge. I had yet to learn that lectures and indeed courses could be finely tuned machines for the organization and delivery of information, knowledge and skills. I survived my teaching deficiencies by cultivating personal mentorships with my students individually. My students survived because they were bright, and curious and forgiving. I hope at least I did them no harm.

I left Colgate, still a floundering teacher and would spend the rest of my career on college campuses observing the teaching and learning experience, its successes and failures. A Cornell colleague once told me, “A student’s life is a trail from the admissions office to the placement office, and hopefully we will not screw them up in-between”.

Little has changed in the last thirty years. The demands of an academic career are biased in favor of research, publishing, grants, and institutional participation. “Teaching is just the way we pay the rent”, that same colleague told me. After all, *anyone can teach*. Socrates said so.

My move from Colgate to Cornell was also a career move from researcher-teacher to administrator-teacher. There I found myself in charge of a remedial learning center staffed by education professionals, and through them, for the first time, became immersed in the tools and language of instructional design. I learned how to write learning objectives, course outline development, modularization, managing feedback, writing exams, and assessment rubrics. All the stuff I wished I had learned during my graduate education but didn’t².

The systematic nature of the teaching concepts developed in departments and colleges of education would eventually draw the attention computer programmers and give birth to learning management systems (LMS)³. All of the tools to build a well-organized and delivered course were there for the taking. Traditional faculty were slow and at times resistant to embracing these systems, but they would ultimately change the face of college-classroom-education and set the stage for the explosion of online learning that would follow.

All of these changes came together for me late in my career when I became General Education Director and online teacher for American Sentinel University, an all-online college based in Colorado. I was charged with organizing and developing online undergraduate courses for a variety of course subjects. I learned the intricacies of developing courses inside a learning management system, and aggregating instructional material from a wide range of public and commercial sources -- text, video, images, tables, charts and graphs, -- and use them as building blocks for a meaningful learning experience. I learned to harness the power of peer education through well-mentored discussion boards. I learned how to organize curriculum into coherent academic programs.

It has been a long and sometimes frustrating journey for me, and sure many others. I have always been in envy of naturally gifted teachers, but there are many paths to learning and good organization can compensate for many other failings. *Anyone can teach* if they have the right tools.

1. Articulate Your Learning Objectives, Eberly Learning Center, Carnegie Mellon University <http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/learningobjectives.html>
2. CRLT Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tslt>
3. Learning management Systems https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_management_system