

Advice on teaching and learning

by Bea Groves-McDaniel. March 2026.

- (a) **Lower the emotional temperature.** Enable a relaxed and unthreatening environment where discourse and imagination are possible.
- (b) **Create multiple environments** for involvement.
- (c) Let the students **organise themselves** whenever possible.
- (d) **Leadership means legitimacy:** don't ask them to do anything you wouldn't do!
- (e) **Never teach-to-the-test** (and never teach to the Ofsted visit!)
- (f) **Learn from others** – network as much as possible. Especially with your students.
- (g) If the answer to a problem is a piece of paper, then **it's the wrong answer.**
- (h) **ALL learning is situated** – there is NO SUCH THING as 'abstract' learning.
- (i) **Have fun...** both you and they.
- (j) **If you're not enjoying it,** then they probably aren't either.
- (k) **Coffee breaks** are a religion!
- (l) They will always remember **the LAST thing you taught.** So make it good!
- (m) **Memory is not a 'recording device'.** Memory is constructed and reconstructed through time.
- (n) **The collective nature of learning** is ESSENTIAL to mediate consistency in understanding. It's through our discourse with others that we can gain a 'purchase' on the world.
- (o) **Cultures matter!**
- (p) **Get to know them.** What are their likes/dislikes? What do they fear? What's their partner's name? (or their dog's!)...
- (q) **There will always be failures,** but how these are talked about matters re' future achievement!
- (r) Say to them: **the only way you can fail is by not turning up!**
- (s) Group dynamic is about **'legitimate peripheral participation'** -- students start as newcomers on the edge of their group and, through time, progress to a distinct communal role. This needs fostering, as it is vital for progress.

- (t) There is some **truth in behaviourism**, but not all the time!
- (u) **Communication** is the most essential aspect of teaching and learning, and yet it is greatly neglected. What else do teachers and students do if not communicate? (In the widest sense of the word).
- (v) **Assessment should be as simple** to understand as is humanly possible. Complex assessment destabilises power-relations in courses and degrades student autonomy.
- (w) **The map is not the territory**: a course with too many learning outcomes does not mean assessment is more detailed. Indeed, it often misses the point altogether.
- (x) **Adults have lives** outside of the course. Live with it!
- (y) The most **relevant thinkers** to learning today are Lave & Wenger, Vygotsky, Skinner, Kahneman, Wittgenstein, Freire, Wiliam, and Loftus.

