



## A World of Pedagogic Principles: The Idea of Principles in Academic Pedagogy

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### Abstract

*Principles are by definition abstract notions and, as such, their precise identification may be an onerous task, especially when it comes to them acting as indicators of the inherent pedagogic value of proposed or applied educational models and approaches. Nevertheless, pedagogic principles can be crystallised and agreed upon and can act as objective starting points in one's pedagogic endeavours. The paper, thus, explores the practical application and the theoretical character of pedagogic principles. It then proceeds by offering examples of what could constitute pedagogic principles in the academic environment and examines the value of such from a theoretical and practical perspective. Elaborating on the idea of Academic Freedom the paper advocates a model of pedagogy wherein the objective character of pedagogic approaches based on principles can still flourish further by the hybridisation of such approaches with subjective pedagogic models that have been tested in practice. The paper concludes with evaluating certain modern developments in the area of pedagogic principles.*

**Keywords:** Principles, *pedagogic principles*, *tertiary education*, objectivity, subjectivity, *academic freedom*.

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the idea of pedagogic principles. It is the case that principles are rather abstract notions and, as such, their precise identification may be an onerous task. However, their identification and application should in all probability result in a better academic product, in that a principled approach is one that creates legitimate pedagogic expectations, a clearer pedagogic path. On the basis that an academic community's members would largely agree with certain pedagogic principles, such principles could act as useful indicators. Furthermore, the principles proposed herein are offered on an indicative basis but it is posited that such principles can constitute the basis for an academic pedagogy which would, at the very least, strive to evolve.

#### 1.1. The Idea of Principles

Principles, together with values, constitute the apex of human existence and endeavours. Principles define our laws, our constitutions, our lives, our educational systems, our existence. One might not agree with the principles of another person, yet it is the case that principles define human existence. Principles are not practices. Principles are not doctrines either, as doctrines are not normally open to adaptation or improvement. For the purposes of academic education, principles could be perceived as starting points, one's initial compass in the world of pedagogic ontology.

#### 1.2. A Few Explanatory Notes for the Reader

One should not confuse principles of academic pedagogy with outcomes. It would, therefore, be quite important for one to appreciate that pedagogy, indeed academic pedagogy, should not reduce themselves into metrics and outcomes. In any case, the search for and articulation of pedagogic principles is an important pursuit toward our philosophies and practices of education. One is well-aware of the dangers surrounding modern liberal academic education, the most obvious one being a neoliberal, macdonaldised (Hayes, 2002), commercialised type of education and pedagogy where everything (or almost everything) has to be sacrificed in the altar of profit-making and economic goals disconnected from Academia.

The paper's approach otherwise hovers between the worlds of subjectivity and objectivity. For instance, the proposed pedagogic principle of academic freedom is something that, by definition, comes with a subjective essence to it, whilst other proposed principles herein, such as communication and observation of pedagogy, are somewhat more objective ones and so on.

Finally, it is to be reiterated that the identification of principles is a daunting task in itself, especially considering the magnificent wealth Academia comes with in terms of the diversity and differentiation between educational/pedagogical approaches, directions, purposes, disciplinary and



institutional contexts, and more. In this respect, the ultimate goal of this paper would be to instigate discussion around the nature and value of pedagogic principles, and the fact that such principles are necessarily malleable and never monolithic in a universe of educational priorities and perspectives.

## 2. Academic Pedagogy Principles *per se*

Everyone has principles. Everyone aspires to principles. Even the person who claims that they do not have any principles has a fundamental code of principles as to their non-compliance with the principles of others. Principles govern human existence. Our laws. Our States. Our education.

Principles are constitutive of values. They correspond to values. In our case, the relevant value would be that of education, the proposed principles allowing for the value of education to further materialise. The paper's proposed principles are explored below and are provided in Figure 1 in diagrammatical form.

### *Academic Pedagogy Principles*

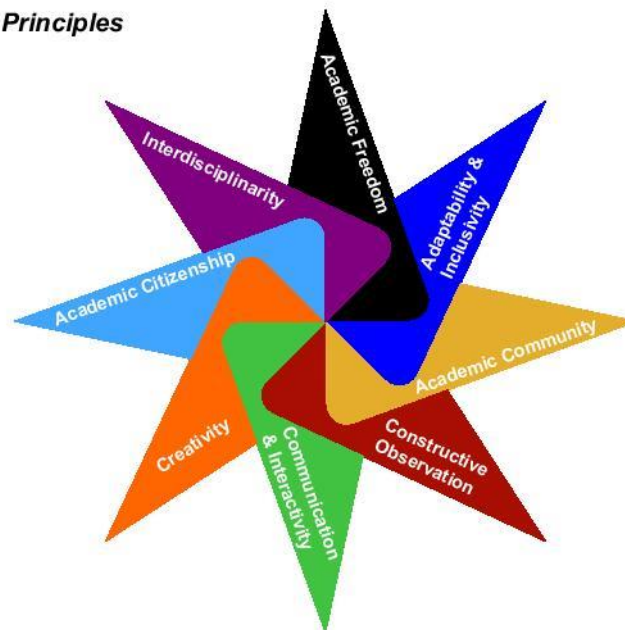


Fig. 1 Academic Pedagogy Principles

### 2.1. Academic Freedom

A principle, second to none in academic life, is the principle of academic freedom. All pedagogy, all research, all operations in Academia ultimately succumb to the principle of academic freedom. All we do, all we will ever do in Academia would ultimately have to be done in freedom. Academic freedom is, in the essence of the matter, all that Academia stands for; remove the spirit of academic freedom from higher education institutions and all that would be left would be centres of indoctrination, a mere shadow of what universities should be about.

### 2.2. Spirit of Academic Community

Our second principle would have to be that of academic community. It is quite important that instructors and students pedagogically flourish in an environment wherein the bonds between them are not merely functional or formal. It is the case that in such an environment *both* pedagogues and students promote such a spirit of academic community, for both of them work towards the same goal, knowledge (Granados Beltrán, 2009: 40). Such a principle would be about a continuous dialogue between academic instructors and students. Yet it would also be about a continuous dialogue between students themselves as well as about a continuous dialogue between academic instructors themselves. Even then, the spirit of academic community of a given university would further strengthen if the students and the instructors of such a university would engage in a continuous dialogue with colleagues and students from other academic institutions, from other countries and so on. The principle also entails a constant dialogue of academic community with society.



### 2.3. Adaptability & Inclusivity

There is no such thing as perfect pedagogy. The closest one would ever get to good pedagogy is a type of pedagogy that is flexible and adapts. What was close-to-perfect yesterday might not be anywhere near perfect tomorrow. There is, however, pedagogy that comes close to excellence. Such is the pedagogy that adapts its modes of instruction (Ikwumelu, Ogene, Oyibe & Oketa, 2015), its curricula, its operations, its teaching and learning strategies to the needs of students, economies and society. Such is the pedagogy that is inclusive and caters for the needs of as many different types of learners as possible (Borich, 2011: 41); a pedagogy that deploys as many pedagogic tools as possible. This is a type of pedagogy that is outward-looking, exciting, inspiring and flexible. It is about experimentation: it is about getting it wrong to get it right. The magnificence of a relatively flexible model of pedagogy lies exactly in the fact that it is not a static, educationally conservative and parochial model of education. Flexibility and adaptability in academic education are strengths; not weaknesses or concessions of pedagogic defeat. It takes sensitive academic spirits, a pro-active student community, cognition, adaptation and contextualisation of the latest pedagogic developments for such a dynamic model of flexible education to flourish.

### 2.4. Communication & Interactivity

Pedagogy is about communication. Excellent pedagogy is about excellent communication, a two-way type of communication initially; a multidirectional type of communication upon maturing of the pedagogic model. An excellent pedagogue is an excellent communicator. An excellent pedagogue is a pedagogue who interacts with student body. A pedagogue of the kind would not only interact with student body but would also allow student body full intellectual autonomy in interacting with him as well as with itself. One could, of course, juxtapose this pedagogue with that instructor who does not trigger the academic curiosity of students; who does not allow student body to actively participate in the learning processes; who delivers their teaching on a merely functional basis and so on. Pedagogy, however, is not a job. It is a function; a sort of a secret map that must be offered and revealed in good time and in the right way to student body. A bit like in Calvino's (1979: 71) city of water, Esmeralda, the pedagogue's ultimate responsibility would be to set out 'the network of [communication] routes [...] marked in different coloured links, all these routes, solid or liquid, evident and hidden'.

### 2.5. Constructive Observation

Pedagogy strives to self-perfect through constructive observation. There is no such thing as a single approach to pedagogy. Nor should there be. There would not be such a thing as a perfect pedagogy either. Nevertheless, there should be such a thing as an evolving type of academic pedagogy. Each pedagogue comes with their unique characteristics in their pedagogic operations. Yet one's pedagogic uniqueness does not mean that one's pedagogy ought not to be the subject matter of constructive observation (Millis, 1992) by students and colleagues. It would, therefore, not be about one's own reflection of their pedagogy, at least not exclusively, as this would create a very subjective model of academic pedagogy. It would predominantly be about constructive observation in addition to certain reflection. The proposed principle otherwise links with the principle of building a spirit of academic community, in that it perceives students and colleagues as active stakeholders and constructive observers of one's pedagogy.

### 2.6. Interdisciplinarity

Whilst in so many of the things we do in academic pedagogy we create specialised spirits, it would be important for our graduates to have also developed a more wide-ranging type of education, which would include, at the very least, a certain few subjects beyond their discipline's subjects (Haynes, 2002: 17). The old question as to creating *homines universales* over *homines speciales* becomes relevant here but it would be quite important for graduates, who would have otherwise specialized in a given discipline, to have minimal awareness, minimal cognition and minimal familiarization with certain subjects beyond those within their discipline. Interdisciplinarity is somewhat more straightforward a matter in the theoretical disciplines. However, even students following positivist subjects should be offered the opportunity for certain exposure to subjects from other positivist and theoretical disciplines.

### 2.7. Creativity

To create enquiring, critical, independent, free minds is one of the main goals of Academia. Pedagogy is not about intellectual spoon-feeding. It is about triggering thinking processes, inspiring, streamlining



and enabling. To excite the academic curiosity of student body is a *sine qua non* of academic pedagogy. There will always be more to be discovered; there will always more to be revealed. This is the essence of knowledge: the ever-lasting journey towards new knowledge; towards new frontiers. A fundamental principle in our operations, a key indicator, will therefore have to be whether students would have been offered that continuous opportunity to learn more, to go beyond in their learning, to let their creativity develop as much as possible.

## 2.8. Academic Citizens of World-Class Ethos

Last but not least, one should aim to produce not just apt and informed critical creatures in the academic environment. One must strive to produce academic citizens of the highest ethical standards, of world-class ethos; academic citizens who would be cosmopolitan creatures (Coryell, Spencer, Sehin (2014); Platsas, 2015). One ought not to merely produce academic citizens who simply get to have a degree in their hands upon graduation, based on the false belief that 'one's job as an academician would have been done'. One produces academic citizens with the idea in mind that these will ultimately be the persons responsible for the well-being of future societies. 'Aim not just to do well but to do good in your lives' was one of the best lines the author of this contribution has come across in his academic path. Excellence is then about virtue and virtue is about knowledge (Lee, 1994: 3, 12). Thus, it is not just about the production of graduates; it would never just be about our graduates filling jobs and positions that would be necessary for the economy. It is about producing academic citizens of a fine ethos, an ethos that will define the societies of the future. Their future is our future but to solidify this better future for all we must do whatever we can to produce virtuous academic citizens. Academia must constantly strive to be at the forefront of producing citizens of the finest ethos: academic citizens who would make good citizens, good economies, good societies. There lies perhaps the greatest strength of Academia, in its enabling essence for a virtuous society.

## 3. Conclusion

It was the purpose of this contribution to explore the idea of principles in academic pedagogy by proposing a number of principles, such principles acting, potentially, as indicators of higher education pedagogy in the learning environment. The value of principles can be found in the fact that these tend to be objective indicators mostly, especially when compared to one's subjective reflective pedagogic practices. However, reflection is not excluded from our analysis and would be a welcome occurrence in one's academic pedagogy. At other times, one's evaluation of pedagogic principles shows a more specifics-based approach (Vrasidas & Mclsaac. 2010) (as opposed to the more cores-based approach of this paper). Finally, all of our principles would be open to certain adaptation, them ultimately succumbing to the leading principle in Academia, that of academic freedom.

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