

Section 3 - Teaching/Learning Model Philosophy and Assumptions

We at Cambridge College believe that each human is always in the process of becoming--of incorporating into their biographies current learning experiences and thus creating new beings--new leaders. It is our role as educators and trainers to help in this transformation and its manifestation--to become new beings who have transcended their previous state of being and are on their way to becoming leaders who strive to live meaningful and productive personal and professional lives. We are here to help them in the change process and to give authenticity to this new state of being. The impact of this process can only be judged when it helps each individual become the unique person s/he is and wants to be. The Cambridge College teaching and learning model, therefore, is derived from fundamental assumptions emanating from our extensive experiences in working with adults, theories of learning and growth, and the lessons learned in the process of meeting the needs of our students. These experiences have been translated into sound practice. These assumptions and the learnings from this praxis (integration of theory and practice) guide all aspects of programs at Cambridge College: admissions, the learning environment, faculty selection, course offerings, assessment of learning and support services. These assumptions, accompanied by explanatory statements, are listed below:

- A. Adult learners bring multiple roles and agendas with them to the learning situations.
 - 1. The adult as an individual, with personal growth needs: psychological, emotional and intellectual.
 - 2. The adult as a family member: acquiring skills and perspectives to be a better parent.
 - 3. The adult as a professional: acquiring skills and perspectives to be a better worker.
 - 4. The adult as a member of the community: acquiring skills and perspectives as a leader, as an organizer, and as a citizen.

- B. The individuality, diversity, and potential of a learner must be affirmed.
 - 1. Each person can learn.
 - 2. Each person has a unique way of learning [a preferred learning and thinking style].
 - 3. Each person is an expert on his or her life experiences.

- C. Learning originates with experience.
 - 1. At any given time, people are the sum total of their previous and current experiences: they know what they want.
 - 2. Experience is contextual: the group, with its needs, its strengths, and nature of their interaction, then, is the curriculum.
 - 3. All learning is socially constructed. It is individualized for personal need, and for competence.
 - 4. People learn from experience, by modeling theories in their personal lives.
 - 5. The interactive communication: constant “give and take” by student and teacher is extremely important in adult learning.

- D. The content and process of acquiring learning are equally important.
 1. There are always emergent qualities in learning that are contextual.
 2. Learning is an organic process -- a flow.
 3. The blend between structured and unstructured activities will affect the learning outcomes.
 4. Being and feeling part of a learning community enhances learning.

- E. Learning is a lifelong process.
 1. Learning how to learn [metacognition] is empowering.
 2. Learning changes the learner.
 3. Learning is healing: learning transcends all inequities.
 4. There is no learning without unlearning.

- F. Learning must be student-centered to be effective.
 1. Each person needs an affirmation of his or her “uniqueness” and capabilities.
 2. Each learner is a person of worth and value.
 3. The ways in which we are the same are more important than the ways in which we are different.
 4. Learning is a process of negotiation: the outcomes and assessment of learning should be meaningful to both the learner and the teacher.
 5. Diversity lies in our capacity and our strength.

- G. Practice and theory is an interactive process.
 1. Theories inform the practice, and practice constantly modifies theory.
 2. No one theory can explain the learning and teaching process completely, and no one theory can help us in designing teaching strategies that enhance learning for all.
 3. Different theories, to varying degrees, inform us about the complexity of the learning and teaching process.

These assumptions and beliefs inform all aspects of teaching and learning at Cambridge College. Some examples are: program planning and outcomes (*what do our students bring to the learning process, and what do they need take away from this process to be successful in their lives*); classroom organization (*student-centered, discussion and activity-oriented*); ways of presenting the material (*diverse methods and settings: lectures, group presentations, role playing, concrete activities, effective blend of theory and practice, currentness of information*); and methods of inquiry (*Socratic, clinical, hypothetical and field-based; individual and collective*).

These assumptions impose roles and responsibilities on both learners and teachers. This implies, for example, that the faculty should be well trained in these practices and show mastery of these practices in their classrooms. Similarly, a student cannot be just a passive member of the group; he/she should bring and share his/her experiences with the group. How they share these experiences and what form and format may depend on the individual, as long as it has the elements of the universality of the modes of communication.

Each of these assumptions, to be translated into actual learning experiences for our students, demands designing sound teaching practices, strategies and activities, learning environments,

and supportive structures and systems that reflect and meet the needs of our students.

The assumption that *each person can learn* translates into specific program decisions. This means, entrance requirements are not critical. More importantly, such an assumption implies that the College puts more emphasis on exit behaviors: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values only, rather than the entrance requirements that may pose undue hurdles and barriers in the way of opening doors and opportunities for learning and teaching process. As a teacher remarked, "I came to earn a Master's degree, but I am leaving as a master teacher." The focus is on change and performance--on competent performance.

The belief that *each person has unique ways of learning* [preferred learning style and mode] supports the practice that before an instructor designs a particular learning experience, he/she must first find out how the students in that group learn and then provide experiences that will match with and enhance their learning styles and needs. This means faculty not only have to be aware of the existence of different learning styles, but should practice strategies in the classroom that work best for these different learning styles. This does not mean supporting idiosyncratic behaviors and preferences of students but rather it means beginning with where they are and how they learn at present and then to take them where they can make use of and learn from diverse learning opportunities and teaching strategies.

The assumption that *each person needs an affirmation of his/her uniqueness and capabilities and is an expert on his/her learning and life experiences* calls for the realization on the part of the faculty that all teaching must connect with the students' past and current learning experiences, and before any new learning can take place the students' learning has to be affirmed. This will make the student aware of the fact that s/he is genuinely invited to participate in and contribute to the learning of others and therefore each one becomes a teacher and a learner at the same time. This results in the group functioning as the curriculum and the teacher a facilitator of the learning process. As students are provided new experiences, they use their store of knowledge to interpret that experience and to transform it into new knowledge, skills, or attitudes that help them grow both personally and professionally. The objective, always, is to nurture and direct this growth in a supportive learning environment.

The assumption that *each person learns differently* calls for the creation of true student-centered learning experiences. This student-centeredness is crucial to the process that links the individual with the socio-cultural world. As many students have informed us that "the true growth in my understanding of teaching and learning was made possible because of the nurturing experiences such as the Professional Seminar and the people in it. I contributed to this process and others affirmed me". This truly supports our belief that all learning is socially constructed but we individualize it for our need to be competent. In that sense all learning is individual but the group and the social constructs facilitate it.

The belief those adults *come to learning experiences with multiple roles and "agendas"* means that the learner will appreciate the emergent quality of learning. Adults are not just interested in fragmented new knowledge, but how this knowledge connects to prior learning to create a greater state of knowing/readiness. For adults learning must have an impact on all their roles: parents, employees, and members of their communities and as individuals.

When these assumptions are translated into teaching and learning processes it becomes quite evident that *the learning processes are as important as the content*. These processes should have a certain quality to them. One of the most important components of such learning processes is that every new experience may either affirm a previous experience or create cognitive dissonance in the mind of the learner. The outcome as a result of resolving these instances of cognitive dissonance is learning and development. The major activities that help in these processes are sharing of experiences and reflection. The student should realize that through sharing and reflection, one can transcend experiences of inequity, pains from previous failures, limitations, and the past itself. For such learning to occur, the teaching must recognize the following developmental stages within the learner.

In the *first stage*, the learner is seeking something: content, skills and a degree. To satisfy this need, i.e., for an individual to be a part of such a learning process, the program should clearly spell out what is offered, what is expected and what are the outcomes: skills, knowledge, procedures, the level and nature of competence.

In the *second stage*, the learner needs affirmation and acknowledgment of his/her past experiences. This requires that the program should have a place where this takes place and provides the processes that make it happen (such as in the Professional Seminar). For an adult learner the content (What needs to be learned?), the setting (What learning situation can make it happen?), its mastery and level of competence and performance (When it is mastered? How it is assessed?) are vitally important.

In the *third stage*, s/he looks for the relevance of new learning and begins to connect the new learning with his/her previous learning and her/his current needs as a person, as a professional, as a member and leader of a family or community. These needs are met by a diversity of courses taught by faculty who are experts in their area(s) and are also perceived as knowledgeable, not only of the subject matter, but also as a teacher who is equally knowledgeable about the various conditions and learning needs of the learners. This is acceptance of and identification with the mentor/teacher--the person who is going to help the learner in the transformation process.

The fourth stage of "learnership" deals with the learner's identification with the new knowledge, skills and processes in the discipline and field one is interested in. A successful transition to the *fourth stage* results in the learner beginning to master the new content and processes while internalizing and applying these new experiences to their various roles and responsibilities. Subsequently, the *final stage* emerges. It reflects the learners' need to plan for future learning and to answer many new unfolding questions. This is the stage where the learner takes charge of his/her learning and recognizes the need for being a life long learner. Now the student is independent of teacher, structures and outcomes. In this model, the teacher must be the best learner. The roles of learner and teacher merge. S/he becomes one's own teacher. S/he identifies leaning needs and garners resources both inside and outside to meet those learning needs. As a student remarked in one of the courses, "I thought once I mastered this strategy, I would be ready to meet the needs of all of my students. But now I realize there are many more considerations that I must be aware of before I can make this remark. There are many more questions that I should be answering before this. It seems you will be seeing me here in the future." This is

planning, not only for applying this learning but also for pursuing more learning. This is the beginning of a lifelong learner. When this stage of learning has reached, learning has transcended the past and the present, the program's ultimate objective.

RATIONALE FOR DIVERSE LEARNING STRUCTURES

Life is about human experience, and without experience, there would be no human being. Learning, then, must in some way begin with experience. We have conscious and unconscious experiences, reflection on these experiences transforms them into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs and finally into competent performance. Learning is individual but the context is always social. Therefore, the context of learning experiences at the college is well thought out. This is accomplished through a variety of settings. Learning, at Cambridge College takes place in variety of settings and conditions. It does not depend just on what the students and the teacher bring to this endeavor but where and how this activity takes place. Since it is both a social act and individual need, the setting and structures can both enhance and create hurdles in this activity.

Settings and structures of learning that foster, enhance, and result in life-long learning.

- Structured, formal and organized learning
- Group as a curriculum
- Self-directed learning
- Incidental/peripheral/exposure/unintentional learning

1. Characteristics of structured, organized and formal learning

Focus and characteristics of this setting of learning are:

- Here teacher is as an expert and authority on a topic (content pre-determined)
- The teaching and learning is centered around a specific content and body of knowledge and skills
- The learning results in a definite body of knowledge. There is a “finished” quality to this knowledge
- The student acquires the appropriate language and familiarity with the field and acquires the universal language of the discipline

Structure and Setting: A formal course with predetermined objectives, outcomes and methods of assessment

2. Characteristics of group learning: group as the curriculum

The focus and characteristics of this type setting of learning are:

- **None of us knows what all of us know:** In a group learning setting such as the Professional Seminar at Cambridge College, where the adults come with so many experiences, the collective knowledge is so vast that the interactions and the synergy result in generation of knowledge that is more than the sum of the

constituents. The objective and the duty of a Professional Seminar leader is to make that synergy possible and at the same time to maintain the individuality of each learner in the group.

- ***Group as a curriculum:*** The objective in this setting is to translate the assumption that ***each individual in the group is the expert on his/her experiences.*** Each member of the group is an active contributor to the learning and the teaching process. In such a setting, the teacher is a facilitator of the process. An example of this type of learning and teaching at Cambridge College is the Professional Seminar. A Pro-Sem leader acts only as a facilitator, organizer, and shaper of the discussion. The knowledge being generated and presented, initially, may be “raw (unfinished/ unpolished/ unobstructed). The job of the Pro-Sem leader is to help abstract, from the group’s experiences and knowledge, hypotheses, conjectures, and theories. And then to connect these with organized knowledge. S/he acknowledges the experiences and concomitant learning from them, directs further directions for explorations, and probes for depth and reasoning behind ideas and then instigates new experiences and new learning.
 - There is emergent and spontaneous quality to this learning
 - Students are in the process of becoming
 - New knowledge is generated
 - Experience is the basis; each experience gives rise to some learning
 - Issues and concerns are close to the learner

Structure and setting: Professional Seminar--The objectives and content reflect the group and its concerns; the outcome is only partly predetermined but the process for determining the content is defined; the methods of assessment are value-free and nonjudgmental. The process is more important than the content.

3. ***Characteristics of self-directed and individualized learning***

The focus and characteristics of this type of learning are:

- To implement the idea that most learning takes place individually, therefore the College provides opportunities for sustained work in an area of student’s interest. This takes place in several ways: Independent Study (IS) and Independent Learning Project. The objective in the independent study is to gather knowledge in area of student’s interest when a course is not available. The objective in the case of an ILP (a requirement from each student at the College) is to help students integrate what they learn in courses, at work and other settings and end up with a product (ILP, a paper, or other tangible product) reflective of their achievement. In the process, the learner develops a high level of metacognition. This involves:
 - Identification with an area of learning emerging either from

- interest, utility or challenge
- Affirmation of a learner's prior experiences and learning
 - ➔ Student begins to explore and engage in self-assessment
 - ➔ Individual's need for more learning
 - To answer questions related to personal and professional issues and concerns
 - To become and perceive oneself as competent in an area of interest
 - To become an expert in an area
 - ➔ Student acquires new knowledge
 - ➔ Recognizes and asserts self-worth
 - ➔ Student acquires further knowledge
 - ➔ Experiences success and as a result desires to learn more
 - ➔ Begins to be a life-long learner

Structure and setting: Independent Learning Project
Independent and focused studies

The student determines the content of the project and negotiates the outcomes and methods of assessment.

4. Characteristics of incidental/expository learning

Focus and characteristics of this type of learning:

- A great deal of learning is unplanned, unstructured and has a chance quality to it. The objective is to provide as many opportunities (venues, people and topics) as possible for these chances to multiply.

Structure and settings:

- Workshops, colloquia, community gatherings, information sessions, orientations, celebrations, graduations, chance meetings and conversations with faculty, guests and other students.

Program Goals

Cambridge College's programs are developed to:

1. Facilitate learning, by immersing students in a learning community in which they experience pedagogical models that honor and empower learners;
2. Promote the development and/or enhancement of skills, competencies, attitudes, values and habits of mind which enable them as teachers, family and community leaders to competently meet the plethora of personal and professional needs and challenges of

nurturing learning in schools, families and communities;

3. Stir and excite the emotions, curiosity and intellect in a manner that will render them lifelong learners

Program Outcomes

1. Each person will realize his/her potential as a person, as a learner, as a teacher, as a therapist, as a community member, and as a trainer.
2. Each person will discover his/her preferred mode of learning, style, strengths and potential.
3. Each person will make sense out of his/her previous experiences and will build on them to move further. They will also have acquired skills, knowledge, and attitudes to make better sense of his/her world as an individual, as a teacher, and as a member of different communities that he or she inhabits, to ultimately to help each person become a lifelong learner.
4. Each will acquire skills in content relating to teaching and learning, and also will be affirmed as an individual and as a professional.
5. Each person will effectively function as a teacher of children or adults from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs.
6. Each person will create learning environments in which he or she helps his or her students, members of his or her community (family) and colleagues, who in turn, realize and exhibit their potentials.
7. Each student will have a network of relationships, not only with his/her fellow learners, but also with Cambridge College faculty and the faculty in their own schools.

Cambridge College, therefore, aspires to be a visionary organization and a learning community. The College has its vision and mission, as reflected in these assumptions and philosophy, but more importantly it is also the place where individual visions and missions get shaped and realized. Most of our students report that their experiences at Cambridge College have been transformational--both personally and professionally. Individuals--both the faculty and students, transformed as a result of experiences provided by the unique learning process, give this institution a dynamic character.