

Praxis International Institute

Educational Philosophy

Student Centred Classes

What Makes Praxis International Institute different? To start, we “think” differently. We recognise that not all students learn in the same way. Just as we have different senses for taking in information about the outside world, learners too have different methods for taking in information that they need to learn. There are many different learning styles and we believe we need to be supportive of them all. (See *“Frames of Mind”* written by Psychologist Howard Gardner, (1983), where he brings forward the idea of “Multiple Intelligences.”)

Here at Praxis, classes are student centred, not educator centred. Information is distributed to students through methods that best suit each **individual** learner rather than trying to deliver using one method to a whole group.

Students are encouraged to experiment and sometimes to fail; we don’t penalize students for making mistakes. Humans typically learn more from their mistakes than from their successes. If we take away the fear of failure and encourage its use as a learning tool, students will naturally reach for greater and greater achievements instead of only attempting what they already know they can succeed at.

The education system as a whole has become self-fulfilling and self-gratifying. Education sets the exams that fit what it has been teaching and then prides itself that it has taught the right things for the exams

(De Bono 1972).

Our evaluation process is also student focused and progressive. Exams are rarely used since they are not the best method of understanding what a student has learned. Since our classes are primarily project based, rather than lecture and/or textbook – workbook, our students are evaluated on the steps and learning they have accomplished, or are in the process of, with constructive feedback at all stages. Marks are awarded for what they have done and the thought processes they have used, not deducted for what they have failed at. And we move on only when they understand the concepts.

Motivation

We believe that all students should be passionate about learning. They should wake up every morning excited about going to school. While many students are, in the traditional system, there are many others that just tolerate it and only show up because they have to. Young people should be banging on the school door every morning and eagerly absorbing, if not demanding, the information and knowledge that teachers disseminate every day in class. This happens when students are motivated to learn. Sitting at attention in neat rows with feet flat on the floor all facing the front and quietly listening to a teacher lecture is hardly motivational.

Motivational activities that we incorporate into the daily lives of our students include:

Fun

Fun energizes people. It makes them more enthusiastic learners. Creativity, laughter and spontaneity, are all excellent ways to get people engaged in opening their minds to learning.

Choice

One of the most distinctive characteristics of human beings is their capacity and desire to make choices. Unfortunately, there are typically very few choices allowed in learning. To increase learner motivation, students are involved in as many choices as possible in our school, providing them with the opportunity to learn about ownership, accountability and responsibility while at the same time becoming skilled at research and decision making.

Social Interaction

Virtually all human beings have a deep desire for social contact with their peers. A high level of social interaction will increase motivation and enhance learning. Opportunities for social interaction can include anything from small group discussions, peer tutoring, collaborative problem-solving and decision-making, and group projects.

The Necessity of Failure

Mistakes are an inevitable part of the learning process, and present great learning opportunities. None of the big discoveries in our world were made without many failing tries along the way. In learning institutions however, failure is usually not rewarded and in fact, is punished with lower grades, lost marks and decreased commitment to learning. We believe in creating an environment of discovery and progressive evaluation. If a student continues to have trouble with an area, we will continue to work with them until they understand it thoroughly.

Learning Measurement

It is ironic that while nothing is more motivating in sports and games than scorekeeping, most people don't look forward to be measured while learning. The difference lies in the way measurement is used. In sports, measurement is used positively to track progress. In learning, it is too often used negatively to find fault. The key to creating motivating learning measurement is to reposition it from something used to judge to a more facilitative force. This can be done in a variety of ways including focusing on formative (improvement-oriented) evaluation, soliciting learner input into what should be measured, and encouraging self-measurement.

Feedback

In sports and games, feedback tends to be immediate and predominantly encouraging, while learning feedback often tends to be detrimental. When constructive feedback is provided, it is often too late for learners to use to improve their performance. Learning feedback can be dramatically improved by providing it continuously (rather than just at the end of a module and calling it an exam), reinforcing the positives (rather than emphasizing the negatives), and focusing feedback on how performance can be improved in the future (rather than dwelling on the past).

Challenge

Challenges have the extraordinary ability to bring out the best in people. Almost everybody will respond enthusiastically to appropriate challenges. Goal-setting is a major source of challenge. The motivating challenges involve learners in setting their own learning goals. When learners set goals for themselves, they tend to be much more committed to achieving them. Surprisingly, self-set goals tend to be more ambitious than those that others would have set.

Recognition

Highly motivated learners need to receive plenty of recognition for the progress they make. Too often we think that only major learning milestones should be positively reinforced. However, it is ongoing recognition that really motivates.

Passion

Last but not least, we believe in finding the passion within each person. When you connect passion and learning, it is difficult for the individual not to be motivated. Passion is contagious; when an educator brings it into the classroom, it leaves with the students as well. Passion is what engages people to act and make a difference in the world. Learning is no different.

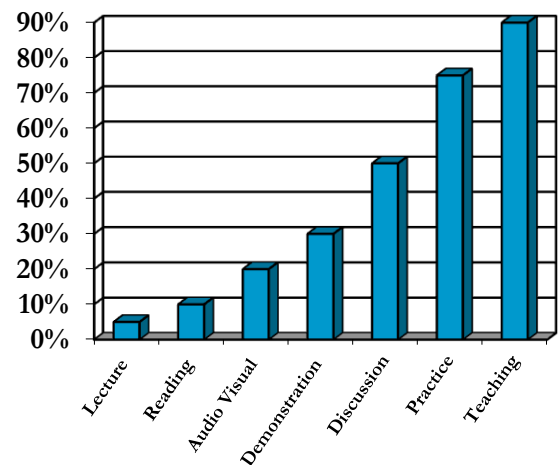
Learning Retention

From the chart at right, we can see how various activities aid in learning retention of students. Notice that it's the two least effective methods that occupy the greatest amount of classroom time in a typical school.

At Praxis, we learn by actually doing, not by simply reading about how it is done. Our classrooms are fluid and comfortable, moving into different shapes as the learners tackle different problems. Our teachers are called educators because they facilitate this knowledge transformation rather than take on the role of disseminator of information.

Our classes are small, diverse groups of learners. Our learners can individually choose from a range of projects - it is common to have them openly discussing their ideas and opinions in order to gain depth to their understanding, actively putting into practice what they have just learned and eagerly teaching their new found skills to others. Much of this happens outside the weekday hours of 8:30 – 3:30.

Learning is not limited to the formalized school day; it can, and does, happen anywhere and at any time. And we believe that one of the best things that an educator can do after bringing all the necessary elements together is to simply get out of the way and let the learning happen.



Foundation

Praxis International Institute's learning principals come from a solid entrepreneurial foundation. For over 20 years, our parent company, Global Infobrokers Inc., has helped entrepreneurs with a dream start and launch their businesses through its post secondary "Praxis School of Entrepreneurship." Almost 800 graduates have completed our programs and started new enterprises. And while we don't expect our high school graduates to all start new enterprises, it is exactly the entrepreneurial "mindset" that we are attempting to develop and nurture. Four common characteristics of this mindset include:

- **Problem solving** – Above all, entrepreneurs are problem solvers. They have to be; in order to accomplish all the great things that a successful entrepreneur achieves, they usually have a string of hurdles to cross. Each one is a problem, and each has to be solved. It's what they do.
- **Visionary**- Entrepreneurs see the big picture and they see how all the pieces fit. They realize that there is no such thing as a free meal, everything has a cause and effect, and there are always consequences for your actions. The trick is to plan far enough ahead so that all your consequences are positive experiences and eventually lead to your larger goals.
- **Creative** – All problem solvers are creative. It's how they solve the problems. Anything else is just following a recipe.
- **Accountable** – What makes entrepreneurs entrepreneurs is the fact that they want to assume responsibility for themselves. They are very independent, self sufficient and instead of waiting for directions, they are used to taking action to see their goals met. They have a strong work ethic, like to succeed or fail by their own means, and they take full responsibility for their actions.
- **Passionate** – Connecting passion to purpose makes an entrepreneur unstoppable.

*Tell me and I will forget,
Show me and I will remember,
Engage me and I will understand.
A Lakota Sioux Proverb
(North American Native)*

Even individually, these characteristics are desirable, but taken together they have given us the explorers and pioneers that have shaped and reshaped our world. They are the advancers of society. They are fearless and action oriented, and they are the very characteristics that many Fortune 500 companies are seeking today. And... they are what Praxis International Institute strives to develop in all their students.