

Florida Tech FIT to Teach Podcast

THE DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION OF DR. STANFIELD

Jared Campbell: I'm sitting here with Andy K. Stanfield of the Florida Institute of Technology. How are you doing today, Andy?

Dr. Andy K. Stanfield: Doing great, Jared. How are you?

Jared Campbell: Tell me some stuff about your teaching experience here.

Dr. Andy K. Stanfield: I prefer to focus heavily on writing. That's one of the main things I want to accomplish in the courses. Both the civ courses and the basic writing is critical thinking and this ability to clearly express themselves. That impacts everything I do because writing is this performance, it's this learning skill. And so I found that if I use the mean and I average, you know, five or six essays together and they do poorly on the first ones, it destroys their motivation. They don't improve with the writing. Often times they're going to drop. So understanding how the learning process and making mistakes affects their motivation has changed the way I approach the classes. So what I do now is I have multiple assignments and they have to accumulate points almost like a game. And that way, if they do poorly on something, it's not that necessarily they failed, but they didn't get as many points. But they still move forward and it gives them a sense of accomplishment and they tend to write more. They improve what they're doing because of the frequency of the writing and because it sort of takes away some of their fear. They can get into the assignments and focus on the writing process. And I see vast improvements. Part of my doctoral studies, I had a course on creating educational games and simulations. I had not used those skills in a while. But when I was trying to figure out a way to get more engagement with the students and to increase the number of assignments that they would do, because with writing, the more you do it, hopefully the better you're going to get. It just made me rethink the approach so that it

encourages them to do more rather than trying to to hold on to the points they have and become risk averse because writing is about making mistakes and learning from those mistakes. And you're, you're afraid to make a mistake. You're not going to get better.

Jared Campbell: So you use gamification to motivate your students and then they write like gangbusters.

Dr. Andy K. Stanfield: They do.

Jared Campbell: That's fantastic. So what is something unique that you do for your classes to keep your students motivated, to keep them engaged in the course? What do you do to keep them on point in your classes? What is something specific that you do?

Dr. Andy K. Stanfield: Well, give the students options in their learning. And this ties in with the accumulation of points. And I want them to do more assignments. I have options besides the in class quizzes to make sure that they do the reading. We have the civilization reports where they use a template that I provided, where they go and analyze civilizations at this very macro level about the politics, the economic systems, religion, education systems are the things that give them character. I'm of the opinion that it's hard to do critical thinking if you don't have a baseline of this foundational knowledge so they can turn in these civilization reports using the template. One of the things I'm really interested in is their response papers. These are short papers where they read excerpts of classic literature, Plato's Apology, one of the neat things like that, and they read it and they respond. And I'm not interested in them looking up traditional answers. I want them to think about it and muse on it. And it gives them a chance then to write and think about bigger issues. And often times I can also catch their grammar errors more when they are writing, is focused on the technical stuff and they get more into their own thoughts. So I can often catch grammar errors, other things I do. We have the longer essays and these require outside research so the good writers will sometimes do. Those are one hundred points versus the response papers are fifty and fifty for the civ report so the good writers can do fewer assignments. And that way,

depending upon the student's needs, they can choose what they wish and turn in the types of assignments that appeal more to them. If they're more history minded, they could focus on the civ reports. They're more into the literature, the essays or the response papers. But the students can craft their own assignments. And I think that's important because in a way, these civ courses are a combination of literature and history. So we're already doing multiple things in the course. So that allows them to make it a little more personalized and hopefully get more engagement and get them more buy in. My main goal is for them to walk out of the class liking it more than when they walked in. If I can light the fire under them, they have the rest of their lives to achieve mastery.

Jared Campbell: That's that's a great point. Differentiate in instruction. Sounds wonderful. Would you be willing to share your template and maybe a little bit about these reports that you're getting your students to write about?

Dr. Andy K. Stanfield: Of course, I would be glad to.

Jared Campbell: OK, well, we'll be looking for those on the teaching council website here at the Florida Institute of Technology. I want to definitely hear a little bit more about that because I have a feeling that all of our students could use help writing and all of our instructors could use help with understanding this concept of differentiated instruction, especially where especially the idea of gamification, of of instruction, I think that's a super motivating tool to use. And that's that's fantastic. Is there an experience you have with a student using this particular differentiated instruction style that you're using that you would like to share? Is there is there anything in particular where you saw somebody go from, you know, being not necessarily a good student at first to someone who's confident in their skills? Can you tell us a little bit about any of that?

Dr. Andy K. Stanfield: I've had several success stories where students in other classes, where they have five or six essays averaged together, they fail the first two or three they would have dropped, their motivation would have been destroyed. So these students ended up in 17 to 20 assignments throughout the semester. They knew they were learning they were getting better. And if I had used the motivation killing mean at a certain point, I believe they would have given up. But as it was, they could see improvement. It was a reward for the hard work and the effort. And riding is something that the more you do it, the better you get. So I want to encourage people to do more of it, not less.

Jared Campbell: Well, I think that answers all of my questions. So you'll definitely want to go to. I'd like to thank Dr. Andy K. Stanfield of the Florida Institute of Technology, thank you for joining us. And I'm so glad that you are able to inspire your students the way you are.

Dr. Andy K. Stanfield: Thank you for the interview. Jared, I want to share this information with others because I think there's value in some of these methods.