Teaching for Intelligence

Teaching for intelligence goes way beyond covering the content of the course. Teachers who teach for intelligence help students develop an interest in the subject, understand how information fits together and why, and how the information is applied outside of the classroom. But most college professors were not "trained" to teach for intelligence, and changing one's teaching practices is not easy.

James Bellanca shared four basic assumptions regarding changing teaching practices in a May 1998 Phi Delta Kappa article (pp. 658-660). First, the traditional method of teaching is not wrong. Some students respond very favorably; but others do not. So teachers need a wider array of skills that can be utilized when more traditional teaching techniques do not seem to work.

Next, teaching is a strategic act of engagement. Bellanca purports that teachers and students will benefit most when the teacher plans how to engage all students in the class activities. Again, it is not a "one size fits all" so teachers need a repertoire of strategies to engage students. Third, changing teacher behavior takes more than a discussion of theoretical information. Teachers must be given the opportunity to learn and practice specific skills to help bring about a change in teaching behavior.

Finally, Bellanca asserts that learning to change teaching style is as difficult as changing learning style. Some teachers start with an understanding of theory and adopt practices that utilize that theory. Others start from a hands-on approach and determine whether the approach worked and why. In either case (and everything in between), teachers must have, and take the time to practice, new skills and reflect on how effective the skills were in reaching all the students in the class.