Aims 1
- Understand the relationship between teaching methods and other parts of the scholarly teaching model
- Appreciate the significance of choice of teaching methods from a student learning perspective

Topic #1.1
How are teaching methods and other elements of the model related? What are the connections?

Preamble: On the significance of method
There are two, quite distinct, ways of understanding the place of teaching methods; an instrumental view and an integral view. The former is probably most widely held amongst university academics; we want to argue a case for the opposing (integral) view as possibly more compatible with a student learning perspective. We are not arguing that one view is right and the other wrong; rather that the two different viewpoints need to be appreciated, and the value-implications of holding each viewpoint recognised.

Methods as instrumental:
An educational process is one which leads to certain aims, embodied within (related to) a body of subject content, coming to be realised within the student. Method is neither more nor less than whatever the teacher chooses to employ to carry out his or her role in the realisation of these aims (the success of which will eventually be evidenced by an assessment process). Method is the instrument that (on the teacher’s part) serves to turn aims (as hopes, intentions or expectations) into reality (as change, growth, development) within the student. Aims are the end, method is the means. Aims are where you want to reach; method is the way you reach it.

On this (unqualified instrumental) view, a “good” method is simply an effective one; if it gets you where you want to go, it is educationally appropriate. If there are many ways of getting there, all equally effective, they will all be equally valid. You then choose the one you will use on grounds of economy or ease of use or some other criterion. The instrumental approach to methods is value-neutral; all equally effective methods are of equal worth. The search for better methods is conducted as a search for greater effectiveness and efficiency in achieving aims.
Methods as integral:

From this perspective an educational process is one through which (as before) a student comes to achieve or realise aims, but it is one conducted in such a manner that when the achievement of those aims is realised (eg through assessment) the student is able to also give an account of how they were achieved, and of the grounds on which they claim to now rightfully own this achievement. This places “becoming educated” as part of the story (narrative) of a student’s life - their lived experience. “Method” becomes whatever role the teacher may happen to have played (by choice or necessity) within that story. As such, method is integrally part, not only of the process, but of the end product. The values of different educational achievements reflect not only the value of what students can eventually do (or perform or demonstrate), but also the value of how (the method by which) they came to have reached that point.

Ends (aims) and means (methods) are thus part of one another, inseparable (integrally related), each containing the other. If asked, in retrospect, what it means to ‘have an education’ in the area of their particular studies, a student could answer in either of two ways.

From a methods-as-instrumental perspective s/he might say “Having an education in this area means that I am now capable of such and such, I know such and such, and I’m qualified to do such and such work”.

From a methods-as-integral perspective the same student might say all those same things, but would be compelled to add “and I arrived at these achievements by studying under (name of teacher) or by studying the (name of course) in (name of institution) or through a learning journey that - because of its richness and depth - taught me far more than just these mere technical competencies that I now enjoy”.

[This same issue regarding the limits of an instrumental view in education will be taken up again, even more critically, in the following module on assessment.]

Methods and evaluation:

On the two different accounts of methods given above, evaluation becomes a different thing. When methods are understood instrumentally, evaluation reduces to such questions as whether the method chosen was effective (or likely to be effective), economical and efficient, and whether it was implemented with appropriate skill.

On an integral view of methods, whilst finding all these questions still relevant, it becomes possible to ask whether the method chosen (from amongst competing methods) was educationally justified in terms of becoming an integral part of the realisation of the aims. In other words, will it be good for the successful student to be able to say “It was by the use of this method (in part) that I was helped to become what I now am”? This is the same as to ask “Has being part of the process required or indicated by this method been a worthwhile educational experience in its own right?” On an instrumental view of methods such a question is irrelevant (even illegitimate), since the choice between opposing or alternative methods is value-neutral; all that matters is that they will eventually achieve their goal. The question is far from irrelevant on an integral view of methods - it is central to evaluation.

Decisions about method can thus be regarded as, in effect, decisions about how the quality of students’ learning experiences will - prospectively - be achieved; the subsequent evaluation of methods then becomes a judgement on what quality of learning experiences students have, in retrospect, actually achieved. Only an integral view of method can accommodate that.

Topic #1.2 What is the significance of methods from a student learning perspective?

In our view it would be impossible to hold a merely instrumental conception of teaching methods from a student learning perspective; hence a commitment to scholarly teaching based on student learning requires the same stance. Choice of competing methods is not ever a value-free decision; it contains profound implications, not merely for the outcomes (the quality of student learning eventually demonstrated on assessment) but for the educational process (the experience of learning as the student encounters it during the entire period of study).

Choice of method thus involves a commitment to achieving a certain relationship, adopting and sustaining a certain stance or positioning of teacher and student throughout the educational process. It is deeply imbued with value, demands ongoing reappraisal and decision-making on the teacher’s part, and is fraught with uncertainties and unpredictabilities to such an extent that achieving a “good” method
it is the most problematic and demanding of all the teacher’s practical obligations. Far from being a case of “choose the right method and implement it”, method becomes a never-ending search for achieving an educative relationship with a student, one that will effectively mediate between the student and the subject matter. Achieving it is thus integrally part of what we mean by a good “student learning outcome”.

Choosing and implementing a suitable teaching method is, on this account, virtually the same as what Prosser & Trigwell describe as the creation of the “learning situation” in which the student finds him or her-self (see the study tasks below). The student is centrally present in this approach to methods, just as s/he was present in the setting of aims.

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**Prosser & Trigwell Chapter 4** on students’ perceptions of their ‘learning situation’.

**Ramsden Chapters 2, 6 and 7** - should be read asking the question “What is the author saying here about ‘teaching method’ (though maybe not actually using that term)?”

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**Aim 2**

- **Examine how your own views of learning might inform the approach you will take to the development of teaching methods/learning experiences**
- **Become broadly informed about the major issues addressed by the higher education literature regarding the development of teaching methods**

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**Topic #2.1 Teaching methods and views of learning**

In a previous section we argued that a teacher’s views of learning - what it comprises, how it takes place, what facilitates it - will unavoidably influence their choice of teaching aims and their ways of formulating statements about aims. The same is true of teaching methods. Some instances of how this might operate were actually foreshadowed in the readings in a previous module, on some 20th Century theories of learning. Here are two contrasting instances we mentioned there, and the ‘methods’ that followed from them:

Within a Behaviouristic view of learning, the teacher’s task was almost entirely consumed with setting (clearly, unambiguously, in terms of observable ‘behaviours’) the objectives of instruction; breaking up the subject matter serially into learnable ‘chunks’; and choosing the optimal ‘method’ for delivering each ‘chunk’. After that, almost anyone could “administer” the learning program - indeed it was self-administerable in many cases, since the teacher’s work was virtually done once those original decisions had been made. All the crucial decisions about method were made by “scientific” analysis in advance of the events that constitute ‘learning’. If learning failed to occur, or was at a lesser level than desired, systematic logic loops led back to reassessment of those initial decisions, upon which everything else depended.

Similarly, within a strict Information Processing framework where subject matter is defined as
‘Information’, the methods chosen will enshrine the model of how information is believed to eventually reside in long-term memory: the lecturer ‘tells’ the subject with exemplary clarity; regular rehearsal and other ‘fixing’ devices are used whenever short-term memory is likely to have become overloaded (eg each five to ten minutes of the lecture); variation in all available presentation factors (pace, media, style) is encouraged so as to retain alertness, interest and attention; application to concrete problems or tasks is regularly mandated; summarising, re-writing, revision and other strategies are used to strengthen long-term memory storage; retrieval devices are offered (mnemonics, diagrams, pictures, key words) and repeated regularly. The learning theory (whether explicit or implicit) determines and drives the development of method.

In contrast, it may be possible to imagine views of learning that would lead a teacher to emphasise self-direction, learning-autonomy or the pursuit of independent studies for particular students and particular subject matter. We leave the reader to imagine what such a theory of learning might comprise.

**Task**

Take a particular subject you teach and consider the precise methods you are accustomed to using to maximise learning in that subject. What do those methods tell you about the (possibly implicit) theories of learning you may be operating on? Revise the earlier “20th Century theories of learning” piece if necessary. If no answer is readily evident, talk it through with a colleague to see if they can “backwards chain” from what you do (your practice) to what you probably believe in (your theory).

**Note**

“Flexible Delivery” - as a question of method.

Consider what might be the content of beliefs about student learning that would lead a teacher to emphasise ‘flexibility’ in their delivery methods. Use a range of interpretations of ‘flexible’ and consider each one separately - such as able to be studied from home; able to be studied at one’s own pace; offering a choice of study and/or assessment methods; studying alone, in isolation; studying collaboratively with a group of fellow-students; choosing one’s own sequence for studying topics; etc.

In this writer’s view there exists no such thing(s) as “Flexible Delivery Methods” in their own right distinct from other methods already used (some of them for generations) in good teaching. The press for “Flexible Delivery” is a move to “mainstream” a variety of methods that have already been, in the main, tested and found effective, but which until now have remained marginal (restricted to particular groups of students or particular subject matter). It seeks to consolidate these methods under one umbrella or rubric, the notion of ‘flexibility’, which has impressive political support and a clearly demonstrated economic potential for helping universities to attract more students and fund themselves more independently of government.

The delivery method that is an exception to that rule is possibly “web-based instruction” (which in some places has become the key indicator for flexibility), but even that is merely an extension of what has been going on for years in distance teaching. The main sources of the conglomerate of methods called “flexible delivery” are not hard to find.

⇒ Look for these elements of “Flexible Delivery” in the literature on:-

- Distance learning (External Studies) - mainly the parts dealing with information technology
- Self-directed learning (“andragogy”) - mainly from the Adult Education literature
- Individualised (personalised) Instruction - see the Keller Plan and PSI literature
- Self- and peer-assessment
- Peer-support (students teaching one another) and collaborative learning
- Computer-assisted and computer-mediated learning
- Negotiated studies and contract learning

⇒ Other? (add your own)
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<th><strong>Aims 3</strong></th>
<th><strong>2-hours</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Understand how - in what ways - the contemporary work on a student learning perspective (of which Ramsden’s work is offered as an example) substantially enhances our ability to critique and appraise teaching methods (generically, whatever they might comprise, and across all subjects) in higher education.</strong></td>
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<th><strong>Topic #3</strong></th>
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| **Overview:** Ramsden attempts to define an intellectual position, a piece of firm ground, from which one can look at every imaginable teaching method in higher education and say what the strengths and weaknesses of each might be in terms of some universal criteria equally applicable to all. That is to say, a position from which to offer a generic critique, independent of subject matter or any other variable. It merely presumes that, for teaching to be taking place, there will be a teacher (responsible agent) playing some role; there will be subject matter (out of which aims are extracted); and there will be students.

What happens when these three elements come together is “method”, or “a way for teaching to be happening”; and that ideally also means “a way for student learning to be happening” (the two aren’t the same, but one is the condition for the other to be successful). That latter logical step is of course the problematic one - sometimes students don’t learn what we want/expect/need them to, or they learn it in ways (qualitatively) that we regard as unwise or unworthy or insufficient or inept. Ramsden’s “high ground” for this critique of method comprises the quality of student learning outcomes, and he draws upon (and elaborates) a comprehensive theory regarding these. His text is (in this writer’s opinion) a theoretically dense exposition, which really needs to be studied from start to finish. For present purposes, however, it may suffice if we look at Chapters 7 and 9.

In Chapter 7 Ramsden’s purpose (stated at the outset) is to develop his theories of teaching by giving substance to an earlier statement in Chapter 2. He does this by adopting a three-part model (Theories 1, 2 and 3) which he regards as “simple .. a sort of ordered common sense”. In this writer’s view, one of the tests of whether he has succeeded in his project will be that the three-part model is applicable, in some way or other, to every imaginable kind and instance of teaching. As you read it, therefore, constantly - every sentence, every paragraph - apply it to your own teaching (and that of your colleagues within your subject or field). Can you SEE what Ramsden is describing, as it happens in YOUR teaching? Does it fit?

In Chapter 9, the principles la, whatever it comprises.

In this writer’s view, the important thing one can learn from this is not so much Ramsden’s conclusions but his critical method. Central to that critical method are the values (criteria) against which all methods are to be judged; until you are clear about what those values are, you haven’t understood Ramsden or the student learning perspective. |

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<th><strong>Study</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ramsden Chapter 7</strong> (Theories of Teaching in Higher Education)</td>
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<td><strong>Ramsden Chapter 9</strong> (Teaching strategies for effective learning)</td>
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<th><strong>Note</strong></th>
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<td>This would be a good time to look at the items mentioned earlier under ‘flexible delivery methods’ and test out how Ramsden’s critique might be applied, in practice, to some of them - web-based instruction, for instance.</td>
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<th><strong>Aim 4</strong></th>
<th><strong>3 hours</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Become aware of the variety of ways teaching methods are employed and justified within your own disciplinary setting, and discover the extent to which these either incorporate or exclude a student learning perspective.</strong></td>
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It is very rare indeed for one single method (where “method” is narrowly construed) to be used exclusively in teaching a subject. As already discussed, most subjects employ a range or repertoire of often diverse methods, and generally attempt, with varying degrees of success, to interconnect or coordinate them. Probably the best-known instances of the problems of coordination are where a lecture course is run in parallel with a laboratory or field course (as in the sciences) and where a lecture course is coordinated with a parallel small-groups program (maybe called tutorials or workshops) as in much social sciences, humanities and maths teaching; or else coordinated with a field, practicum or clinical experience (as in many professional studies programs).

Where a relatively pure “single method” is claimed to be used (as in Keller Plan or “PSI”, and in Problem-Based Learning) it will generally be found to be not at all as “pure” as claimed, but rather a carefully coordinated composite of more rudimentary methods, each of which can be separately described, and that the “glue” holding them all together is some central commitment to a particular value governing the way students are to go about learning (in “PSI” the value is independence and personalisation, in “PBL” the value is inquiry or problem-solving). Each of these latter two “special” methods is, however, a composite of others: small group meetings, the possibility of lectures, one-to-one tutorials, collaborative work, private study, and so on.

The task required in this Topic is to apply this analysis and identify methods used in your own teaching, your own disciplinary situation. It may be best done by thinking through the situation at departmental, rather than individual, level. But do whatever seems best in your own situation. Think of the task essentially as an itemising, a stocktake, to identify and list the incidence of the full variety of available teaching methods customarily used.

In addition to identifying the methods, it will be necessary to also recognise (i) what those who use that method are trying to achieve by using it (since any method can be used with all different kinds of intentions), and (ii) how they are going about using it (since any method can be employed in many different ways, sometimes with very different outcomes). Finally, mention the more obvious or better-known ‘problems’ associated with each method - things any teacher who uses the method would willingly admit to. Try, therefore, setting out your findings in a table under those headings:

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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Used (by Whom?Where?)</th>
<th>Intention Behind Use</th>
<th>Styles/Strategy of Usage</th>
<th>Problems Encountered</th>
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◊ With this stocktake in front of you, start to do some of the real thinking - the educational bit of the project. Apply the meta-critique demonstrated by Ramsden in Chapters 7 and 9, to the use of these methods, either across your department or in your own teaching.

◊ First, take a guess at which particular “Theory of teaching” (see Ramsden Chap 7 for this) is operating behind the use of each method.

◊ For the better-known methods (see the list above) read again Ramsden’s critique of their most conspicuous shortcomings (see Ramsden Chapter 9) and compare that with the problems you have already listed. How does the perceptions of problems on the part of academic staff who use these methods square with Ramsden’s “meta-critique” of the methods? Can we account for discrepancies?

◊ Given the Intentions listed in column 3 of your stocktake, read Ramsden’s Chapter 9 (pages 170-180) again and consider whether some other method might be equally viable but more effective in each case. Or consider whether the existing method, applied differently, might be more effective than at present. Look particularly at some of the criteria Ramsden invokes on those pages: “structure and cooperation” (170); “understanding key ideas” (172); “relevance and integration” (173); “linking goals to methods” (175); “variety and improvisation” (176); “connecting action and ideology” (178); “active learning” (179) [and lots of others - these are only samples of the values mentioned].
Aim 5
2 hours
- Study relevant parts of the general and discipline based literature that provide accounts or recommendations of teaching methods within your own discipline, and critically appraise this from a student learning perspective.

Topic #5
For this activity it is suggested that you use the supplied 253 Ideas for your Teaching or identify a journal (or failing that a book) that addresses teaching and learning or educational issues within your own disciplinary area or your field of academic or professional interest.

If a journal, take a recent, representative sample of what it publishes - perhaps a complete year’s Issues from within the last five years. [If no journal is available in your precise field, try to locate one in a reasonably similar or related field. Failing that, try the library catalogue for any text whatever that deals with teaching and learning in your area. Failing that, look through some recent years of the HERDSA publications: the journal (Higher Education Research and Development) and the annual conference proceedings (Research and Development in Higher Education); scan the contents pages and try to locate any articles at all that refer to teaching or learning within your area or an area close to it.]

Your goal is to locate and critically read a few papers or chapters or sections that appear, from their titles, to be likely to address, recommend, critique or evaluate, some method of teaching - or that take a particular method merely “for granted” without questioning its justifications.

Read whatever you can find, and summarise what position the respective authors appear take about teaching methods.

Then make notes of your own in the form of the draft for a critical response to these articles, from a student learning perspective. If you use the supplied book, you might also be looking for new methods for your own teaching.

Aim 6
2-hours
Reflection:
Bring together the new ideas your have been asked to encounter within this Section and relate them to your own present position, your current perspective on, or your stance towards the choice of teaching methods in your discipline or scholarly field;
Try to come to some interim conclusion, regarding where you stand about the question of how to teach within your field;
And also relate this to how you believe your departmental colleagues would most probably view the issue.

Topic #6
The goal of this section has been to study the question of the choice, or development, of appropriate teaching methods within a discipline, and the student learning perspective towards methods - what that perspective implies or suggests ought to be the way a scholarly teacher goes about choosing or developing methods.

(i) Try summarising in your own words - a paragraph or two at most - the gist or essence of what you think are the most important implications of a student learning perspective for the choice or development of teaching method in subjects you actually teach
(ii) Summarise, in a similar way, what you believe is the kind of story or account that most of your colleagues would accept, regarding why the present dominant teaching methods are actually used in your department; that is, what are the principal public justifications or arguments for existing methods.
(iii) Outline the points you would speak to (that is, use concise, point form to identify the issues or arguments you would use) if you were invited to present a half-hour lunch-time teaching seminar to your department on the topic “What should we do about teaching methods in this department?”
(iv) Against what you have written in (iii), mention what you think would be the most predictable responses to your presentation, from different categories of colleagues; this would be your agenda to use in planning to anticipate, then answer, their questions in the discussion after your talk.

Note
Flexible Learning - communicating with students given the variation in their prior experiences.
One interpretation of “flexibility” in a flexible learning environment is that students from a wide variety of different backgrounds, with widely divergent prior experiences, ought to be able to
engage productively with the study materials and syllabus of a course of study and proceed in their own ways through it. That is to say, to be more “flexible” means (on this particular definition) to find ways of making a course learnable by people whatever their kinds of prior learning experiences; provided, of course, they can demonstrate that they are academically ready for the required level of study.

Another way of putting that policy would be to say “We intend to be flexible by abandoning the assumption most of us generally adopt when encountering new students - the assumption that, in almost all relevant respects, they are just like us, or just like we were when we studied this subject; so, we will actually expect them to be different - even very different - from us!, and we will try to find ways of not letting that fact be a barrier to their learning.”

If, therefore, we are to be faced with such a heterogeneous group of students, the practical question arises as to how we will even begin to communicate with them; What assumptions can we reasonably make about them? What would be reasonable guidelines for policy regarding how to approach the class on the first days of a course, or even prior to that, when all are strangers (to us and to one another)? What kinds of things would you want to reasonably find out about them and their backgrounds and prior experiences that would enable you to make good decisions about your ongoing communications with them and your development of an appropriate and justified teaching method (from a student learning perspective, of course)?

**Other Sources**


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