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Course Countdown

6 weeks before class:
* Draft your learning objectives: http://wiki.ubc.ca/Learning_Objectives#Online_Resources
* Check for copyright compliance: http://copyright.ubc.ca
* Learn about your students http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/yourstudents.html How students learn: http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/principles/learning.html
* Support undergraduate success:
  http://wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Guide_to_Teaching_for_New_Faculty_at_UBC
  (Supporting Undergrad student success)

4 weeks before class:
* Preparing syllabus:
  http://wiki.ubc.ca/Syllabus_Design_%28Teaching_and_Learning%29
* Confirm assessment methods (to do: categorize each assessment resource with assessment) then add url
* Get familiar with UBC supported technologies:
  http://www.elearning.ubc.ca/toolkit/

2 weeks before class:
* Lesson planning:
  http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/index.html
* Working with Tas
  http://wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Guide_to_Teaching_for_New_Faculty_at_UBC

* Working with first year students:
  http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/student-toolkits/

Day 1/Week 1:
* Class climate:
  http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/learningenvironment.html
  Aboriginal focus:
  http://ctlt.ubc.ca/programs/aboriginal-initiatives-programs/
* First day of Class:
  http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/firstday.html

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What to Do with the International Students? How to Prepare Before Class Starts

Research at Thompson Rivers University (Garson, 2006) revealed that while faculty who were interviewed cited language as the main challenge for international students, both international and domestic students identified other challenges such as expectations in group work, workload and academic integrity. In response to this research, I worked with a team at TRU to produce vignettes that provide insight into some of the challenges. There are four that address: content and checking for understanding, rhetorical style and the thesis statement, academic integrity and working in a group. Each vignette is a compilation of instruction that is less than effective, an explanation of the underlying challenge and a demonstration of possible adjustments by the instructors that have proven to be more effective for them. Each section takes about 15 minutes. Included is a list of references.

Before the beginning of the semester, it could be useful to watch the vignettes. This may provide some insight into what is going on for the students’, which can inform the approach to teaching.

Culturally Diverse Learners is available as an Open Education Resource through BC Campus at:

http://solr.bccampus.ca:8001/bcc/items/e9c660f5-06e5-ed0a-2826-e6abfb3122e1/cdl.zip/cdl/index.html

Sign in to preview.

Submission by
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First Day of Class Student Buy-In: Advice from Unknown Mentors


Brain research showing that novelty helps information stick (e.g., Phelps, 2004; Weierich, Wright, Negreia, Dickerson, & Barrett, 2010) may account for this phenomenon, but whatever the reason, leveraging it to your and your students’ benefit makes sense. The simple strategy described below creates novelty because it disrupts students’ expectation about the “normal routine” of a first class day, yet it is non-threatening and does not require extra work of students on the first day of class. (Not that there’s a darned thing wrong with students working during the first day of class, mind you.)

Ask your students in class this semester to write down advice they would provide to students who will take the course the next term. This is the low-tech version of “mentor in a box.” On the first class day, hand these letters out for your new students to read, then have the students pass the letters around through a few iterations so that each student has the opportunity to read several letters. Then have a class discussion to solicit common themes in the letters of advice.

Many times the mentors will have written things like, “Be sure to do the homework Dr. Jones assigns for the chapter about _____ because it really helps you understand the concepts,” or, “Get yourself into a study group to go over the material outside of class—that really helped me and all my group members make it through this class,” etc.

The fact that the advice is coming from students who have survived the course is the key thing. Your new students would be likely to value such advice if they had a chance encounter with your former students, knew those students passed the course, and had the opportunity to get pointers on how to ace the course.

The devilishly effective attribute that makes this strategy impactful is that what your students write as advice for new students is generally very positive, even if the recommendations are things like, “Because this is such a hard subject, you really have to work in this class, but following the syllabus and asking Dr. Jones for help will get you through.”

Let your exiting students be your best ambassadors for your incoming students.

The high-tech version of this strategy probably packs even more punch for having new students really take to heart the suggestions given by mentors, but it takes a bit more planning, time, and tech-savvy expertise (or arrangements made to get assistance with the technology). Whereas the low-tech version takes only a few minutes during the last class session with your prior class when students write their advice, the high-tech version requires asking students to make videos with their laptops and emailing to you or uploading those files so you can assemble them into a Powerpoint or Prezi or other presentation or load them into your course web shell for accessing to show in class, etc.

The beneficial trade-off for that bit of extra work is the impact the videos will make on the students and
the guaranteed focus of attention that the videos will create. When you know your students are paying attention, the likelihood that the information being shared at that point will be retained is greatly enhanced.

Whether you take the low-tech or the high-tech route, spending some time the first class session discussing strategies for success in the class—and doing so in the language of peers as delivered by peers—can help your students greatly.


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A New Type of Scavenger Hunt as an Ice-Breaker

Recently, I started using a new type of ice-breaker at the beginning of my first class. It is best for small classes such as my introductory science course which has about 20 students, but it can be modified for large classes.

This ice-breaker is essentially a different type of scavenger hunt. Prior to the first class, I look at my roster to see the major for each student. I then make up a 3-column table. The left-hand column is headed “Major” and lists all the students’ majors; each major is listed as many times as there are students with this major. The middle column is headed “Classmate’s Name.” The right-hand column is headed “Classmate’s Favorite Hobby/Activity.” The cells in the middle and right-hand columns are empty.

I ask the students to get up and fill in the empty cells by talking with their classmates for about 15-20 minutes. The room soon is buzzing with conversation. The students like this activity because it gives them an opportunity to meet their classmates and learn something about them – sometimes with surprising results. For example, two students discovered that they both were ice figure skaters, and two African students discovered that they were from the same tribe in Nigeria.

The purpose of this ice-breaker is to let the students meet each other, because they will be placed in groups during the semester for lab work and other projects. The groups will change periodically, but the students have at least met each other during the initial ice-breaker.

For large classes, the table and process could be modified as follows. There still would be three columns, each with 20 rows of empty cells. The left had column would be titled “Name,” the middle column “Major,” and the right hand column “Classmate’s Favorite Hobby/Activity.” The students would get up, start talking with nearby classmates, and fill in as many rows as possible within the 15-20 minutes allowed.

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Using the Course Syllabus as an Opportunity to Promote Student Learning

Many professors may ask themselves if their students read the course syllabus, and what do they get out of such reading. In light of this, in spring of 2011 I started to implement the creation of learning contracts in my courses with two purposes in mind: (1) to promote the reading of the syllabus at the start of the course and (2) to foster self-regulation in students’ learning. For the first course assignment students present a draft of a learning contract where they establish a learning goal to accomplish in the course for the term, and identify what they consider helpful from me as a professor and their peers in order to attain such goal. The criteria for the learning goal includes: relation to course content, achievable in the term, and measureable. The learning contract format contains the following elements:

- Statement of learning goal

Response to the following questions:

- What do they commit to as students in the course in order to accomplish such goal?
- What do they need from me as their professor in order to accomplish their learning goal?
- What do they need from their peers in the course in order to accomplish their learning goal?

In order to help students complete their learning contract, the first class session involves a workshop for students to learn to write learning goals using Bloom’s (XXX) and Fink’s (1993) taxonomies. In the second class session students give each other feedback on their learning contracts, make adjustments, and hand it in at the end.

Throughout the term, students engage in three self-assessment exercises where they evaluate their progress towards their learning goals. The same self-assessment instrument is used in each occasion. The instrument includes a series of closed and open ended questions where students respond to aspects such as:

- Perception of their progress towards the attainment of their learning goals
- What aspects of the class have helped in this attainment
- What aspects of the class have made this attainment difficult
- What they would do differently as students for the rest of the term in order to attain their learning goal
- What they would like for me as their professor to do differently for the rest of the term in order to attain their learning goal
- What they would like for their peers to do differently for the rest of the term in order to attain their learning goal

I present consolidated results of each self-assessment exercise in a class session which serves as input for group discussion on how the class is progressing and how they feel about such progress. In sum, the learning contract activity has proven to be useful to engage students in the course content and for me as the professor to identify during the semester the aspects of the class that student perceive to help and hinder their learning.

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Strategies for Learning Names in Large Classes

Purpose: To help build rapport and show students that you care about them as individuals even in large class settings. Learning names makes people feel valued. Small interventions can make big differences.

**Strategy One (Dee Fink)**

I used small groups extensively in my large Geography course. After forming the groups on the first day of class, I took a Polaroid picture of each group, and they wrote their names by their individual picture. I then posted these pictures by my desk in my office and worked on learning the names within each group. After learning the names in the first group, I would learn a new group and review the names in the previous groups, and so on. I took a week or two to get them all done, but I eventually did. It was a lot easier to memorize 12 groups of 6 students, than it was to memorize 72 students.

**Strategy Two (Dee Fink)**

A math professor used assigned seating, made a chart, and then each day of class, worked on memorizing a block of 6 students (3 in front and 3 behind). Each day when he came to class, he made a point of visiting with students in each new block and in the ones he had already learned—in addition to the class in general.

**Strategy Three (Gerry Wojnar)**

I memorize my roll sheets about a week before classes start, reciting names forwards and backwards. Then on the first day of class, I go around the room identifying students, and half the work is already done—with their names already in memory, the task is simply to match names and faces. It helps to give students some short task at that point (e.g., filling out basic background info cards), during which time I cycle through my roll sheet trying to identify all students. For a few I’ll call out their names while they work. Lastly, I’ll try to revisit names and faces by going around the room to recite all the students’ names, preferably without reference to the roll sheet.

**Strategy Four (Gerry Wojnar)**

A mandatory office visit from students in the first 10 days of the semester, even if just to say hello, also helps. Such break-the-ice visits also seem to promote more content-focused office visits as the semester progresses.

**Strategy Five (Kejing Liu)**

I manage to remember my students’ names first by asking them to make a name card and place it at the table—this will help me relate the name with the seat, and then by encouraging them to sit at the same seat for next two or three class meetings.
Strategy Six (Kejing Liu)

I always ask my classes to fill out a student information card with the following information:

Course Number ______________________

Name: ______________ Name you like to be called: __________________

1 word for your learning style: _________________________________

2 words for your interests: _________________________________

3 words for your personality: _________________________________

4 words for your beliefs in children: __________________

I am an Early Childhood faculty, which explains why I ask for their beliefs in children. Try it, and you will learn a lot of interesting things about your students – it will help you a lot to remember your students very quickly.

Strategy Seven (Susan Robison)

Have students make name "tents" out of cardboard or card stock that you provide. They raise their tent every time they wish to be called on. They can also put the tent on their desk so as they do projects, labs, or group work you can associate the names and faces. With both of these approaches, you have to decide if you will collect the tents and bring them to class or trust the students to bring them.

Strategy Eight (Susan Robison)

If you have access to student photos [as we do at UTSA], you can make a seating chart and study the pictures and names before the course even starts.

Strategy Nine (Susan Robison)

When the students come for office hours, ask, "Please remind me your name." Take notes on the meeting especially on any follow up you promise to do.
Remember to Consider Learning Space

Often when planning instruction we are asked to state our goal, intention or outcome. This focuses our instructional and assessment efforts, and when properly conveyed to learners, it enables them to understand where things are heading and what might count in terms of a mark or grade. The growing popularity of authentic, real-world assessment tasks reflects our attempts to focus student effort on learning how to do the sorts of things they will need to do in their chosen careers. But as time goes on and we gain more experience teaching, we come to understand that the skills required to produce those real-world products are often hidden. Those skills may include critical or creative thinking, sense-making, cross-cultural competency, social intelligence, cognitive load management and virtual collaboration - to name just a few. So we begin to realize that not all learning can be captured by our often narrowly stated intentions.

As we get experienced in the teaching business we realize that stated goals actually capture very little of what students actually learn. So here's my tip:

The next time you write some kind of outcome or goal or intention or objective, and an accompanying assessment task, write it and then answer this question:

What type of learning space will provide the best place for learners to practice developing the skills they will need to achieve success in this task?

This will focus your attention on process - how actually will students be able to go about their learning? What conditions are necessary for them to be able to flourish under your instruction? The answers will guide you at to what kind of learning space you will create that will accomplish your objective but will allow importantly some much more richer and more personal learning to occur.

In this sense a learning space extends far beyond the physical and into the whole learning environment that we as teachers are capable of creating for our students

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When designing or re-designing a course, Dee Fink and others recommend that you first determine all the situational factors that will influence the course—the course level, whether it is required or an elective, the time of day, the classroom layout, your teaching experience, etc.—in order to put the course in context. Then, as Stephen Covey recommends, “Begin with the end in mind” by focusing on the learning goals you have for students. This approach is sometimes called a “backwards design” model, prompted by questions such as, “What do you want your students to ‘look like’ by the end of the semester? Five years after the course has ended? What should they know about the subject? What should they be able to do with what they know? What should they value about the discipline?” Then you move to the feedback and assessment planning: How will you know that students have met your learning goals? How can you design authentic assessments that enable them to focus on doing something in the future, not merely regurgitating facts. Finally, what creative classroom and out-of-class assignments (either face-to-face or online) will promote your learning goals? When all your course elements are well-designed and well-integrated, your course is said to be in alignment and there is a strong probability that you will be teaching for “significant learning.”
A Visual Representation of Your Course

Have you ever wondered what you could do to help your students understand why you are teaching what you teach and in the order and manner in which you teach it?

As the faculty member, you know the structure of the course and why the topics are presented in a certain order, but do the students really get it?

Why not try producing a visual representation of your course? Universal Design for Learning (http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html) suggests that multiple options for representation of content (http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines/principle1) is a great way to help students understand content by guiding information processing and transfer of learning across topics and the course as a whole. There are multiple ways to show the flow of the course. You might draw a concept map and scan it in to create a digital picture to display. You could use a free concept mapping software program like Cmap (http://cmap.ihmc.us/)

or any software that would allow you to use tools to create a flow of ideas, Microsoft Word and Power Point do this, as well as the free online tool Presi (http://prezi.com/). The point of this visual representation is to create an alternate way of communicating about how your course works and how the topics in your course relate to each other and the larger ideas in your area of study.

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Warm-Ups

“I got to get on the good foot
Got to do it on the good foot
Do it with the good foot”

--“Get on the Good Foot,” written by Fred Wesley, James Brown, Joe Mims; performed by James Brown

How can you get off on a good foot at the beginning of each class period? How can you wake up your students and get them ready to get down to the business of learning?

One very effective teaching tip that I have used for years is what I call “warm-ups.” Warm-ups are like pre-exercise stretches, but for the mind (and the attention span).

Usually on the second day of class, I inform my students that at the beginning of each class period throughout the semester, we will devote the first 5-7 minutes to a warm-up. Warm-ups consist of something to challenge the mind, engage the students, and begin class periods in a fun way. Sometimes warm-ups relate to something we’ve been discussing in class, sometimes they do not. Some of my favorite warm-ups are games in which I compete against the class, who acts as a team. Games that work well for warm-ups include Twenty Questions and Hangman. Usually, the students are the guessers, but sometimes I take on that role and try to figure out what my students are thinking. At other times, the students and I work together as a team in playing against web versions of these games:

http://www.20q.net/
http://www.hangman.no/
http://www.hangman-online.com/

The online game Sporcle also works well, and users are continually adding new games:

http://www.sporcle.com/

Online word games are also great. There are many located at: http://www.wuzzlesandpuzzles.com/

Riddles also work nicely, as do short (usually humorous) YouTube clips. These are just a few suggestions. Anything that is brief, interactive, and involves solving a puzzle or having a laugh would probably work as a warm-up. In fact, as the semester progresses, I often have students emailing me with suggestions for warm-ups.

I am amazed at how actively students engage in these kinds of warm-ups, and it does seem to make a difference in motivation levels. For 90 minute classes, I sometimes save the warm-ups as a mid-class refresher. To me, five minutes of class time is a small price to pay for my students’ attention.

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Low-Tech Classroom Response Systems (Clickers)

Have you wanted to use “clickers” in class to gauge students’ understanding, but you don’t necessarily want to spend the time developing the PowerPoints or the questions online that some systems use? Or perhaps you’re not sure if you want students to invest in them because you’re not sure how often you’ll use them, and you don’t want them to waste money to only use them a time or two during the semester, or if you’re considering a web site like http://www.polleverywhere.com, you’re not sure you want students getting out their phones after you’ve worked so hard to get them to put the devices away! You may want to try something low-tech to see if you like using a student response system first, too. Here are two ways to make low-tech “clickers” for class that don’t involve cell phones or other electronic gadgets.

The first is to create a Word document that has a table with 2 columns and 3 rows, placing a letter in 5 of the boxes and a ? in the 6th box for the choices students might have. The table would look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then print them and give one to each student (or post them on Blackboard and ask students to print and bring them to class). Students can then fold the sheet of paper to display the letter for the answer option that is “correct” or that they most agree with. They can display a ? if they truly have no idea.

A second low-tech way to do this is to buy different colored index cards and give students one colored card for A, another color for B, and so on, remembering to have a color for ?, as well. You can distribute “packets” of the cards on the first day of class and ask students to always bring them.

While using these low-tech paper “student response systems” does not allow the anonymity that their electronic counterparts do, the paper method does allow for you to still get an idea of what students do or don’t understand. You also will have the chance to ask them to find someone who has a different answer displayed than they do and discuss why they each chose the answer they did. Then have everyone share their answers again, changing if they need to do so. Therefore, the giving up of anonymity provides some chances for interaction that can’t be had in quite the same way as with a “real clicker.”

Submitted by
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Use PowerPoint to Prompt Engaging Learning Activities During Class

Dilbert depicts PowerPoint presentations as a direct route to slumber and employee revolt. PowerPoint presentations need not be deadly. Instructors can create slides that prompt class activities that engage students, motivate meaningful class discussion, and promote deep learning (Berk, 2011).

Instructors commonly organize and plan the presentation of content while they create a set of PowerPoint slides. Consider creating slides to plan and prompt engaging learning activities at key points during a class presentation.

Instructors who use personal response systems (clickers) can add a slide that poses a question to evaluate student understanding of a critical concept or to ask students to apply a model or principle to a specific application. Allow students a moment to think individually or discuss the question in small groups before they record their response to the question with their clickers.

An instructor who does not use clickers can present a slide that poses a question as a prompt for small group discussion (e.g., as a pair-share activity) or a brief in-class written response to the question (e.g., a minute paper).

Share responses to the prompt with the entire class. If using clicker questions, display a chart summarizing the pattern of responses from the group. Otherwise, ask for a show of hands for typical responses or initiate a class discussion in which several groups report the consensus response from their discussion.

Wrap up the discussion and refocus attention on the content that triggered the activity.

- If common misconceptions about the critical concept emerge in the pattern of responses, spend some time defusing these misconceptions.
- If the prompt asked for application to a real world problem, discuss and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the applications proposed.
- If the prompt asked for opinions on a controversial topic, ask the class to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the different positions that emerge.

Include no more than one or two of these engagement slides during a class session to engage student interest and focus attention on critical points for the day’s lesson.


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Cases/Role-Playing/Jigsaw - A Teaching Technique for Exploring Multiple Perspectives

There are many teaching techniques that get students engaged by having them discuss and apply course content. Using case studies, having students role-play, and employing cooperative learning strategies are a few examples.

Cases are narratives that address realistic issues, based on actual events or contrived, that provide a basis for student discussion.

Role-playing has students assume the roles of characters in a fictional setting. Players take responsibility for acting out these roles within a narrative, either through literal acting or through a process of structured decision-making or character development.

The Jigsaw technique is a cooperative learning strategy that has students interacting with others in groups to develop and refine their understanding of some issue. Students meet in a home group, disperse to join different second groups, and then reconvene in their home groups (thus, the jigsaw designation).

The following teaching technique, created by a journalism professor at the University of Hawaii (Brislin, 1995), is a combination of the above and can be used with any topic having multiple perspectives. It involves some preparation and will probably take an entire class period so it is not a technique to be used without careful planning or one that would be used many times during the semester.

1) Assign a case for the students to read (with supporting documents if desired) that provides sufficient information on the topic to allow for a rich discussion. This could be a hypothetical case that you have written, one that you acquired through some educational resource, or one that you constructed based on some news event. A second option that you could use is, in lieu of a pre-written case, is to provide the students with materials and references (for example, news clippings or web links) that you have assembled for them to study. A third alternative is to have students research the topic themselves. If this alternative is chosen, you might want to assign a short paper for an individual grade summarizing what was read or researched to ensure that each student brings sufficient information to the group.

2) In class, create equal sized groups of 4-6 students. The number of groups depends on the number of perspectives that could be taken in the case. Assign each group member a number.

3) Assign each group a role based on the characters in the case and/or the different perspectives. It is probably best not to assign the roles prior to class to ensure that each student has the broadest understanding of the case.

4) Each group discusses the case from their assigned character or perspective. Allow up to 10 minutes for this activity.

5) Reorganize groups by student number so that new groups result each having at least one member from each perspective.
6) Students in these new "jigsaw" groups argue the case for 20 minutes by presenting the perspective of the role they are playing while considering and analyzing the perspectives of the others.

7) Students then return to their original groups and share the perspectives they received in their jigsaw groups that may have made them rethink their original position. Allow up to 10 minutes for this activity.

8) The exercise could culminate with a class discussion about the topic. Each student, having now heard multiple perspectives on the issue, could be assigned to write a short position paper (in class or as homework) on what stance or action he or she would personally take in this case writing the paper as themselves and not the role that they played.

For example, if an environmental issue were to be addressed, students could argue from the perspectives of a member of the general public, a representative from a business company, a scientist, or a politician. This technique lends itself well to disciplines that address multiple points of view whether the issue is medical, political, economic, ethical, or some other discipline-specific topic.


Submitted by

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Not Just Fun and Games! Structure Class Demonstrations to Reinforce Learning Goals

Classroom demonstrations that illustrate an important process, phenomenon, or application of a concept can generate interest and engage students with course material. Although students enjoy classroom demonstrations, they sometimes remember the activity but do not remember the course learning goals that instructors want to promote when they design the demonstration. An effective demonstration connects student memories of the classroom experience with the concepts the activity was designed to demonstrate.

Strategies that transform an entertaining demonstration into an effective learning experience

- Identify the learning outcome(s) you intend to promote with the classroom demonstration. For example, a demonstration that illustrates a counterintuitive or surprising outcome can be used to identify assumptions that lead students to make erroneous predictions. Students experience surprise at unexpected results, which motivates curiosity and encourages students to give weight and credibility to disciplinary concepts and models that explain these findings.
- Practice the demonstration to ensure it works properly during class.
- Prepare students for the demonstration. Observations are biased by preconceptions (Bransford & Johnson, 1972). Two observers of the same event will remember it differently if they experience the event with different frameworks and expectations (Holst & Pezdek, 1992). Don’t assume students will notice the details you notice or interpret the demonstration in the same way you do. Begin with an explanation that gives students the framework they need to focus their attention on the most relevant aspects of the demonstration. Remind students about the relation between observations during the demonstration and the course material.
- If possible, make students predict the outcome before you conduct the demonstration.
- After the demonstration is finished, ask students to discuss the outcome and their observations with each other and the class as a whole.
- Reinforce the purpose of the demonstration with a debriefing discussion that identifies and explains the principles demonstrated. Explicitly connect the observations from the demonstration to course content and the learning goals for the activity. Use the curiosity elicited by a surprising outcome to focus attention on disciplinary explanations that are based on valid disciplinary assumptions and models rather than the naïve models students used when they made their initial prediction.
- Ask students to take a minute or two to write a reflection on the demonstration. What did they learn from this experience? What was the purpose of including this activity in the class? Reflective writing will reinforce student learning. These essays will also reveal areas that continue to confuse students, which instructors can use to refine the demonstration for use in future classes.

Pyper, B. A. (2008). Best practices in physics demonstrations or “Oh, I thought this was just for entertainment.” Power Point slides for a presentation at the AAPT UT/ID section meeting, Boise,
ID. Retrieved August 2, 2011:  

Submitted by:  
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The Crossword Puzzle as Threshold to Higher-Order Thinking

One of the most difficult tasks we encounter with students is moving them beyond a mere accumulation of factual material in class. Often our transmission of lower-order thinking skills (remembering and understanding) is somewhat akin to the proverbial giving of a fish to the hungry individual. Increasingly in the 21st century, we are recognizing the need to teach our students how to fish; that is, how can we best teach the skills for higher-order thinking.

One effective threshold to the top level on Bloom’s revised pyramid of learning, creating, is the crossword puzzle, and perhaps the first major goal it can achieve is helping students to become adept at a major skill in creating, perception shifting, or learning to look at a given issue or problem from multiple perspectives.

Suppose you provide your students with a crossword puzzle grid where 1 Across is four letters with a clue of “First place.” Since 2012 is an Olympic year, one student in the class is bound to call out, “GOLD.”

Without having 1, 2, 3, and 4 Down, it’s difficult to know if GOLD is correct, but let’s say you pronounce that answer wrong and help the students by asking to think in terms of biology. Both “CELL” and “WOMB” are excellent suggestions, but we doubt you’ll get them for a while. Why? Your students will have trouble shifting gear from one field of perception to another. Psychology has a principle often referred to as “the primacy of the first,” which states that once our mind settles on something, changing that thought is difficult.

You could provide your students with the fish, “CELL” and “WOMB,” or you could further illustrate the problem by offering the lens of still another field such as religion and watch them stumble to come up with “EDEN.”

Or you could teach them how to fish by explaining what perception shift is and why it’s difficult. You could extend that teaching moment by having students become cruciverbalists (solvers/constructors of crossword puzzles) and create some more of the crossword puzzle, thereby moving them up Bloom’s Revised Pyramid.

Submitted by

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Improving Small Group Work through Role Clarification

Erin Hill, Ph.D.
University of Washington Bothell

**Goal:** To Increase Effectiveness of Small Group Work

**Rationale:** By assigning each group member a specific role, the instructor can avoid the typical pitfalls of small group work, such as uneven participation and difficulty staying on task. Assigning students specific roles creates an environment conducive to peer learning and enables effective team work.

**Method:**

1) Instructor facilitates a large group discussion of group work norms. Amongst those that the instructor should ensure get discussed are the following:
   a. Practice active listening skills
   b. Ask for help when needed...
   c. ...but don’t ask others to do your work for you
   d. Offer help when asked...
   e. ...but don’t do other people’s work for them
   f. Play your role

2) Instructor introduces and explains roles. Instructor emphasizes that each person is responsible for understanding and playing their role. The instructor can tweak the roles to fit their needs; one example is attached1.

3) Randomly assign group members; here’s one fun way to do that:
   a. Get a deck of playing cards (more than 1 for classes larger than 52)
   b. Distribute the cards
   c. Have students group themselves by card (e.g., Aces of all suits will sit together)
   d. Put copy of group roles on each desk

4) For reporting back, either have students hand in their cards and then select randomly, or have a second deck and choose from there.

5) Get feedback from the students as to how the process went – either through discussion, anonymous written feedback or some combination of methods.

6) Tweak accordingly and enjoy!

Adapted from Elizabeth Cohen’s *Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom*.

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Submitted by Karen Rosenberg
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1 Thanks to Dr. Robin Angotti, Associate Professor of Education at the University of Washington Bothell, for this example as well as the method for assigning group members.
Online Collaboration: The New Group Format

Like many professors in my age group, the transition from lecture based, traditional classroom models to technology inclusive, collaborative approaches to adult learning did not come easily or naturally for me. However, I arrived at the realization that students today, even good students, were simply unable to adequately assimilate information with traditional, instructor-driven, models. Continued effectiveness in the classroom would require new skills and adjustments on my part.

I began to seek out various on-line tools to encourage interaction and collaborative work. I discovered a product called Evernote™ that allows students to share virtual “notebooks” so they can compile materials for group projects in one place. Evernote™ is a free service available on most electronic devices. It allows users to type notes into an Evernote™ notebook and access those notes from anywhere. Students may record information in text, audio or visual format with text being searchable within images.

In a project group, each student is able to go to the document stored in Evernote™ and edit or revise, thus eliminating the frustration students often have in relation to coordinating schedules to arrange meeting times for group work. Everyone has access to all of the articles and other resources for the project and can add resources at any time. Suddenly, students were contributing more, creating more as a group, instead of relying on one person to compile the project, and completing projects within the time frames assigned. Complaints related to “social loafing” subsided. My skepticism waned.

As I pondered other ways that students might be able to work “together” from a distance, I discovered StudyBlue™. The collaborative features of StudyBlue™ are part of what earned them a place in the 2012, Top 25 Websites for Teaching and Learning, awarded by the American Association of School Librarians.¹ StudyBlue™ created the ability for students to share virtual “backpacks” with their classmates, enabling collaboration of a flashcard database for their specific course, text or discipline. Students can learn from classmates as well as approximately one million users worldwide, who add roughly 2 million new flashcards each week through the shared database.² As students enter their flashcard, they are shown approximately 30 related cards from their classmates or students in general. They can then add another student’s card to their deck, use their own, or both.

Evernote™ teamed up with StudyBlue™ to allow students to take their Evernote™ notebooks and transfer them to their virtual “backpack” in StudyBlue™ where they can make their interactive flashcards (which can include text, audio and imagery), study guides and quizzes that are available on both desktop and mobile devices without having to retype data. Evernote™ accounts, or specific notebooks within accounts, can be set to automatically sync with StudyBlue™ upon login at StudyBlue™.

In my class, I encourage students to type notes in Evernote™ or export them from Word™ into Evernote™, sync and study with StudyBlue™. This ability to access notes and flashcards quickly and easily, via mobile device, has increased interaction with the material and encouraged students to build their knowledge base together. Both tools appeal to our tech savvy student population by providing a cutting edge, convenient way to accomplish course objectives and projects.


Submitted by
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Voice Thread

One my absolute favorite online tools is Voice Thread (free versions at http://voicethread.com). This is a tool that allows photos to be uploaded, text to be included, and audio threads. It is a way for everyone in the class to collaborate on a topic. Consider this - a test will take place on Friday covering James Madison. As the instructor, I get the ball rolling by putting his picture in the middle of the board. Then I post an audio question (not an actual test question but something in the ballpark) and invite the students to add information that would answer the question. I also invite the students to start asking other questions or posting information they find important and likely to be covered on the exam. I email them the link or post it in class (this works for online and on-ground) and ask them to contribute. Viola - we now have students teaching each other, reviewing the materials, and interactively engaged in study! This is also a nice summary review that can be shared in class prior to the exam.

Want to add a twist - collaborate with an instructor in another university (how about in another part of the world) that might be covering a concept you are. This is a great way for the two classes to start discussing how various cultures manage a situation or simply handle the topic. Talk about global learning!

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Online Writing Instruction beyond the Discussion Board

Teaching writing online may seem intuitive for many faculty given all of the writing that actually happens in online courses – discussion boards, peer-review projects, research papers, and more. However, using the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing report (http://wpacouncil.org/framework/) as an intellectual and pedagogical springboard for invigorating and improving online writing instruction can be especially helpful for instructors who teach content areas that promote inquiry through writing, online or otherwise.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project worked together to research the report’s eight “habits of the mind” for student writers. The eight habits are values most, if not all, educators embrace and strive to nurture in students and writers:

- Curiosity
- Openness
- Engagement
- Creativity
- Persistence
- Responsibility
- Flexibility
- Metacognition

So, how might one go about encouraging these values online, especially for writing communities who work exclusively or partially online? Here are a few suggested resources that embrace the multifaceted nature of writing beyond the discussion board:

**Curiosity** – WebQuests – learner-created or faculty-crafted – embrace inquiry-centered, collaborative lessons for team learning in addition to visual resources such as the cloud-based graphic organizer creation site, bubbl.us. Sites like Quadrivil Quandary also prompt students to revel in (and practice) word play, pure and simple.

**Openness** – Building community and praxis through low-stakes, weekly writing opportunities such as Twitter (mini-writing labs that focus on thesis statements or ways to curate timely research) and blogs such as Blogger or Wordpress help students write for authentic audiences (in addition to receiving and responding to peer review comments along the way).

**Engagement** – Online writing conferences between student and professor and/or peer groups can be incredibly instructive. Decide first if the conferences you hold will be asynchronous, for instance, back-and-forth email or a self-paced Google Document, or synchronous, real-time web conferences via programs like Adobe Connect, Google chat, Skype, and others. Beth Hewett’s terrific book, *The Online Writing Conference: A Guide for Teachers and Tutors* (2010), highlights how inviting students to set agendas for writing conferences invests students in the learning process.
Creativity – Finding one’s voice, especially in writing, can sometimes be difficult. Depending on the conventions and styles you want students to write in, consider inspiring them with some of these clever finds:

- **Finding Your Voice** by Leo Babauta, Zen Habits blog
- **I Write Like** (find out which famous writer you sound the most like)
- **750 Words a Day**: A great writing tool for students who benefit from daily practice

Persistence – The online environment is, in many respects, ideal for the ever-evolving writing lab and student! Help students take stock of where they’re at in the writing process by providing personalized feedback through screencasting programs such as Jing and Screenr or embedded audio comments in Microsoft Word. To learn more, I highly recommend reading a recent *Journal of Interactive Technology & Pedagogy* article, “Talking with Students through Screencasting: Experimentations with Video Feedback to Improve Student Learning” (Thompson & Lee, 2012).

Responsibility – To foster student ownership in the writing process, online writing projects should include:

- A clearly written assignment sheet
- A timeline that incorporates the writing process and describes how students will receive feedback from peers and the instructor, when applicable
- A rubric that establishes how the final essay or project will be graded
- A reminder that students should speak up if something is confusing or vexing and not to wait until the last minute to post writing online (Murphy’s law is real)

Flexibility –

- Whenever possible, give students options and choices within writing tasks.
- Understand that students are learning new technologies too; they may need a boost and/or explicit instruction in learning how to use the Learning Management System, web conferencing tool, etc.

Metacognition –

- Self-evaluation is essential to building reflective students. VoiceThread works well for this purpose. Furthermore, a sample student self-evaluation may include questions like these (Cully, 2002).
- Consider having students create online revision portfolios, where earlier work is improved and a reflective letter or analysis explains how and why these revisions were made towards the end of the semester.

For more information about online writing instruction, consider the following useful and timely texts:

- Scott Warnock’s *Teaching Writing Online: How & Why* (2009)
- CCCC Committee on Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction (2013)

Submitted by:
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Enhance Student Collaboration with Online Tools: Google Apps

Faculty members care about effective teaching and student engagement. Sometimes in conversation, faculty members voice concerns about student collaboration. Let’s consider two of the most common:

- **Accountability**: How do I hold all students in the team accountable for doing their share of the work? How do members of a team hold each other accountable?

- **Time constraints**: How do I engage students in meaningful collaborative work when it takes so much class time?

Some of the emerging educational technologies might be able to address these prevalent concerns in an easy and user-friendly manner. This summer NYIT has adopted Google Apps for Education. We now have access to a suite of tools that allow students to collaborate – from any location and at any time – and that keep track of individuals’ contributions to the work.

This week, we’ll look at how to access the tools and a brief description of the ways you might use some of them. The next few Weekly Teaching Notes will highlight some of the ways you can use Google Apps to support make student collaboration, making it even more effective. In the spring semester, join your colleagues for some workshops at the Center for Teaching and Learning, in which faculty members will demonstrate the ways they have put Google Apps to use.

First, how do you access Google Apps? Log into the portal at [http://my.nyit.edu](http://my.nyit.edu), and look at the menu on the left side of the screen. At the bottom of the list, you will find links to “NYIT Apps Calendar,” “NYIT Apps Docs,” and “NYIT Apps Sites.” Each of these tools can be used publically, so the world can see them, or privately, with access restricted to whomever you designate. You can give people view-only access, or you can grant them editing privileges.

**Google Calendar** lets you create multiple calendars. You can create one for each course you teach, and put class meetings, readings, and assignment due dates on it. Students can subscribe to the calendars for each of their courses—when you make a change to the course calendar, it will automatically appear in the students’ accounts. Since student email at NYIT is hosted by Gmail, students can access the Google Apps calendar whenever they check their email.

**Google Docs** actually includes several different tools: a word processor, a spreadsheet, presentation software, a forms/survey generator that deposits data directly into a spreadsheet, and a drawing tool. You can create a “collection” of various documents and share the collection with a class. Any document added to that collection is also shared, automatically. Google docs have some special Web 2.0 features students already might be using outside school: students working on a document or a presentation can edit simultaneously and can use a chat window on one side of the screen to talk about what they’re doing. If they need to work asynchronously, they can leave comments for one another in a Facebook-style threaded display. You can track changes to the document, which allows you to see who did what and also allows you to ‘roll back’ to a previous version.
**Google Sites** provides a simple interface to build a web site, and has a large number of templates to get you and your students started. Sites can be used to organize information for a course, a project, or anything in between. They can be used as repositories for documents, links to resources, or as a collaborative creative space in which students build a project. As with Google Docs, you can track changes to the site, and hold students accountable for their individual contributions.

**Help!**

All Google Apps include comprehensive help pages. At the top right corner of the window, click the gear-shaped icon. The menu will allow you to change your settings (preferences), and will also direct you to the help pages, which are both indexed and searchable. For additional technical support, please contact Service Central at servicecentral@nyit.edu.

In the coming weeks, we will go into more detail about how you can use each of these tools to enhance student engagement and learning in your courses. To follow up on any of these ideas, please contact me at fglazer@nyit.edu.

Submitted by:
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More on Student Collaboration and Google Apps

Many schools in the US and around the world are using Google Apps for Education to support student learning and provide opportunities for student engagement and collaboration.

You might ask: “What’s in it for me?” A simple answer is:

1) It will save you a lot of time
2) It will make you a very interesting teacher who uses technology innovatively (students love Google Apps’ user-friendly interface!)

You might also ask: “What’s in it for my students?” A simple answer is:

1) Easy collaboration: no more multiple copies of documents, each one slightly different
2) Easy collaboration: easy scheduling!
3) Skills that are transferable to the work world

You have probably read or heard the term "cloud computing" or "working in the cloud" or some such phrase with cloud in it. For those unsure of this term, it is really just a metaphor for putting the stuff you create – documents, or spreadsheets, or calendars, or web sites – on a server somewhere in "Google land" so that you and others can access it whenever you are on the Internet.

This is actually a fairly straightforward concept, but the implications are profound. We no longer need to remember a flash drive with the presentation we want to use, no longer need to lug the laptop to a classroom that already has a computer in it, and no longer need to worry about showing up to class on the other side of campus only to realize we forgot our notes for the class.

I have been using Google Apps with my classes for about 3 years now. Initially, I used my personal Google account and now, supported by NYIT, I use Google Apps for Education. I find that I teach differently and my students are more engaged in the class.

Sharing class materials is easy

**Google Sites.** Faculty can create basic web sites for their classes to serve as "home base." For many of my face-to-face classes, I set up a class site with one page for the syllabus, one for a list of blog sites the students have created, a third for class announcements, and a “file cabinet” page to house my video lectures and accompanying Power Point slides. This allows students to access course material anytime they can get on the Internet. I have also found it useful to use during class to refer back to the syllabus, or to bring up a document about which a student might have a question.

**Google Docs.** If you don’t want to set up a Google Site, you have another option that is just as easy. Google Docs allows you to create a ‘collection,’ and tag specific files as part of the collection. If you create a collection and share it with your class, then any document you subsequently add to the collection will be shared as well, automatically.
You can create ‘collections-within-collections,’ analogous to creating sub-folders, which gives you more flexibility. You could, for example, have a master “collection” for each class, with sub-collections for each major topic. To make things even easier, Google Docs will let you upload an entire folder at a time, and will automatically create collections for each sub-folder.

**Students collaborate easily and are more accountable for their work**

**Google Docs.** Google documents allow multiple users to contribute to one document and collaborate interactively on a project.

For the Group Presentation project in my Speech 105 class, one student in the group creates the initial Google Presentation file and shares it with the others (and with me). Students can see what has already been done and can plan their contributions accordingly. Google Docs allows me to see which student created which portion of the presentation, making it easier to assign equitable grades.

**Google Calendar.** Google calendar facilitates work progress and supports creation of timelines.

Students working in groups can create and share a project calendar. They can establish deadlines for stages of the project and schedule group meetings. If they find it helpful, individual students can configure their calendar to send them text message reminders in advance of important deadlines.

**Google Sites.** Students can create sites to organize their work. The site can provide a structure that makes it easy to find their presentations and other documents, links to resources, and the group’s calendar.

These are just a few examples of the many things that both you and your students can do more effectively with Google Apps. There are many more possibilities, some of which we have yet to think of. The easiest way to get started, however, is to sign into the NYIT portal, click on one of the new Google App links on the left, and begin to experiment.

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Your feedback, suggestions, and original ideas are always welcome! To follow up on any of these ideas, please contact me at fglazer@nyit.edu.

Submitted by:
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Which tool? ... Blackboard? Google Apps? Something else?

Four faculty members at NYIT with expertise in Blackboard (Bb) and Google Apps shared some strategies they use to increase student engagement and learning and answered questions from the other participants about how to achieve certain pedagogical goals using these tools. Here, I share some of the ideas generated at the workshop. Thanks to Dan Quigley, College of Arts and Sciences, and to Kate O’Hara, Stan Silverman, and Mike Uttendorfer, all in the School of Education, for sharing their experiences.

Our panelists prefer Google Apps as a tool for facilitating group work. Do you want your students to write a paper or create a presentation collaboratively? Edit one another’s writing? Collect and analyze data? Google Sites or Google Documents can be used to organize contributions from multiple students, much as you might use the wiki tool in Blackboard. Google Docs includes a word processor, a presentation tool, a spreadsheet, and a form generator that deposits information into a spreadsheet.

Google Forms are especially versatile – the four faculty on the panel use the tool for attendance, for gathering information in one place (e.g., students’ choice of topics for papers), for quizzes and anonymous surveys, and as a way for students to get to know one another. This last technique is employed by Stan Silverman, who asks students to answer a series of questions about themselves. All the students can view each others’ responses on the spreadsheet, and Stan uses their responses to selected questions in the survey as a way to sort his students into groups.

Blackboard does have tools for groups, and many of those tools can link directly to the grade center. However, as Mike Uttendorfer pointed out, if students are sharing documents back and forth the groups tool in Bb will result in multiple copies of a document at different stages of completion, while Google Apps will maintain a single document, with a history of changes and the ability to revert to an earlier version.

One innovative idea for integrating the two suites of tools is to embed the Google documents, drawings, forms, etc. on a content page in Bb. Kate O’Hara, who shared this idea, said it makes the Bb pages more visually appealing to students, and the students can use Google Apps from within the Bb environment. This strategy has the added advantage of giving the student a wider variety of tools to use, and familiarity with Google Apps gives them a skill they can use in a professional setting.

One of the recurring themes during the workshop was how to organize course materials. Mike Uttendorfer does this within Bb by creating a content page for each week/unit of the course, and giving that page a consistent structure each week. The page starts with a weekly ‘roadmap’ that includes the learning objectives, activities, resources, and approximate time required to complete each task. Folders on the page keep resource materials and activities grouped together, and each unit ends with a self-assessment for the students, so they can gauge their mastery of the material. Frequent use of anonymous surveys helps Mike gather feedback about the course design and any difficulties the students might be having with the material.
If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a video is worth an essay. Several of the faculty use short screencasts to give students a tour of the virtual environment, directions on how to do things, feedback on student work, and to convey content. Dan Quigley asks his students to use a free screencasting tool (two popular tools are Jing – [http://www.jingproject.com](http://www.jingproject.com) – and Screencast-O-Matic – [http://www.screencast-o-matic.com](http://www.screencast-o-matic.com)) to provide narration for a slide presentation, as a way to move student presentations online. It is a good idea to provide students with several options when using this approach, because the computers they have at home are going to have a range of ability with respect to the technologies they can support.

A third thread to the conversation was synchronous activities. Students learn best with a blend of asynchronous and synchronous activities – regardless of whether the synchronous activities occur online or in person – especially when the learning that happens in one venue is reinforced in the other. We had a wide-ranging discussion of different tools that are available, each of which has different strengths and limitations. Dan Quigley made an excellent point: when starting out, keep your (and your students’) expectations realistic. If you want to experiment with a synchronous online format like a webinar, it might be best to do so as an enhancement to a course that meets in person – that way if the technology doesn't work as advertised, you have the regular class meeting as a backup.

As you can see, there are lots of choices out there. Ultimately, the best choice is the one that allows you to answer “yes” to these questions:

- Does this tool measurably improve teaching and learning?
- Will this tool help my students become more engaged with the course material?
- Does this tool make my work or that of my students easier and more efficient?
- Is this tool “better enough” than what I’m currently using to justify the time and effort required to learn it?

Your feedback, suggestions, and original ideas are always welcome! To follow up on any of these ideas, please contact me at fglazer@nyit.edu.

Submitted by:
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There’s an intriguing new theory of learning out there called GAMIFICATION. While this may sound like educational gaming, actually it is not. Gamification suggests that our students (at least the digital natives among them) are used to the kind of incentive structures that are built into digital games. If that’s the case, why can’t we incorporate similar incentive structures into how we teach? That’s the question that gamification scholars are exploring—and you don’t even need technology to do it. The theory is really about motivation and engagement.

In understanding gamification, it helps to think about your own experience with games. Have you rescued the princess? Do you have a farm in Farmville? Have you ever ventured into World of Warcraft? If you do, think about how these games motivate engagement.

Some examples of how to incorporate gamification into instruction:

- Turn assignments into self-paced challenges or quests. You can give students several quests and allow them the option of choosing which to pursue.
- Give out points or “badges” for student achievements. These need not be extra credit, but you can turn it into a competition, visibly recognizing those that are leading in points, or in certain categories or themes.
- Design your assignments or instruction so that there are levels of achievement. Require students to pass one level before moving on to the next.
- Related to the item above, you can have each “level” end with a “monster” challenge, i.e. a harder assignment or activity that may take several attempts to complete successfully.
- Think about structuring group assignments similarly to large multi-player games. Groups, for example, can be chosen based on abilities (or points).
There’s a great overview (Seven Things You Need to Know about Gamification) from EDUCAUSE, accessible here http://www.educause.edu/Resources/7ThingsYouShouldKnowAboutGamif/233416

If you want to know even more, THE GAMIFICATION OF LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION: Game-based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education by Karl Lapp (Pfeiffer, 2012) is recent book that provides some great ideas.

Submitted by
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The Claremont Dialog

The Claremont Dialog helps students reflect on their curricular experience, whether assignment, activity, reading, or service. Many reflection models, such as the DEAL (Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning) Model for Critical Reflection and Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle, ask students to consider and make sense of their experiences. Students start their reflective journey by describing, for example, a field study, both objectively and personally. During a dialog, participating students may do just this – reflect and share with a group of peers without judgment or comment – on their field study work. If students do not wish to share, they may “pass” their turn around the circle.

The Claremont Dialog is an example of contemplative pedagogy, an increasingly “hot topic” in higher education. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society explores a number of practices that draw upon mindfulness and reflection techniques from both religious and secular traditions, such as the practice described here. The Claremont Dialog takes advantage of some conventional discussion tools such as agendas and clear objectives to facilitate dynamic and focused learning. However, it is structured to counteract some of the issues sometimes associated with classroom discussions, such as giving ample opportunity for quiet or shy students to voice their opinions.

In general, the Claremont Dialog draws from questions such as, “How does ___ feel?,” “What was your experience with ___?,” and “What did I learn about myself from ___?” The dialog is also considered confidential, and there is no judgment either during or after the experience. It allows for critical self-reflection in a supportive group environment.

In practice, the class:

- Forms a circle
- Takes a moment of silence/meditation
- The leader/instructor (who is part of the circle), explains the rules for the Claremont Dialog as well as the objectives of this particular dialog (perhaps including a guiding question)
- The leader shares his/her experience or response to the guiding question
- Students are given opportunity to participate by sharing their experiences as the dialog moves around the circle

Resources:
http://www.contemplativemind.org/
http://academic.regis.edu/ed202/subsequent/kolb2.htm

Submitted by:
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http://www.wcu.edu

Personalize Plagiarism to Prevent its Practice

Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards.
– Vernon Sanders Law, former major league baseball player (Pittsburgh Pirates)

Strong emotions help cement an experience into long-term memory. Not convinced? Think back – where were you when ...

- The first man landed on the moon?
- A prominent political figure in your country was shot?
- You first learned of the events of 9/11/2001?
- You celebrated an important milestone?

We can use this phenomenon to help our students learn certain key concepts more deeply. For example, let’s look at how Deborah Zarker Miller, an assistant professor of English at Anderson University, makes plagiarism very personal to her students.

First, ask your students to create an original work that is in some way related to your course, and tell them they will each have 60 seconds to present their creation to the class. A student in Foundations of Inquiry might create a brief video or write a short essay elaborating on one of the disciplines introduced in that course; a student in Interior Design might create a montage of sustainable materials; a student in Life Sciences might build a 3-dimensional model to represent a structure in the cell; a student in Engineering might create a schematic for a new, energy-efficient vehicle.

At the next class, after each student presents his or her work, let the students wander around and examine them more closely. Most likely, you will see a range of creativity – and of effort – in the projects. Tell the students to identify the work they find the most creative by standing next to it. Some students will choose their own work, but other students will likely choose someone else’s.

Once everyone has made a choice, tell the students to cross out the name of the person who created the project they are standing by, and to write in their own names instead. Inform them that you will give credit to the student(s) who have identified that work as most creative, not to the student who produced it. Wait for your announcement to sink in, and then ask if there are any questions. As the discussion evolves, the students will begin to realize the connection between what has just happened and plagiarism. Perhaps experiencing plagiarism from “the other side” will make a deeper, longer-lasting impact.

Resources:

students-feel-the-injustice-of-plagiarism/


To follow up on any of these ideas, please contact me at fglazer@nyit.edu. The activity created by Deborah Zarker Miller was used with permission.

Submitted by:
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http://www.nyit.edu/ctl
A perennial problem for many faculty members is students arriving late to class. I've found a way to encourage students to arrive on time, while exercising their creativity.

As one of the preliminary exercises in creating an animation, I ask the students to first read a series of short stories and then write a factual account of something that they have experienced that has made an impact on them. They are then instructed to set their written story aside and "perform" the story as a storyteller. This is a standard exercise commonly used in many classes that involve creative expression.

Based on this idea, I have developed a storytelling assignment in dealing with students that come to class late. When a student comes in after the class starts, all class activity stops and the tardy student is required to tell the story of why he or she is late. They cannot, however, tell the truth! Instead, they must invent and deliver a story on the spot that makes the class respond as an audience. The story must be entertaining, fantastic, emotional, or in any other way, engaging. The class then votes by showing a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down. If the vote goes in the student's favor, then they will simply be marked late.

If they do not succeed in their efforts then they are marked as unprepared. This exercise has forced all the students to be prepared with at least one good story and has completely eliminated the issue of lateness.

The exercise gets even better if I am ever late to class, since the rule also applies to me. The first time that I announced this policy, the inevitable happened. Heavy traffic made me late to the next class but I had my story ready to go and thankfully did get a thumbs-up.

Contributor:
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Your feedback, suggestions, and original ideas are always welcome! To follow up on any of these ideas, please contact me at fglazer@nyit.edu.

Submitted by:
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Short Video Guides for Students on Effective Study Strategies

College students frequently waste time using ineffective study strategies because they are unaware of which strategies are effective or don’t retain the suggestions for effective study provided by their instructors. Stephen Chew, a cognitive psychologist at Samford University, created a series of 5 short YouTube videos that describe effective study strategies and explain why these strategies produce learning that lasts.

In each video, Chew provides context and defines terms so that an instructor can direct students to an individual video for good advice on studying. However, because each video builds on concepts explained in detail in earlier videos, the greatest benefit will be gained by asking students to view all of the videos in sequence. The following annotated guide to the five videos is based on descriptions provided by Stephen Chew.

Video Guide: How to Study Long and Hard and Still Fail...or How to Get the Most Out of Studying

The overall theme of the videos communicates two important ideas. First, students who use ineffective or inefficient ways of studying will discover that they study long and hard and still fail. Second, students who use effective strategies will get the most learning out of their study time and will be more likely to succeed.

Video 1: Beliefs That Make You Fail...Or Succeed

Chew examines common mistaken beliefs students often possess that undermine their learning. The video tries to correct those misconceptions with accurate beliefs about learning.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RH95h36NChI

Video 2: What Students Should Understand About How People Learn

Chew introduces a simple but powerful theory of memory, Levels of Processing, that explains why some strategies are more beneficial than others for learning. Application of the Levels of Processing model when selecting study strategies can help students improve their study.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O7y7XEC66M

Video 3: Cognitive Principles for Optimizing Learning

Chew operationalizes the concept of level of processing into four principles that students can use to develop effective study strategies.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xeHh5DnClw

Video 4: Putting the Principles for Optimizing Learning into Practice

Chew applies the principles of deep processing to common study situations. Chew describes the conditions in which the student’s method for taking notes in class or highlighting text while reading corresponds to either shallow or deep processing, with predictable consequences for quality of learning.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9GrOxhYZdQ

Video 5: I Blew the Exam, Now What?

Chew addresses what students should and should not do when they earn a bad grade on an exam.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVRiMkdRsU

The first four videos are based on a presentation Stephen Chew makes to freshmen at Samford, which he described in a publication of the Association for Psychological Science Observer (2010).

Available at the following URL:


Submitted by:

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uwf.edu/cutla/
TED Resources

In the Fall of 2008 I distributed a TLC called TED Resources about a variety of speeches freely available online under a Creative Commons license. Please revisit the TED Talks website! In the last 4 years the TED Resources have expanded to over 1100 speeches on a very wide range of topics. You can easily locate the most appropriate speech for your needs by browsing for topic, key word, presenter, or length of speech (from 3 to 18 minutes). The site has an impressive list of presenters, including Bill Gates, Bill Clinton, anthropologist Jane Goodall, journalist Malcolm Gladwell, molecular scientist Paul Rothemund, educator Salman Khan, Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, and many Noble Prize winners. There are translations available in up to 84 languages. As an added bonus, the Ted Resources website also contains a searchable database of over 1400 quotes from the presentations. Visit often! I’m confident the TED website will continue to expand with new, interesting, and up-to-date resources.

TED talks http://www.ted.com/talks
Themes http://www.ted.com/themes
Translations http://www.ted.com/OpenTranslationProject
Quotes http://www.ted.com/quotes

Submitted by
Debi Griffin, Manager
Faculty Development Center
Bellarmine University
Student Engagement Technique: Silent Discussion

Rationale:
This well-established yet underutilized technique is one of my favorites because it supports critical thinking, active engagement, and social, dialogic learning. From a brain-based education perspective, it also stimulates areas of the brain that oral communication does not, theoretically encouraging the formation of important neural pathways. Finally, it helps build classroom community because it is a communication equalizer, permitting many of the quieter students a stronger voice.

Procedure:
1. Ask each student to write a response to a prompt.
2. Have students form small, circular groups.
3. Ask each student to pass her response to the right and then read and write back to the response that is passed to her.
4. After students have had time to respond, ask them to once again pass their papers to the right so that they each receive a new silent discussion that they will read and respond to. They should be engaging in the whole conversation, not just the original prompt.
5. Continue this process so that each paper is passed two or more cycles around the circle.
6. Allow students to converse in small groups before transitioning to a whole class discussion or concluding the exercise.

Troubleshooting:
- Students initially resist this exercise, but by the end of the discussion, they are usually energetically engaged. I require that the silent part of the discussion be silent (except for moments of appreciative laughter as students view their peers’ responses to their ideas). Once learned, it is a simple process, but step-by-step instructions are essential the first time out.

Adapted by Kira Trainor
Assistant Professor of English
Community College of Rhode Island

Submitted by:
Karen Griscom
Assistant Professor of English
Coordinator, Center for Innovative Teaching, Learning, and Assessment
Community College of Rhode Island
Got a Minute for My Worldview?

“By setting aside time for students to get to know each other in the early weeks of the course, professors underscore the importance of the initial student-to-student interchanges, acknowledge the value of the student viewpoints and the contributions of each member of the class, and open the way for students to begin to value other students as resources – all qualities of a working community” (Duffy and Jones 1995, p.129).

In this week’s teaching message, I offer two suggestions for helping students become more aware of their own positionalities and growth within the context of your course. In the classroom, it is a fool’s errand to begin the semester without clearly defining what it is we want our students to learn. Once we articulate our learning objectives and define what our students should be able to know and do by the end of the term, we can develop a comprehensive assessment plan that tests their attainment of these objectives at specific points during the semester. But to focus solely on students’ content mastery would be to deny a significant part of their development as complete beings. A meta-goal of our work in higher education might be to help students move along their own paths of intellectual development to an end point neither of us can yet see. If this is the case, an additional set of affective assessments can make this growth apparent to students.

Consider beginning the semester with a short activity that helps students take stock of how their personal and social identities might influence their perspectives on course topics. Brookfield and Preskill (2005, p. 158 – 159) describe an activity that they call “Standpoint Statements,” which can be used effectively as a more advanced ice-breaker that helps students take stock of where they stand on various issues vis-à-vis their peers in the class. To complete this activity, students begin by writing down a few demographic facts about themselves (e.g. race/ethnicity, religious identity, socioeconomic background, etc.). Students then brainstorm about how these features of their identity shape the way they view the world. You might encourage them to think even more specifically about how it will shape their perceptions of the course content. For example, a student in an anthropology course might say that his resistance to studying evolution is linked to his upbringing as a Christian.

While Brookfield and Preskill include a third written component in this exercise, at this point I recommend having students move into a small-group discussion of what they have written. In addition to helping students get to know one another, this activity has the additional benefit of creating a classroom climate in which sharing personal perspectives is valued. Permitting personal experience to be discussed in concert with more theoretical perspectives “allows students to claim a knowledge base from which they can speak” (hooks, 1994, p. 148). This particularly important for students who may feel alienated from the norms of traditional academic culture (i.e. students of color, first-generation students, etc.).

The end of the semester is the time when we typically evaluate how far our students have progressed in terms of mastering the course content. However, this can also be a time for students to self-assess their personal development. Consider using a closing assignment that encourages students to articulate how they have been changed by their experiences in your course. This could be done as a Minute Paper (Angelo & Cross, 1993) or as a letter to themselves that you will collect and mail to them in a specified
number of weeks or months. If you used the Standpoint Statement activity at the beginning of the semester, you might encourage students to think specifically about how their identities influenced their reception of course material. You might also ask whether or not their perspectives on the world we transformed as a result of having taken this course and, if so, how (see Mezirow 1981 for more on perspective transformation).

However you ultimately choose to approach this, bookending your course with reflective activities that prompt students to think about who they are and their relationship to your course will turn a mere class into a meaningful learning experience. These tasks help the student to see how his or her identities shape the ways in which he or she perceives the content of your course at the beginning of the semester and, in turn, how his or her perception of the world has been further refined by the course content at the semester’s end.

Works Cited


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A Primer on Critical Thinking

**Critical Thinking:**
A well-cultivated critical thinker:

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely;
- gathers and assesses relevant information, and effectively interprets it;
- comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards;
- thinks open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.

Facione (2004) described cognitive skills and affective dispositions associated with critical thinking. These include:

**Critical Thinking and the Learning Environment:**
- Formulate discussions and questions to improve adult learners’ critical thinking skills:
  - **Clarity** Could you elaborate further? Could you give me an example?
  - **Accuracy** How could we find out if that is true? How could we verify or test that?
  - **Precision** Could you give me more details? Could you be more exact?
Relevance  How does that relate to the problem?  How does that help us with the issue?

Depth  What factors make this a difficult problem?  What are some of the complexities of this question?

Breadth  Do we need to look at this from another perspective?  Do we need to consider another point of view?

Logic  Does all this make sense together?  Does what you say follow from the evidence?

Significance  Is this the central idea to focus on?  Which of these facts are most important?

Fairness  Do I have any vested interest in this issue?  Am I sympathetically representing the viewpoints of others?  (Paul & Elder, 2006).

b. Plan authentic tasks which address important issues or problems.
c. Replicate real life situations within the discipline.
d. Restructure learning to promote higher level thinking (See “Blooms taxonomy”).
e. Promote active learning by planning inductive teaching- learning methods such as:
   - Guided Inquiry;
   - Problem-based;
   - Project-based; and
   - Case-base learning.


Submitted by
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With the Community, Not Just In It

“It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.”

--Mark Twain

Community engagement, gaining ascendancy in recent years for some disciplines, brings great promise for students and teachers as a memorable and meaningful approach to education. A burgeoning literature characterizes many aspects of this pedagogy, but a number of clear principles help ensure a quality community-based learning experience for all participants.

validity of the “text”

By thinking of the community as a text, specifically selected for maximum impact in the classroom – as well as beyond it, selection of a community site or partner parallels the agonizing selection of a textbook. With no “perfect” text out there, teachers must choose a location or organization for students that will help them test out the theories they learn in the classroom, balancing the shortcomings and the positive attributes of the source. Instructors should consider the difficulty of the community agency as text, how easily it can be read and understood by students, and how poised for highlighting, underlining, and notetaking the agency and its staff, volunteers, and clients might be.

reciprocity

From the perspective of the faculty, one way to guarantee a successful collaboration with students and community partners is to consider the reciprocity of such an undertaking for all parties concerned. Community engaged activity thus represents not just a one way street, with students and faculty dropping into the community, with little care or concern about the true needs, the success of some approaches over others, and the ability to hear and understand what happens when the vital energy of students finds its way into the city. There can be nothing more deeply satisfying than for a student to know the tasks they have undertaken really do matter and do make a difference for others. Having that good feeling in the end requires much listening, an openness to others, and a deep connection to the community by the faculty member.

in it for the long term

By living in a place, one begins to know it more deeply and thus comprehend the needs of its constituents, organizations, and community as a whole. Community-based work calls for faculty to leave their offices, classrooms, and studios, and be in the city – on its streets, patronizing its retail establishments and services, letting its culture seep in to the faculty life. By listening closely and examining where the community does not quite come together or where there might be friction or where there exists a need to be met – these cracks and fissures provide golden opportunities for faculty, students, and institutions to truly be of benefit to the places in which they sit. A long-term attitude of a faculty member thinking with the community ideally makes possible a recognition of an authentic approach that will result in transformative, positive change.
Because any community-engaged project requires thoughtful articulation of responsibilities and connection to the educational purposes of activities, the syllabus provides the place for the critically important documentation of expectations for faculty, student, and partner. Taking the time to work with the community site or agency to help them see the learning goals of the course and the way that the community project ties in with the rest of the material from class makes a huge difference in understanding with the staff, volunteer, or agency with whom or where the student and faculty may work. In having these conversations before the semester commences and in talking them through, faculty help avoid challenges and circumstances for students, the faculty member themselves, and the community partner throughout the semester and beyond.

resource


Submitted by
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University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Developing Student Reading Capacity

One question that often comes up in discussion during our various communities of practices concerns reading, both getting the students to do the readings and helping students develop a more critical eye. Below are some suggestions shared by faculty at Laurier and elsewhere.

**Talk about what it means to be a X in your discipline** (e.g., a geographer). How does a geographer think, problem solve, read, write, and so on? What questions do they implicitly ask themselves when approaching a particular text? What is the discourse of the discipline? How can we make more transparent and accessible to our students, what comes naturally to us as academics?

**Develop an activity associated with the reading(s) that feeds into classroom discussion (or an assignment).** For example, in one of our first year Religion and Culture courses - *Evil and Its Symbols* - the professor asks her students to identify a short passage or quote from the reading that is salient to them, and to write a short paragraph identifying why this passage or quote spoke to them and how it connects to the topic under study. Students hand their work in 24 hours before class. Their work becomes the foundation for discussion in the next class meeting. A portion of the students' total grade is assigned to these submissions.

**Model critical reading in the classroom.** I like the approach created by Professor Shelagh Crooks of St. Mary's University (Canada). In her class, she provides students with a short reading (it could be one from the assigned reading list) and, in groups, asks them to work through the following questions. These questions are taken up collectively. This exercise is repeated several times over a number of classes, thereby building student capacity and confidence to read with a more critical eye. Discipline specific questions could be added to the listed below to reflect one's discipline or subject area. You could also turn this exercise into an assignment.

Questions: (1) What is the topic under discussion? (2) What is the issue at hand? (3) What position does the author take? (4) What evidence does the author provide? (5) How credible is the evidence?

**Other considerations:**
- invite authors into the classroom via Skype or other technology to bring a reading to life
- provide a worksheet for students to document their thinking/discussion

**Favourite Resource:**
*Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (John Bean, 2011)

**SoTL piece on reading:**

Prepared by
Jeanette McDonald and Anna Barichello

Submitted by
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Learning from Conflict in the Classroom

“The study of conflict should be viewed as a basic human requirement and the practice of constructive conflict as an essential set of interpersonal skills” (Wilmot and Hocker, 2011, p. 2)

There are several approaches that instructors can adopt for addressing conflict in the classroom as a learning opportunity for students. One way to begin preparing students to engage in conflict moments is to have them identify their approach to conflict and their conflict style (Wilmot and Hocker 2011). By having students read through the following statements and identify which statement aligns with their views on conflict, students gain valuable insights into their preferred communication mode—competing, avoiding, compromising, collaborating, and/or accommodating (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974):

- I love peace and harmony and will go to great lengths to avoid conflict.
- I sometimes will willingly engage in conflict, but only if I can see no other good choice.
- I like the give-and-take of a good verbal conflict and am not particularly wary of getting involved.
- I enjoy constructive conflict. My adrenaline gets going and I like to see what can come of it. I even seek out conflict at times.
- I count on conflict to help clear the air, solve problems, and get us to a “different place.”

Additionally, instructors can implement activities where students brainstorm constructive and deconstructive approaches for addressing conflict. One activity, adapted from “The Complete Guide to Conflict Resolution in the Workplace” by Marick F. Masters and Robert R. Albright, asks students to think of a recent conflict they have had with a peer, superior, or subordinate; write down what the conflict was about; and list the various ways they could have handled it. Finally, they identify how they handled it and why it worked or did not work.

Utilizing role-play is also a helpful strategy for generating helpful proactive and reactive strategies for conflict communication. This active learning strategy gives students the opportunity to solve a problem, apply skills, explore/change values, develop empathy, and to become aware of their assumptions (Nickerson 2007). Role-plays are well-suited for exploring conflict communication because they help students experience “stressful, unfamiliar, complex, or controversial situations” (Bonwell 1991). Students can reflect on the words and actions of each character to determine the effectiveness of communication in addressing the conflict and the particular conflict modes present in their scenario.

Facilitating difficult conversations on controversial topics is a common practice among instructors from almost all disciplinary backgrounds. By incorporating proactive and reactive strategies for conflict communication into the course content and modeling constructive ways of handling conflict, instructors can better prepare students to learn from all aspects of difference in the classroom.

Resources:

“Managing Classroom Conflict.” Center for Faculty Excellence, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. November 2004.


Submitted by
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Teaching Evening (or other extended time) Classes

Teaching classes that meet for more than the usual 50 or 75-minute class period creates a different set of challenges for both the faculty member and the students. Consider the ideas below for maximizing learning in evening classes. If you’d like more detailed suggestions and resources for each tip, just ask! molly.h.baker@svcc.edu

1. During the first class, help everyone get to know each other.
2. Include opening activities in each class that assist students in quickly shifting gears from whatever they were doing during the day or before class to focus on that class’s topic/content.
3. Structure the learning environment in any of 7+ ways to reduce the mental fatigue that learners may bring to class or develop during a longer class.
4. Coach your students to “eat for learning” prior to class. Specific kinds of protein, carbs and fat produce energy; others make you relaxed and sleepy. Not eating at all before class is the worst!
5. Employ small group activities often during class, based on research for how to use them effectively to promote learning, motivation, and engagement.
6. Employ incomplete handouts, review sheets, worksheets or other printed resources that students work with while listening or doing throughout the evening.
7. Engage students in learning how to learn, through experiencing your disciplinary networks, researching or using tech tools that lend themselves to work in your field, participating in authentic class projects that simulate ones that they might do when working in your field, and getting started on meaningful assignments that require various types of library research.
8. Invite guest speakers to attend your class LIVE in person or via chat, speaker phone, or web conference; or in a recorded fashion such as via video on-site scenarios; or as an asynchronous critic of student projects.
9. During one evening class, devise several ways for the students to experience the content multiple times, such as responding to clicker questions, working through problem sets in small groups, developing exam or study questions from the readings, practicing sample exam questions with a partner, exploring case studies or scenarios in which the content is applied to solve novel problems, or listening to short presentations with 1-3 slides.

Submitted by
Molly H. Baker, Ph.D.
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Nutrition and Learning

Let’s consider a major factor that affects students’ attention and engagement, especially in an evening or other extended length class. Of course, overall nutrition affects the brain also, things like enough iron, vitamins, calcium, and fiber. But here we are going to discuss how what and when your students eat the day of class can make a major difference in their ability to stay awake, focused and able to learn for several hours at the end of the day. Most students don’t know this!

Brains need proteins, carbohydrates and fats to produce energy that can be draw upon while learning. However, not any type of protein, carb or fat will do. Some of these actually make a person drowsy or prevent the right kind of proteins, carbs and fats from doing their job! Consider these facts and then read more about it at http://www.askdrsears.com/HTML/4/T040400.ASP

1. Students who arrive hungry, in general, are likely to be irritable, restless, apathetic, sad, unmotivated, and less able to recall earlier learning or apply new learning to problem-solving tasks. Hunger contributes to mental fatigue, as discussed in Day Three. This goes for skipping breakfast before an extended morning class, as well.
2. Eating habits such as eating a large meal before class or eating a high-carbohydrate/low protein meal may solve the hunger problem, but makes your students drowsy and lethargic. Chocolate, pastries, bean burritos, sunflower seeds, bananas, dairy products, spaghetti with heavy sauce, and fattier meats tend to relax the brain and are ideal in the evening if you are trying to wind down!
3. Omega-3 fatty acids are important to general brain health. Foods such as eggs, flax or canola oil, salmon or tuna, soybeans, walnuts or pumpkin seeds, wheat germ, and almonds are excellent sources of these healthy fats.
4. Best foods for pre-class eating before an evening class include:
   a. A lower-calorie, light meal, such as a salad with tuna, vegetables, and dressing made with canola oil, stir-fried vegetables on brown rice, or even yogurt and fresh fruit.
   b. A more filling, but nutritious meal such as a PB&J sandwich on whole grain bread and an apple and glass of milk.
   c. Complex carbohydrates such as fruits like apples or oranges (not fruit juice), whole grain cereals (e.g., oatmeal) or whole-grains (not wheat, but whole wheat, brown rice), and as little refined sugar as possible (e.g., colas, candy, pastries).
   d. Proteins containing tyrosine amino acids, such as seafood, turkey, tofu, lentils, peanuts (or peanut butter), tuna, salmon. These proteins wake up the brain, rather than relax and wind it down.
   e. When eating both energy-producing proteins and carbs, eat the protein BEFORE the complex carbohydrates.
   f. Avoid nicotine, artificial sweeteners, hydrogenated fats in prepared foods, alcohol, junk sugars and white bread before class.

Submitted by
Molly H. Baker, Ph.D.
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Sauk Valley Community College
Identifying Student Learning Factors

Inclusive learning environments are promoted by finding out about your students and responding to what you learn. It is this responsiveness to your students that moves a course design from teacher-centered to learning-focused.

It is often easy to sit in your office by yourself and think about the courses you will teach. Maybe you prefer the coffee shop on the corner or at home late at night like me. Each time we design a lecture or a lesson or an entire course in this manner, it becomes easy to omit the most important factor in the teaching and learning environment – the student as the learner. And working by ourselves allows us to gloss over the assumptions we are making about those in the audience meant to be the beneficiaries of our plans. If these assumptions go unacknowledged and the students are not part of the consideration in designing instruction, it makes it difficult to design learning-focused lessons or courses. It is easy to think about these assumptions but how often do you take the time to write them out?

Use the quick fill-ins below to identify the student learning factors that should be addressed in your lessons or courses and to remind you what assumptions you are making about your students.

1. From that perspective that the absolutely perfect students enroll in your class, what characteristics (as learners) would you want those students to have to run your ideal lesson or course and see those wonderful students succeed? Take a moment to think about the background knowledge, skills, and attitudes you would like your students to have upon entering your lesson or course. Write those thoughts down below.

   **Ideal World Answers**

   *Coming into your lesson/course...*  
   What background knowledge do students **will NEED to possess** to succeed in your course?

   What kind of learning skills do students **will NEED to possess** to succeed in your course? Consider the vast array of skills such as reading skills; writing abilities; study skills; test-taking abilities; thinking skills; organizational skills; mathematical skills; laboratory skills; library skills; etc.)

   What kind of attitude do students **will NEED to possess** to succeed in your course? (i.e., expectations, interests, motivation to work and meet the demands of your course, willingness to revise completed work, etc.)

2. Next, consider talking with faculty that may have taught your lesson or course before. Talk with students that have taken similar courses or even your course in previous offerings. Ask them about that knowledge, those skills, and those attitudes that they **actually had** when they were about to enter your lesson or course. Ask them to be honest – brutally so. Use those answers to help you respond as best you can to the questions below.
3. Now, compare the answers you have written. Usually there are some mismatches. After all, we all don’t usually teach our ideal students. We teach our real students. The mismatches or gaps between these sets of answers are the student learning factors that will limit the potential learning for your students in your lesson or course.

In order for student learning to be optimized in your lesson or course, these gaps will need to be intentionally addressed in the lessons or in homework of the course.

And now that some of your assumptions about your students are written down, use them to ask your students questions once they actually become part of your course. Consider knowledge probes or skill-trying-out lessons early on in the semester. The approach of faculty mentioned in the Ken Bain book *What the Best College Teachers Do* of try, fail, receive feedback, and try again works wonderfully to find out what skills your students have or need work on. Finally, and most importantly, respond to what you find out by adapting your lessons and course to the actual students in your course. This ability to respond to what you find out will go a long way toward making your students feel included in the learning process and will allow you to meet your high expectations for them.

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The Past is Always With Us

Our brains are not built to remember unconnected facts; if material doesn’t relate to something else that is important to us, we forget. Not only do we need prior experiences as an anchor, but the quality of our prior assumptions, conceptual knowledge and biases can all influence what we learn, for better or worse. If you’d like to experience the importance of prior knowledge firsthand, take a challenging class in a new area. Notice how much you try to use your prior knowledge to anchor new material and see how many misconceptions you have!

Despite these well known findings, most of us do little to discover what our students already know (or think they know) about our disciplines. And yet, that prior knowledge may make or break their chances for success in our classes.

In introductory courses we typically don’t expect students to show a sophisticated grasp of disciplinary concepts. Unfortunately, we often find something more difficult to change: a mental framework that’s a bit dented or missing critical pieces. Misconceptions and incorrect information can distort and limit student learning, especially at the introductory level. Unfortunately, since this incorrect information is also anchored in prior knowledge, it can be resistant to change. Discovering common student misconceptions and designing experiences that challenge them is a critical part of building new levels of expertise. Experiments, demonstrations, videos and other active methods that directly challenge student misconceptions are often the most powerful since they use multiple channels and can have more emotional impact than lecture or readings. It takes a powerful stimulus to dislodge embedded rust.

As students advance in the discipline, they begin to develop more sophisticated knowledge structures. In these upper level classes it’s important to find out what students already know so that you don’t try to build on knowledge that isn’t there. Having a good understanding of prior knowledge can also help you advise students – someone with gaps that are just too large may need to take a pre-requisite course, while others may need to be referred for tutoring in specific areas. Other students may be able to skip some topics, or take a more in-depth approach.

There are many ways to assess prior learning. Some faculty members use pre-tests or writing assignments that identify strengths and weaknesses, but it does take time to read and analyze them, even when they are ungraded. Asking students to draw a concept map showing what they know on a given topic is a quick way to show you what students think is important and also gives you a picture of how they organize that information. Another approach is the Knowledge survey. This type of survey is often quite lengthy, but students are not actually asked to answer the questions as they would on an exam. Instead, they rate their level of knowledge of each concept or process on a three point scale from absolute certainty to complete ignorance. These surveys can be analyzed electronically and they provide a quick snapshot of the class that can help you focus your class time more productively. Administering the same survey or asking for the same concept map at the end of the course provides a check up on how effectively you were able to reach your goals; ideally you will see positive improvements for the class as a whole and for individual students as well.

Submitted by
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Knowledge Surveys


Purpose: “Knowledge surveys provide a means to assess changes in specific content learning and intellectual development. More importantly, they promote student learning by improving course organization and planning. For instructors, the tool establishes a high degree of instructional alignment, and, if properly used, can insure employment of all seven "best practices" during the enactment of the course. Beyond increasing success of individual courses, knowledge surveys inform curriculum development to better achieve, improve and document program success.”

Steps: “Students take knowledge surveys at the beginning and end of each course. A survey consists of course learning objectives framed as questions that test mastery of particular objective. Students address the questions, not by providing actual answers, but instead by responding to a three-point rating of one’s own confidence to respond with competence to each query.” The results show gains in knowledge, as in the chart below, which can be correlated with the final exam questions.

Knowledge surveys are powerful assessment instruments useful also for publications in the “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” where faculty conduct rigorous research on their own classes to determine learning outcomes.

Those who want to learn more about Knowledge surveys should register for Ed Nuhfer’s two workshops on this topic. Ed is probably the world’s leading expert on Knowledge Surveys.

Comparison of normalized reported knowledge and final examinations results from astronomy class. Students were slightly overconfident about their knowledge on several of the questions from the first part of the course and less confident about their knowledge level of material toward the latter part of the course. The latter portion of the course covered material that was conceptually and mathematically new to the students. (from Knipp, 2001)

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Effective Feedback

Timely and explicit feedback is an important component of the learning process. Below is an excerpt on strategies for giving effective feedback from *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (pp. 139-152).

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Research has long shown that feedback is more effective when it identifies particular aspects of student performance they need to improve rather than providing a generic evaluation of performance, such as a grade or abstract praise or discouragement. Although grades and scores provide some information on the *degree to which* students’ performance has met the criteria, they do not explain *which aspects* did or did not meet the criteria and *how* (pp. 139-140).

Simply giving students lots of feedback about their performance is also not necessarily an example of effective feedback. Too much feedback tends to overwhelm students. For example, research has shown that too many comments in the form of margin notes on student writing are often counterproductive because students are either overwhelmed by the number of items to consider or because they focus their revision on a subset of the comments that involve detailed, easy-to-fix elements rather than more important conceptual or structural changes (p. 140).

The full benefits of feedback can only be realized when the feedback adequately directs students’ subsequent practice and when students have the capacity to incorporate that feedback into further practice (p. 141).

It is also important to consider the appropriate timing of feedback. This involves both *how soon* feedback is given (typically, earlier is better) as well as *how often* (typically, more frequently is better). The ideal timing of feedback, however, cannot be determined by any general rule. Rather, it is best decided in terms of what would best support the goals you have set for students’ learning. Generally, more frequent feedback leads to more efficient learning because it helps students stay on track and address their errors before they become entrenched (p. 142).

**WHAT STRATEGIES DOES THE RESEARCH SUGGEST?**

*Use a rubric to specify and communicate performance criteria.* When students do not know what the performance criteria are, it is difficult for them to practice appropriately and to monitor their progress and understanding. A common approach to communicating performance criteria is through a *rubric*—a scoring tool that explicitly represents the performance expectations for a given assignment. A rubric divides the assigned work into component parts and provides clear descriptions of the characteristics of high-, medium-, and low-quality work associated with each component (p. 146).

*Build in multiple opportunities for practice.* Because learning accumulates gradually with practice, multiple assignments of shorter length or smaller scope tend to result in more learning than a single assignment of great length or large scope. Bear in mind, however, that a single opportunity to practice a given kind of assignment is likely to be insufficient for students to develop the relevant set of skills, let alone to be able to incorporate your feedback on subsequent, related assignments (p. 146).
**Set expectations about practice.** Students can underestimate the amount of time an assignment requires. It is vital to provide students with guidelines for the amount, type, and level of practice required to master the knowledge or skills at the level you expect (p.147).

**Give examples or models of target performance.** It can also be helpful to show students examples of what the target performance looks like (such as an effective paper or a robust solution to a problem). Sharing samples of past student work can help students see how your performance criteria can be put into practice in an actual assignment. Such examples are even more powerful when you either highlight or annotate particular features of the sample assignment that ‘work’ (p. 147).

**Show students what you do not want.** Illustrate common misinterpretations students have shown in the past or explain why some pieces of work do not meet your assignment goals. Such examples can also be used to give students practice at distinguishing between high- and low-quality work. To get students more actively involved and check their understanding, you can ask them to grade a sample assignment by following a rubric (p. 148).

**Provide feedback at the group level.** Not all feedback has to be individual to be valuable. You might at times identify the most common errors that students committed, provide the group with this list, and discuss those errors (p. 150).

**Incorporate peer feedback.** Not all feedback has to come from you to be valuable. With explicit guidelines, criteria, or a rubric, students can provide constructive feedback on each other’s work. This can also help students become better at identifying the qualities of good work and diagnosing their own problems. Besides the advantages to students, peer feedback allows you to increase the frequency of feedback without increasing your load. Keep in mind, however, that for peer feedback to be effective, you need to explain clearly what it is, the rationale behind it, how students would engage in it, and give students adequate practice with feedback (p. 151).

**Require students to specify how they used feedback in subsequent work.** Feedback is most valuable when students have the opportunity to reflect on it so they can effectively incorporate it into future practice, performance, or both. Because students often do not see the connection between or among assignments, projects, exams, and so on, asking students to note explicitly how a piece of feedback impacted their practice or performance helps them see and experience the ‘complete’ learning cycle. For example, some instructors who assign multiple drafts of papers require students to submit with each subsequent draft their commented-on prior draft with a paragraph describing how they incorporated the feedback. An analogous approach could be applied to a project assignment that included multiple milestones (pp. 151-152).


Submitted by:
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Have Students Process Feedback

Have you ever wondered whether your students actually read your comments, feedback, and corrections on their work? Here is a way to ensure they take your feedback seriously. After you return a first draft of a paper, a final draft, or project, have students do a follow-up writing assignment of paraphrasing your comments. This follow-up assignment has several good consequences. First, students read all your feedback carefully and do their best to understand it. Second, you find out how are interpreting your comments—in particular, whether they are understanding them as you intended. If they are not, you can correct any misunderstandings. Third, because they are really reading and trying to make sense out of your feedback, they are more likely to use it to produce better work in the future.

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Formative and Summative Feedback and Its Impact on Learner Motivation

According to Dempsey & Sales (1993), the motivational approach to feedback is based on the belief that “...letting people know how well they are performing a task acts as an incentive for greater effort in the future” (p. 4). Creemers (1996) cited the use of feedback and corrective instruction as one of the instructor behaviors that contribute to better student outcomes.

Learners tend to fall on a goal continuum that ranges from ego-involved (performance orientation) to task-involved (learning orientation). If they are ego-involved, they have strong incentives to demonstrate and display their abilities. If learners are task-involved, they possess strong incentives to learn, gain skills, and improve mastery. If a learner receives no cues or feedback to select or favor one goal orientation over another, they act according to their predispositions (Dempsey & Sales, 1993; Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

Typically, instructor feedback has been viewed as a useful technique to assist learners. For example, learner thought patterns and/or actions can be redirected and areas of strength or weakness can be communicated. According to Hoska (1993), it is possible to provide feedback to learners that can influence their goal orientations and maximize their incentive to perform. Approaches that have been successful include: modifying the learner’s view of intelligence, altering the goal structure of the learning task, and controlling the delivery of learning rewards. Hoska (1993) also believes feedback should help learners understand that abilities are skills that can be developed through practice, effort is key to increasing one’s skills, and mistakes are not failures; rather they are part of the skill-development process.

In order to provide effective feedback, the facilitator needs to reflect upon his/her approach to the teaching-learning process. For example, does the instructor view learning from a constructivist perspective or approach it in a more traditionalist fashion? If constructivist teaching practices are used, the emphasis is on helping learners internalize and reshape, or transform new information. This transformation occurs through the creation of new understandings (Jackson, 1986; Gardner, 1991). New cognitive structures can emerge from these understandings. In contrast, the traditional approach has been deemed to be more of a process where the learning process involves repeating or miming new material or information (Jackson, 1986). These two different approaches to learning will determine the instructional strategies used by the instructor, and in turn will impact the level of learner motivation. Feedback can also be organized around different types of interaction: learner-to-learner, learner-to-instructor, learner-to-content, and learner-to-interface (Hillman, Willis, & Gunawardena, 1994).

White and Weight (2000) discuss the issue of the online student who needs extra motivation, and propose various strategies that the instructor/facilitator can use to provide this motivation. These range from sending a direct note to the student to asking all students to relate their learning to their current work experience. The authors also stress the importance of the sensitive nature of these actions. In addition, they believe “Feedback that is timely is far more motivational and beneficial to performance improvement than delayed feedback. Thus, online feedback is best when it is prompt” (p. 63).

Formative feedback potentially “modifies a student’s thinking or behavior for the purpose of learning, and summative feedback assesses how well a student accomplishes a task or achieves a result for the purpose of grading” (White & Weight, 2000, p. 168). Since formative feedback influences thought and behavior, it is more motivational. During this process students are asked to continue doing what they
have been doing, ask questions, participate, stay on topic, and/or modify their thinking or approach (when and if necessary). White & Weight (2000) also stress that feedback should be multidimensional, non-evaluative, supportive, student controlled, consistent, constructive, objective, timely, and specific. They cite some of the best practices used by online instructors for providing constructive formative and summative feedback:

- Focus on specific behavior rather than on the online student
- Take the needs of the online student into account
- Direct feedback toward behavior the online student can change
- Help online students to “own” the feedback
- Give timely online feedback
- Check online feedback for clarity
- Consider online feedback as part of an ongoing relationship (White & Weight, 2000, p. 173-4).

As we strive to provide constructive and substantive formative and summative feedback, it is essential to understand its impact on learner motivation. This knowledge will allow us to utilize more effective instructional practices and provide more meaningful learning experiences, while also improving our course design.

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Holistic Conversations About a Course – Activity for the Last Week of Class

For some classes it may be important to obtain information about what assignments and experiences were of value before course evaluations are returned – especially if you are preparing to teach the same course the next term prior to course evaluations being processed and returned.

1. Prepare a sheet of paper that simply has a label for the assignment or experience on the top – one for each area you are interested in obtaining information. For example:

| Autobiography of your science education | Long-term observation journal | Article critique | Small group discussions on differentiation | Field experience |

2. Group your students by the number of areas you are exploring.

3. Give each group one of the sheets ask one person to be the scribe. They are to write what was effective about the assignment/experience and what was ineffective about the assignment. Give the group about three minutes to do this.

4. Rotate sheets clockwise. The next group reads what is on the sheet and adds effective and ineffective aspects. Give the group about three minutes to do this.

5. Rotate sheets clockwise again...same task as above. Give the group about three minutes to do this.

6. Rotate sheets clockwise – this is the last time – the group is to read all the comments and then rank order the three most important comments on the sheet. The groups may need more than three minutes but are usually done within five minutes.

7. Open the floor for discussion. Start with the area you are most interested in and ask the group that has that sheet to talk about their ranking and why they rated things this way. This allows you to hear, respond, and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses. Because the group that ranks speaks first there is less resistance to engaging in the conversation since they are just reporting out the ranking and were not responsible for the items on the sheet. What I have found is that this acts as a catalyst for a healthy whole class discussion of what was learned during the course.

In addition to providing you with guidance for the next time you teach the course, you will be able to reemphasize course outcomes, rearticulate interconnections of concepts and experiences, and communicate intent while having a chance to review material. Collect the sheets so that you can read everything and use them to shape aspects of the course the next time you teach it.

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A Classroom Assessment Technique: Key Principle and Restating

(Source: John Hertel, a law professor at the United States Air Force Academy)

[Effective in small and large classes and useful for online adaptations]

Purpose: To help both you and your students determine the knowledge gains from a single lesson.

Steps: Before beginning a discussion/lesson, have students write on an index card a broad concept such as the primary conclusion in a science article, the key point in a mini-case study, or the theme of a work of literature. Conduct the lesson. Before adjournment, have the students draw a line on the index card under their original comment and restate the same broad concept with—one hopes!—enhanced understanding.

Assessment and follow-on: By comparing student's understanding prior to the lesson to their understanding after the lesson has concluded, you get an idea of how well their knowledge has deepened—or not. You can discuss with students in a subsequent meeting the class's overall comprehension, sharing particularly cogent student summaries. You can also use the responses to identify and subsequently address misconceptions.

Examples: Two actual student responses to a mini-case study in business law, "Comedy Cottage":

Comedy Cottage

Key Point = whether the manager violated the duty of loyalty and competition by opening his business in the same location

Key point = issue injunction to stop lease order to prevent him from competing in the comedy club business within a certain distance

Comedy Cottage

Key point = No idea what this case is about. Don’t remember.

Key point = One principle is that of loyalty. In a corporation you are required to be loyal and not take their secrets and go create your own business (Copy Cat).

Submitted by Barbara Millis
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A Classroom Assessment Technique: Categorizing Grid

[Effective in small and large classes and useful for online adaptations]

**Purpose:** To help both you and your students determine what they know and don’t know.

**Overview:** In many disciplines, especially at an introductory level, a first step to real problem solving is learning how a variety of conceptual taxonomies work. In other words, students need to learn the rules for what goes with what. **Categorizing grids** can be a useful diagnostic aid in these situations. Courses in the biological and life sciences, for example, lend themselves easily to the use of this technique. To begin, you will need to identify a key taxonomy and then design a grid that represents those interrelationships. Keep it simple at first. Avoid trivial or ambiguous relationships, which tend to backfire by focusing students on superficial kinds of learning. Although probably most useful in introductory courses, this technique can also be used to help develop basic study skills for students who plan to continue in the field. The grids can be used as homework or to generate group-based online or in-class discussions.

**Example of Categorizing Grid**

*Sample provided courtesy of Robert Mitchell (Biology).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divisions of Aorta</th>
<th>Primary Branches</th>
<th>Subdivisions</th>
<th>Region or organ supplies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ascending aorta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch of the aorta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoracic aorta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdominal aorta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.psu.edu/celt/CATs.html](http://www.psu.edu/celt/CATs.html). Penn State Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. *An Introduction to Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Diane M. Emerson, Kathryn M. Plank, and R. Neill Johnson.

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Writing the Right Book for Right Brainers

Everything was going so well. Our university Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) focused on developing critical and creative thinkers, the University had constructed a venue for the QEP called the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, and we had reflected the national Creative Campus Initiative in the new Minor in Applied Creative Thinking we had OK-ed by the Council on Academic Affairs. But when we sat down to work out the details on the first course in the minor, Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking, the stars fell out of alignment.

Figuring out the student learning outcomes was relatively easy. Syllabi usually follow the course texts, so we set about selecting the best book. Unfortunately, our choices came down to two extremes, especially since we wanted a textbook aimed at college (and possibly secondary education) students. On one hand were the simplistic books along the lines of using nursery rhymes to stimulate creativity, and at the other extreme loomed a slew of highly complex, domain-specific texts along the lines of The Universal Encyclopedia of Creativity Studies in Psychology.

We wanted a book that didn’t insult our students’ intelligence or become so highly technical that the major concepts would be lost in domain-specific terminology. We wanted a book that was domain-general rather than written for a particular field. We wanted some illustration, but we detested those junior-high textbooks that clutter colorful pages with sidebars, pictures, cutesy quotes, and “If you were a tree, what kind of a tree would you be” exercises. We wanted the book research-based, but not research-dominated. And finally, to make it interesting, we were looking for a text with some good stories, best practices, key research, pop culture/current references, and a sense of humor.

Our problem took shape quickly. No text that we could locate contained, as they say on HGTV, most of our “must-haves.” After fighting through the frustration, we found one solution dominated all others—if you want the perfect textbook, write it yourself.

That option seemed do-able. Among the three of us, we had over nine-hundred publications, including over a dozen books. And since we had written seven books in the “It Works for Me” series for New Forums Press, we wrote up a prospectus and sent it to our publisher. His green light arrived last August (2011), but in order to train instructors we needed the text published by April (2012).

Six months to write a text and leave a month for our publisher was a tall order. We sat down and brainstormed a rough idea of the content. For the few months preceding our onset, we had been researching the material. We had actually facilitated a professional learning community (PLC) on creativity, and we had published a few articles about brainstorming and the creative environment, so we weren’t starting from scratch.

One thing that helped us immensely was coming up with the book’s precise title. We chose Applied Creative Thinking because the title’s acronym (ACT) emphasized a key feature of the book: we wanted students not just sitting there in their Rodin postures, but actually acting, applying, analyzing, assessing, and creating. You could say we desired for them to Bloom, at least in the sense of higher-order thinking, but, more importantly, we didn’t want creativity just another academic subject—we wanted creativity a skill, a strategy the students developed.

Poet Theodore Roethke wrote, “I learn by going where I have to go.” We discovered that in the very writing of the book we used the strategies we were writing about, but along the way the writing made us aware of other strategies, such as glimmer-catching, that we hadn’t considered in our initial brainstorming and planning of the book. In short, we were both authors and students, with the bonus of getting to ACT on the subject of our research.
Maybe all textbooks get written because the professor doesn’t like the extant texts. We’re not sure if all that’s true, but in writing our *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* (2012), we learned a lot more than we had just reading the research.

Our writing process not only demonstrated creativity, but modeled it.

Submitted by
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Hal Blythe, Eastern Kentucky University
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Book Review: Reading for Understanding: How Reading Apprenticeship Improves Disciplinary Learning in Secondary and College Classrooms


Who isn’t anxious about students’ reading? It seems that in every discipline and at every level, we are struggling to figure out how to hold students accountable for reading as a primary mode of learning. Do students read? Do they comprehend or retain what they read? How do we help them develop critical academic literacies?

This new volume is a fantastic resource for changing that anxiety into productive inquiry and promising pedagogical practices. The authors draw upon fifteen years of research into and practice of the Reading Apprenticeship instructional framework, developed by WestEd’s Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI), which advocates integrating “metacognitive conversation” about texts into classroom life (in every discipline). In so doing, the authors argue, faculty build on students’ underestimated strengths as readers and problem solvers and create instructional opportunities for "apprenticing" students into discipline-specific academic literacies. With the authority of several large randomized controlled trials proving the efficacy of this method and with the heart of dozens of “classroom close-ups” featuring the extraordinary work of teachers and students in high school and college classrooms, this book is both inspiring and practically helpful.

Although the examples come from high school and community college classrooms, I have no trouble relating this pedagogical approach to my setting. At every level, reading is about equity, and this book makes the case loud and clear: all of our students deserve a rigorous and engaging curriculum that apprentices them into academic and disciplinary modes of thinking.

Submitted by
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What to Do About Bi-modal Student Evaluations?

Have you ever received a puzzling set of student evaluations where one group of students thinks you are the best teacher they ever had, and another significant group are frustrated and consider you a menace to their grade point average? Over the years I have consulted with a fair number of faculty members who have received similar evaluations from their students, usually at the end of the term when there is nothing to do for them.

The most common reason for this scenario is explained in the work of William G. Perry, Jr. His 1970 book, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston), lays out the epistemological development of students in their early adulthood in a way that shines a light on the bimodal evaluation conundrum.

Perry's research uncovers how students generally move from a simplistic, dualistic view of knowledge (there is a right answer and the teacher's job is to tell me what it is) towards the apprehension of a more relativistic view during their undergraduate years. Later, during graduate studies, many students then move on to making a commitment to a particular world view, or interpretation of knowledge.

Perry's main line of development is laid out on pages 9-10 as follows:

**Position 1** The student sees the world in polar terms of we-right-good vs. other-wrong-bad. Right Answers exist in the Absolute, known to Authority whose role is to mediate (teach) them. Knowledge and goodness are perceived as quantitative accretions of discrete rightnesses to be collected by hard work and obedience (paradigm: a spelling test).

**Position 2** The student perceives diversity of opinion, and uncertainty, and accounts for them as unwarranted confusion in poorly qualified Authorities or as mere exercises set by Authority “so we can learn to find The Answer for ourselves.”

**Position 3** The student accepts diversity and uncertainty as legitimate but still *temporary* in areas where Authority “hasn’t found The Answer yet.” He supposes Authority grades him in these areas on “good expression” but remains puzzled as to standards.

**Position 4 (a)** The student perceives legitimate uncertainty (and therefore diversity of opinion) to be extensive and raises it to the status of an unstructured epistemological realm of its own in which “anyone has a right to his own opinion,” a realm which he sets over against Authority's realm where right—wrong still prevails, or (b) the student discovers qualitative contextual relativistic reasoning as a special case of “what They want” within Authority's realm.

**Position 5** The student perceives all knowledge and values (including authority’s) as contextual and relativistic and subordinates dualistic right—wrong functions to the status of a special case, in context.

**Position 6** The student apprehends the necessity of orienting himself in a relativistic world through some form of personal Commitment (as distinct from unquestioned or unconsidered commitment to simple belief in certainty).

**Position 7** The student makes an initial Commitment in some area
Position 8  The student experiences the implications of Commitment, and explores the subjective and stylistic issues of responsibility.

Position 9  The student experiences the affirmation of identity among multiple responsibilities and realizes Commitment as an ongoing, unfolding activity through which he expresses his life style.

We can see the movement from a dualist view in positions 1 through 3, then a movement that begins to apprehend the relativistic nature of knowledge in position 4, moving into a fully relativistic and contextual view in position 5, and then making the first steps towards commitment in position 6.

In my observations, many students enter university with a clearly dualist point of view. Accordingly, these students perceive that the function of a teacher is to provide students with correct answers. A faculty member’s insistence on critical thought and analysis is likely to face incomprehension among introductory students. In a way, this is quite natural. Even the most advanced intellectual, when faced with learning something completely new (learning to snowboard, for example) will at first desperately want to know the right answer! As we become more proficient, we can begin to see the benefits of different perspectives and styles, and might actually enjoy experimenting with them. But until we know we can make it down a hill without disaster at every turn, we’ll cling for comfort to the "right answer."

Assignments that require students to analyze multiple points of view will confuse introductory students unless particular attention is paid to preparing them for this task. What does it really mean to see something through a sociologist's eyes? A biologist's? A composer's ears, an artist's eyes or a writer's? Learning to "unpack" these different epistemologies for introductory students provides teachers with the tools to bring students on board the critical enterprise of learning the "lenses" through which the disciplines see and interpret the world.

As students become more comfortable in a field, they generally progress through the stages that Perry discovered in his research and the problem of bi-modal student evaluations tends to dissipate. Just remember that your students are not like you, and that you likely cannot remember what it feels like to not understand how your discipline structures knowledge. Preparing to teach an introductory course, particularly as a new instructor, requires a leap of the imagination to see the course from your students' eyes. It also requires the skill to survey your students early and often during the course to maintain communication and make adjustments as necessary.

Submitted by:

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# Group Member Roles

## Facilitator
- Gets the team started
- Makes sure everyone understands what’s going on
- Organizes team so they complete the task
  - *Does everyone get what to do?*
  - *Who knows how to start?*
  - *I’m not sure we all understand...can someone help?*
  - *Can someone explain it another way?*

## Resource Monitor
- Asks team questions in order to determine if outside resources (books, notes, materials, people) are needed
- Calls the teacher over for team questions
  - *Are there other materials/resources that would help us?*
  - *Do we all have the same question?*
  - *I’ll call the teacher over.*

## Product Monitor
- Makes sure each member understands the work, records the data, and can report out
- Gives update statements on team’s progress
- Makes sure each member’s thinking is incorporated into the group’s final product
  - *Are all of our ideas included in our final product?*
  - *Is everyone prepared to report out our ideas?*
  - *Did everyone get that in your notes?*

## Equity Monitor
- Encourages equal participation and enforces use of norms
- Makes sure all voices are heard
- Assures that all members explain their thinking and understand each other’s thinking
  - *How can we work this out?*
  - *Can someone restate what was just said?*
  - *We need to work on listening to each member.*
My thesis is that Socratic circles make a good fit for IDC seminars. Seminar comes from the Latin word *semen*. A seminar is meant to be a seedbed of new thinking made possible by the participation of the seminarians.

There is no universally-recognized definition or practice of Socratic circles. Over the last quarter century books, websites and journal articles have discussed the use of Socratic principles in the classroom, all with slightly different interpretations and applications. All, however, have two things in common.

1. **Appeal to the philosopher Socrates, considered by many to be the father of critical thinking.** Socrates championed questioning as the royal road to wisdom, virtue and truth. Ultimately he was put to death for teaching the youth of Athens to question everything, including what they had been taught about the gods. Some of his most famous quotations concern critical thinking.

   "*The unexamined life is not worth living.*"

   "*The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.*"

   "*Know yourself.*"

   "*Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.*"

   "*Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.*"

   "*Nature has given us two ears, two eyes, and but one tongue, to the end that we should hear and see more than we speak.*"

   In a former life, I was trained in the Rogerian school of psychotherapy, sometimes called client-centered or non-directive therapy. That was a thoroughly Socratic approach to psychotherapy. Carl Rogers, the founder, believed that those seeking therapy have the capacity to find their own answers. The therapist’s task is not to tell people what to do, Dr. Phil style, but to offer an accepting climate, treat clients with the utmost regard, work hard at understanding things from their point of view, and ask the questions that help them apply critical thinking to their crisis. A respectful milieu, Rogers believed, empowers and emboldens clients to find their own answers and work out their own salvation.

   Bringing Socrates into the classroom means, among other things, encouraging students to question everything (instead of swallowing whole what authorities say) and trusting that the students have within themselves the capacity to work out their own answers with a little help from their friends.

2. **Appeal to the circle, or the round table, as a symbol.** King Arthur’s legendary roundtable, around which he and his knights sat, testified that everyone sitting around it had equal status. Contrast the round table with the rectangular table in many board rooms where the president or CEO sits at the head and presides or pontificates, or the traditional classroom designed for students to look, not at each other for enlightenment, God forbid, but at the teacher (see graphic #1).

   In a group setting, the Socratic assumption is that every student has a unique set of experiences and a unique set of lenses or filters through which everything experienced has been passed, and therefore has a unique contribution to make to the group. Each student is expected to give others in the group the benefit of her opinion. Even not-well-thought-out, half-baked ideas are welcome. When one student speaks, the other students listen respectfully, ask questions, and expect to learn something—not just sit in silence and take notes, or wait for an opening to play their card.

   The circle culture aims to improve active listening skills and encourage civil discourse, as contrasted with *The View* or *The McLaughlin Report*, two current examples on television, where members of the panel attempt to drown out each other, cut off each other, and put down each other because they are interested only in winning the debate, not in understanding other points of view. Active listening and civil discourse are crucial to most things in life we value—relating within the family, communicating at work, being a good friend, becoming a citizen of the world.
“Highest” learning is the cognitive goal of the socratic approach. “Lower” learning is what the traditional classroom offers—basic knowledge. A class on Socrates, for example, would cover date of birth and death, where he lived, what he taught, and the like. We could call it “name, rank and serial number” or “just the facts, ma’am” information. A second level of learning, “higher learning,” would be logical questioning based on the information provided; i.e., “Why did Socrates not leave any writings?” or “What was the hemlock that he drank?” A third level, “highest” learning, plumbs meaning beyond the information and reaches for ultimate matters; i.e., “Why do bad things happen to good people?” or “What, if anything, in life is worth dying for?”

STEPS TO TAKE

1. **Arrange Classroom.** Many classrooms are not conducive to Socratic circles. Big tables and heavy chairs in a small space are formidable obstacles to Socratic learning. An ideal classroom for Socratic learning has easily movable chairs and no tables.

   Students in the seminar are arranged in two groups, half practitioners and half observers. Some instructors prefer to arrange the two groups in concentric circles, with the practitioners the inner circle and the observers the outer circle. I prefer two half circles facing each other (see graphic #2). The instructor is located somewhere outside the two groups, grading the participants on a grid.

2. **Process Assigned Readings.** The students have been assigned two short readings. I ask them to e-mail me before class one question each reading provoked within them. That serves two purposes: 1. It shows me that they read the articles 2. It can get those who are a little shy to speak up because they come to class prepared to make at least one comment in the circle. I often use a column from *The New York Times* on some current issue (immigration, war, the economy, end of the world, climate change, etc). The practitioner group talks for approximately 15 minutes. The observer group silently makes notes on the same grid the instructor uses that counts the number of times each student speaks and judges the quality of each comment with a plus or a minus (see graphic #3). The instructor calls time when she feels everyone has had opportunity to participate.

3. **Debrief.** When the instructor calls time, she invites everyone to take a deep breath (or stand and stretch). After a minute of decompression, all sit and she calls for a discussion of the process, first asking the participants, “How did you think it went?” Next she asks the observers for their input. Keep the emphasis on the process, not on content. The debriefing can probably be done in 10 minutes or less. While the groups are debriefing, the instructor may choose to participate in the conversation. At the end, the observers give their practitioner-counterparts their scorecards. I only get the observers to fill out scorecards the first Socratic circle or two, just to give them a feel for how the instructor will be grading all future circles and to impress on them that the participation of every student is one of the expectations.

4. **Reverse Roles.** Next the two groups switch places and the process is repeated. I assign two readings for each class, so no one knows in advance which issue his group will be asked to discuss (so he must come to class prepared to discuss both).

At the end of the Socratic circle, I sometimes have everyone fill out a Locard’s Exchange card, named after French criminologist Edmond Locard who 100 years ago posited that anyone who passes through a room leaves (probably unconsciously) something behind, and takes something out (i.e., a hair, bodily fluid, a fingerprint, a footprint, fiber from clothing, etc). On one side of a 3 X 5 card students will write a new thought they will be taking with them from the circle, and a sentence on the other side on what they—through their participation—believe they left behind. They sign the card. This invites a personal, confidential communication with the instructor.
### (Graphic #1) TWO MODES OF LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Socratic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students in rows with eyes on professor</td>
<td>Students in circle with professor outside circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor the expert; students observe</td>
<td>Students the experts; instructor observes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monologue</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend</td>
<td>Examine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
<td>Seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainty</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“These truths are self-evident”</td>
<td>“Come let us reason together”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogance</td>
<td>Humility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rightness</td>
<td>Virtue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child</td>
<td>Adult-Adult; Child-Child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### (Graphic #2) SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

- Concentric Circles
- Two Half-Circles Facing
## SCORING GRID

**Participation Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date__________________</th>
<th>Students:</th>
<th>Participation Skills</th>
<th>Legend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listens Actively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responds Respectfully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiates Ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Listens Actively
- asked a relevant question
- connected to another’s comment
- paraphrased another’s idea
- telegraphed disengagement/disapproval
- checked electronic device

### Responds Respectfully
- called a student by name
- made eye contact with student being addressed
- used sarcasm/ridicule
- monopolized discussion
- interrupted/was rude
- didn’t speak

### Initiates Ideas
- referenced assigned reading
- risked an opinion
- looked at instructor for approval
- raised hand to speak
- offered no question or insight