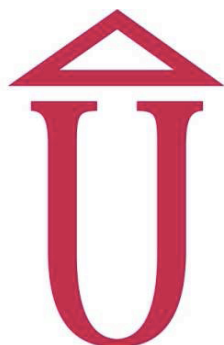


Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase

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L'Expo- Enseignement
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Shannon Murray
2011 Conference Committee Chair

Introduction

The 2010 AAU Teaching Showcase was held in September at the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown, and by a lovely coincidence, the PEI Jazz and Blues Festival was in town that same week. That coincidence made for a wonderful confluence of ideas and energies. Our theme was "Key Changes: Transitions in Our Students, Our Classrooms, Ourselves," and while, as happens at any university gathering, we did at times sing the blues for the future of higher education, much of the time we heard about new modes or new ways of singing old tunes, and we experienced that fruitful combination of the well rehearsed and the improvised.

Our focus was on change. (Has there ever, I wonder, been a time when we believed we were *not* in a period of change in university and college teaching?) While moments of transition can be frightening and full of uncertainty -- think of the first-year student approaching a university classroom for the first time, or the graduate about to discover what life is like after college--, they are also invitations to creativity, opportunities to improve and develop, challenges to discover new ways of thinking and learning. If anything can characterize the varied contributions of our participants in the conference and in these proceedings, it is a sense of excitement about how we can exploit moments of transition to make teaching and learning better.

You'll find three kinds of papers in this collection: invited talks from our keynote speaker and our two Distinguished Teaching Award winners; longer explorations of issues related to teaching and learning; and the "furious fives," a series of brief suggestions for good practice from our closing plenary.

Ajay Heble starts us off with a playful take on the intersections of jazz and pedagogy; using the composer and improviser Sun Ra as his starting point, he explores ways of connecting what we do in the classroom with the world beyond campus walls. Taking up that challenge, Angela Thompson and her students Colin Dillon, Kieran Gallivan, and Ericka Webb write about their experiences with service learning. Their collaborative work demonstrates how the theory presented in class lectures can be effectively connected to a need in the world -- in this case, the need to get children physically active.

Three of the papers engage in quite different ways with the opportunities that new technology presents for university teaching. Jason Pearson explores a number of low-cost options such as video and podcasting for dealing with the reality of high-enrolment classes. Katherine Darvesh suggests supplementing face-to-face office hours with an electronic office hour, using a system like Windows Live Messenger. And Dave Cormier and Bonnie Stewart ask us to think about what it means to be both "open" and "connected" in an increasingly digital world. In these papers, technology can provide a solution or improve an already established practice, but it can also alter the way we understand knowledge, learning, and communication.

Felicia Eghan, Anne MacCleave, Karen Bamford, and Maureen Volk tackle the large and important issues of assessment and feedback. Eghan and MacCleave begin with the perceived problem of grade inflation, but a review of the literature leads them to the larger question: what is, after all, the purpose of assessment? Karen Bamford suggests making the dreary chore of essay marking less painful and more effective through face-to-face marking meetings. Maureen Volk is concerned with our own ability as instructors to receive and make effective use of student feedback, concluding that we need to see course evaluations as data that must be analyzed and documented. A conclusion we could draw from these papers is that both students and faculty need prompt, effective feedback if they are to grow.

The parallel between student and teacher continues in the essays by Suzanne Seager and Anna Smol. Suzanne recounts her experience as a Math professor taking an undergraduate course in a subject she had always feared. Her time as an English student brought her some surprising insights about her fellow students and encouraged some changes in her own teaching. And Anna Smol adds a lively twist to her first class's explanation of course policies by giving her students a kind of case study, in which they are encouraged to "think like a professor." These papers suggest that both students and faculty can benefit from seeing how the other half learns and works.

In the rest of the furious fives, you will find a variety of brief, low-risk ideas to improve our students' learning. Greg Doran's KWL sheets encourage students to take responsibility for their learning by asking them to recount what they know, what they've learned, and what they want to learn. James Whitehead's "circles and squares" exercise is a simple way to show the importance of good communication skills. Angie Thompson chooses "daily experts" from her class to improve public speaking and to encourage participation, while one-word summaries allow Karen Goodnough's students to synthesize and communicate what they've learned. Janet Bryanton and Alex Fancy have found ways to enliven the end of their courses: Janet ends a tough course with a lively debate, and Alex asks his students to write advice and encouragement for the students who come after them. All of these strategies are adaptable, emphasize student responsibility, and encourage active learning.

And we are pleased to include the speeches that the 2010 AAU Distinguished Teaching Award winners were invited to give to the region's university presidents and that they shared with the showcase. Both Jane Magrath from UPEI and Diana Austin from the University of New Brunswick communicate their joy in teaching and their profound sense of the importance of what we do. Diana Austin encourages us not just to look at the "ends" of education but to focus on what comes between, because, as she says, "the middle is where the magic happens." Jane Magrath questions the increasing emphasis on "efficiency" in university education and suggests that good teaching might by its very nature be inefficient. Both award winners make explicit what underlies every contribution to this collection: that good teaching matters.

Introduction

L'événement intitulé « présentation de l'enseignement 2010 de l'Association des universités de l'Atlantique » a eu lieu à l'Université de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, à Charlottetown. Par une heureuse coïncidence, le festival de jazz et de blues se produisait dans la ville la même semaine. Cette coïncidence a permis une merveilleuse convergence d'idées et d'énergie. Notre thème était le suivant : changements clés : les transitions affectant nos étudiants, nos classes et nous-mêmes. Si, comme il se produit dans tous les rassemblements universitaires, nous nous plaignons parfois pour l'avenir de l'enseignement supérieur, la plupart du temps, nous assistons également à une modernisation des anciens modes de pensée et apprécions la combinaison fructueuse du bien préparé et de l'improvisé.

Le changement était au cœur de nos discussions (je me demande s'il y a déjà eu une époque où nous avons cru ne *pas* être en période de changement dans le domaine de l'enseignement collégial et universitaire). Si les périodes de transition peuvent être sources de craintes et d'incertitude – imaginons un étudiant de première année qui intègre pour la première fois une classe universitaire ou un diplômé sur le point de découvrir à quoi ressemble la vie après le collège – elles sont également propices à la créativité et aux occasions d'amélioration et de perfectionnement et offrent des défis permettant de découvrir de nouvelles façons de penser et d'apprendre. S'il y a quelque chose pouvant caractériser les diverses contributions de nos participants à la conférence et aux discussions, c'est bien un sentiment d'enthousiasme par rapport à la façon dont nous pouvons tirer parti des moments de transition afin d'améliorer l'enseignement et l'apprentissage.

Vous trouverez trois types de documents dans cette collecte d'observations : Les allocutions prononcées par notre conférencier principal et nos deux récipiendaires émérites du prix de l'excellence en enseignement; des explorations plus approfondies de questions liées à l'enseignement et à l'apprentissage et les « 5 minutes tous azimuts » (furious fives), une série de courtes suggestions sur les bonnes pratiques durant la Séance plénière de clôture.

Ajay Heble nous a entretenus tout d'abord de façon amusante des croisements qui existent entre le jazz et la pédagogie. Il a cité le compositeur et l'improvisateur Sun Ra comme point de départ pour explorer les façons de faire le lien entre ce que nous faisons en salle de classe et ce qui existe au-delà des murs du campus. Relevant ce défi, Angela Thompson et ses étudiantes Colin Dillon, Kieran Gallivan et Ericka Webb ont présenté leurs essais sur leurs expériences au sujet de l'apprentissage du service. Leur travail collaboratif fait état de la façon dont la théorie présentée lors de cours magistraux peut être liée efficacement à un véritable besoin au sein de la société – dans leur cas, le besoin de faire faire aux enfants plus d'activités sportives.

Trois des documents présentés abordent de manière très différente les occasions offertes par la nouvelle technologie pour l'enseignement universitaire. Jason Pearson explore certaines options peu coûteuses telles que la vidéo et la baladodiffusion pour faire face au problème posé par le taux élevé d'inscription dans les cours. Katherine Darvesh suggère de remplacer les heures de bureau traditionnelles en face à face par une heure de bureau électronique à l'aide d'un système comme Windows Live Messenger. Dave Cormier et Bonnie Stewart nous demandent de réfléchir à ce que signifie être « ouvert d'esprit » tout en étant « connecté », dans un monde de plus en plus numérique. Ces travaux universitaires indiquent comment la technologie peut fournir une solution ou améliorer une pratique déjà en vigueur mais également changer la façon dont nous comprenons le savoir, l'apprentissage et la communication.

Felicia Eghan, Anne MacCleave, Karen Bamford et Maureen Volk ont abordé la vaste question essentielle de l'évaluation et de la rétroaction. Felicia Eghan et Anne MacCleave abordent le problème apparent du gonflage de notes mais un examen de la documentation les pousse à se poser une question de plus grande envergure, à savoir quel est l'objectif ultime de la fonction d'évaluation? Pour alléger la corvée de la notation des dissertations et en optimiser l'efficacité, Karen Bamford suggère d'organiser des séances de notation en direct. Dans son essai, Maureen Volk s'inquiète de notre capacité à titre de chargés de l'enseignement à recevoir la rétroaction des étudiants et à en faire bon usage. Elle conclut en précisant que nous devons utiliser l'évaluation des cours comme des données devant être analysées et documentées. Ces travaux nous permettent de conclure que, pour progresser, les étudiants et le corps professoral ont besoin d'une rétroaction rapide et efficace.

Le parallèle entre l'étudiant et l'enseignant se poursuit avec les textes écrits par Suzanne Seager et Anna Smol. Suzanne raconte son expérience de professeure de mathématiques devant suivre un cours de premier cycle sur un sujet qu'elle avait toujours redouté. Cette expérience d'étudiante anglophone lui a fourni des éléments surprenants sur ses collègues étudiants et l'a incité à apporter certains correctifs à sa façon d'enseigner. Durant l'explication des modalités du cours, lors de sa première classe, Anna Smol ajoute quant à elle une touche vivante en proposant à ses étudiants une étude de cas et en les incitant à « réfléchir à la manière d'un professeur ». Ces documents laissent entendre que tant les étudiants que les enseignants peuvent profiter de comprendre comment ceux qui leur font face apprennent et travaillent.

Les participants des autres « 5 minutes tous azimuts » ont proposé une variété de suggestions courtes et à faible risque visant à améliorer l'apprentissage de nos étudiants. Les feuillets SVA (savoir-vouloir-apprendre) de Greg Doran encouragent les étudiants à être responsables de leurs apprentissages en leur demandant de dire ce qu'ils savent, ce qu'ils ont appris et ce qu'ils veulent apprendre. L'exercice sur les « cercles et les carrés » de James Whitehead est un moyen facile de montrer l'importance des bonnes aptitudes à communiquer. Angie Thompson désigne quant à elle des « experts quotidiens » dans sa classe afin d'améliorer l'art de parler en public et d'encourager la participation tandis que Karen Goodnough demande à ses étudiants des « récapitulatifs en un mot » permettant de synthétiser et de communiquer ce qu'ils ont appris. Janet Bryanton et Alex Fancy ont trouvé des façons de rendre plus vivants la fin de leurs cours: Ainsi, Janet termine un cours difficile par un débat animé et Alex demande à ses étudiants de rédiger des conseils et des encouragements destinés aux futurs élèves. Toutes ces stratégies sont flexibles, mettent l'accent sur la responsabilité des étudiants et encourage l'apprentissage actif. Nous sommes également heureux d'inclure les discours que les récipiendaires émérites du prix de l'excellence en enseignement 2010 de l'Association des universités de l'Atlantique ont prononcés devant les présidents universitaires de la région et partagés lors de notre événement. Jane Magrath, de l'Université de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard et Diana Austin, de l'Université du Nouveau-Brunswick ont toutes deux fait part de leur plaisir d'enseigner et de leur profond sentiment quant à l'importante cruciale de notre rôle. Diana Austin nous invite à ne pas voir que les « finalités » de l'éducation mais à mettre l'accent sur ce qui se produit durant le processus même car, comme elle le dit si bien: « c'est en plein processus que la magie opère ». Jane Magrath remet en question l'emphase accrue que l'on porte à « l'efficacité » dans le secteur de l'enseignement universitaire et fait observer que le bon enseignement peut s'avérer, de par sa nature, inefficace. Les deux récipiendaires du prix énoncent clairement le postulat sous-jacent à chaque contribution de cette collecte d'observations, à savoir l'importance de l'enseignement efficace.

Shannon Murray
2011 Conference Chair

Ajay Heble
Department of English
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Keynote Address

Destinations Out: Towards a Jazz-Inflected Model for Community-Based Learning

Abstract

When Duke Ellington, in a 1957 issue of *Down Beat*, was quoted as saying that he was not interested in educating people, fellow jazz composer and improviser Sun Ra, in the liner notes to one of his earliest recordings released that same year, responded by declaring, “I want to go on record as stating that I am.” In this talk, I’ll suggest that Ra’s pronouncement has a valuable, if unsuspected, role to play for critical practice and research in pedagogy, and that the questions it opens up can reinvigorate our understanding of the very places where we look for knowledge. I’ll suggest that Ra’s interest in educating people, indeed, has much to tell us about the kinds of transitions in education that are at the heart of this year’s conference theme.

In particular, I’d like, by way of an analysis of the objectives and principles articulated in the Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education (1995-2004), to suggest that for education to be a purposeful site for critical activism, one of our key challenges, as teachers and educators, will be to create structures in our classrooms (as well as within the larger institutions in which we work) that encourage broader forms of community-based learning and involvement. And this will mean reaching outside the walls of the classroom, as it has traditionally been defined. It will also mean producing new criteria of judgment and response, as well as a broadening of our sense of intellectual purpose. In short, it will mean (and this, indeed, is where I take my cue from Ra’s Astro Black jazz philosophizing) thinking anew about what we do, and about how and why we do it.

Introduction

When Duke Ellington, in a 1957 issue of *Down Beat*, was quoted as saying that he was not interested in educating people, fellow jazz composer and improviser Sun Ra, in the liner notes to one of his earliest recordings released that same year, responded by declaring, “I want to go on record as stating that I am.” In this talk, I’ll suggest that Ra’s pronouncement has a valuable, if unsuspected, role to play for critical practice and research in pedagogy, and that the questions it opens up can reinvigorate our understanding of the very places where we look for knowledge.

Now, I admit, Ra might seem somewhat out-of-place in a paper (and a conference) on pedagogy. After all, throughout his time on this planet, Ra insisted that he was—well, yes—from another planet, that he hailed from outer space. But it’s precisely Ra’s out-ness (and he may well be the most out-cat in the history of music) that commands our respectful attention. I’ve argued elsewhere that outer space functions for Ra as a metaphor for possibility (or perhaps for performing the impossible), for alternatives to dominant systems of knowledge production, and that this was particularly important for aggrieved populations sounding off against systems of oppression and racist constraint.

“If you find earth boring, just the same old same thing,” Ra liked to declare, “then come on and sign up for Outer Spaceways Incorporated.” Or, in a piece entitled “Imagination,” Ra asked us, “If we came from nowhere here, why can’t we go somewhere there?” The full lyric, reprinted in Ra’s book of poetry and prose, *The Immeasurable Equation*, reads, “Imagination is a magic carpet / Upon which we may soar / To distant lands and climes / And even go beyond the moon / To any planet in the sky / If we came from nowhere here / Why can’t we go somewhere there?” (206).

Now, all this might seem like flippant rhetoric and offhand space-age futurism from an eccentric and marginalized figure in jazz history. In a recent article, I've argued, however, that it is anything but (see Heble, "Somewhere There"). Despite being marginalized and summarily dismissed in dominant narratives of the music and all but forgotten in most institutionalized accounts of jazz history, Ra, to my mind, remains a hugely influential and pioneering improvising artist. Think, for instance, of his reinvention of musical and conceptual categories, of his profound and salutary commitment to enabling aggrieved peoples to become subjects of their own histories and futures. Indeed, "nowhere here," for Ra, was an apt and deadly serious descriptor for the earth-bound dead-end life-situations in which African Americans repeatedly found themselves, a world of systematized and institutionalized forms of violence, oppression, and racist constraint. As Ra once wrote, "We need to get off this planet as fast as possible. We'd better be out there when here blows up" (*Immeasurable Equation* 461). "Somewhere There," and "Outer Spaceways Incorporated," by contrast, offer a place of hope and possibility, a place of black social mobility.

Herein, I'd like to suggest, lies a tale about the resilience, force, and impact of improvisatory performance practices. If, as bell hooks has argued, "African American performance has been a site for the imagination of future possibilities" ("Performance Practice" 220), and if, as another theorist suggests, "the emergence of a radical future . . . is almost always necessarily defined by its very otherness from the world as is" (Shukaitis 112), then Ra's out-ness, his fondness for blasting off into what other African American improvising artists might have called "destinations out," needs to be seen and heard as a kind of (social and sonic) expression of black mobility. Ra's performances, often featuring a quasi-theatrical improvised romp through the history of African American music from the early forms of swing (remember that Ra played with Fletcher Henderson) to bebop, free jazz, and—well, yes—far far beyond into the outer space noisiness of who-knows-where, were themselves statements about a mobility of practice, expressions both of unspoken, erased, or whitewashed black histories and of unwritten, unscripted futures. The "somewhere there" of improvisation was, for Ra, part of black music's resistance to capture and fixity, its noisiness and clamorousness part of a refusal to give in to the kind of culture of acquiescence or non-participation which resigns itself to the way things are because (or so we are too often told) no other future is possible.

In today's talk, I'd like to turn up the volume on some of those earlier arguments to suggest that Ra's interest in educating people might have much to tell us about the kinds of transitions in education that are at the heart of this year's conference theme.

In particular, I'd like, by way of the objectives and principles articulated in the Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education (1995-2004), and the follow up World Program for Human Rights Education, and with reference to work associated with the SSHRC MCRI project, Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice, to suggest that for education to be a purposeful site for critical activism, one of our key challenges, as teachers and educators, will be to create structures in our classrooms (as well as within the larger institutions in which we work) that encourage broader forms of community-based learning and involvement. And this will mean reaching outside the walls of the classroom, as it has traditionally been defined. It will also mean producing new criteria of judgment and response (new grading mechanisms, new structures of reward and placement), as well as a broadening of our sense of intellectual purpose. In short, it will mean (and this, indeed, is where I take my cue from Ra's *Astro Black* jazz philosophizing) thinking anew about what we do, and about how and why we do it. This notion of reaching outside the classroom or what bell hooks calls "teaching community," I will suggest, ought to occupy a central place in any serious attempt to reflect on what it means to make teaching and learning more socially and ethically responsible.

Looking Beyond the Classroom

"Introducing or improving human rights education," the Plan of Action for the United Nations World Program of Human Rights Education tells us, "requires adopting a holistic approach to teaching and learning, by integrating programme objectives and content, resources, methodologies, assessment and evaluation; by looking beyond the classroom, and by building partnerships between different members of the school community" (paragraph D18). In the context of working towards such a holistic approach, this notion of "looking beyond the classroom," or of "teaching community," ought to be central to our attempt to reflect on the key transitions (and, indeed, the most pressing and contentious matters) currently animating the theory and practice of education. At an institutional

moment when complacency and careerism are the orders of the day, we urgently “need a new breed of citizen scholars who can identify not only with the institution and discipline but also with community,” as Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt argue (37). Indeed, when my students reflect on their own experiences with forms of community-based learning, so many of them come back again and again to how refreshing it is when our classroom work invites us (students and teachers alike) to think rigorously about the relation between theory and practice, especially when so much of what we do in the university “tends to be about career advancement and competition” (their words), and when so much of what we do in our classes is (again, in the words of my students) “about saying things that we don’t necessarily mean or that don’t have much relevance to people’s lives.” Students firmly believe that what they can gain from community-based educational practices, from pedagogy that looks “beyond the classroom,” differs markedly from the knowledge they derive from more familiar models of education. In contrast to the passive, compartmentalized, and decontextualized brand of learning that gets promoted by rote exercises that call for memorization and regurgitation (only to be forgotten when term tests and exams are over), community-based learning is very much in keeping with key principles articulated in the Plan of Action for the UN Decade of Human Rights Education, specifically that education “shall be shaped in such a way as to be relevant to the daily lives of learners, and shall seek to engage learners in a dialogue about the ways and means of transforming human rights from the expression of abstract norms to the reality of their social, economic, cultural, and political conditions” (par 6). “Looking beyond the classroom,” in short, seems to me to be one of the fundamental principles and strategies that ought to define a pedagogy that’s mindful of ethics and social responsibility. In times when we’re increasingly being called to account for what we do, and when, in fact, we need to find purposeful ways to respond to the anxiety, in particular, that surrounds current debates about the relevance (and future) of humanities research and teaching (an area too often viewed as having little or no social instrumentality), community-based education for human rights not only offers a resonant opportunity for teachers and students to be explicit in articulating the public relevance of the work we do in our classes, but also productively and purposefully reminds us that learning is an ongoing process of inquiry that is linked in complex ways to notions of democratic citizenship.

Now lest I be misunderstood, let me make it clear that when I talk about community-based education I have in mind here something rather different from the kinds of narrowly defined notions of civic volunteerism that are frequently offered in response to questions about (and demands for) public accountability. Indeed, rhetoric linking global citizenship to traditional notions of volunteerism too often gets bandied about these days in the service of a marketplace model of education. And as Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne point out in their survey of the field, attempts to strengthen democracy and citizen participation through civic education and service learning programs vary wildly in their underlying beliefs and assumptions, with many of these programs having at their core a decidedly conservative character. “What political and ideological interests,” they encourage us to ask, “are embedded in or easily attached to various conceptions of citizenship?” (21). The critical force of many of the concepts currently in fashion in educational debates—from “learner-centeredness” to “experiential learning” to “citizenship education”—indeed runs the risk of being dissipated unless a commitment to human rights and social justice is central to our efforts and policies. As Howard Solomon writes in an essay analyzing “the intellectual activist challenge to conservative notions of merit within the university” (180), “Liberal advocates of public service typically imagine a traditional, narrowly defined model of volunteerism that is perceived to be rightly separate from, and less worthy than, the university’s real business of teaching and scholarship” (184). Like Solomon, I want to argue that we need to challenge assumptions about what constitutes the university’s “real business” and to put critical pressure on received categories used to measure and to reward academic production. Solomon suggests that the concept of the ‘intellectual activist’ calls into question neat definitions of ‘volunteer’ and ‘community service,’ and it problematizes the relationships between university and society. It also problematizes the relationships among the three categories ‘service,’ ‘teaching,’ and ‘scholarship’ within the university itself” (185).

With Solomon, I’d like to ask what happens when commitments to activist struggles in the community are understood to be very much a part of the “real business” of teaching and research? What risks do we take when we feel compelled (as I so often do) to transform the classroom into a theatre of political issues? What happens when, as teachers, scholars, and citizens, we insist that through our educational efforts we are participating in (and, indeed, building) vital social purpose enterprises in our communities? And given that some of the most compelling thinking about activism has been suspicious of the enormous distance between the elite interpretive frameworks that academic discourse tends to impose on our understanding of activist endeavor, and the situated knowledges of aggrieved peoples, what relationship should our pedagogy have to those knowledges? How can we, as privileged thinkers working within elitist institutions, best express our commitment to, and affiliation with, those outside the academy who are struggling for access to rights and representation? It’s unlikely that rightless peoples have much to

learn from academics about human rights; the question, I think, is how best can we learn to convey the urgency and the complexities of their struggles.

These sorts of questions mandate fresh new ways of thinking about education, and they demand a willingness, on the part of educators, to take risks, to resist orthodoxy (including orthodox assumptions about matters of intellectual prestige), and to trouble settled habits of response and judgement. The point here is that if the exercise of human rights becomes meaningful not only through the existence of covenants and treaties, but also as a result of the broader cultures of consciousness and obligation that might help transform those rules into acknowledgement and action, then a radical reorganization of our priorities as educators seems very much to be in order. My talk today seeks to advance an argument and an agenda for a pedagogy that is grounded in the struggle for human rights and social justice. While such an agenda is in keeping with the Plan of Action for the recently concluded United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education, as well as with the objectives articulated in the follow-up UN World Programme for Human Rights Education, it remains at odds with so many of the reigning assumptions in current educational practice, particularly those that frame teaching and scholarship within the context of corporate logics and priorities.

Such an agenda, I must confess, is also at odds with so much of what passes for engaged scholarship and teaching in my own discipline of the humanities. Lennard Davis, for instance, has expressed concern about how the very act of reading (and, by implication, teaching) novels inhibits social change because we allow our consideration and analysis of the transformations that characters undergo (from blindness to insight, from self-deception to self-revelation, and so forth) to become a kind of surrogate for any form of external change. Do texts in an English class, Davis's work invites us to ask, become "sites of resistance" or arenas for dialogue, such that we don't bother to act in the real world? Is there a danger that criticism functions only in the classroom, that it doesn't purposefully get extended to those in the broader public arena who are engaged in struggles for human rights and social justice? Does theory (as it has become axiomatic in many humanities classrooms) run the risk of becoming so highly specialized that it may have very little to say to those who don't, by profession, belong to the intellectual class?

Such concerns, unfortunately, ring true, and furthermore, we too often pride ourselves on the fraudulent and misguided belief that an attention to matters of race, gender, class, sexuality and diversity in texts offers us sufficient purchase on the urgent ethico-political struggles being waged in the public arena. But I'm not ready just yet to give up on the work that I do: after all, I'm still teaching, I'm still professing literature. Of course, I'm frequently tempted to ask, how precisely will the work we do in our classrooms result in improvements in people's lives, in policy changes, in more just institutional structures, in alterations in the distribution of power, in prevention of human rights abuses? True, these sorts of changes can (and have) sometimes come about because of the work of teachers and students, and they have occasionally, sometimes profoundly, been sparked (in the case of fictional texts such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper," among others) by the work of creative artists. But perhaps these are not quite the right questions. Better, perhaps, to try to understand how research and pedagogy might bear witness to suffering and atrocities. Better to recognize how they give testimony and sounding to issues ignored in the mainstream press, and raise questions about positions which too often get institutionalized as unworthy of public attention. Better to understand, as Aruna Srivastava has argued, that the "disciplines and isolation of institutional life make those of us who have complicated investments in academe, those of us who are subjected to the domination of institutional norms, histories, and denials, forget that it is working across these boundaries and borders, in coalition (as fractious as these may be) that allows us to mount the most effective resistance" (125). Better to remember the words of Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, who tell us that "the organization and self-education of groups in the community . . . and their networking and activism, continue to be the fundamental elements in steps toward the democratization of our social life and meaningful social change" (307). Better, that is, to focus on the hope and the opportunities for change that our teaching and research might enable.

If, as educators, we aim not simply to transmit knowledge (via what Paulo Freire famously calls the banking method of pedagogy) but instead to encourage the activation of knowledge, we will, perforce, reach new audiences, invite broader forms of public participation and critical inquiry, generate new structures of hope and momentum. And this kind of work, as bell hooks importantly insists, "can serve to expand all our communities of resistance so that they are not just composed of college teachers, students, or well-educated politicians" (*Teaching Community* xii). With hooks, I share the strong belief that hope resides in our ability as teachers to find innovative ways to make the world our classroom, to create classrooms without boundaries. "The most exciting aspect of teaching outside conventional

structures and/or college classrooms,” writes hooks, “has been the sharing of the theory we write in academia with non-academic audiences and, most importantly, seeing their hunger to learn new ways of knowing, their desire to use this knowledge in meaningful ways to enrich their daily lives” (xi). With hooks, I locate a powerful sense of hope in the growing recognition among some educators that human rights education necessitates a commitment to taking teaching and learning outside the walls of the structured and formal classroom setting, a recognition--in keeping, I would suggest, with Sun Ra’s insistence that we take him seriously as a kind of educator--of the extent to which activist practices might be understood as powerful sites of pedagogical intervention.

Class Action: Towards a Pedagogy of Hope

Indeed, over the last several years, my own teaching and research have become increasingly committed to making links between what we do in the classroom (in my case as an English professor, with the “business we do with texts”) and broader struggles (for equality, for rights, for access to representation, for democratization) in the public sphere. I’ve sought to develop pedagogical strategies that foster connections between what students learn or do at university and how they come to understand themselves as socially responsible citizens. To that end, I’ve tried, whenever possible, to design my university courses at all levels (from first year classes to graduate seminars) to require various forms of community-based learning and research. I’ve encouraged my students to become aware of pressing issues in their communities and to develop a sense of ethical responsibility for seeking to address these issues, and to recognize the connections between our classroom texts and struggles taking place outside the academy.

Such pedagogical priorities are in keeping not only with the Plan of Action for the UN Decade of Human Right Education, which, you’ll recall, seeks to shape educational practices “in such a way as to be relevant to the daily lives of learners,” but also with bell hooks’s argument in her book *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. “Teachers who have a vision of democratic education,” hooks writes,

assume that learning is never confined solely to an institutionalized classroom. Rather than embodying the conventional false assumption that the university setting is not the ‘real world’ and teaching accordingly, the democratic educator breaks through the false construction of the corporate university as set apart from real life and seeks to re-envision schooling as always a part of our real world experience, and our real life. Embracing the concept of a democratic education we see teaching and learning as taking place constantly. We share the knowledge gleaned in classrooms beyond those settings thereby working to challenge the construction of certain forms of knowledge as always and only available to the elite. (41)

As part of my effort to re-envision schooling as always a part of our real world experience, the final “assignment” in my courses often takes the form of a “pro-active, community-facing intervention.” I challenge my students to move beyond the walls of the classroom in an effort to make interventions in the broader community. I ask also that they use these “assignments” as an opportunity to activate their knowledge and their education, to take the initiative to “do something” about struggles for social justice. They’re told, too, that they should feel free to draw on (and to work in partnership with) local resources and social justice organizations (Amnesty International, Campus Radio Stations, Public Interest Research Groups, International Resource Centres, etc.) in the community. They’re required, by way of an in-progress report, to discuss their preliminary findings (as well as any obstacles) to the class in a seminar presentation, to “pitch” their projects at an early stage before a panel of outside “experts,” and to submit (to me and to all members of the class) a bibliography of relevant sources and resources. At the end of the semester, I ask them to submit a written account of the work they’ve done in the course, and, in particular, to reflect on how that work has encouraged them to rethink their understanding of the places where we look for knowledge, to think anew about what constitutes research. I tell them that the written account should be understood as an opportunity to think through the rationale for the community projects in which they’ve been engaged, as well as to consider both the anticipated benefits and limitations of their work. To what extent, I ask, have the teaching methods and strategies employed during their projects been successful?

And there’s one more critical thing about this assignment: I insist that their interventions take the form of a collaborative project. I give several reasons for this insistence. One of the challenges facing any organization working for human rights, I remind my students, is to learn to how work effectively as a collective. Doing community-based social justice work can be difficult enough at the best of times, but these difficulties can often be

confounded by various factors (coordination of schedules, interpersonal relations, issues of trust and leadership, feelings of helplessness, etc.). I ask my students to work collaboratively so they can begin to recognize and negotiate these sorts of challenges.

Furthermore, in an era when our very frames of reference are massively shaped by taken-for-granted assumptions about the primacy of the individual, it's particularly vital, I believe, for students to recognize the importance (and indeed the urgency) of social organization and collective action. Such a recognition can purposefully unsettle institutionalized understandings of history that teach us primarily to canonize the contributions of individual people. Furthermore, as George Lipsitz writes, "Powerful corporations try to convince us that our only important identities are as individual consumers, not as members of cultural communities. Dominant political institutions encourage us to think of ourselves as atomized citizen-subjects, not as the beneficiaries of collective social movements from the past or as generators of new ones in the future. The pervasive nature of therapeutic advice we receive from newspaper columnists, talk-show hosts, authors of self-help books, and from trained therapeutic professionals themselves generally encourages us to seek self-improvement rather than social connection as our most important life project." (xviii). My insistence that students work as a collective is part of a larger effort to put critical pressure on such hegemonic social constructions of individualism.

Lipsitz, indeed, is forthright on the need for such efforts:

Intellectuals and artists today often live disconnected from active social movements. . . They work within hierarchical institutions and confront reward structures that privilege individual distinction over collective social change. The painful contradictions confronting socially conscious artists and intellectuals in our society are most often experienced individually, but they stem from the systematic and structural imperatives that give cultural workers contradictory social roles. By their very nature, creative and critical endeavors allow and encourage identification with others. Intellectuals often work in solitude, but rarely in isolation. Empathy emerges within artistic and intellectual work as a critical way of knowing, as a tool for understanding things outside our own experience. In times of tumult and change, artists and intellectuals can often experience their connections to others as both an honor and a responsibility. On the other hand, the routine conditions of training, employment, and evaluation in jobs that rely on "mind work" encourage a competitive individualism rooted in the imperative to distinguish oneself from others and to surpass others in accomplishment and status. Artists and intellectuals who have never experienced directly the power of social movements in transforming social relations can easily become isolated in their own consciousness and activity, unable to distinguish between their own abstract desires for social change and actual social movements. (277)

My own insistence on collaborative work, then, also has much to do with a deep feeling of unease with institutionalized (and, again, taken-for-granted) assumptions about what Lipsitz here calls "mind work," and, in particular, with the kind of "routine conditions" associated with classroom practices and priorities. As Kenneth Bruffee writes in his book *Collaborative Learning*, "there is no recognized, validly institutionalized, productive relationship among students" (66) in university classrooms. Students talk to their teacher, they write to their teacher, and they determine their fate in relation to their teacher, individually. Moreover, Bruffee reminds us, "traditional teaching assumes and maintains a negative competitive relationship among students" (66). Most teaching, indeed, fails to recognize collaboration as being educationally valid. I've long been noting that the most purposeful and the most engaged learning in my classes occurs through classroom dialogue and discussion, and not through what Paulo Freire has famously labeled the "banking method" of pedagogy. It's always seemed somehow unfortunate to me that after such tremendously inspiring and exciting in-class discussions and shared inquiry throughout the semester, students are required, at the end of term, to abandon this sense of "social connection" (to borrow from Lipsitz) and to retreat into the privacy of their individual consciousnesses in order to write standardized term papers and final examinations. Precisely because so much classroom learning remains rooted in these sorts of individual processes, I've been trying to find innovative ways to move towards what Freire calls dialogic or problem-posing education, to disrupt hegemonic ways of doing things in the classroom. In an effort to challenge these orthodoxies and to put critical pressure on notions of individualism, then, I ask my students to work as a collective (with all the attendant problems that come with collective work). I also try to discourage competitiveness by having students work towards a group grade (a grade which I've often asked the students to assign to themselves).

The response (especially from students) has been overwhelmingly positive. And what's particularly encouraging is that many of the students from these courses have gone on to develop (and to deepen their commitment to) their projects well beyond the frame of the classroom, to encourage replication of their efforts, and to spark new social justice related initiatives. Some have organized conferences emerging out of the work they've done in our classes, others have edited a special journal issue on pedagogy and social change, while others still have made a documentary film that's been picked up by the National Film Board of Canada and screened nationwide in Canada at various conferences and in a range of educational communities. Much of this work, indeed, has attracted the attention and praise of journalists, activists, educators, and several community-based human rights organizations. Needless to say, these sorts of achievements are a tremendous source of pride for me as their teacher: they speak very powerfully to the ways in which university level work can establish a genuine foundation for vital forms of civic engagement. And herein lies a message of hope.

Playing the Changes: Learning from Jazz and Improvisation

The key transition that I've chosen as the focus for my talk today has been the need to create structures in our classrooms (as well as within the larger institutions in which we work) that encourage broader forms of community-based learning and involvement. This transition, of course, touches on all three of the conference sub-themes (our students, our classrooms, ourselves). In an essay on civic engagement, community-based learning and the humanities, David Cooper puts it this way: "No longer directing from the sidelines or articulating abstractions from behind a podium," we as community-based educators now find ourselves engaged in "a pedagogy that demands a great deal of preparation and planning, but at the same time requires spontaneity and flexibility. We [have] to give up some expectations about what should happen in a college [or university] classroom. In the process, we [find] new ways of thinking about those questions that all of us in higher education ponder: Where does the learning take place, and what do I want my students to take away with them?" (15). Although he isn't referencing jazz or music, Cooper is, in effect, making a case about the community-based educator as a skilled improviser. Think back to what I suggested earlier: that the questions needing to be asked about education, the transitions I'm pointing to, mandate fresh new ways of thinking: they demand a willingness to take risks, to resist orthodoxy, to trouble settled habits of response and judgment. And these, indeed, are lessons we can learn from jazz and improvised music, from artists and creative practitioners like Sun Ra, who have developed and manifest enormous capacities of resilience. What new theoretical and organizational models and practices might be developed, then, for the development of theories of education that embed improvisation itself as a methodology? This is one of the research questions we'll be taking up in future work with the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice project. Cooper's question about where learning takes place is, in addition, precisely what Sun Ra's response to Duke Ellington (his insistence that he be taken seriously as an educator) asks us to consider. Indeed, I began today's talk with Ra's response to Ellington precisely because it issues something of a challenge to the institutionalization of knowledge, because it, like bell hooks's argument about the urgent need for democratic educators to break out of the confines of the institutionalized classroom, asks us to reflect on what it might mean to educate people not through conventional academic institutions or in traditional educational settings. What Ra has taught us, in other words, is that the *outside* can function as a place of hope and possibility. Ra's example points to the ways in which the locations where jazz maintains its most salient innovations may well reside *somewhere there*, outside conventional spaces, places, and institutional practices of legitimation. This, it seems to me, offers a vital and enduring lesson for all of us as teachers and learners.

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Professors, Presidents, and the Magic in the Middle

Abstract

The award winners were asked to share their passion and dedication for teaching both to the Showcase in a featured panel and to a later meeting of the AAU university presidents: here is Dr. Austin's presentation

I am delighted with the double honour I have been given: first an AAU Award for Distinguished Teaching and now an opportunity to share with AAU's distinguished leaders a few comments on the given topic of *why I think good teaching matters*. I'd like to begin by expanding the question to consider not just "why" good teaching matters but also "who" it matters to, beyond students. I'd also like to expand our discussion of why good teaching matters by handing out two "discovery objects" for you to study while I speak. (And, yes, there will be a test at the end.)

Despite the fact that having a vivid imagination is pretty much an occupational hazard of being an English professor, I don't presume to think that I can come anywhere near imagining accurately what it must feel like to be in your positions. You head one of society's most important institutions and yet you must have to deal almost daily with the frustrations of your position. You are always aware, I suspect, that our society often does not recognize how much universities contribute to society's overall economic and social well-being—not just through research but also through *teaching*, which is, after all, the catalyst that propels many of society's brightest and most needed contributors onto their varying career paths, including research ones. Perhaps even worse, I'm sure you're also aware that there may always be "doubters within the doors," professors within your own institutions who worry that "Administrators" have forgotten what it's like to be on the front-lines of teaching, who feel abandoned by "Administrators" who seem always to have their gaze fixed elsewhere, on the next big fund-raising gala or on the next legacy project.

So what can we do—do together and do to help each other—to try to remedy the frequent misunderstandings about the importance of good teaching to the health of our universities and to the health of our society?

Well, my contribution to our joint problem starts with my awareness of the importance of good teaching to student engagement--and of student engagement to student retention and to alumni loyalty later, as well as to the NSSE statistics that help with recruiting. So I do already have an inkling of the importance of good teaching to—let's be blunt—a healthy bottom line. And I also recognize that without a healthy bottom line, of course, the good teaching that I believe to be so important cannot exist because without adequate financing, universities cannot exist.

But I know as well that what good teaching does in the classroom to engage students—not just for "now" but for a lifetime - affects the bottom line of society, because I regularly hear from students who express their recognition of and gratitude for the ways that UNB's teaching has contributed to their personal and professional development. For example, right now on the UNB website's Careers Connection page, a former student who has kept in touch with me over the years pays tribute to the fact that, in his view, our poetry class "was hugely instrumental in helping me think creatively," saying that it helped him "see an alignment of ideas that other people have not seen." But the creative thinking skills that he learned in our poetry class and that he considers integral to his career are not being practised as part of a profession as a poet. Instead, these have contributed to the great praise he has since received as "an e-health visionary," and as a young man named one of Canada's "Top 40 under 40" Leaders of the Future (2004), as well as CIO of the Year (Chief Information Officer, 2005). His career is in health-care, where he has held various CEO positions, in charge of budgets up to \$4 billion--but he tells me he still owns (and dips into) his old poetry anthology.

Similarly, just a few weeks ago I received a congratulatory e-mail from a former student who had heard of my AAU award. Now the CEO of his own video-game development studio (one of the few small studios accredited by Nintendo), he wrote to tell me that a single comment I had made on an essay nearly 20 years ago had helped steer him towards his current successful career: “This was a defining moment for me and I have never looked back So you see, you made that observation and here I am with 20 some odd people and their children and families . . . along the road to here touching thousands and feeding, clothing, and growing people So through the six degrees of separation, I thank you for those people who owe you more than me.”

The many e-mails I have received over the years make clear to me that students already know that teaching matters, so I am left to ask what professors and presidents can do to help each other to make sure that teaching continues to matter at the university level. Well, although I may sound like Aesop’s little mouse cheekily making its offer to the mighty lion, I can promise to keep trying to help you and our institution by continuing to teach, as I’ve always tried to do, with both expertise and passion so that our students will be engaged both now and later.

And, if I had the courage of Aesop’s mouse, what service to making teaching matter might I ask of you in return? Well, my heart-felt, if mouse-sized, plea to you would be simple. You are all in your current positions because you combine two of the most important characteristics outside the classroom that can also help make teaching matter: you have a passionate commitment to the value of education, and you have the talent of innovative thinking. So my only request is to ask you to do what you have already proved you do best: problem-solving. Please just ask yourself some questions over the next few months, whenever you get a moment’s downtime from your job’s hustle and bustle. Are there any examples of revenue-neutral “what if” ideas that you might be able to come up with to show the “doubters within the doors” just how much you truly do believe that good teaching does still matter? Maybe drop by for a friendly cup of Departmental coffee and get the kind of feedback that focus groups can’t offer? Perhaps occasionally sit in on classes in various disciplines and have a word afterwards with the instructor and/or students? Possibly ask IT to set up an electronic suggestions box (anonymity optional) that you personally review and respond to a couple of times a year in an informal university-wide e-mail? These are only a few possible examples of the admittedly small gestures I am asking of you, but what I am trying to stress is that small gestures can send a big signal. Small actions can demonstrate a reassuring personal commitment to education, and they don’t have to cost much beyond a few hours of your time each month. I realize that time is a precious commodity for those in your leadership positions, but it is also a productive investment in your university’s morale. We all need to show each other regularly that we all care about teaching and learning.

At the start of my comments I handed out two small “discovery” objects for everyone to study, and I warned you there would be a test at the end. So now I would ask you to venture to tell me what you think they are.

Let’s take the first: what is this object? Some might say a letter-opener; others might say an old-fashioned pen. Both definitions are “right” if we just focus on the opposing ends of the object. But do we always have to approach objects—or problems—in this binary way, seeing only “either-or” possibilities? Try looking away from the ends to focus closely on the *middle* of this object, at the spot just before the division into the two ends seems to force us to make our choice of defining it as either letter-opener or pen. Once we tear ourselves away from a focus on the obvious functionality of the different ends, we are rewarded with a vision of completely unexpected possibilities—literally. This letter opener/pen is actually a type of antique object called a Stanhope, and it is a concrete demonstration of how open-minded, creative thinking can accomplish what might be thought to be impossible. Hold the tiny middle opening up against a light source and look through what turns out to be a magnifying lens. In this impossibly tiny space (about the size of the head of a pin), you can see 4 wonderfully clear photographs of Boulogne, France, all distinctly labelled. In other words, don’t just focus on the different ends, because the middle is where the magic happens.

If such unexpected possibilities can be found in a cheap, tacky souvenir, just imagine what possibilities might be discovered if professors and presidents also sometimes stopped focusing on the specifics of their hierarchically different tasks and tried to meet somewhere in the middle, to work together on the shared goal of making visible both to ourselves and to society our deeply held, joint belief that “yes, good teaching really does matter.” In one way or another, the teaching done at universities affects every single person in our society, every single day, so teaching really does matter, in concrete and in often unimagined ways. So let’s emphasize this point, by working together.

Oh - and the identity of the second item? That's just a modern Swiss gadget for splitting the tops of hard-boiled eggs. It was included as a distraction to show how easily we can all be lured away from focusing on what's truly important and thus miss noticing right in front of us the small miracles that are possible.

Jane Magrath

AAU Distinguished Teaching Award Winner

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The Marvelous Inefficiency of Good Teaching

Abstract

The award winners were asked to share their passion and dedication for teaching both to the Showcase in a featured panel and to a later meeting of the AAU university presidents: here is Dr. Magrath's presentation.

Thank you to the AAU selection committee for the honour of this award, and to you for the privilege of speaking to you this evening.

When she heard about my AAU Award, my younger sister laughed. “Did the committee know about me?” she asked. My sister is 7½ years younger than I am, and this means that she has been “taught” by me her whole life. When we were children, I taught her many useful things that continue to enrich her life: how to be afraid, for example, to eat the ends of bananas—because everyone knows that tarantulas lay their eggs there; how to turn blue, for example, while stuck in a traffic jam in a tunnel in Massachusetts—because everyone knows that if you don't hold your breath when you go through a tunnel it will collapse on you.

But my sister's question didn't refer to the lifetime of “valuable” instruction she's received from me. It referred to one specific event: the day I taught her to read. By the time my sister turned 4 (I was 11), I was a seasoned teacher with several successful placements behind me. I had taught a motley collection of stuffed animals, first in a school at the end of my bed, then in a shed in the garden; and, finally, in a permanent school-room behind the noisy old oil furnace in the crumbling stone basement in the old house we lived in, in southern Ontario. I'd had my eye on my sister—a kind of sentient stuffed animal—as a teaching prospect for quite some time; but it wasn't until she became a bright and precocious 4-year-old that I saw her full potential as a student. And one winter day, I decided to test my powers as a teacher by giving her the greatest gift: I decided to teach her to read. I don't remember the specifics of that day—and, fortunately for her, I don't think she really does either. But family legend holds that I took her down to my creepy basement schoolroom and refused to let her go upstairs—not for snacks, not to pee, not for anything at all—until she could read a whole page in the early reader I was using as a textbook. My sister learned to read that day—and I'm not sure she's ever really forgiven me.

I was thrilled with myself—in a few short hours, I had accomplished what real grade-school teachers spent many months doing. But at 11, I failed to see what I hadn't taught her. While I *had* taught her to put letters together to make meaning, my incredibly *efficient* teaching method had robbed her of the gifts that good teachers give beyond the mechanics of a particular skill set: the *joy* of reading; the transformative potential of “trying on other lives through literature”; the questioning and discovery and critical thinking; and the countless other things good teachers give to their students by teaching in ways that are less efficient than mine were then.

In one of his provocative books on education, David Solway writes: “. . . education was never meant to be *efficient*. It was meant to be difficult, interesting, pleasurable, errant, prodigal in every respect, transgressive, personal, lengthy, demanding, and hospitable—but not efficient.”¹

And, fortunately for my students, I have become a much less *efficient* teacher than I was at 11—a trait I share with the many good teachers I am blessed to work with, who model this *inefficiency* in so many essential and pedagogically significant ways. For example:

- No matter how long we've been at this, and how practised we are, it *still* takes us at least 20-minutes to grade an average paper—and we grade *a lot* of papers each term.
- It takes us an *average* of 3-10 hours to prepare for every single class we teach, even if we've taught the course before: because we do a host of inefficient things like re-reading novels we've taught before; like looking for new and innovative ways to teach previously taught material; and like constantly re-jigging our courses to teach new material.
- Throughout the term, we will continually adjust our plans for classes—sometimes even ditching all that careful and time-consuming preparation—in order to respond to the particular students in the course and the particular shape class discussions take.

And good teachers also know that only part of our teaching happens in the class. We often spend considerable time in our offices talking with groups of students and with individuals. We help with coursework, and we bounce ideas. But we also just *talk* with lonely or confused or enthusiastic students; we provide informal academic counselling, and (especially if we're women) we tend to provide informal front-line personal counselling—a significant, if silent, contribution to student retention. And because of this, all those other time-consuming things we do—like grading and preparing classes—rarely happen within the hours we spend on campus—instead, they take place in our evenings and weekends during the term.

Atlantic universities have a large number of really good teachers. We see this in the number of national, regional, and local awards our faculty hold; but we also see it in the significant number of really, really fine teachers we all know who haven't yet been recognized with an award—teachers who transform the lives of their students by embracing a wide variety of pedagogies and practices that are “difficult, interesting, pleasurable, errant, prodigal in every respect, transgressive, personal, lengthy, demanding, and hospitable—but not efficient.”

And this *inefficiency* is why good teaching—something absolutely essential to universities—is, in the 21st-century, with the drive towards the corporatization of universities and its inherent push towards efficiency, often oddly at odds with the mandates of universities and with the focus of administrators. And this is why new policies and procedures—made at the administrative level and usually *without* consultation with teaching faculty—can *hinder* good teaching—ironically undermining the very purpose of the university in the name of making the university more purposeful.

A quick example:

Our university has a particular lounge that faculty have traditionally made use of for special, innovative teaching that cannot be done in their regular classrooms: for various displays, and for presentations to which members of the larger PEI community are also invited, for example. One of the wonderful things about this space was that it could be booked directly by faculty—often with relatively short notice—and that tables and chairs could be brought into the room to make it work for a wide variety of events. Recently, though, a complicated new policy has been implemented which ultimately means that while faculty can still book the room, their departments will be charged for each table and chair that is brought into the room. Naturally, this new policy means that faculty will not be using the room as they have done and that the many innovative and enriching activities will no longer be available to students.

These kinds of decisions are made all the time by university administrators—not because they're trying to have a negative impact on good teaching, but because they're trying to make their universities as efficient as possible in difficult, corporate times. But these kinds of decisions—about space, about *classroom* space; about teaching schedules; about timetabling; about class sizes DO affect—and sometimes negatively—good teaching, and our ability to provide the best, most creative, most meaningful education for our students.

I'm not idealistically suggesting, here, that we can ignore the zietgeist or magically transport ourselves back to some idyllic pre-corporate time; but I am suggesting the need to recognize and acknowledge this gap between efficiency and good teaching and to find ways to support and encourage the sometimes inefficiency of good teaching. And one of the easiest, simplest, and most efficient ways to do this is to consult—to *talk with and really listen to*—good

teaching faculty about issues, decisions and policies that might have an impact—no matter how small—on their teaching.

The inevitable corporatization of universities often means a growing distance between administration and faculty. But, if we value our students and the quality of their education, we need to fight to bridge this distance and work together to protect good teaching and to support good teachers. And we need to do this because it's in that powerful relationship between faculty and students—in that dynamic, exciting, transformative (and yes, often *inefficient*) process of education—that we find the essence, the purpose, and the soul of the university.

¹ David Solway. (2000). *The turtle hypodermic of sickenpods*. (p 5). Montreal: McGill-Queens.

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Life in the Open: 21st Century Learning & Teaching

Abstract

We live in a time of change. We hear a great deal about technology and social media and the next big thing that will make us more connected, but there is also anxiety and discomfort about issues of privacy in all this open connectedness and concern about whether our increasingly mobile technologies are making us more distracted and less able to think. Nicholas Carr and Larry Sanger tell us Google is making us stupid. From Mark Prensky, we hear discourse about how today's university students are "digital natives," foreign beings that those of us born before 1980 or so will never ever truly understand.

This is the context in which we all teach today. We hear kids are not as engaged as they used to be, and in the increasingly instrumental and job-focused view of the academy and its societal role, we wring our hands for the future of the humanities and for our lost heritage of the common good.

What does it mean to live in the open, in this digitized, connected world? How can we, as adults and representatives of the university tradition, participate in or even shape this sphere presented as our opposite, our Other? Is there a role for us, no matter our generation or our literacies? We say yes, and argue that the shift required is one of literacies and networks: that thriving in the open is a matter mostly of engagement. This session will model social media practices and examine their far-reaching implications for higher education.

Introduction

In a world in which participatory collaboration and innovation are increasingly valued (Fischer & Giaccardi, 2006), digital practices demand a central focus within educational research. Digital and social media impact the contexts in which people construct and perform knowledge (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) and identity (Thompson & Cupples, 2008). Today, educational opportunities and Open Educational Resources (OERs) are available online to anyone interested, and the connections created by communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and crowdsourcing (Howe, 2008, Shirky, 2008) make networked teaching and learning highly rewarding (Couros, 2010).

For all the hype, however, this is also a time of anxiety and discomfort regarding digital participation, social networking, and the ways in which our increasingly mobile technologies affect us. Digital identity pioneer Sherry Turkle (2010) now claims that Facebook makes us lonely. Nicholas Carr (2008) tells us Google is making us stupid. From Prensky (1999), we hear that today's university students are "digital natives," foreign beings that those of us born before 1980 or so will never ever truly understand.

Questions of what we lose in this shift to digital practices are important, though the rush to backlash against social media is part of the same trajectory that leads to simplistic acclaim. In truth, social media are complex. Their full impact will perhaps only be felt and understood historically. But the opportunity and innovation they offer need not be embraced blindly to be explored and investigated. This is a time in which young people still need leadership and mentorship from educators, particularly in this online sphere in which so much may seem commercial or trite. How

can we make the most of the networked spaces and platforms of the digital world for learning purposes and for education? In this paper, we posit that openness and connectedness, in particular, are key literacies for successful participation and collaboration using social media. Used in combination, they offer effective ways to utilize digital technologies for immersive practice, for human connection, for knowledge-building, and for networked learning.

Social Connectedness – Slow Path to Immersion

Change is hard. Educational practitioners are frequently confronted with requests for openness with parents, with students, and with each other. They are asked to network and to 'keep up' with the pace of change using social media. But what does it mean to live in the open, to participate in digital learning networks? What do the practices of digital participation and social media mean for higher education in the 21st century?

In one sense, digital practices represent a significant challenge to the structure of education as most of us have known it. The open networks and platforms of social media facilitate people's engagement across fields of common interest, and support opportunities for participatory learning (Araya, 2010) without classrooms, without accreditation, and, in many cases, without the formalized hierarchy of separate teacher and student roles. Participatory learning experiences tend to be goal-focused and based on aggregation of participants' iterative knowledge, ignoring many of the disciplinary conventions that mark academic knowledge and teaching (Davidson, 2009). Ideas are shared and distributed in real time.

At the same time, these new platforms for teaching and learning are not as different as the hype would lead us to believe, nor are they the domain of the so-called 'digital natives.' Social media creates an environment of immersion. And at first, immersion – in another culture or a foreign language class – tends to be an uncomfortable experience. Most of us are relatively privileged in negotiating our daily environments and are accustomed to understanding them: we speak well, we understand the appropriate social cues, we know how to get around and are aware of the implicit hierarchies and power relations that structure our campus lives.

If we imagine the world of social media as a new coffee shop in an unfamiliar part of town, we can begin to explore some parallels. The new place may require a different currency or etiquette, and new patrons may need to observe the customs and risk a little embarrassment in order to become adept at ordering and paying. The new place will have unfamiliar cycles of traffic, times at which different communities tend to congregate. A new patron may take a while to integrate into the rhythms of the place and develop connections with the regulars. The literacies underlying the various behaviours, however, will not be utterly foreign. They will still be about exchange of money for coffee, about interactions with others, about being in a public space. Being able to read the 'vibe' or way of doing things that permeates a particular environment will be helpful in speeding the process, but it will still take time and repeated effort. It is the same for an experienced learner approaching social media for the first time. The technology of interaction may be different, but the goals and practices remain familiar. By participating, we immerse ourselves in new locales.

David White's (2008) work suggests that this immersion factor is significant in terms of people's comfort and skill with social media and with digital technologies generally. Regardless of age, it takes time and investment to become comfortable. White has repositioned the digital natives vs. digital immigrants binary as one of residents vs. visitors, wherein residents are those who've invested the time to become comfortable enough in the environment to begin to see beyond its walls and involve themselves in the things they can do there, foremost among these the building of relationships. In other words, there is actually no age barrier to successful social media participation, or to successful teaching and learning and living in the open. Like all barriers of comfort and discomfort, only practice and use will break it down. Everyone, whether five or fifty, starts in social media as a visitor.

The idea that age is the primary factor in determining digital propensities has also been refuted by studies that suggest that factors of privilege and opportunity for immersion have a greater impact on young people's skill levels with technology than any inherent generational advantage (Nasah, DaCosta, & Seok, 2010).

We are teaching in the 21st century. But we are not teaching a new crop of people never seen before. Rather, they're students in a challenging time, negotiating both the 20th century institutional expectations that still shape and

permeate classroom behaviours, and a 21st century social media culture which brings with it significant shifts in identity and role and concepts of what it means to learn. We are, as a result, teachers in a challenging time. We are decentered, competing with hand-held devices and the supposedly lurid lures of the internet even in the classroom. The literacies we need to navigate this time, however, build on the same literacies that have always underwritten learning.

Social Media Literacies

An important maxim to keep in mind when considering digital participation is that social media are social first and foremost. Focusing on the technologies, as the digital native mythology does, isolates and over-emphasizes the tools on which digital participation is based. Digital networks are ultimately about people and interactions. In fact, the literacies that underlie success in a networked learning environment are often the same skills that have contributed to success in traditional educational and professional contexts. Teaching and learning in the social media context require social media literacies.

Literacies in a social media context are usually framed as multiple, rather than as one “literacy.” This reflects the shift in educational research towards perceiving traditional text literacy as a combination of multiple skills (Collins, 1995). It also reflects the diversity of actions, skills and practices on which social media operates. Regular users of most social media platforms need print and visual literacy skills, but also information literacy, in terms of both critical thinking and hypertext use (Downes, 2006). Additionally, participatory digital platforms are social spaces with complex etiquette norms that an effective user must be literate in to perform appropriately: people skills are required to connect effectively with people, no matter the medium. Social media literacies do not represent a single, masterable skill, but rather an always-shifting set of practices in a complex environment.

To *connect*, then, in a digital literacy sense, is to interact directly with others, to reach out and reciprocate. Connecting involves reading social cues through digital means, and using one's own energy to forge ties with others and to forward the network's understanding/knowledge.

While many of the influential thinkers driving change and conceptual development within this field are affiliated, in one way or another, with universities, many do not limit their publishing to traditional, academic, peer-reviewed channels. Social media literacies are in part about having the power to construct and contribute knowledge. “Social media makes transparent the messiness of collaboration and provides opportunities for institutions to rethink top-down models of learning” (Madsen-Brooks, Blankenship & Sawhill, 2009. Abstract). Academics and public intellectuals who work actively within social media and have platforms and communities of their own on blogs, Twitter, posterous, etc., often post significant ideas online long before they commit them to an academic format. They then open themselves to input and comment from what is colloquially known as the 'wisdom of crowds' model, which has been the subject of an overt comparison study with peer review (Anderson, 2006). Peer review still has its place of privilege within the academic study of digital literacies. But it is no longer the sole mode of publishing nor the primary means by which the media and broader culture learn about the field. “The problem with the paper publishing cycle is the time it takes to proceed through the entire cycle, and the constraints on time and space that go along with the medium place severe restrictions on the flexibility and applicability of the academic tradition” (Cormier, 2010, p. 515). To be truly part of the conversation on digital participation and learning, then, one needs to actually participate.

Being *open*, as a digital literacy, involves sharing with one's connections and audience via public forums. Effective sharing includes having the courage to be open to the wisdom of crowds, and to risk asking for feedback on the intermediate phases of work or research. Openness involves presenting oneself as a voice in a larger conversation, rather than needing to have the final answer on all topics. And it involves public practice, because through the reciprocity of connectedness, one's contacts often invite their own contacts into the interaction, if one's work is available for all to see. Thus are networks and reputations built.

Connectedness, therefore, begets connectedness through the processes of openness and amplification. But sharing via social media has an etiquette, as well. Social media are not broadcast media: as in face-to-face networks, simply promoting one's work without taking time to engage with that of others will generally not result in success. One is

expected to both generate content – even if only in the form of short personal status updates – and to comment on and engage with that of others. The digital environment thus allows for creation and consumption at once. Known as “produsage” (Bruns, 2007), this means of engaging and connecting allows for collaborative participation in the creation and authorization of knowledge. Theorists such as Clay Shirky (2008) have posited that sharing is, in fact, the key literacy and possibility of social media. On Twitter, on blogs, on Flickr, and in Wikipedia, people are contributing their own writing, photographs, and ideas to a broad pool of work for which they are also the audience.

Digital participation is a learning-by-doing activity, wherein social media literacies develop gradually and in context. By entering into the cycle of sharing and reciprocating, of openness and connectedness, one establishes a level of immersion that allows for further levels of participation. “Building a network takes time, investment, and performance literacies: above all, it takes a platform for prolonged exposure, contact, and sharing” (Stewart, 2011). Lave & Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation, wherein new members of a group observe and then gradually take on increasingly complex and central roles, has been a hallmark of online collaborative enterprise, notably within open source, open education, and do-it-yourself digital circles. “Open source communities have developed a well-established path by which newcomers can ‘learn the ropes’ and become trusted members of the community through a process of legitimate peripheral participation” (Brown & Adler, 2008, Learning to Be section, p 3). Legitimate peripheral participation allows people to be gradually mentored into meaningful contributory roles within a community; it also makes fringe participation acceptable. In other words, it is okay, in any or most social media environments, not to know what one is doing. Get in there and watch and learn.

Connected/Open as Innovation

In a world in which digital media are increasingly ubiquitous, the simple presence of technology, even in classrooms and curriculum, is not innovative. Neither is digital participation's reliance on networks. Networking has been central to the forging of connections and professional opportunities for generations: everyone has multiple social networks of some type, whether they be simply family groups, religious affiliations, class memberships, or formal associations such as service groups.

Educational innovation in social media is about extending and broadening network relationships to other learners and learning opportunities, extending people's capacity to explore, connect, and produce in ways the traditional classroom simply cannot support. The technology's capacity to allow people to be social and connected across geographic and disciplinary boundaries means that specialized interests can be much more deeply explored and supported, and that learning can be both more personalized and more effectively integrated into other life activities. Enacting participatory roles within networks has been shown to enhance agency (Kalantzis, 2006). Increased connectedness broadens the scope of what an individual can accomplish within social media, both expanding his or her links to potential learning opportunities and support systems, and increasing his or her profile and reach, or capacity to gain recognition for whatever work he or she shares within that environment.

Openness allows for unique opportunities for emergence to affect the learning process. It allows for multiple viewpoints on new ideas. Open courses, for instance, “permit educators and a global network of learners to participate in research, learning, and sense-making around a given topic” (Cormier & Siemens, 2010, p. 38). Openness creates opportunities for ideas to collide.

Connected/Open as Networked Learning

Digital platforms encourage learning as a participatory, social process (McLoughlin and Lee, 2007) and bypass traditional gatekeeping industries, enabling self-publishing (Spender, 1995), open online knowledge networks (Downes, 2006) and other avenues to self-expression. Blogs and digital 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou, 2006) such as tweets are performative, participatory meaning-making strategies that shape selves and connections within networks (Thompson & Cupples, 2008). Social media thus differ from traditional face-to-face networks in that they enable people not only to make contact with a multitude of others, but to showcase their own strengths, work, or ideas as a means of inviting contact with unknown others. Thus a teacher may write blog posts or share lesson plans and reflections on a given topic, and if that teacher has cultivated a broad and effective network, those items may

begin to circulate in broader networks as users comment on and/or share them in turn with their own networks. This amplification of a person's work can serve to raise a person's profile and forge new connections for the individual with whom the work originated.

To an extent, this model can also be adapted for K-12 classroom use, though privacy concerns and regulations tend to limit the network to which openness and connectedness can be scaffolded. And without the capacity to make connections based on shared interest, efforts to utilize social media for student learning can mistake the technology – rather than the network itself – for innovation (Stewart, 2011). Building a sustainable network takes time, investment, and literacies: above all, it takes a platform for prolonged exposure, contact, and sharing among students. Models such as www.youthvoices.com have supported long-term writing engagement between geographically diverse students, and created a truly successful learning network. This replaces the teacher-as-audience model for student work with that of authentic audience, still supported by teacher mentorship and guidance.

Connected/Open Directions for Curriculum

In the control culture of systemic teacher-driven education, this drive towards a participatory and personalized curriculum represents a significant shift. Using social media effectively with students isn't about playing the role of knower, but of scaffolder, synthesizer. In the 21st century, one of teachers' most valuable roles may be in helping students learn the strategies, discourses, and literacies necessary to forging effective learning connections of their own.

In many ways, this is not a new concept. Since the advent of writing, educators have been scaffolders as well as knowers, connecting students to the wisdom of their particular tradition or field by means of books and other learning media. Today, the shift is in the reach educators and learners possess: not only do digital platforms like Wikipedia and Google make the wisdom of the ages available at people's fingertips, but networking sites such as Twitter can sometimes allow people to make personal contacts and connections with leaders and experts in given fields. Social media, if used well, can not only cross distances but flatten hierarchies.

At times, the communities available online can act as curricula in and of themselves. Cormier's (2008) concept of community as curriculum, which applies Deleuze & Guattari's (1981) rhizomatic model to learning, offers a model by which connectedness can be a learning end in itself. In Cormier's work, the rhizome represents a model for distribution of knowledge in community contexts and other environments where traditional gatekeeping structures of organization and validation may not be required, replicable, or desirable. Rhizomatic learning allows a digital community to dispense with predetermined knowledge distribution structures, and therefore with external validation of the knowledge created within and for the community. "A learner acquires basic forms of literacy and associates with different peer groups. Networks begin to form and, occasionally, communities develop. Knowledge is created and sometimes discarded as the community interacts . . . [K]nowledge is a rhizome, a snapshot of interconnected ties in constant flux that is evaluated by its success in context" (Cormier, 2010, p. 514).

The rhizomatic conception of learning, while manifested primarily through digital participation, still carries a distinct connection to the traditional model of academia, in which citations link learning to that which has gone before. Google, in fact, based its link protocol on the academic citation system (Brin & Page, 1990). While Jaron Lanier (2010) warns against the notion of the hive mind, or the pack mentality that he perceives as lionized by crowdsourcing and much of open source internet culture, the practice of recognizing information and knowledge when interlinked and supported by other identifiable forms of knowledge is not entirely digital. The "cultures of participation" (Jenkins, 2006) which distribute decision-making capacities to members of civil society via social media do rely on and require critical literacies, but so have all previous knowledge-validation systems in human history. Whether widespread access to what have previously been tightly-controlled echelons of power will prove to be good for human society cannot yet be known, but the capacity to influence what counts as knowledge is certainly more open at this point in history than it has been for a long while.

Connected/Open in Practice

The concept of connection in digital participation is central to the learning theory of connectivism, developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes. Connectivism emphasizes network creation and the capacity to distinguish between important and unimportant information in a constantly fluid environment. In 2008, Siemens and Downes facilitated the first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), called Connectivism and Connectivist Knowledge (CCK08). The MOOC model, which has been taken up for a growing number of other open online courses in the interim (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens and Cormier, 2010), is an embodiment of connectivist theory in action. Because MOOCs utilize social media platforms rather than closed, course-specific virtual classrooms, they make it possible for learners to build real-life networks that extend and persist beyond course boundaries. MOOCs also distribute responsibility for learning. Siemens emphasizes that in the digital age, “the learner is the teacher is the learner” (Siemens, 2006, p. 42). It is, then, individual networked connections rather than hierarchies or pre-determined roles that create capacity within participatory digital environments. And it is sharing – working and living in the open, and allowing others a window through which to engage – that creates connections in social media.

Conclusion

Social media are social, participatory, and immersive environments, ones in which creation and consumption are entwined roles. The digital practices of social media can help educators and students build vibrant, participatory networks and reputations surrounding their work. The literacies of openness and connectedness which support these practices are not technological literacies at all, but interactive ones. Thus, life in open networks is only as lonely as we allow it to be, and people of all ages – the so-called digital natives and the most elderly Luddite among us – can build meaningful networks of engagement using these platforms *if* we remember that we are connecting and communicating with people, not with technologies themselves.

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The Electronic Office Hour: An Opportunity for Peer Learning and Student Engagement

Abstract

Today's learners are well versed in a variety of technologies that many in the professoriate were not exposed to when they attended university. One such technology used by many students today is internet chat. This submission will describe the use of the "virtual office hour" using Windows Live Messenger™, a system currently used by many of our students for non-teaching and learning purposes. The logistics of hosting an electronic office hour will be presented, followed by a discussion of the advantages and challenges of this tool and personal reflections. While the virtual office hour is not for everyone, the objective is to demonstrate what can be done with the method, in the hopes that it will appeal to those faculty in transition from mid- to late-career, when a modification of course delivery could provide a refreshing change of routine. The virtual office hour fosters student engagement, i.e., increased ownership of one's learning as well as the increased reciprocity developed by students playing the role of host in familiar terrain. The option within the technology for group chat is particularly supportive of peer learning.

Introduction

One of the challenges faced by academics today is how to connect with their students, given that students of today communicate so differently when taken in comparison to students we taught a decade or two ago. The majority of students in our undergraduate classes are classified as Millennials. University faculty, staff, and administrators are struggling to adjust their techniques so as to better meet the needs of their students. In a presentation at a recent Senior Women Academic Administrators of Canada, Bourne-Tyson (2008) reviewed some of the characteristics of Millennials. Manning, Everett, and Robert note that Millennials are greatly influenced by technology, and by the forms of communication that they have grown up with. One of the forms of communication used by many students today is some form of online chat with their peers. I have drawn inspiration from colleagues in my Chemical Education community who have used some of the new technology to provide assistance to their Chemistry students in a variety of ways. Burk (2008, 2010) has used a variety of social networking tools to facilitate communication with students in a General Chemistry course. Poë (2010) has suggested that the appropriate web-based technology can assist students to form global on-line Problem-based Learning communities.

Logistics

Below I will present some of the steps that need to be taken in order to establish an electronic office hour. While some of the details will vary with the specific platform, many of the considerations remain the same.

Choose Timing

One of the first issues you'll have to grapple with is the issue of timing; i.e., when should you hold your electronic office hour? There is little use in holding an office hour the day after you give a quiz. Students preparing for the quiz will have missed out on getting any extra help. I hold my office hour the night before the Chemistry prelab is due. (The prelab is a short exercise that students are required to complete in preparation for their laboratory session). The second issue is the time of day. As Burk has pointed out, if you hold it in the evening, you are meeting with them just as they are working on their Chemistry problems; classes are over, and it is during the after-supper evening hours when they sit down in front of the computer to work and to chat with their peers. It may be off-putting to some instructors to hold an office hour in the evenings, but my experience has been that it need not

add to the total workload. Students come to know that this is the time you are available, and they make good use of the hour. It reduces (but does not entirely eliminate) the ad-hoc office visits. The virtual office hour may not appeal to all learners, and I am happy to assert that there will always be some who prefer to employ face-to-face methods.

Communicate Timing with Students

Usually, this would be done in class and/or on your course outline. Be specific about which office hours are in-person office hours, and which are electronic. Give students any information they might need to know in order to join the electronic office hour.

The following is a sample of what might be provided:

Office hours:

Wednesdays, 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. or by appointment

Mondays, 10:00 p.m.-11:00 p.m. (note: this is an electronic office hour, on Windows Live Messenger™:
your_address@hotmail.com)

Prepare the “Room”

This is going to depend on how you plan on holding the electronic hour. If you plan on hosting it via Windows Live Messenger™, you are going to need your own account and the software. I will not describe the details here, but I would suggest that any member of the Millennial generation would be happy to help you with this. Further instructions on setting up this particular technology are also available at <http://explore.live.com/>

Host a Session

Sign in to the chat room. If it is Window Live Messenger™, sign in according to the procedure provided on the website. Once you sign in, and students see that you are online, you will start to be contacted (i.e., students can initiate a conversation with you). Your first conversation will be the “base” upon which you can build a group chat by adding others as they request it. At the end, you are able to save the session to a file, which can then be posted to your course management software.

The following is a sample conversation. While the names and the conversation are fictitious, they give the reader an idea of the types of conversations that can take place.

Mandy: My high Molecular Weight PVA was stronger, but is that right?

Jan: Some groups found the high MW film to be stronger than the low MW one, but others found it to be thinner and more breakable.

Henry: Me too, Jan.

Linda: Maybe everybody in the Tuesday lab section had that stronger one, do you think?

Prof: Well, whatever result you obtained, be sure to report what you saw.

Linda: And another question, for that C₆H₁₂O₆, do we just need to calculate the molar mass on page 4?

Prof: That’s right.

Debbie: And Linda, don’t forget to enter it into your lab report before turning in the prelab.

Linda: Oh, right.

Prof: Thank you for the reminder, Debbie. Yes, you'll need to include that piece of information in the lab report.

Issues

As Burk has emphasized, it is important to remember that this is “their” world. Don’t present yourself as the authority when it comes to the use of this technology; for example, don’t be overly critical of spelling, given that students are rapidly typing in their questions. Because this is “their” world, you may find yourself needing instruction or guidance from your students. Your students will be delighted to offer this instruction. Because you are part teacher and part student in this environment, reciprocity is encouraged.

In some chat environments, the name the participant chooses to use in the chat may bear little or no resemblance to his or her actual name. Often students will choose a moniker. This nickname has its advantages; if students are shy to ask a question, their nickname increases anonymity. Having said that, it does mean that sometimes when one goes to class the next day, it is hard to know who has asked that question the day before.

Selection of the timing of the office hour can be challenging when the class has (as it often does) representation from Millennials and their slightly more senior counterparts, the Generation-Xers. While 10:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m. may be perfect (or even a little early) for a Millennial student, some of the Generation-Xers may complain about the lateness of the hour, particularly if they have young children. Last but not least, the timing has to work for the instructor, taking into consideration her or his evening routine and responsibilities.

What about students who would like to have a one-on-one conversation? This can be achieved by having a side conversation with that student, without bringing them into the main “room.” Just remember that you may have several conversations to deal with, if this one-on-one conversation is concurrent with the group chat.

One issue that will come up is that of dealing with multiple concurrent questions. If a dozen people are asking you questions all at once, how do you field them all? This can also happen in a face-to-face office hour, but somehow in a live situation, it is more apparent to all that you can’t address them all simultaneously. In the chat, you may have to say “I’ll answer X’s question first, then Y’s then Z’s” just so people know how you are going to field the questions. What has happened sometimes (and it’s delightful when it does) is that while you are discussing a question with student X, the question posed by student Y is answered by student Z! This peer-to-peer learning was particularly helpful the first few times I held electronic office hours, when I was struggling to manage all of the questions. Because the chat will be available afterwards, if a student joins in mid-session with a question that has already been asked, you can refer him or her to the transcript and go right to the next question on a busy evening. Some students join for the evening, but do not ask any questions. They are simply interested in observing. This is quite acceptable.

Should electronic office hours be the only way to access the professor? I would not be in favour of that. We celebrate the diversity in our classrooms, and this diversity will include varying attitudes towards technology. While some students are delighted with the format of the electronic office hour, others prefer the face-to-face office hour. Another issue is whether to hold the chat on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook). The problem with using such a forum for electronic office hour is that so much is revealed – on both sides – that it could well exceed the bounds of social decorum. The issue of using social networking sites for academic purposes is a topic of lively discussion. As the technologies evolve, so do the rules and guidelines for their use. A good place to get advice on what is appropriate in terms of current best practices would be your university’s office of instructional development.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Different technologies present distinct advantages and disadvantages. In the first year, I used Windows Live Messenger[™], whereas this year I now use the chat functionality available in Moodle, which is one of the various types of course management software currently available. When one uses the chat functionality available in course

management software, the chat room and its participants are already established, because members of the class or lab section are automatically registered in the course, and are therefore eligible to visit the chat. On the other hand, when using Windows Live Messenger™, students must be “accepted” into the contact list of the instructor once at the beginning of the course, and then added to any chat as it proceeds. An analogy for this is that a group chat in Windows Live Messenger™ is very much like being in a room where every so often someone knocks at the door and you, as instructor/host, have to let her or him in. Moodle chat is more like holding a tutorial in a classroom with an unlocked door; students can walk in and hear the conversation right away without waiting to be admitted. Another consideration is that in Moodle and similar course management software, the chat automatically becomes part of the record, as long as the chat is set up in that way. This contrasts with Windows Live Messenger™, where a few minutes’ worth of work is required at the end to actually save and post the chat onto the course website so that the transcript is available to all students.

The decision as to which type of technology to employ will rest with the instructor. Moodle and its counterparts provide the instructor with more ease of use, but a little bit of the anonymity and feeling of reciprocity are lost. Also, it is quite likely that some students are already logged in to Windows Live Messenger™ for their own purposes; they do not need to make a special visit to get there. And the extra work of physically posting the chat does provide an opportunity to edit the chat if clarifications or corrections are required.

In the case of a lab course, the chat can be a good opportunity to exchange results. The simulated session described above alludes to this. In another instance I can recall, students learned that not everybody got the “right” answer...there was quite a variation in results, and that can be an opportunity to be reassured that in most cases the variation had to do with the details of the method (although results that were “way off” caused some members of the group to take a closer look at their calculations).

Is there a risk of too much collusion? If students get the opportunity to “chat” and exchange results, could this be the unintended consequence? Yes, sometimes the “answer” will be revealed, but the risk of having a result revealed should be weighed against the benefits of fostering peer-to-peer learning. The instructor can manage this situation to a certain extent by virtue of their presence.

Some may find the technology unattractive because of the need to be a rapid typist; certainly the chat as it is represented here would be challenging for those who type very slowly with the “hunt and peck” method. This does not necessarily rule out the electronic office hour: there are variations of the technology that may suit. In many chat environments (Elluminate live!™ and Skype, for example), as well as in Windows Live Messenger™, it is possible for the instructor (and for all other participants) to use a microphone and their speaking voice. Some may find a combination of typed chat and voiceover to be a more suitable approach. It should also be noted that certain technologies permit the use of a drawing tool, if diagrams or sketches are necessary. Your university’s office of instructional development would be a good place to get advice on tools and technologies appropriate to your needs and abilities.

One of the elements that took me by surprise was the increased participation of members of the class who did not normally come to my office or raise their hands in class. This is perhaps one of the most compelling reasons for me to continue to offer this type of office hour; namely, the ability to engage and to communicate with students who do not normally choose to do so via traditional methods.

There is a fundamental question that is sometimes asked when one discusses techniques such as the one described here; namely, “By catering to the preferences of these students, are we doing more harm than good? Shouldn’t university be a transformative experience, whereby students learn to adapt to a more traditional style of learning and communication?” My view on this is that for many students, Chemistry can be a very intimidating subject. The introductory General Chemistry course is required by students from many programmes. If providing an electronic office hour helps them to begin their university experience with Chemistry in a positive manner, then I think it is worthwhile to do so.

Summary

Hosting an electronic office hour provides an excellent opportunity to add variety to your method of course delivery. I would particularly recommend it for somebody who has taught a course several times, and who would like to add this new component in order to assist students with the more challenging aspects of the course. You may find that your students are delighted with the opportunity to get extra help in an environment that resonates with their way of communicating. You may even notice that you are able to reach and to assist students who would not typically seek help from their instructor via the traditional office hour. And finally, at the end of a particularly busy session, you may find yourself exhausted, yet elated by an hour packed full of “teachable moments.”

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Grade Inflation: What is the Purpose of Assessment?

Abstract

Grade inflation, defined as a disconnect between assigned grades and actual achievement, has been a major concern on university campuses for decades. However, not everyone agrees that it is a problem. Among issues related to grade inflation are students focusing on grades instead of learning, instructors buying student approval with high grades, students' view of education as a consumer item with a related sense of entitlement, public demands for accountability, sending unclear signals to the public or potential employers and so on (Winzer, 2002). Despite these issues, a prior question ought to be asked: What is the purpose of assessment? Grading or measurement is only one component of the broader construct, assessment (McMillan et al., 2011). Tied to competing views of teaching and learning, two contrasting perspectives on assessment will be identified: Assessment for Learning and Assessment for Ranking (Adapted from Cook-Sather, 2010). Selected issues related to grade inflation will be reexamined through the lenses of these two perspectives and examples of assessment practices will be shared. The audience will be invited to identify Assessment for Learning and Assessment for Ranking in a range of positions and ideas about grade inflation and to consider how contemporary approaches to teaching and learning might impact this concern.

Introduction

Grades are a normative aspect of the educational process in measuring or evaluating students from elementary to graduate school. Grade inflation, defined as a disconnect between assigned grades and actual achievement or competence, has been a major concern on university campuses for decades. To demonstrate the longevity of this issue, Kohn (2002) contrasted two quotes that essentially expressed the same ideas. One quote was from a Harvard committee report in 1894, whereas the second was based on an article written by Mansfield (2001). However, not everyone agrees that it is a problem. Runté (2005) found that whenever he encountered an article that presented grade inflation as a problem, he found another one that refuted this claim.

We became interested in the topic of grade inflation because it was a big concern at our university a few years ago. In response to this concern, research was conducted to rank departments at the university according to grades given to students. This research created tension but also started dialogue within departments. Those who claimed to be hard markers were gratified by having their status confirmed and started pointing fingers at their colleagues. Were they assuming that more rigorous grading equated to higher quality learning? Marking rubrics became popular and workshops were given on developing and using rubrics for marking. Some departments raised the mark for A to 88-94 and 95-100 for A+. Some faculty members in some departments who were classified as hard markers started marking even harder to the point of losing students.

Discussion in Family Studies and Gerontology Department centered on whether it was appropriate to compare different departments, such as comparing math, statistics and science to education, women's studies and family studies. Not only do assessment practices vary widely across departments, but student interests and aptitudes typically differ. Education requires graduates who already have a first degree and selects the best from a large pool of applicants. It is like comparing apples and oranges. Meanwhile, in the Faculty of Education, a discussion was

started about doing away with marks altogether and switching to a Pass/Fail system. We were amazed at this range of responses to the issue of grade inflation. It seemed that Pandora's Box had been opened.

In this paper, we explore selected issues associated with grade inflation and report on related activities introduced during our Teaching Showcase presentation. Then, we introduce a prior question that should be raised if the problem of grade inflation is to be fully understood: What is the purpose of assessment? We explore two competing perspectives in relation to this question: Assessment for Ranking and Assessment for Learning. Two issues related to grade inflation are reexamined through the lenses of these two perspectives to illustrate how each might impact proposed solutions. We describe the final activity where participants were invited to identify the Ranking and Learning orientations in a range of positions and ideas about grade inflation. We conclude that discussions about this complex issue might be more meaningful if participants understood the assumptions underlying competing views about teaching, learning and assessment.

To explore the issue of grade inflation, we relied predominantly on an article prepared by Winzer (2002) at the University of Lethbridge. She based her work on a thorough and comprehensive review of the literature spanning over three decades. We found this report to be an excellent resource and highly recommend it for university committees, departments or faculties who want to dialogue about the grade inflation issue.

Winzer organized her work around reasons or explanations for grade inflation based on the following themes: institutional change; student demography; changes in grading policy; faculty behavior; and curriculum changes. Owing to the short time frame of our presentation, we reduced the list of themes to four, renamed them and identified issues instead of reasons or explanations. The four themes were student beliefs and explanations; faculty concerns and pressures; curriculum issues; and institutional and departmental issues. These themes and selected issues are summarized briefly as follows:

Student Beliefs and Explanations

Based on her literature review, Winzer (2002) reported that it has become the norm at some institutions and programs for students to expect high grades without necessarily worrying about achievement or effort. In some cases, students view education as just one of many consumer items and have a related sense of entitlement (e.g., We pay tuition and we expect you to assign a good grade). Perhaps even more damaging, students actively seek out departments, courses and instructors associated with assigning higher grades. An abiding belief of some students is that grades are more important to success in life than acquired knowledge, learning to learn or hard work. That is, students focus on grades rather than learning. As a result of inflated grades, students develop misguided perspectives and beliefs of their competence and achievement.

Faculty Concerns and Pressures

Faculty face numerous pressures when it comes to assessment. In their course evaluations, students tend to give higher ratings to instructors who award higher marks. These student evaluations are subsequently used in decisions on faculty retention, tenure and promotion. Faculty with higher standards tend to relax their expectations to avoid being perceived as unfair and hence unpopular. When students whine, argue, negotiate or demand explanations if their marks do not meet their expectations, faculty frequently succumb to pressure by awarding higher grades. Moreover, heavy faculty workloads such as large class sizes and multiple teaching, service and scholarly commitments may compromise time spent on evaluation (Winzer, 2002).

Not only do faculty face pressures from students and their institutions over the assignment of grades, but grade inflation might be perpetuated by younger faculty who bring their own experiences with inflated grades in high school, and this norm is simply continued. Also, it is easier for faculty to assign high grades because, unlike low grades, it is unnecessary to justify them. A concern among some faculty is that assigning low grades might damage students' self-esteem rather than making them feel more capable and empowered. Grades serve as both rewards and incentives in some cases; that is, grades are assigned to motivate marginal students and encourage learning (Winzer, 2002).

Curriculum Issues

Conflicting views or philosophies between advocates of norm-referenced and criteria-referenced assessment and advocates of traditional forms of assessment versus more “authentic” forms contribute to competing beliefs about grade inflation. Examples of authentic assessment include mastery learning and contract learning when students participate in defining the standard. Competing views also exist between faculty who adopt a more constructivist and collaborative approach to the learning environment and those who use a more traditional approach. Traditional evaluation roles seem contradictory to constructivists who often search for more compatible forms of assessment. Some claim that faculty spoon feed and entertain students more than they used to, a situation that might alter expectations and inhibit students from mastering the course content (Winzer, 2002).

Institution and Department Issues

Grade inflation is a problem across many levels of schooling. Grade inflation at the secondary school level confounds college and university entrance criteria. A far more serious problem is that inflated grades send unclear signals to stakeholders such as the public, potential employers, regulatory bodies and graduate schools. Thus, the information value of grades for both students and the public has diminished. The best students can no longer be reliably distinguished from the very good, good or mediocre students. Moreover, grade inflation devalues achievement and student effort. Rather than reflecting achievement, high grades are assigned to attract and retain students in departments for student enrollment (Winzer, 2002).

Reasons for Grade Inflation

Not included in our summary of selected issues were some of the explanations that Winzer offered for grade inflation, such as the belief that today’s students are better than previous generations and that increased enrollment of female and adult students leads to higher grades because these cohorts tend to achieve more than their male or younger counterparts. In addition, some programs with rigorous admission standards start with exceptionally high-achieving students.

Rather than introduce these explanations and issues to our participants, we wanted to make our session more experiential and interactive. We decided to start with issues that our participants believed were important.

Group Work

As part of our interactive Teaching Showcase presentation, we had participants work in groups to identify issues related to grade inflation most pertinent to them. A wide range of issues was generated by each group and written on post-its by an assigned recorder. At the front of the room, we hung four large flip chart sheets that paralleled the four themes and related issues listed in point form. The flip charts were covered until the groups finished their discussions. For comparison purposes, we invited participants to stick their post-its beside similar issues on the flip charts. Blank flip chart sheets were left to accommodate issues that could not be matched. Results of this activity were then discussed and compared to the literature on this topic. Participants were given a chart outlining the themes and associated issues to take with them.

Results of the Issues Activity

In total, 34 post-its were placed on the flip charts. These reflected an impressive array of different issues considering that groups had only 10 minutes to generate them. It appeared that the issue stimulated a good deal of discussion, and our participants were knowledgeable about this issue.

At the end of our session, we counted 11 post-its on the blank flip chart sheets. When these “non-matches” were reanalyzed, 4 post-its were considered similar enough to existing issues to be repositioned within one of the four

themes. That left following 7 issues that remained “non-matches”: “increasing intelligence,” “better pedagogy,” “measurement tools,” “assessment tools do not suit the situation,” “maybe the criteria are not set satisfactorily,” “What about the Bell Curve?” and “fairness across disciplines.”

The issues summarized under the four themes were by no means exhaustive; nonetheless, there were 27 matches. Although not all individual issues were matched, all four themes had a cluster of matched issues. Two post-its were related to the Institutional and Departmental Issues theme but not specific issues under the theme. These included grades required for professional school entrance and the reality of students “pushing” for grades in order to maintain scholarships and /or acceptance to post graduate education.

The most frequently matched issue was “Students expect high grades with little effort or achievement” with four post-its. Winzer (2002) reported that the most important or serious explanation for grade inflation was the use of student evaluation for tenure and promotion decisions. This issue did not figure prominently with our participants with only 2 post-its placed with this issue.

Winzer’s inquiry and the group work of our participants illustrated that this issue is complex, multifaceted and multilayered. For example, issues at the institutional level differ from those at the departmental and classroom level. Concerns of professional programs that are accountable to external bodies for accreditation differ from those of liberal arts disciplines. There is no easy answer for problems and concerns related to grade inflation and it would be inadvisable if not impossible to find a single solution to suit all situations.

After extended engagement with Winzer’s inquiry, we sensed that something was missing from the debate over whether or not grade inflation was really a problem. We believed that a prior question needed to be posed before this debate could be more fully understood: What is the purpose of assessment?

What is the Purpose of Assessment?¹

Winzer (2002) did not pose this question directly, although she mentioned ideological differences among those who promote criteria-referenced assessment and norm-referenced assessment. These were listed as one among many explanations for grade inflation. In contrast, we believe that this question should precede any further discussion because the answer to this question is tied to competing views of teaching and learning based on competing theoretical and philosophical positions. Two instructors who hold competing ideological views of teaching and learning would view the same issue related to grade inflation differently. Without a thorough exploration and consideration of competing ideological stances, discussions may inadvertently be at cross-purposes. Participants might assume falsely that everyone is “on the same page” when, in fact, they are miles apart in their views. Having shared these points, we acknowledge that combinations of these views are possible and that they do not always exist in pure form. Alternatively, the two competing views could be considered as two ends of a continuum. To understand the impact of ideological differences, we intentionally polarized these two widely different views of the purpose of assessment.

Assessment for Ranking

Although she acknowledged competing philosophies that relate to grade inflation such as norm referenced or criteria referenced assessment, Winzer (2002) appeared to accept the idea that the purpose of assessment was for ranking: “Rightly or wrongly, the higher education system is the agency for sorting and selecting. Grades sort students and assign them a particular spot on the continuum” (p.15).

Assigning grades is a well established part of academic culture. University departments are expected to sort or rank students to help determine recipients of awards or scholarships. External accrediting bodies are also interested in ranking students, as are graduate school admission committees who admit students on a competitive basis (Kohn, 2002). For these situations, grade inflation is seen as a threat to the process of ranking students with confidence. Those who advocate “assessment for ranking” worry that failure to sort students on the basis of grades might undermine trust in universities among the public at large, professional organizations, accrediting bodies and

graduate schools (Mansfield, 2001; Winzer, 2002). These worries are tied into demands for accountability from various stakeholders.

Assessment for Learning

In the field of education, an “assessment for learning” (i.e., students given feedback, corrective instruction) and “assessment as learning” (to engage students in learning, encourage self-monitoring) movements represent newer approaches to classroom assessment (McMillan, Hellsten & Klinger, 2011). Among others, Kohn (2002) is a staunch advocate of the “assessment for learning” orientation. He noted that assessment has evolved from trying to sort students or “catching them out” (i.e., finding out what they do not know) to providing opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know or what they have learned. He believed that assessment for ranking was based on a “simplistic and outdated view of knowledge and learning” (p. 5) and thought it remarkable “how rarely learning even figures into this discussion” (p. 5). He also claimed that a greater emphasis on grades is associated with reduced learning, whereas less focus on grades is related to enhanced learning.

Moreover, Kohn (2002) reported that grades do not predict career success according to research from the fields of medicine and law. Apparently, grades and test scores predict little other than subsequent grades and test scores. These claims raise questions about using grades to ensure accountability.

Kohn (2002) also raised concerns about negative effects of creating “winners and losers” through ranking practices and the creation of competitive classroom climates that are counterproductive to winners and losers alike. Such competitive climates might discourage “a free exchange of ideas and a sense of community that’s conducive to exploration” (p.6). Grading practices and competition also work against the development of intrinsic motivation for learning or learning for its own sake towards a more extrinsic motivation that typically fails in the long term.

Similar to Kohn (2002), Cook-Sather (2010) believed that assessment practices should foster intrinsic motivation by supporting student learning, encouraging students to care about their learning, posing questions, enhancing metacognitive awareness (i.e., thinking about one’s thinking and learning) and so on. Learning is viewed as a *process* that unfolds over a period of time; that is, students address authentic problems or questions, propose solutions or answers, receive feedback and respond to feedback. Assessments should be used primarily to help students become better learners and thinkers.

Rather than the one-sided creation of a competitive climate, Cook-Sather (2010) believed that a quality learning space was a shared responsibility of both teacher and students. Students should be encouraged to assess themselves as well.

Impact of View on Grade Inflation Issue

Recall our claim that faculty perspectives on the purpose of assessment would impact how they viewed issues associated with grade inflation and solutions they might propose for associated problems. To illustrate this claim, consider the following issues:

Inflated grades send unclear signals to stakeholders (e.g., the public, potential employers, regulatory bodies, graduate schools)

Faculty who believe that the purpose of assessment is primarily for ranking would consider this issue as serious and worry that the public’s trust in educational institutions would be undermined. Their solution would be to urge faculty members across departments and programs to mark more rigorously. In contrast, those who believe that the purpose of assessment is primarily for learning might also view this issue as serious but would propose a different solution. They would urge that stakeholders be educated about more contemporary views of teaching and learning and the “what, how and why” of alternative assessment practices. Some advocates of the assessment for learning stance advocate that grades be dispensed with altogether (Kohn, 2002). Those who assume a less radical view might propose that any grades assigned be accompanied by a description of what students actually learned in the course or what they are capable of doing as a result of the course.

Here is another issue:

Faculty succumb to pressure from students for higher grades (whining, arguing, negotiating, demanding explanations)

Faculty who advocate assessment for ranking as the predominant goal would urge faculty to be strong and hold their ground in order to maintain rigor in marking. Those who believe that assessment should be primarily for learning would claim that the whining, arguing, negotiating and demands would likely disappear since students are provided with feedback on their progress throughout the course. If students are dissatisfied with their progress in a course, they are invited to resubmit their work by responding to the instructor’s feedback. The result is that students learn enhanced standards, heighten metacognitive awareness of their learning, and experience a rich learning situation.

Owing to these contrasting perspectives and their impact on how people view the issues related to grade inflation, it is important to consider the assumptions underlying each perspective. Without an awareness of these differences, one instructor’s view of grade inflation would make no sense to those holding competing views. To further the conversation, it helps to identify the contrasting views regardless of agreement with either of them.

Identifying Whether Assessment is Primarily for Ranking or Learning

As a final activity for our presentation, we passed out sheets with a dozen statements about teaching, learning and assessment (See Table 1). We asked participants to place an **R** beside each statement that reflected the “assessment for ranking” orientation and **L** beside each statement that reflected an “assessment for learning” stance. There was no further time for follow-up discussion, so we passed out a second sheet with our answers and a brief description of the sources of these statements. This sheet was intended to allow participants to compare their responses to ours.

Table 1. Assessment for Ranking or Assessment for Learning?

1. “Rightly or wrongly, the higher education system is the agency for sorting and selecting. Grades sort students and assign them a particular spot on the continuum.”
2. The effects of teaching over time are meant to be meaningful, and experienced as affirming in terms of learners’ thoughts, actions and emotions. In contrast, student performance on standardized measures is the sole focus regardless of whether students understand or are affected by their studies.
3. “In the academic domain as a whole, it is a breach of academic responsibility to acquiesce to the degradation of standards by inflating grades and pandering to the demands for a weak, watered down curriculum.”
4. Learning is viewed as a process. Students “tackle authentic and intriguing questions and tasks,” defend choices and solutions, receive feedback and try again.
5. Teachers and learners are co-learners with shared responsibility for the quality of the learning environment. “Teachers do not blame their students for the difficulties they face (which would put all the responsibility on the learners) and they see themselves as ongoing learners too.”
6. Administrators are viewing rampant grade inflation as an assault on the principles of the academy.
7. “It takes less work and effort to receive a high grade than it did in the past; the grades students receive are not awarded consistently in a manner commensurate with effort mediated by ability . . . It is a problem of puffery, with much of the current grading designed only to please and placate . . .”

8. "... the natural critical learning environment is built with the goals of supporting student learning, as opposed to covering content," assessing the extent to which the content has been covered and ranking students based on this assessment.
9. The best teachers tend to avoid using extrinsic motivators such as grades in favour of fostering intrinsic ones and encourage cooperation rather than competition.
10. Grading serves two basic purposes: 1) information for students about their performance in relation to others in the class and 2) information about student performance for the public, potential employees, regulatory bodies and graduate schools.
11. Teachers who value each student are not interested in sorting students into good or bad, bright or dull, winners or losers. "Believing in students does not mean setting high standards and letting students sink or swim but rather, setting high standards, conveying confidence that students can meet those and supporting their efforts."
12. "Graduate programs may accept students on the basis of tainted evidence and are then negatively affected when entering students lack the requisite knowledge and skills. Incompetents are being turned loose on the marketplace."
(Adapted from Cook-Sather, 2010 and Winzer, 2002).

Readers are invited to use this identification activity to reflect on their views of teaching learning and the problem of grade inflation. They might examine assumptions of which they are unaware and be less likely to adopt any position uncritically.¹

Conclusion

The issue of grade inflation is complex and multilayered with many related issues, but not everyone agrees that it is a problem. This issue is confounded by competing views of the purpose of assessment based on different assumptions about teaching and learning. Two contrasting perspectives are reflected in the belief that assessments are conducted primarily to rank the achievement of students in relation to each other and the belief that the purpose of assessment is primarily to help students learn. Persons holding these two perspectives view the issue of grade inflation differently and are so far apart that consensus on the issue might be impossible. Nonetheless, it is important to reveal implicit assumptions with the goal of better understanding competing positions. This preliminary step would help to make discussions about the nature and extent of the grade inflation problem much more meaningful.

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¹ Answer Code (R=item reflecting assessment for ranking; L=item reflecting assessment for learning)
1. R, 2. L, 3. R, 4. L, 5. L, 6. R, 7. R, 8. L, 9. L, 10. R, 11. L, 12. R

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Technology-Driven Approaches to Engaging Large Classes

Abstract

Several low-cost technology-driven approaches for engaging students in large classes are suggested. Specifically, the use of presentation technology to enhance the effectiveness of live demonstrations in class is discussed, including several important considerations for their preparation and implementation. A quantitative evaluation of these methods has been conducted and the results are presented. Additionally, the use of podcast technology for lecture supplementation is discussed, along with several strategies to increase their effectiveness. Metrics of success such as student attendance rates and performance have been monitored and are included.

Introduction

Large class sizes are an unfortunate reality on the university campus. This is especially true at the first-year level, where there could easily be hundreds of students to a single professor. Inevitably, the demographic of such a large introductory class will be composed of students with a wide variety of backgrounds in the discipline and an entire spectrum of learning styles. In addition, the variability of their background, is at least matched by the myriad of academic paths the students will eventually take, for which the introductory class is a prerequisite. Indeed, only a small fraction of students in such introductory classes may actually go on to concentrate in the discipline (in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Prince Edward Island, only about 7% of our introductory chemistry students will actually graduate with a chemistry degree). This means that the expectations of each member of the class may vary widely. The combination of these factors results in significant pedagogical challenges to engaging and retaining first-year students.

What then is our responsibility as professors of such classes? It appears as though we must take great care to craft a course that begins with a basic enough premise to be palatable to the entire class, yet still offer challenges to even the brightest of pupils. We must also be cognizant of the fact that every student has his or her own way of learning, and thus we must bring a high degree of variety to the classroom in terms of our methods of delivery. Of course, we are required to prepare our students for future study in our discipline, should they choose to do so, and therefore must maintain a certain degree of rigor while we are simultaneously aware that for the vast majority of the class such rigor may not be relevant. This amounts to quite a delicate balance and should be approached with the requisite level of care. Striving to make a class the best possible experience we can for our students is not only our job; but for many of us, our introductory classes represent the “face” of our departments. They are our handshake to the rest of the university community, and those who come away from the course with a positive impression become ambassadors for our departments. It is therefore clearly in our best interest to endeavor to meet these challenges.

To engage today’s students, we must be mindful of the fact that they are significantly more “tech-savvy” than those of any previous generation. Students often prefer internet resources (examples abound, including Google, Wikipedia, YouTube, SciFinder, etc.) that are accessible from virtually anywhere over physically going to the library for hard copies of reference material. Laptops, iPads, BlackBerries and other mobile electronic devices now routinely grace lecture halls, course content is being presented online and even textbooks are now being offered as “ebooks” available on the publishers’ websites. The vast quantity of electronic information that inundates our students at such an incredibly fast pace *outside* the classroom is contributing to an attrition in the effectiveness of traditional teaching practices. Those who choose to cling to older lecturing principles are at risk of losing their ability to connect with students in a meaningful way. Technology as an everyday accessory for today’s student is a

trend that is not likely to be slowed, let alone stopped, so one can easily argue that it would be more fruitful to adapt and accommodate such trends in the classroom, even encourage them.

What are presented here are some technology-driven solutions to these challenges that are designed to engage students specifically in large classes. As such, they address issues concerning variable backgrounds, learning styles and expectations among students in large classes. Specifically, I will discuss approaches for in and out of the classroom and present a summary of the student evaluation of these techniques. I hope to convince the reader of the merits of these resources and demonstrate that incorporating technology into a course is straightforward to accomplish.

Demonstrations

Performing live demonstrations in the classroom is an educational experience for your students that often pays significant dividends. Connections are more easily formed between theoretical aspects of the subject and the tangible “real-world” implications (Ben-Zvi, 1996). As a consequence of the broad focus of topics covered in introductory classes, they are highly amenable to engaging and exciting classroom demonstrations. Unfortunately, large class sizes in introductory and mid-level classes hinder the effectiveness of such demonstrations because students are often unable to see clearly anything that isn't written on the board or displayed via the projector. Consequently, students are often left underexposed to the relevance of the discipline and do not fully appreciate how it can relate to the everyday aspects of their lives.

Fortunately, technology can come to the rescue. In the Department of Chemistry at the University of Prince Edward Island, we have implemented a mobile demonstrations trolley specifically designed to address large-class issues. The unit is constructed from a highly durable mobile Rubbermaid instrument cart². A camera³ is mounted to the top of the demonstrations trolley that interfaces with classroom data projectors, allowing the instructor to easily include the entire class when performing interesting demonstrations. Even the intricate details of a demonstration are clear for all to see as they are projected onto a screen. The camera is a durable, high quality camera built for the rigors of daily use and comes pre-mounted on a 76 cm flexible frame. This design makes repositioning the camera effortless. It has built-in connectivity for composite video, S-video, and USB making it ideal to interface with televisions, VCRs, projectors, and computers. The product has autofocus capabilities and a much higher resolution than lower-priced cameras and comes with software for both Windows and Macintosh computer systems.

As Shkhashiri (1983) points out, though, the context of the demonstration is just as important as the demonstration itself. It isn't always useful to demonstrate for the sake of demonstrating; it should be relevant and purposeful, and the instructor should maintain a certain degree of enthusiasm to increase its effectiveness. It is therefore useful to take a moment to discuss the structure of a lecture that might incorporate a live demonstration.

Each of my lectures begins with a brief introduction to the topic that will be the focus of the day. This is often via a relevant anecdote or story that is chosen such that it helps students to realize the connections between what they are about to learn and their everyday lives. For example, in the introductory chemistry class that I teach, these could be discussions that range from alternative fuel sources to why we spread salt on the roads in winter to melt ice. With this, the stage is set and the students' interest has been piqued. I have found this to be a prime time for implementing a carefully chosen demonstration of the topic. Students are engaged, and in many cases students will actually be able to participate in the demonstrations as well, which promotes hands-on, active learning and enhances the experience for everyone.

Following the demonstration is an excellent time to open a dialogue amongst the class. This is accomplished by posing a question to the class pertaining to the topic of the day and the demonstration. The question is designed to challenge their understanding of what has been presented to them and generally will require careful thought and analysis. The students are then invited to discuss their solutions to the problem, and in a large class there will inevitably be a range of opinions and interpretations, some quite different from the others.

² Available from Canadawide Scientific, www.canadawide.ca (catalog no. 243-750-11)

³ The camera we have chosen is the Ken-a-vision MVP50 (www.ken-a-vision.com/MVP50.asp).

This is a wonderful opportunity to engage the students with an active learning exercise whereby members of the class with differing viewpoints participate in a debate. Students who feel they know the answer are invited to offer it to the class, and those who are unsure may listen and learn from their peers. Those who have offered solutions must then defend their position by answering questions from their classmates and me and, having heard the evidence presented by their classmates, the entire class is then asked to vote by a show of hands for what they now think the correct answer is.

What has been most interesting about observing this process is that the students with the correct answer do not always win the debate. That is, occasionally, those with the wrong answer have been able to convince the majority of the class of the merits of their position. Of course the truth is inevitably revealed throughout the remainder of the lesson, and the students do come away with the correct answer; however, I feel they come away with something far more valuable. They learn that sometimes the right answer is not always the most popular and the fact that a particular solution has the most support doesn't make it correct. This is a critically important lesson in science as it is in all disciplines and has brought a wealth of added value to the demonstrations.

I endeavored to utilize the technology as much as possible, and this resulted in me bringing it to class at least once a week but more often twice a week. I collected demonstration ideas from a variety of sources and developed several of my own so that I could tailor the presentation to the lecture material and also to my own personal style of teaching. Subsequently, I collected these and compiled a directory that is stored with the trolley that outlines the relevant demonstrations for specific topics, complete with materials lists and recommendations.

Having such a resource at my disposal allowed me to transcend the traditional lecture and bring chemistry “alive” for my students. I can say now that the students appreciated having this resource as well. To gauge the effectiveness of both the trolley itself and of my use of it, I circulated a student opinion survey at the end of the fall semester last year. The survey asked students to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 whether they agreed with certain statements pertaining to demonstrations and the demonstration trolley. A score of 1 indicated that the student strongly disagreed with the statement, and a score of 5 indicated that the student strongly agreed with the statement.

Specifically, although I suspected the students enjoyed the demonstrations, I was interested in gauging whether they served a valuable pedagogical role or whether they were merely entertaining and provided little food for thought. Fortunately, the results of the survey were quite clear and indicated that although the students did in fact find the demonstrations entertaining, they also facilitated a better understanding of the fundamental chemical principles behind them. This is supported by the response to the following statements:

Statement	Average Response Value
The demonstrations ...	
... helped me to understand the course material.	4.38
... were appropriate for the topics discussed.	4.64
... helped me to realize the connections between the class material and the real world.	4.28
... confused me.	1.40
...were entertaining.	4.74
...were boring.	1.31
I would rather have taken a chemistry class without demonstrations	1.17

The values listed in the above table indicate the average response of the students (a total of 84 students participated in the survey). Clearly, the students both enjoyed the demonstrations and found them helpful for learning. Although implementing demonstrations can take time away from other in-class activities, students performed equally well on tests with or without demonstrations, and thus there is little sacrificed and much gained from taking the time to engage students in this way. By far, the survey question that received the most definitive response was the last one in the above table, where 74 out of the 84 students indicated that they strongly disagreed with the statement and therefore appreciated my efforts in this regard.

In terms of the equipment itself, the student feedback was also very informative and positive. I was able to assess whether the students felt that the trolley was necessary and whether having that technology available contributed in a meaningful way to their classroom experience. These questions are summarized in the following table:

Statement	Average Response Value
The demonstrations trolley...	
... increased the effectiveness of the demonstrations.	4.52
... allowed me to see what the instructor was doing.	4.63
... was unnecessary.	1.55

Students clearly appreciated having the resource available, and it made a significant impact on their classroom experience. It simply would not have been possible to teach in the manner that I enjoy without the technology.

There are many additional benefits of this technology to those who teach classes with laboratory components, where large numbers of inexperienced students are being exposed to the practical concepts of techniques for the first time. In this environment, it is crucial to provide careful and consistent instruction to the students to maximize safety as well as learning. In the Department of Chemistry at the University of Prince Edward Island, the demonstration technology is used to record short instructional vignettes to be played for the students in the lab, and this will ensure that everyone receives consistent instructions, sees proper technique and adheres to appropriate laboratory standards of etiquette.

Podcasts

Podcasts (a term popularized by the advent of the Apple iPod) are a series of media files, in the form of audio or video clips, offered episodically for download online. The adoption of this concept for pedagogical purposes was almost immediate, and iTunes⁴ now offers an extensive collection of open educational podcasts in disciplines ranging from medieval history to quantum mechanics. The educational benefits of these resources for students are immense; students now have fingertip access to world-leading experts in almost any topic they are interested in, they can pause and rewind material that wasn't entirely clear the first time they experienced it, and perhaps best of all, it's completely free.

The educational benefits of these resources need little justification, and so I will not dwell on them here. Instead, I would like to offer some suggestions about how to get the most impact out of them in your class. Specifically, what I have found to be particularly rewarding is taking the time to create my own podcasts that are tailored to my students' needs. This is a barrier that may seem formidable to some, yet there are key advantages (above and beyond those already mentioned) to investing time in this initiative:

1. Students resonate more with the personal touch of *their own* professor as opposed to an unknown face and are therefore more likely to subscribe to the concept and reap the rewards for doing so. The style of the podcasts is more likely to conform to your teaching style, which affords a consistency that students appreciate.
2. The content may be tailored to your course. In other words, the needs of your students may be addressed specifically as opposed to the more general offerings that are publicly available. You may also address topics that aren't treated elsewhere such as your own particular assignments.
3. The time that it takes to create such a resource for your students need only be invested once. In the majority of cases podcasts will remain relevant for a long period of time and thus are just as valuable to next year's class (and the year after that!).

³ See <http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

The portability of the resource is also a feature that is quite attractive to students. Podcasts may be downloaded and placed on mobile devices such as iPods or laptops and are then accessible virtually anytime and anywhere. Students can then make the most of their morning commute by viewing a tutorial while riding the bus, for example.

Since beginning the development of a series of podcasts for my introductory chemistry course, there has been a significant decrease in the amount of time that I spend answering minor student questions via email or office visits. Reinforcing many of the routine tasks and skills that my students are required to learn may be relegated to the “virtual professor” that the students have access to online. They may play these podcasts over and over again until the requisite skills have been mastered. In large introductory classes, it is also important to realize that many students may be reluctant to approach a professor for help on their own and podcasts thus offer a method of engaging these students outside of the classroom.

As a matter of interest, I have monitored attendance levels in my classes since incorporating this technology and have noticed no significant change compared to classes not using podcasts. Although one might expect a decline in attendance when class material is available in other venues, this was not observed in my case. I have also paid close attention to student performance. It’s difficult to determine how significant an impact the podcasts have had on student performance on tests and exams, because there are inherent differences between each class from year to year, and the tests are also of varying levels of difficulty. That being said, there were no significant increases observed in grades on tests or exams, as a result of incorporating podcast technology. The student evaluation of the technology, however, was clearly decisive in that the students unanimously appreciated having access to the technology and valued it as a part of their course experience.

Once you begin, creating podcasts for your class can become as routine as preparing for traditional lectures; however, there are important principles that are recommended. For example, podcasts should be relatively short, usually no longer than 10 minutes. There are several reasons for this. Pedagogically, it is preferable to be direct and concise in the presentation by sticking to a single topic. This also allows the podcasts to be catalogued appropriately, which makes it far easier for students to search through a series of them to find one on the subject that they are most interested in. From a technological perspective, keeping podcasts short also helps to reduce file size, which allows for faster downloads.

It’s also important to provide as much variety as possible. I like to create a podcast on the basics of a particular topic in the course and then provide several more that demonstrate different problem solving techniques relevant to that topic. Students find it very useful to be able to watch their professor solve the types of problems that they’ll be faced with and have him or her talk them through the thought process involved. Several examples help to reinforce these concepts through repetition.

The software that is required for creating podcasts is minimal. Indeed, users of Apple Mac computers already have all the tools they need to create professional-looking podcasts. Alternatively, there are several freeware programs available for download that perform well in this regard for both Mac and PC users. Online tutorials are plentiful for instruction on the creation and upload of podcasts⁵, and your institution should be able to provide space to upload this content, allowing students in your class to access it. This means that the cost of implementing this technology in your courses can quite realistically be negligible.

Conclusion

In a perfect world, we would not have the burden of increasing class sizes and depleting resources with which to teach our students, and addressing these challenges would be moot. However, so long as the reality is in fact quite the opposite, it is imperative that we continue the dialogue regarding best practices for engaging and retaining students at the first year level (where so much of their university experience occurs in large classes). There are several successful high-tech and low-tech approaches developed to meet the challenges of large student-to-teacher ratios (Shaver, 2010). I have discussed several complementary low-cost strategies for engaging students in large

⁵ For example see, <http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/specs.html> or <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-CA/windows-vista/Create-your-own-podcast-What-you-need-to-know-to-be-a-podcaster>

classes that incorporate technology. These are designed to assist with the instruction of large classes both in and out of the classroom but may be utilized in any size class at any level of study.

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Learning from the Other Side: In Which a Professor Becomes a Student, and a Scientist Studies the Humanities

Abstract

I teach mathematics, which I love, but I have suffered from “English anxiety” since high school (the last time I had taken an English course). So, while on sabbatical several years ago, I decided to register for an English literature course. I wanted to understand better what professors in English actually do, and to re-experience being a student in a subject I have long struggled with (and thus better empathize with my own students). I achieved both goals (and cured my English anxiety), but also learned much more. The experience led me to reflect on the roles of teachers and students, resulting in some radical changes in the way I teach my own courses.

Section 1. Introduction

I can still remember the library of Mary Jane Shannon Junior High School where I first heard the word “theme” in an English class. I didn’t understand it then, nor did it become any clearer through the rest of high school. Because of this word (and a feeling that answers and grades were completely random), I left high school with severe “English anxiety.” I had no intention of ever taking a university English course, or any course in the humanities. I loved the certainty of mathematics, where the final answer is objectively right or wrong, however exciting and creative the path leading to it. But I’m now at a small university, and over time I’ve come to know some of my colleagues in the humanities. They didn’t seem all that scary, and it seemed to me it might be worthwhile to overcome my English anxiety and find out what English professors actually do. So, during a sabbatical several years ago, I decided to register for an English literature course, the first of what became four courses in the humanities (see Table 1). I achieved my goals and learned far more than I expected, but, more than that, reflecting on the experience led to improvements in my own teaching. Here I will discuss some of the important differences I found between these four humanities courses and the mathematics and science courses I have had much more experience with, and how my teaching changed as a result.

Term	Action
Fall 04/05	Audited Introduction to Literature
Winter 04/05	Audited Literature 2000 course.
Fall 05/06	Took Women’s Studies I for credit.
Winter 05/06	Audited Women’s Studies II.
Winter 05/06	Taught Math 4000 “humanities style”
Fall 06/07 – present	Adopted techniques to Math 3000
Fall 07/08 - present	Adopted techniques to Math 2000

Section 2. The Path to Learning

Mathematical and scientific knowledge is hierarchical and focussed on problem solving. Almost all lower level

courses serve as a specific prerequisite for one or more upper level courses, so that a specific body of knowledge and problem solving skills is required. Progress through the course must also be ordered, with each new topic depending on previous ones. In order to achieve this, student work is distributed over the term, with frequent assignments, labs and/or quizzes. The main student resource is the all-inclusive textbook, containing motivation, theory, explanations, examples, and exercises. Students are not expected to read this in advance; in fact most of them would find it difficult to do so. Instead, they are first introduced to a topic in class, where they are provided with the terminology along with examples of problem solving (typically by lecture, but techniques such as guided discovery may also be used along with demonstrations and other activities). They are then assigned problems on the topic as practice and/or for evaluation. Thus the pattern, repeated frequently throughout the term, is

Week or two of classes — Assignment / Quiz / Lab.

In the humanities courses I took, on the other hand, the emphasis was on improving students' writing and critical thinking skills. Within the first five minutes of my first class, this was made clear by the course outline: rather than the one-page list of information required by the Dean so typical in math, I was impressed by half a dozen pages of detailed information, including a syllabus specifying the assigned reading and activities for every class during the term. This turned out to be typical: the other courses also began with such a syllabus. Three of the four courses had a textbook, but it was a collection of short works from which the professor chose readings, and was supplemented by a variety of additional resources: novels, articles, films, and so on. In each course, most of the evaluated work was concentrated into two papers. The starting point of a learning cycle was a reading to be completed before class, from which class discussion would follow. None of the professors checked that this reading was done, or forced participation in the class discussions. We were expected to use the class discussions as a model of the critical thinking we would need to write the papers. So the pattern, repeated twice, was

Four to six weeks of (Reading — Class discussion) — Paper.

Section 3. Can Math be Taught “Humanities Style”?

One of the things I found most amazing about the humanities courses was that they introduced students directly to research in the discipline. Each had a librarian come in to talk about such things as electronic databases, and we read journal articles even in the introductory courses. I had never seen a research paper in math until I was well into graduate school, and certainly could not have read one. I wondered whether it might be possible to introduce senior math students to the research literature in a non-trivial way. After plenty of thought, I decided to try using some of the techniques from the humanities in a fourth year selected topics course on my own research area, graph theory and combinatorics. Here is an extract from the course outline; I have italicised the parts influenced by the humanities courses:

Objectives

- To learn more about combinatorics and graph theory.
- *To learn how to learn math on your own, from a textbook.*
- *To learn about research mathematics, and how to read it.*
- To improve your problem solving skills.

Format

This will be run as a seminar course. I will give you reading assignments along with some basic practice exercises to complete before class. We will then spend class time going over any difficulties with the readings and looking at more complex problems. We will also spend some time reading from mathematics papers, and each of you will read and present one mathematical paper as a project. Because of the structure of this course it is essential that you come to class prepared and ready to participate.

Class Participation

Class participation includes preparations, which means doing the assigned readings and practice exercises before class, and coming to class with either solutions to the practice exercises, or questions about them, or both. It also includes participating in solving problems during class.

Participation does **not** require that you come up with correct answers; it includes asking questions or offering suggestions even if the suggestions don't work out.

Project

The project consists of reading a mathematical research paper, writing a report on it, and presenting the paper in class. The goal is to learn how to read research papers, and to practice your presentation skills. You may choose your own presentation format, whatever you think most appropriate to share what you've learned from the paper. I will help you with any difficulties you have in reading the paper; I don't expect you to do this completely on your own.

This was a very big departure from any math course I'd ever taught before, and I was not sure how the students would react. Seven students (mostly in third year) had registered, but one dropped out on the first day when she found out about the presentation. After that inauspicious start, things went far better than I had anticipated. The initial readings came from a first year textbook, and the students had no difficulty with them or the basic exercises, so in most classes I would put up a problem and have them solve it as a group. After some hesitation they were all involved and my role was reduced to providing hints when necessary and emphasizing the techniques of problem solving (including that it was okay to get stuck and start all over again from the beginning, something they hadn't seen demonstrated in a math class before). I chose as a first research paper one of my own so that I could talk about how the research was done and how months of work and three research notebooks were distilled into six pages. To my surprise, some of them were impressed that I was a published author. I helped them find appropriate papers to present then spent the remainder of the classes on essential background ideas for the specific papers they had chosen. One student complained (with some justification!) that the course involved too much work, but the other course evaluations were excellent, and two of the students went on to graduate work in graph theory. It was the best teaching experience I have ever had.

Section 4. The Real World of Math Courses

Unfortunately, one gets very few opportunities in the sciences to teach a small group on one's own research area. So, after this success, I looked for ways I could bring some of the same spirit into the required courses for math majors. I started with third year analysis (the course math majors most dread) followed by second year discrete mathematics (a larger course of about 25 students), and now routinely apply this pattern to all of my teaching except the introductory level service courses. Although I got here through a unique route, these techniques are part of the active learning approach to teaching. The pattern goes as follows:

Preparation — Class Discussion — Assignment

I keep a detailed syllabus on Moodle listing the preparation for each class. This consists of a reading assignment, followed by a few practice exercises the students must be ready to hand in (though I don't collect them every class). The focus of the reading is usually terminology, so the students come to class having worked on a couple of examples illustrating the definitions (in reality, most of them work backwards from the exercises to figure out what they need to read in the text, but the effect is the same). This saves time that would be spent on trivial explanations, and allows us, after any questions about the preparations, to spend more time on the complex concepts and proofs most students are unable to understand on their own. In smaller classes I'll develop these through class discussion, providing help with problem solving tips and the occasional short lecture on more difficult results. In larger classes I supplement this with a lot of small group work. Preparations and class participation (including group work) count for a small portion of the grade, but they are evaluated for whether or not they are serious attempts rather than for mathematical correctness (this also makes them very quick to grade). By the time they reach the assignments, the students have already had practice thinking rather than just watching, and have had a chance to ask questions about the parts they find difficult. The results have been very satisfying, for me as well as for the students. Although I get grumbles about the workload, the math majors do appreciate how much they are learning, and the class atmosphere is more comfortable as we focus together on the struggle to learn.

Section 5. For the English Professors

When I gave this presentation at the Showcase, I got questions from English professors asking me what I could say about improving their courses, so this section is for them. I was very fortunate in that all of the humanities professors I took courses from were excellent teachers. I appreciated their enthusiasm, the variety of experiences they introduced into the classroom, and their willingness to answer questions (as a mature student I raised my hand whenever I didn't fully understand something, which was quite often, although I tried to hold back and let the other students answer first when the professor asked questions of the class). They faced many of the same problems that arise in introductory math courses, dealing with students who often didn't want to be there and were inadequately prepared by the schools (adding fractions versus noun/verb agreement). There are only two minor quibbles I had about the courses. One was the lack of examples, something I had always taken for granted in math and science courses. I would have liked to have seen a few sample student papers (on a topic different from what we were assigned) with various letter grades, to see how the kind of ideas discussed in class could be expressed in written form. I was comfortable with the mechanics of writing a paper, but I'd never seen graded papers other than my own and thus had no feel for what was really expected, although the rubrics that were provided were helpful in determining what was not acceptable. The other quibble was the poor quality of small group discussion. All the courses I took had some degree of small group work, but none of them graded this, and, although some of the professors tried to circulate, they would often be waylaid for a sizable time by one or two of groups, leaving the rest of us largely alone. Perhaps they thought the students knew what to do, but in reality the students in my groups tended either to jump in forcefully with their own opinions or hang back and say nothing, so that there was little real discussion. No one ever asked the less dominant students for their thoughts. I'd hold my opinions until everyone else had had a chance to volunteer, and would then invite those who'd been silent to contribute. They were usually willing to do so (unless of course they hadn't done the readings) but they would never disagree with a dominant group member. As soon as the group had an adequate response to the specific question asked, conversation would veer off, so that I learned quite a lot about their social lives but very little relevant to the topic at issue. This was a disappointment, but it was more than made up for by the quality of the class discussions led by the professors.

Section 6. Conclusion

After a certain point in our teaching careers, many of us become set in our ways. I strongly recommend taking a course in an unfamiliar or feared discipline as a way of developing a new perspective on teaching. And I'd like to thank the professors of the courses I took (they know who they are). When I first talked to them, they all expressed doubt that I would actually learn anything in their courses; they seemed to believe that somehow I already knew it all (though, oddly enough, none of them expressed confidence in their understanding of mathematics). They opened up new worlds to me, and I am deeply grateful for all they have taught me.

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Think Like A Professor!: Student and Faculty Perceptions of Course Policies

Abstract

The “Think Like a Professor!” exercise is designed to enliven introductory classes while presenting course policies and regulations to students. The exercise pulls students out of their passive role as receptacles of course information, puts them in the instructor’s place, and asks them to apply the instructor’s course policies in various scenarios based on real incidents. The exercise accomplishes several goals, including establishing appropriate modes of interaction among students, asking students to read and extract information, requiring students to apply, analyze, and synthesize facts and ideas, giving students insight into how their actions are perceived by faculty and others, and giving faculty feedback on their regulations and a view of student attitudes and values. Students are encouraged to see that course policies and regulations have a purpose that is applicable to both students and instructors.

It’s the first day of class, and we all know the drill. The course outlines, with requirements, expectations, and policies detailing how your course will be run, must be handed out. You need to get your students to read what must look to them like the fine print of a long contract – one of several outlines they’ll be collecting in the first couple of days. Especially for first-year students just out of high school, course outlines may present a confusing array of do’s and don’ts: all assignments must use APA, or was that MLA? No late papers will be accepted, but sometimes late papers will have points deducted. You must have a note for absences, but some profs don’t take attendance. You have to write all the assignments to pass, but didn’t someone say that you could do extra assignments for additional credit?

For the course instructor, the necessity of going over the course outline can deflate the liveliest of introductory classes. You may find yourself standing in front of the class on the first day, plodding through each requirement and every policy statement, declaiming against errors and misdemeanours while your students’ eyes glaze over. Or, you can hand out the course outlines and tell your students to read through them on their own – in theory, not an unreasonable expectation; in practice, one that seldom works.

To enliven these introductory classes - both for my sake and my students’ - I present an exercise that pulls students out of their passive role as receptacles of course information, puts them in my place, and asks them to apply my course policies in various scenarios - in other words, to “Think Like a Professor!” Their task is to imagine that they are the professor of our course and have written the course outline, including all of its policies, expectations, and requirements, and that they will now be faced with various situations, all based on actual events, in which they will have to apply the rules of the course. The exercise serves many purposes: to introduce students to each other; to start developing constructive, collaborative discussions among students; to encourage them to read a text closely; to direct them to a knowledge of the rules and regulations of the course, and to gain some understanding of academic life. The benefits of the assignment are reciprocal: as the instructor, you gain insight into some of the beliefs and practices of your students. Sometimes, you may realize that you have to explain issues or revise requirements that you thought were clear and complete; at other times, your students can advise you on ways to deal with difficult problems. You may be asking your students to “think like a professor,” but this exercise also gives you access to thinking like a student.

The first step is to hand out the course outlines. However, instead of discussing each requirement in detail, I take a broader approach in which I emphasize a main theme: that all of my requirements are designed to make the course run effectively and fairly both for my students and for myself. The underlying point is that all of the policies and regulations have a purpose; they are not simply punitive measures created because I am “mean” but measures designed to encourage students to be active, courteous, professional participants in the class. In addition, I make sure

to explain that regulations and policies have a purpose that applies to me as the instructor as well, enabling me to teach effectively and fairly. So, for example, I might point out that I have regulations on late papers for the following reasons: first, to make the course run effectively and fairly for all students, who are thus encouraged to keep up with their assignments, which will help make them successful in their coursework, and so that students are rewarded fairly for pushing themselves to get work in on time. But the other side of the equation should not be forgotten either; the regulation is also designed to help me run the course effectively and fairly by keeping assignments coming in an organized and steady flow that will allow me to manage my workload and so give me enough time to provide effective feedback on assignments; as well, the regulation ensures that I am grading according to equal expectations of all students. It doesn't hurt to give students such insights into the demands of academic life. The instructor's expectations and workload have to be made transparent to students, who, like the general public, rarely have a clear idea of what a professor's job entails. While I assure students that I am not complaining about a career that I love, I do give them a snapshot of what the job entails. They seem to be interested in hearing that professors do not just teach two or three classes a week but that these classes require preparation time, that professors are expected to do research and administrative work while often carrying a heavy marking load. The goal of the initial overview of course policies and regulations is to emphasize that there is a good reason for each requirement, both from the instructor's and the students' point of view. From the start of the discussion, then, you can reinforce the idea that a course is an experience shared by faculty and students, not imposed by one on the other.

After giving students my general thesis for all of the requirements, I leave it up to them to discover the supporting details. They get a copy of the course outline and the "Think Like a Professor!" handout, which usually contains about half a dozen scenarios that an instructor might come across. If there is time, students can divide into small groups for discussion in class, or they can be asked to post their responses in online course management systems like Blackboard or Moodle discussion forums. In live class discussions, the students have the advantage of face-to-face introductions and interactions in a small group, preparing them for further small-group work or contributions to the class at large. On the other hand, asking students to respond online has the advantage of giving them a task right at the beginning of the course that will require them to figure out how to log on and post responses on a course site; in addition, some students find it easier to participate at first in an online forum rather than in a live in-class one. Online discussions also have the advantage of giving the instructor a step-by-step view of how the discussion among students has been shaped and what individual views might be, not just the consensus of a group. (The quotations in this essay come from such online postings on a discussion forum.) Whatever mode of discussion is used, while giving students the assignment instructions I can suggest models of interaction: supporting other students, rewording their understanding, courteously disagreeing and offering another opinion. Students typically do not see the exercise as a difficult one, so they are unlikely to be intimidated by having to express an opinion. Establishing these models of interaction right away provides a foundation for future discussions, for peer editing, in which students are sometimes reluctant to comment on others' ideas, and for critical reading and thinking, in which students have to engage actively with others' ideas and facts.

The "Think Like a Professor!" handout that students are given contains this preamble: "You are the professor of this course. You've handed out your course outlines, and you've pointed out the course policies to the class. And yet, the following things happen. What *will* you do?" Each scenario is based on past incidents with students, although of course details are altered so that no one can be identified. Each scenario is presented in a few sentences and ends with a version of the question, "What *will* you do?"

When I first created these scenarios, I thought that most of them would simply require the application of straightforward facts; for example, if I stated in my outline that late papers will have one grade level deducted for every twenty-four hours they were late, and if I stated that papers should be handed in directly to me or our department secretary and in other circumstances they should have a faculty signature and date on them to mark the date and time of submission, then the answer to the following scenario would be obvious:

Your students have an essay due on Wednesday. You collect the papers and leave at the end of the day, and since you don't have any classes or meetings this week on Thursday or Friday, and Monday is a holiday, you decide to do your research, prepare your classes, and grade papers at home. You finally come back on campus on Tuesday morning. When you open your office door, you find a paper has been slipped under the door. It only has the student's name on it as well as the date the paper was due. What *will* you do about the grading of this paper?

Mostly, students respond in expected ways, applying the one-grade-level-per-day-late rule and pointing out that papers left under the door without a faculty signature and date would be considered to have been submitted on the day they were picked up. Of course, you might find a student who simply has not read the course policies or not read them carefully enough, providing a response that is basically a guess: “I would tell the student that no late papers will be accepted.” What I find interesting in such a response is that the student does not seem to recognize the need to consult a text in order to extract information to be applied to the situation, in spite of being told to do so in the assignment instructions. Or perhaps the student has consulted the text but skimmed over it so quickly that the essential information has been overlooked. In either case, even superficial or surface reading, which involves “the tacit acceptance of information contained in the text” (Hermida 92), and which is thought to be the predominant mode of reading among university students (Hermida 93; Hunt 1-2), is absent. Should such problems arise, the instructor has an opportunity to recognize and address the issue from the very beginning of the course. How many students are skimming / misunderstanding / ignoring the text? Is your course regulation clearly explained? Should you present it differently? If you think that the text you have provided is clear but a significant number of students are not able to extract and apply information from it, then you may have to address basic reading skills in your course before throwing your students into more complex scholarly prose.

In fact, the “Think Like a Professor!” scenarios, although presented in plain language in a few sentences, typically call on more than surface reading skills. In being presented with a real-life context that includes details of student and faculty actions, the student must bring into play some of the cognitive activities associated with deep reading, such as “the ability to analyse, synthesize, solve problems” and to think “meta-cognitively in order to negotiate meanings with the author and to construct new meaning from the text” (Hermida 93). I deliberately include elements in some of my scenarios that raise issues that go beyond the application of facts from the course outline, as in this scenario:

You get the following email from one of your students: “hey, I couldn’t come to class yesterday sorry :) did i miss anything imp.? if u cld send me ur notes that wld be gr8.” What *will* you do?

The obvious response is to apply my policy that “Students are expected to make correct use of language to the best of their abilities in all non-graded written materials, including emails to the instructor and discussion posts to the class.” In my overview of course policies, I explain that the reason for this one is to encourage students to recognize that different styles of writing are appropriate in different situations, and that any correspondence with people in the university who are not personal friends is a professional communication that should be written accordingly. So far, the reason for the policy from a student’s point of view is clear. What other reasons, particularly from the instructor’s point of view, could explain this policy? This is where the opportunity to reveal aspects of a professor’s life, to make our jobs and attitudes more transparent to students, comes up. I am frank with my students when I tell them that emails written in textspeak annoy me and that other people in the university – other professors, admissions officers, registrar’s office staff – react similarly, with such communications creating a negative impression of the student. But this brief scenario packs a further punch. “Did I miss anything important?” I explain to students that this common question implies that instructors’ preparations before and efforts during class are totally insignificant; in other words, the question is usually perceived as insulting. “Can you send me your notes?” is another question that instructors may deal with in different ways, depending on whether they post lecture notes or not for their classes; if they don’t, then the issue of attendance and requests for extra help will arise; if they do post lecture notes, then the tone and context of the question needs some thought. This brief scenario, then, should elicit not only a response that demonstrates reading for information (the course policy states “correct use of language...”) but also a response that brings into play policies on attendance, that requires a recognition of purpose and tone in writing, and that asks students to suggest ways in which the instructor should respond to the student of such an email. The student is asked to imagine both writer and audience in this rhetorical situation and to see that, as writers themselves, their communications have an effect on the people who receive them; in doing so, my hope is that they will also begin to understand why the instructor would write such a policy in the first place. My intention is to move students to see reading and writing “for real,” as Russell Hunt would say – to view the course outline as “something more than a load of neatly baled information to be internalized and remembered ...” (1), and to understand the “rhetorical motives of texts” (Hunt 2).

In some cases, students elaborate on the course information with responses that tend to soften the effect of a regulation. Going back again to the scenario of the late paper slipped under the office door, one student writes: “I would take one grade level off for the first day and I would talk to the student and ask when they submitted it, and hope that they are honest and take off one grade level for each day that it was late.” In this case, my course outline included nothing about seeking out the student for his or her account of when the essay was submitted – and I can hear jaded teachers scoffing at the idea of relying on the hope that students would give an honest account of their late papers - but it is not uncommon for my students to inject a personal intervention into various scenarios where I would have thought none was required. Here is another example, in which a student brings into play the personal attentions of the professor and even the dean in dealing with a fairly minor attendance problem. The scenario involved a student who had missed five classes without notifying anybody, did not realize that an assignment was due in the last class, and had asked that no late penalties be assigned to her paper because she had been ill (though no medical note was presented). Here is one student’s idea of how such a scenario should be handled:

Considering this scenario, I would first want to sit down and discuss my expectations with the student. I would explain the terms of the policy regarding the attendance and the expectation of her contacting me. I would explain the expectations regarding handing in work and also the fact that I must be notified prior to the due date if there will be a delay in handing in the assignment. In this discussion, I would clearly articulate to the student that she was informed of these policies at the beginning of the term and I would review her prior performance in the early term and how she was doing academically in the course. I would discuss the fact that I wanted her and I to talk to the Dean and decide what the plan of action will be. In reviewing our discussion I will try to understand her response to the seriousness of her actions and if she can continue to attend class. This student and I met with the dean and decided since this behaviour had never occurred before I decided to give her a second chance to complete the course. In regards to the assignment, because the student did not contact me prior to the due date I deducted one grade level for every 24 hours that she did not pass it in.

The last sentence in this response arrives at what I had thought was the straightforward answer to the scenario, but in order to get there, a series of interviews is imagined as taking place. Not all students expect this level of personal attention; one response to the above student’s post stated:

I do not quite agree with you in the sense that I think you are giving this student way too much of your time. I do not think it is up to the professor to explain the course policies to a student, it is up to the student to read them and ask questions if they do not understand. I also do not think a meeting with the dean is necessary....

In the latter response, we have a student who has been acclimated, for better or worse, to the university environment; she understands her responsibilities in the current academic world. In the first response, though, we have a student who believes that professors and deans should undertake a personal intervention in a common student problem in order to keep the student on track. Perhaps this response is an idealized image of what a personalized education is supposed to be; perhaps it is the legacy of high school expectations that teachers, guidance counsellors, and principals will deal with behavioural problems. Whatever your view of this posting, these kinds of responses are an opportunity for instructors to question whether they should provide more personal interventions with students and/or whether they should explain that university students are typically considered independent adults who are expected to act responsibly and knowledgeably on their own – and then to take the consequences. Serious problems might elicit comments or an interview with the professor - or they might not, and students are usually expected to seek help from faculty or counsellors on their own. This is a difficult lesson especially for first-year students to grasp: that although they will be invited to consult their professors during office hours, the level of academic advice and support that they receive largely depends on their own initiatives. In their research on student perceptions of course policies, Duplaga and Astani discuss the relationship between justice and caring in the implementation of course regulations and suggest that “the ethical responsibility of an instructor does not end with the determination of fair course policies. There is still much ethical work to be done by the instructor in terms of presenting and enforcing the policies within caring relations with all students” (14). Many of the student responses that I have seen envision a student-faculty relationship based on such a blending of both justice and caring for the individual.

One of my scenarios is completely open to negotiation about how to deal with a sensitive situation that should be perceived as both just and caring:

One of your students sends you an email to say that he cannot hand in the assignment that is due today because his grandfather has just died and he has to go to the funeral. What *will* you do?

The issue revealed to students in this case is the alarming death rate, usually of grandparents, around midterm and exam time. In the spirit of revealing the faculty side of the situation, I explain to students that instructors are used to hearing such excuses and that their first reaction might be to disbelieve the excuse. The class discussion then turns to how can a student present such an excuse if a death really occurs? I also ask for advice about how an instructor should handle such a situation; for example, should the instructor insist on an obituary or death notice? Some students have told me that that is what is expected in other courses and that they consider this to be fair; others have told me that when asked to provide such a document, they felt offended. With a scenario such as this one, I am willing to be guided by the consensus of the class in deciding how the situation should be handled, but even if an instructor has a clearly stated policy for such a case, the scenario provides an opportunity for discussing how students can establish their credibility in a course so that they will be believed no matter what problems they run into. I think the argument could be made that dealing with scenarios such as these, even if only in general class discussions, is one way of combining a sense of justice with an attitude of caring and respect for students.

The “Think Like a Professor!” exercise is designed to bridge the gap between students and instructors, enhancing their mutual understanding of each other’s attitudes and expectations. Does the exercise have an effect? Does it prevent plagiarism, ensure all essays are on time, make everyone attend every class? Sadly, no. The exercise may not change all behaviours, but I do find that on the whole my students at least know my course policies. Even when they are not at their best – handing in a late paper, for example - they will say something like “I know there’s a late penalty.” In other words, they have remembered some information; they know the regulations and policies. But I hope they know more than that: that faculty and students are in this endeavour together and that there are reasons for course policies that apply to both sides - for me, to let me do my job fairly and effectively, and for them, to encourage them to get the most out of the journey we are all taking together.

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Working Together: Professor and Student Experiences with Service Learning

Abstract

This paper presents the experiences of three students and their professor regarding working collaboratively in a service learning setting relating to children and their physical growth and development and to their health education. Promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles to children in an organized format (i.e., Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Lifestyles programs) not only facilitated the learning of course content, but also developed ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills which prepared the students for the next step in their career (i.e., entrance to a Bachelor of Education program) and provided an advantage in their academic training because of their practical experiences. From the professor’s perspective, working interactively with students allowed for a better understanding of the students’ knowledge, skills, and learning styles which enhanced planning of course content and delivery. Given these findings, service learning should be emphasized as not only a valid pedagogic tool, but also for the practical experiences which have positive influences for students’ future education and career development and for professors’ planning and delivering of course content.

Introduction

Service learning is a pedagogic technique that provides a practical method to link theory presented in class lectures, discussions, and assigned readings to the “real world” (Dicklitch, 2003). Students’ service learning experiences may provide one of the best approaches to practically test or experience “theory” from class lectures or readings (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, 2000; Blieszner and Artale, 2001; Kronick, 2007). To be effective and meaningful, the service learning volunteer opportunities must bring the theories examined in the classroom to life outside of it, and these opportunities should be outside the students’ comfort zone – culturally, economically, and socially (Dicklitch, 2003). Further, for effectiveness, the service volunteer experiences should involve hands-on opportunities to work directly with the community members in a way that challenge students’ stereotypes, prejudices, and current ways of thinking (Dicklitch, 2003). In addition to connecting their academic studies to their real-world encounters in their service learning experiences, students are encouraged to connect their personal goals and values to their volunteer work (Bishop and Driver, 2007). It is in this regard that in addition to enhancing academic and self-development, students experiences in service learning promote broad notions of social responsibility (Eyler, 2002; Joseph, Stone, Grantham, Harmancioglu, and Ibrahim, 2007; Matthews-Gardner, Fitzgerald, and Gitelson, 2005).

Service learning is a resource intensive pedagogy – particularly at the individual class level – with benefits that potentially accumulate over time (Matthews-Gardner et al., 2005). One of these potential benefits for the students

who participate in it is enhanced or improved short (i.e., in the particular class where service learning was done) and long-term (i.e., in subsequent classes) academic performance (Strage, 2004). Empirical evidence on the broader (i.e., beyond enhanced academic performance) short-term impact of service learning is mixed (Matthews-Gardner, 2005) and in some cases inconclusive (Eyler, 2002). It actually may not be realistic to expect a one-term experience with a service learning project – even if it involves 15 to 20 hours of service and a reflective assignment - to lead to dramatic changes in a student’s approach to learning, his or her attitudes and values towards others, and/or the topic in the community (Matthews-Gardner et al., 2005), or for moral development and moral orientation (Bernacki and Jaeger, 2008). Perhaps more than one encounter is needed; perhaps also the students need more time and other experiences to fully realize the benefits. Still, research is supportive of short term benefits, with one study reporting that students identified skill improvement, development of counselling skills, and professional role socializations as the main benefits of their service learning experiences (Reising, Allen, and Hall, 2006). Another study reported that students enrolled in pharmacy believed their service learning experiences were educational, built confidence, improved communication skills, and effectively enhanced their understanding of others’ needs (Piper, DeYoung, and Lamsam, 2000).

Survey research on the effects of service learning typically examines personal qualities such as efficacy, interpersonal skills, reduction of stereotyping, and enhancement of social responsibility (Hunt, 2007). Another factor often included is the exploration of potential careers through exposure to a variety of work environments (Blieszner and Artale, 2001). A descriptive phenomenological approach used to examine students in nursing service learning experiences showed that not only did the students see the nursing profession in a new light, they also developed empathy for the individuals they worked with in the community and re-examined their assumptions, perceptions and societal stereotypes (Hunt, 2007). This research clearly demonstrates the need for service learning experiences to better prepare students for the “real world” that they will continue to live and work in, so that they can do so more effectively as well as with more caring and compassion. It should be pointed out that students in fields that do not necessarily lead to a career in human services still benefit from their service learning experiences in that it attunes them to the needs of their community (Kronick, 2007) and, equally important, puts a face on the individuals who live within it.

Methods: Working Together

Three graduated students (two males, one female; one year post graduation; currently in a Bachelor of Education program) and their professor combined their thoughts for this paper regarding their collaborative experiences in service learning from two required courses (Child Growth and Development and Health Education) for a Pre-Education major in Human Kinetics over two academic terms. In each class there were many options for service learning, ranging from volunteering to working one-on-one in tutoring or mentoring-type settings to working with other volunteers in a physical activity or sport/coaching setting. The children the volunteer services were aimed towards ranged from preschool to secondary school ages. Regardless of the setting, each student who chose the service learning option in each class committed 15 to 20 hours of his or her time to providing service. Students then completed an assignment based upon their volunteer experiences which asked them to reflect upon what they ascertained about children in the setting in which they volunteered and how that discovery related to what they were learning in class lectures or discussions or from their assigned readings. Students were also asked to identify what they discovered about themselves and how because of this experience they would be better teachers, parents, health promoters, etc.

The three graduated students chose to work each term with their professor in her programs designed to meet the community need for physical activity and overweight prevention in children. Specifically, these students volunteered to assist with the delivery of an after-school physical activity (Fit 4 Life) and healthy lifestyles classroom (Fit 4 Lifestyles) program designed for children in grades 3 to 6. More specifically, in the first term, the students volunteered for Fit 4 Life, and in the second term, they volunteered for both Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Lifestyles as the programs operated back-to-back and included the same registrants. Fit 4 Life is an inclusive physical activity program offered twice per week after school for an hour for ten weeks for 25+ boys and girls in grades 3 and 4, and twice per week for 20+ boys and girls in grades 5 and 6. Approximately ten university students (primarily from the Department of Human Kinetics) assisted with the delivery of the program, so that there was a low instructor to participant ratio (1:3). With this low instructor to participant ratio, participants received a high level of individual attention and encouragement. With university student-volunteer supervision, the program participants walked

approximately 20 to 25 minutes from their elementary or junior school to the University for the one-hour low-organized games program. Games/activities that emphasized inclusive and continuous participation rather than elimination or competition were the main focus. Standard sports (i.e., basketball, hockey, soccer, football) were not played. A rotating schedule was used to emphasize different components of physical fitness (upper body strength, lower body strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, cardiorespiratory endurance) and games/activities were chosen – by the student-volunteers – to reflect these components. Several different games were played each session to reduce boredom and to maintain the participants' interest and adherence to the program. Further opportunities for other types of physical activity were provided with the hour spent in the swimming pool, on the skating rink, and in outdoor play. New in January 2010 and added to complement the Fit 4 Life program was a 45-minute interactive classroom session (termed Fit 4 Lifestyles) where the elementary school participants were provided with a healthy snack and taught nutrition and lifestyle lessons. These lessons were designed to allow for active hands-on participation and covered nine nutrition and lifestyle topics over the span of the program.

The student-volunteers' responsibilities for these programs included a commitment of several hours once per week for ten weeks. Student-volunteers were assigned one or more roles each time at Fit 4 Life: being in charge (to direct all the activities, coordinating the other student-volunteers, ensuring the equipment is properly stored, etc.), teaching self selected games or activities that adhered to the philosophy of the program and addressed the physical fitness focus, walking to pick up the participants from their school, or waiting with the participants at the end of the program to be picked up. For Fit 4 Lifestyles, the student-volunteers prepared snacks, taught the provided lessons on nutrition and healthy lifestyles, and assisted in keeping the participants on task. Regardless of the assigned role, student-volunteers were expected to promote physical activity and healthy living in a safely constructed positive environment.

Results and Discussion of Working Together

The three students obtained academic, professional, and personal benefits from their service learning experiences, in particular from working with their professor and the Fit 4 Life programs. Specific to academic benefits, the students identified “real life” examples that reflected the course content – particularly related to the physical growth and development of children and how it relates to children's ability and capacity for physical activity, physical fitness, and physical education. Specifically, the student-volunteers were able to observe motor skill development, the health-related components of physical fitness, issues related to thermoregulation, stages of pubertal development, the expected differences between boys and girls, and the range of performance ability and capacity normally found within boys and girls. Further, as self-described kinaesthetic learners, they felt they were better able to learn about these expected developmental changes in a physically active setting where they too were active and engaged participants. Related to health education and promotion, the student-volunteers learned practical information regarding what is involved in promoting healthy eating and lifestyles to children, the need to use a level of language reflective of the children's stage of learning, the reality of parental influence on children's attitudes and behaviours, and the importance and recognition of their position as role models. Another benefit the students identified to their academic development was the relationship developed with their professor. Because of this enhanced relationship developed from working in a gymnasium and classroom setting, the relationship was open and relaxed, thus easing the typical student stress that comes when asking their professor questions or for clarification of assignments, theory, etc.

Similar to the research of Bleiszner and Artale (2001), the student-volunteers described confirming their career choice as one of the most important professional benefits of volunteering for the Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Lifestyles programs. Not only was their career choice confirmed, but so was the particular level they were interested in preparing for as teachers (i.e., elementary, junior, or secondary). In this regard, the practical volunteer experiences were an asset listed on their resumes when applying for entrance to the Bachelor of Education program, and they provided tangible evidence for their choice to be teachers, as well as examples for discussion in the required essays of the application package. The students also enhanced their leadership skills – in particular when they were put in charge of the program for the day. Not only did they learn how to manage the 25+ children in a gymnasium and/or classroom setting, but they also had to effectively coordinate the efforts of the other ten or so student-volunteers. These experiences also facilitated the development of effective and efficient communication skills whether talking one-on-one with the participants during the walk from the school to the program, using a “gym” voice and short, precise instructions to ‘teach’ an activity/game in the physical activity program, or using a ‘classroom’ voice to

teach about healthy living and nutrition in a smaller classroom setting. Because Fit 4 Life is an inclusive program, children with mental and/or physical disabilities were also included. The addition of these children provided for the opportunity to experiment with various methods of inclusion which effectively helped these student-volunteers break down the barriers and build their self confidence for their inclusive teaching practices. Further, working with a team of student-volunteers, the students learned not only how to work effectively with one another, but also various effective and not so effective approaches to teach, organize, adapt, and interact with children. There were also opportunities to interact and communicate effectively with parents regarding their child's experiences in the program, which is also important for developing teachers to gain experience. The student volunteers also felt that their learning how to work with children had benefits that extended beyond their chosen profession of teachers; they felt it was critical in their development as future parents, coaches, and in all walks of life and, as identified previously by Kronick (2007), in understanding the community and its needs.

Personally, the students gained from the gift of volunteering, recognizing that their efforts at physical activity and healthy living promotion were fulfilling a community need to provide safe and healthy after-school care at a time and in an environment where sedentary living, overweight and obesity are on the rise. As such, their social responsibility and commitment to the community was promoted (Eyler, 2002; Joseph et al., 2005; Matthews-Gardner et al., 2005). At a very personal level, being involved in these programs also helped to build the students' confidence in their skills for 'teaching' or working with children – and their parents. In this regard, it was felt that the program design and the way it was facilitated allowed for personal growth. For the first few sessions, the professor delivers the programs to model the expected behaviour/future responsibilities of the student-volunteers. Then, students are assigned roles which are performed with the professor supervising. Eventually, the professor has the students take charge and coordinate the program's activities. Finally, the students felt – because of their time and experience with these programs – that they were actually ahead of their current classmates in the Bachelor of Education program in terms of preparation for becoming a teacher because they had experience and skills 'in progress' that allowed them to shine in their practical learning experiences with children in middle school as Bachelor of Education students. Further, these students were less nervous when engaged in their first practicum (i.e., practice teaching under the supervision of another teacher).

Like the students, the professor gained professionally and personally from the collaboration. Professionally – as a teacher – the understanding of students' academic and professional needs was enhanced. The teaching and learning of course content was extended beyond the classroom with real practical examples raised in the classroom as well as during 'debriefing' moments once the Fit 4 Life and Fit 4 Lifestyles participants left the programs. Further, the capacity to develop 'real' skills for working with children was realized. These skills include effective and efficient ways to organize children, methods of delivering instructions (i.e., concise and appropriate terminology), and one-on-one and small group communications. Examples of leadership and role modeling could also be discussed.

Personally, for the professor, there is also the gift of giving – in this case 'giving' to the community, to children and their parents, and to the students. Creating and facilitating a program that meets a community need has a reward in itself. A further reward comes from the delight the participants get from the physical activity program and in connecting with the student-volunteers who quickly become heroes. The parents are also indebted to the professor for an after-school program that promotes healthy living in addition to meeting their needs for after-school care. Finally, there is a particular reward in creating an experience for university students that not only benefits their academic development but also provides the opportunity for them to cultivate and/or extend various hard and soft skills required to be successful in their future, regardless of career choice.

In conclusion, given the students' and professor's reflections, it is clear that working collaboratively in a service learning setting has tremendous benefits for the students, the professor, the community, and the participants (and their parents) in the program. Though extra time and effort are required from the students and professor for this experience to be successful, the outcomes are worth the effort.

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Using Student Feedback Effectively to Improve Teaching and Curriculum

Abstract

End-of-term course evaluation surveys can be a rich source of ideas for improvements to our teaching and our curriculum—if we use the feedback effectively and systematically. Factors that limit the effectiveness of course evaluations include standardized surveys that may not ask about the things that we really need to know about our courses, feedback that arrives too late to stimulate changes while a course is in progress, survey results that arrive when we are distracted by the next term's courses, and the lack of dissemination of student comments on program issues that affect courses other than the one under review. Making effective use of student feedback requires getting the right feedback at the right time, analysing it carefully to improve teaching, and sharing students' opinions on broader program issues with the people who are responsible for curriculum development.

The collection of student feedback on university teaching in the form of end-of-semester course evaluation questionnaires has become routine at most universities in Canada. The questionnaires are usually administered near the end of the teaching term; numerical averages are compiled centrally and returned to the instructor, usually during the following term. Whether or not the results are made directly available to anyone other than the instructor, it has become widely expected that numerical summaries will be included in promotion and tenure files.

This system offers a number of benefits, both to students, who get the opportunity for input into the educational process, and to faculty, who can learn from student perspectives on our teaching. The practice of including course evaluations in promotion and tenure files helps to ensure that teaching is given some weight in those decisions and that student perspectives are included in assessments of university teaching, while the use of standardized questionnaires has the advantage of producing results that are comparable and reliable, essential attributes for instruments being used to evaluate faculty.

However, the process also has a number of features that limit its effectiveness:

- Standardized surveys usually ask a limited number of fairly general questions.
- The questions tend to be based on the standard lecture course format and may be meaningless for courses in non-standard formats, such as individualized instruction, labs, musical ensembles and other activity courses.
- The surveys are administered at the end of the term, when it is too late to improve the course for the students who completed the questionnaire. Since next year's class may not have the same concerns and preferences, any changes made in response to a previous class may not accommodate the needs of next group of students.
- The generic questionnaires may not ask about the specific things that we really need or want to know about our courses.
- Survey results arrive after the start of next teaching term. This means that the surveyed courses may not be a high priority if we are teaching other courses in the new term. It is all too easy to set the results aside and forget about them when we are revising and preparing our courses the next time we teach them.
- Students' written comments are usually returned only to the instructor, even though they may address

curriculum or program issues that we are powerless to change by ourselves.

To make the most effective use of course evaluation surveys, we need to make sure that we are:

- getting the right feedback;
- getting feedback at the right time;
- making effective use of student feedback to improve teaching; and
- making effective use of student feedback to improve programs.

Getting the Right Feedback

There are a few simple steps that we can take to improve the quality of feedback received from course evaluations. Some institutional survey forms allow for the addition of customized questions created by the instructor. This option is especially useful for courses taught in non-standard formats. It can be difficult to find time to draft these questions during the end-of-term rush, so giving this some thought and drafting the supplementary questions at the start of the term will increase the odds of following through.

If the institutional questionnaire does not allow for instructor-defined supplementary questions, we can design and administer a separate, supplementary questionnaire. Since these results will be compiled by the instructor, the forms should be anonymous, and the students should be assured that the instructor will not read and compile the responses until after submitting final grades. For the same reason, it is best to keep the questions focused on course content rather than on the quality of instruction. This is an opportunity to get the students' assessment of the value of individual topics and components in the course, and to get their reaction to the assignments and evaluation methods used. My colleagues and I have found this especially useful in shaping and refining new courses.

Getting Feedback at the Right Time

If we want to use student feedback to improve our current courses, we need to hear from students before the end of the term, when there is still time to make adjustments. We can ask them to write short, anonymous commentaries in the last few minutes of a class, telling us what they found the most helpful part of that class, what they found the least helpful, whether they found any part of the class embarrassing or particularly exciting, or anything else that we would like to know. Stephen D. Brookfield suggests the use of the Critical Incident Questionnaire, and there are numerous other approaches described in the literature.

A slightly more formal option is to use a midterm course evaluation questionnaire. Robert Boice suggests a template that includes the following open-ended questions: "Indicate what the instructor does well (please be specific and generous)," and "Indicate what the instructor could do differently and/or better (please be specific and constructive)." These are followed by three statements with which students are asked to agree or disagree on a scale of 5: "The instructor is approachable and helpful," "I am learning a lot in this class," and "I would recommend this class to a friend." He recommends asking two students to collect the questionnaires and compile the results by calculating the average on the numerical questions and making a list of the most representative written comments. The two students then give the results to the instructor, preferably in person. At the next opportunity, the instructor discusses the results with the class, thanking them for the positive comments and acknowledging the concerns expressed. Some of the changes requested by students may not be feasible or pedagogically sound; in those cases, the instructor explains why the changes can't be made. However, there will usually be at least one or two adjustments that can be made in response to student concerns.

The wording of Boice's questions, especially the invitation to be "specific," "generous" and "constructive," encourages positive student engagement. However, some instructors might prefer questions that put the focus more squarely on student learning, by asking what aspects of the course are helping students learn and what aspects interfere with their learning. Others may want more specific feedback about particular activities or assignments.

Since midterm course evaluations are not mandated by the institution, we can choose the format and the questions in order to get the information that we most need.

Making Effective Use of Student Feedback to Improve Teaching

Through course evaluations, students give us a wealth of data, both quantitative and qualitative, about our courses and our teaching. If we want to use the data effectively, we need to analyse them, just as we would analyse any other research data. To do that, we need to set aside a time, preferably during a part of the year when we are not teaching, to review the results in depth before planning our courses for the next year. Looking for patterns in the numerical results, collating students' written responses and sorting them to identify trends will help us see what is most important. The final essential step is to act like a true academic, putting our analysis in writing along with our reaction to the student responses and a summary of any changes we plan to make as a result. Many faculty engage in this sort of exercise regularly when under review for tenure or promotion, but senior faculty can benefit from maintaining the habit in the absence of external evaluation. If we do it annually, we can look back each year at our previous analyses and resolutions to see whether we have followed through on our intentions and how effective our actions have been. And if we forward our annual reflection to the unit administrator for inclusion in our personnel file, we can give ourselves a little extra incentive to take the exercise seriously, while demonstrating our belief in faculty accountability for teaching.

Making Effective Use of Student Feedback to Improve Programs

Major curriculum reviews often begin with surveys of alumni and current students to gather their opinions about the program and its effectiveness. Meanwhile, many students have been giving us this information all along in our course evaluations, commenting on issues such as the sequencing of content from one course to next, the relationship of a course to its prerequisite course(s), the amount of credit relative to the workload, whether a course should be required or elective, or the need for more or fewer courses in an area. However, these written comments never reach anyone but the course instructor, who has limited authority to make changes to the curriculum within his or her own courses, and no authority to respond independently to concerns that affect the program as a whole.

Responsibility for these issues resides with the unit administrator and the committee(s) responsible for curriculum development, none of whom are likely to see the student comments unless we pass them along. If the unit administrator has been receiving annual teaching reflections from faculty within the unit, she or he will have a view of the big picture, which can then be presented to the appropriate committee if action appears desirable. Or if faculty prefer, program issues can be conveyed directly to the committee responsible for curriculum development. Imagine how effective our curriculum committees could be if they received a short annual summary from each faculty member in the unit describing the program-related concerns raised by students in their course evaluations that year. Over the course of a few years, it would be possible to identify key issues that require action before they become serious problems.

By getting the right feedback at the right time, by taking the time to analyse and respond to it in writing, and by ensuring that the issues raised by students get to the people who have the authority to act on them, we can ensure that our universities' investment in course evaluations pays dividends through improved teaching and programs that are responsive to student needs.

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Furious Fives

Here are ten fast and furious five-minute ideas to try in your teaching.

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KWL Sheets: From Introduction to Engagement

A KWL sheet is an easy way to have students collect background or introductory information, such as key characteristics of a literary period, on their own. To begin, I give the students a sheet, which is divided into three columns, with the topic written across the top. First, the students are asked to write down what they *know* about the given topic in the **K** column. This part of the process can be done either during or outside of class time. However, I find that it works best if it is done in class, for it gets the students thinking about the topic immediately. Next, the students are asked to create four questions (the first being provided), reflecting what they *want* to know about the topic, and place them in the **W** column. This step can also be done in class, but I find that it works better if the students do it outside of class, when they are able to sit and think about the topic. Alternately, the **W** column can be left blank, allowing the students to create as many questions as they like. However, I have found that the quality of the questions improves if I limit the number and provide one as a guide. Finally, the students are asked to fill in what they *learn* about the topic in the **L** column. I tell the students that they can use any source to fill in the final column, and that it does not have to be cited for this particular assignment. Also, the students are free to attach additional sheets to the original one to create a larger **L** column. Finally, I suggest that they should be sure to answer the questions they placed in the middle column. I usually give the students a weekend to complete the sheet. In the next class, the students bring in the completed sheet and break into small groups to compare their results. At this time, students can still add to the **L** column on the sheet, for they are still learning.

In this way, I no longer have to give introductory lectures, for the students invariably cover the material themselves. To ensure that key concepts or pieces of information are not missed, and to generate discussion about the topic, I ask for examples from each column and write them on the board. In this way, I can fill in any blanks, and they continue to teach each other through the sharing of the information. I have found this technique to be very successful, and I see the results on the final exams, where the majority of students remember the important terms or ideas that were covered by the KWL sheets. A sample of recent comments from student evaluations also suggests that the KWL sheets are proving effective: “KWL sheets were extremely useful – I was always prepared for class.” and “Use of KWL’s forced us to keep up with readings so that we could add to class conversation.” Furthermore, to ensure that students take the assignment seriously, the sheets are handed in and graded. Through written feedback and discussion in class, I try to lead the students to ask more open-ended questions as a way both to acquire knowledge and to develop analytic skills. I feel that KWL sheets help students engage with and retain the information better than any lecture I could provide.

Sample KWL Sheet from *English 222: Reading Film*

Topic: Cinematography

K What do I Know?	W What do I Want to Know?	L What did I Learn?
	1. What are the key characteristics of cinematography? 2. ...	

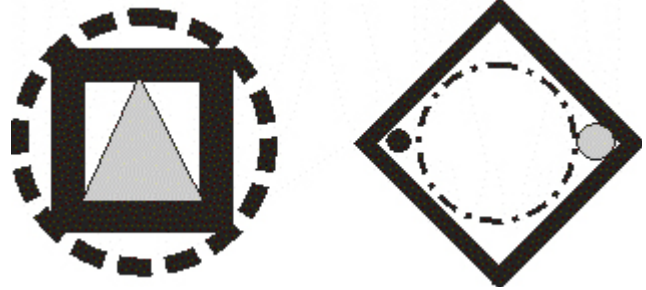
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Circles and Squares: An Exercise in Effective Communication and Critical Reading

We've all experienced it. The first essays filter in, and rather than being buoyed at the wonder of a student who has absorbed, researched, and blended ideas, our bubbles are rudely burst with: 1) "Why on Earth didn't he or she follow the clear instructions?" (assuming they *were* clear); 2) "I have no idea what this student is trying to communicate," or; 3) "I think this student understands the issue, but he or she just isn't communicating it in a coherent fashion"!

After this first deflating experience with a class, I sometimes introduce an exercise that forces the students to think carefully about reading instructions critically, and following them explicitly. The exercise also forces them to think about explaining themselves coherently - with an audience in mind. The exercise takes about 10 minutes and initially perplexes them, but they generally get the point.

Prepare two geometric designs, as right. Get the students to form pairs in the class and give each a different design, hidden from the other. Ask the students to describe what they see on a provided piece of paper. Do not tell them why they are doing this; they should write as they normally would. Only give them 5 minutes. If they are given more time they will go into greater detail than would be natural, or be over-verbose. Finally, get the two students to swap their descriptions. Now each is to draw what the other has described!



After a few minutes they can compare their partner's original design with what they have drawn. Ask them the following: Is it close to the original design? How does it deviate? Are any deviations a result of the initial description being vague, or a result of not reading the description properly? Are the line thicknesses correct? Are the orientations of objects and the shadings correct?

This exercise is good in that the teacher wins whether the designs are good or not. You've got to love that! If the drawings are poor, it emphasizes that either the students need to better describe what they see/know/understand so that another person can visualize what is being communicated, or that they should pay greater attention to following the instructions. If the designs are good, both partners are capable of communicating effectively *and* following instructions. Well done! If they can do it for this exercise, the challenge is to make sure they think of this exercise when they go to describe other concepts/idea for others to read.

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Daily Experts

Purpose

To encourage students to speak in class and to develop their public speaking skills. To help you to learn your students' names and to provide another "tool" to use when teaching.

What are "Daily Experts"?

Five to ten students identified are on a PowerPoint slide at the beginning of class. These individuals, assuming they are in class, become "daily experts" - the first ones I ask questions to or opinions of before opening the discussion to the class. Or they may be the ones I ask to form a sliding Likert scale showing how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement. In practice, use of "daily experts" provides for various options to create effective learning opportunities through one-on-one dialogue in the midst of a larger class, thus creating an environment that encourages active classroom engagement. Often in my first year class (130+ students), the questions I pose review the materials covered in the previous lecture – and are identified on PowerPoint and asked at the beginning of class. This reminds the "daily experts" and the class what was recently covered. I often build on the students' responses, asking related questions and/or adding depth to the material. In my fourth year classes (60-70 students), "daily experts" can be used to review material as well, though more frequently I pose questions or seek opinions in the middle or, latter half of class after new content has been covered. These questions/opinions tend to be more application-oriented, often requiring lengthier responses from which I build class or small group discussions. In both classes, I select ten students to join me in the front of the classroom to enlarge their Likert-scale responses on a scale of 1 to 10 to opinion-based statements from which I build classroom discussions.

Why use "Daily Experts"?

I use this technique for many reasons. For my first year class, to "break the ice," which I hope helps students realize that I am approachable and so that each student has at least one opportunity to speak in the class. In my fourth year classes, I also use "daily experts" so that each student has the opportunity to speak in at least one class but more as tool to ensure all students have the chance to share their relevant experiences/opinions with me and the rest of the class. In both classes, it is to provide an alternative way to present information and to keep students actively engaged.

How does the professor benefit from "Daily Experts"?

It helps me to get to know my students' names, and I am more likely to remember them outside of class. In an off-beat way, "daily experts" encourages class attendance. Students want to be there when their name is called/highlighted rather than hearing from their classmates "you missed being a 'daily expert' today" or me saying "I missed you in class today; you were a 'daily expert.'" This method also forces me to focus on individuals rather than the group. As such, I see each interaction with a "daily expert" as a teaching opportunity. It may be an opportunity to help that particular student gain a little confidence, to face his or her fear of speaking up, to interact with his or her professor, and most importantly to get him or her to actively engage in the class and the materials covered.

What about the rest of the class?

There are benefits to the whole class as well when I interact with my “daily experts,” even though that interaction is very much one-on-one focused. One benefit relates to the opportunity to learn classmates’ names. Other benefits relate more to the academic experience in that the other students can think about how they might have responded differently, they can learn from others’ experiences, they can learn how to ask questions in a non-threatening way as well as how to create a comfortable teaching environment, and they should be able to actively engage in the material covered.

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One-Word Summaries

Summarization techniques provide students with opportunities to develop and enhance learning in many areas such as comprehension, analysis, and memory and allow both teachers and students to monitor comprehension of subject-matter knowledge. If adopted, they can also promote many of the tenets of constructivist learning theory (von Glaserfeld, 1996; Vygotsky, 1976), thus encouraging students to make connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge. Summarization techniques may be used individually or collaboratively orally, in writing, or through engaging various multiple intelligences (graphic organizers, drama, etc.). According to Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001), research indicates that summarization ranks among the top nine teaching strategies in education.

In this “Furious Five” session, the presenter introduces a specific summarization technique referred to as *one-word summaries*. At the end of a learning episode, the instructor asks students to write one word that captures the essence of the concepts or ideas addressed, and then students provide an explanation for the word choice. These explanations may be shared with the entire class or shared within small groups. In selecting a word to represent the essence of a learning episode, students identify the critical attributes of a concept and justify their choice, thus engaging several higher order thinking skills.

Variations of this approach may be adopted. For example, a class may brainstorm a list of one-word terms to reflect the main ideas of a learning episode. Then, each group selects a word from the brainstorming exercise that best represents the learning episode’s main ideas, and group members present their rationale for the word choice.

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Making a Virtue of Necessity: How to Mark Essays AND

Like most of those who teach in the humanities, I have to mark many essays each year. I dislike the task intensely, and if allowed to do so, would put it off indefinitely. Over many years, however, I've devised a method of marking papers that compels me to deal with the burden punctually, helps me to know my students better, and, I believe, makes my response to the essay more helpful to them.

In short, I see each of my students for 5-10 minutes to return their papers. This sounds more daunting than it really is.

Here's how it works: on the day that, or example, my Shakespeare class (enrollment 60) hands in (or is supposed to hand in) their papers, I circulate a sheet with a list of appointment times. I've established these times to suit my own schedule, in blocks of one to two hours a day over 10 days or so. (With appointments at 10 minute intervals, I can see 6 students in an hour.) I tell the students that they can't claim an appointment until they've submitted a paper. Then I mark the papers in the order of the appointments. The relatively small number of papers per day required to meet this schedule is tolerable, and because I will be seeing the student in person, I'm able to spend less time on each paper than I would otherwise. I just need to write enough to remind myself what I should say at the meeting. Thus I might spend 15-20 minutes preparing for the interview and another 5-10 speaking with the students.

Some of my colleagues express discomfort at the prospect of returning weak papers to students face-to-face. How do you hand over a D paper without flinching? It can certainly, at times, be an uncomfortable process. But I like being able to assess the student's attitude to their work. A surprising number will admit cheerfully that they could have done better if they had spent more time on the assignment. Far fewer will start to cry because they've been unable to get beyond a C in spite of their best efforts. To these students you can offer whatever help your institution provides: I try to encourage them, offer extra help with upcoming assignments, urge them to internalize Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, etc. My point is, of course, that you can adjust the tone and content of your response according to the situation. And for those students in the A range, you can spend a minute on the paper, and 9 minutes finding out who they are.

The personal interview system will not work for everyone, but for me it has transformed the dreary chore of marking into something valuable. I meet my students; I glimpse their experience of the course; I can offer some help where it's most needed. A few students never bother to pick up their papers, and I don't force them to do so. Most of those who do come, however, are grateful for the opportunity to discuss their work one on one.

Janet Bryanton
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The Great Debate: A Tip for Your Last Class

To end my Nursing Research course in a positive and fun way, while at the same time reviewing course content and having the students think critically and draw on their knowledge from the course, I have them debate the pros and cons of quantitative and qualitative research. During the course, I emphasize that both methods have their place and are very important in advancing our body of knowledge in Nursing. This exercise allows students to pick a favorite method based on their learning during the course. Here are the steps:

1. I have the students line up around the room based on their rating of the methods. Students who strongly like quantitative research are “10” and those who strongly like qualitative research are “1.” Those who are neutral are “5.” They line up in this fashion around the room filling in the other ratings. Then I go around the room and assign them to six groups (could be more or less depending on the number of students), counting off 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. What this does is ensure there are students in each group who like both methods. This allows for better discussion when they work in small groups.
2. I have them work in the small groups for about 10 minutes. They develop a list of pros and cons for both methods. This gives them an opportunity to review course content and draw on each other’s knowledge.
3. Then I go around and assign each of the groups to either the quantitative team or the qualitative team. So there are three groups for each side. They then continue to work in the same small group, but now the task is to “beef up” the pros of their assigned method and the cons of the other. They work for about another 10 minutes preparing these lists, which then become the items for their debate.
4. I then let them choose a debater from their group. The six debaters (three for each side) come to the front of the room and take about 5 minutes to work on their strategy for the debate.
5. I then call for the debate to begin, and they start and debate the methods until they have exhausted their pros and cons.
6. The audience is asked not to help out until they just can’t contain themselves any longer.
7. They then cheer for both teams, and of course they usually both win, because the students want their side to win.

As a teacher, I have so much fun watching the students get so serious and intent on debating the virtues of their method. Research is not an easy subject to teach, and I love watching the enthusiasm this exercise promotes. The students really enjoy it and have a ball poking fun at the methods. It is wonderful to see quiet students come forward and participate. Because I have marks for participation, I mention that students who have not participated as actively as they would have liked to during the term have an opportunity to enhance their mark by being a debater. It is interesting how this can draw some of them out. Overall, I find this exercise to be a very effective one for a great last class.

Alex Fancy
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The Time Capsule

At or near the conclusion of a course, students are asked to write anonymous advice and encouragement for the next cohort of students in the same course. They are also encouraged to provide advice for the instructor. Their remarks are then compiled in a single document that is given to new students at the beginning of the following session.

I ask students to read the time capsule in the first or second class, to discuss it in a breakout session (an excellent ice-breaker), and then to participate in a full-class discussion.

Advice is validated because it comes from other students; the discussion can answer questions and diminish anxiety; the time capsule can show students whether their objectives are in line with those of the course; and this can also mark the beginning of the formation of a classroom community.

I also point out how I have followed, or hope to follow, advice that the previous cohort has left for me, and this transparency helps to build a good rapport with the students in the new cohort.

Authors

Austin, Diana has experienced education through diverse approaches, travelling from a 3-room country schoolhouse to classrooms at the University of New Brunswick, Queen's, and Oxford. She is now a professor at UNB teaching 20th and 21st Century British Literature, with a particular interest in World War I literature, women's writing, and the intersection of public violence and private lives. Diana has won a variety of teaching awards throughout her career, most recently the 2010 AAU Distinguished Teacher Award and the 2011 3M National Teaching Fellowship.

Bamford, Karen is a Professor of English at Mount Allison University where she teaches Renaissance and Modern drama. Current research interests include the representation of maternity in early modern romance narratives, and the work of Daniel MacIvor.

Bryanton, Janet is an Associate Professor in Nursing at UPEI where she teaching Nursing Research, Nursing of Childbearing Families, and a clinical course in Maternity nursing. She has over 25 years of teaching experience. Her research interests include perinatal health promotion, women's perceptions of their birth experience, early parenting, and family-centered care.

Cormier, Dave is an independent educational researcher and thinker, an online community manager, and Manager of Web Communications and Innovations at the University of Prince Edward Island. He has published on open education, the rhizomatic model of education, and practical classroom uses of virtual worlds. In partnerships for research and learning, in teaching, and in the animated debate in the comments section of his blog, collaboration has been the driving influence on Dave's career in education. Dave is the co-founder and current manager of Edtechtalk, a community that has produced more than 1000 live interactive webcasts since June 2005.

Darvesh, Karen is an Associate Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Physics at Mount Saint Vincent University. For some years now she has been involved with the Chemical Education division of the Canadian Society for Chemistry, serving in various capacities, including Chair. She recently served as an instructor at the Canadian Chemistry Olympiad National camp, held in June 2009 in Toronto, helping to prepare the top high-school Chemistry students in Canada for the International Chemistry Olympiad, held in 2009 in Cambridge. Dr. Darvesh's recent research involves computational studies that could have a positive impact on the search for new drugs to treat Alzheimer's disease. She was recognized with the MSVU Alumnae Award for Teaching Excellence in 2008.

Dillon, Collin is a student at St. Francis Xavier University enrolled in the first year of the Bachelor of Education program. He volunteered for the Fit for Life program for two semesters in his final year of a Bachelor of Arts in Human Kinetics. He hopes to implement programs in other schools that will create awareness of physical activity and its lifelong benefits for those participating and for those involved with program leaders. He has a further interest in promoting physical activity to students in ways that result in physical activity becoming an integral part of their lifestyle.

Doran, Greg is the Coordinator of Theatre Studies and an Associate Professor of English at the University of Prince Edward Island. With his production company, Vagabond Productions, Dr. Doran has directed a variety of shows, including the premiere productions of *The Outsider*, based on *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus, by Thomas Morgan Jones and *The Magdalene Variations*, which he co-created with Catherine Innes-Parker. In addition, he is the co-chair of the Acting/ Directing Symposium of the Mid-America Theatre Conference and a member of the editorial board for Theatre/ Practice.

Eghan, Felicia is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Studies and Gerontology at Mount Saint Vincent University. Among her research interests are curriculum development, critical thinking, values reasoning, learning styles, African immigrant retirement experiences and Black women's health issues.

Fancy, Alex is Professor Emeritus at Mount Allison University. He is the founder of Mount Allison's bilingual theatre company, Tintamarre. He was the first winner of the AAU Distinguished Teacher Award and has received the Herbert and Leota Tucker Teaching Award, Lieutenant-Governor's Prix Dialogue Award, and the Mount Allison Alumni Lifetime Achievement Award. His special research interests include rhythms of teaching and learning.

Gallivan, Kieran is a student at St. Francis Xavier University enrolled in the first year of the Bachelor of Education program. He volunteered for the Fit for Life program for two semesters in his final year of a Bachelor of Science in Human Kinetics. He hopes to implement programs in other schools with a goal to create leadership programs for high school students to benefit from the rewarding experience of working with young children, while also promoting physical activity in young boys and girls as a lifetime skill.

Goodnough, Karen has been a faculty member in education at Memorial University since December 2003 and is currently the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs. Her research interests include collaborative action research, teacher education, problem-based learning, and science teacher development.

Heble, Ajay is a Professor of English in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph. He is the author or editor of several books, and the Founder and Artistic Director of the award-winning Guelph Jazz Festival. He is also a founding co-editor of the journal *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* (www.criticalimprov.com), and Project Director for Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice, a large-scale Major Collaborative Research Initiative, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Magrath, Jane obtained her PhD in English at the University of Alberta in 1997 and has been teaching literature at the University of Prince Edward Island since 1998. She is the co-founder of the Chinook Project at the Atlantic Veterinary College. Her area of specialization is eighteenth-century correspondence and representation of bodies and medicine.

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Pearson, Jason is an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at the University of Prince Edward Island. He teaches general chemistry at the first-year level and also advanced physical chemistry and quantum chemistry. His research focuses on the development of computational procedures for the rational design of molecules with tailored properties. Jason received his Ph.D. at Dalhousie University in 2007 where he was awarded the President's Graduate Teaching Assistant Award for his work with improving the laboratory experience for undergraduates. He is also a winner of the national Reg Friesen Award recognizing excellence in the field of chemical education by the Canadian Society for Chemistry.

Seager, Suzanne developed a love of teaching mathematics at St. Francis Girls Secondary School in Ghana, where she was sent by CUSO in 1975. She interrupted her teaching career to get a doctorate from Carleton University, and has been enjoying both teaching and graph theory research at Mount Saint Vincent University since 1988. She is particularly proud of a talk about her research she gave at a faculty seminar titled "Graph Theory: All the Mathematics You Need to Know for This You Learned in Kindergarten."

Smol, Anna is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Mount Saint Vincent University, where she teaches various subjects, including Old English, writing, women's literature, poetry, and a course on Tolkien and myth-making. Her recent publications focus on Tolkien and on adaptations of medieval literature for children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She was the recipient of a Mount Saint Vincent Alumnae Award for Teaching Excellence in 1993 and the Mount's Instructional Leadership Award in 2011.

Stewart, Bonnie is an educator, writer, and Ph.D student exploring social media, identity, and education at the University of Prince Edward Island. A longtime blogger and social media subject herself, Bonnie is interested in digital performance of identity and the challenges it raises for public education. Her work examines the reputational economy in which social media platforms operate, and the ways in which social networks shape narratives and discourses of self. Bonnie is conducting her dissertation research in part through open practice and performance within her online network.

Thompson, Angela is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Kinetics at St. Francis Xavier University. She incorporated service-learning in her first Health Education class ten years ago. The following year, she provided opportunities for service-learning in Child Growth and Development. Since then, she has responded to the community's need for physical activity programs for elementary school children by creating and coordinating the Fit 4 Life programs so that she is actively practicing what she preaches in the classroom to the field.

Volk, Maureen is a member of the faculty in the School of Music at Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she teaches piano, piano literature, studio pedagogy and aural skills. She served as director of the School of Music from 1990-2000. She studied at the University of Regina, The Juilliard School in New York, and Indiana University, where she completed her doctorate. In 2008, she received Memorial University's President's Award for Distinguished Teaching. Dr. Volk is an active pianist who has performed in Canada and the United States. She has released two CDs on the Centaur Records label, a solo CD entitled *Schubert and Debussy* and a duo CD with her former student Thomas Yee, containing music for two pianos by Canadian composers.

Webb, Ericka is a first-year student in the Bachelor of Education program at St. Francis Xavier University preparing to be a secondary school teacher of physical education and math. Her interest in Fit 4 Life continues with plans to create a similar program with Grade 11 or 12 students being involved as program deliverers thus ensuring future individuals benefit from this type of experience. She is particularly interested in seeking and experimenting with new and engaging physical activities for middle- and high-school females to increase participation levels.

Whitehead, James is an Associate Professor in the Science and Technology Studies Programme, and the Director of Teaching and Learning, at St Thomas University, Fredericton. After completing a Bachelor's degree in Earth Science at the University of Wales, Cardiff, he received a PhD from the University of New Brunswick studying the asbestos bearing rocks of the Eastern Townships of Quebec. He completed two post-doctoral research positions: with the Geological Survey of Canada (studying the 100 km diameter Popigai impact crater in Siberia) and with NASA (studying the morphologies of Martian impact craters with the aim of determining how their form is affected by the target materials on which they occur). His interests include beekeeping, tango, animal welfare and science education.