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Letting All Voices Be Heard

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Letting All Voices Be Heard

Most of us would never intentionally hurt our students. And yet, unconsciously, many teachers leave students feeling invalidated and excluded during class everyday. It can be a look, a tone of voice or the absence of eye contact. It can be the lack of affirmation for a student's contribution—right or wrong. It can be the habit that develops in calling repeatedly on the same students and letting them become the “voice of the class.”

Everybody wants to feel important. To call on a student, hear a response and then turn to call on another student without comment is rude and dismissing. It may seem like a small thing, hardly important, and yet it serves to silence many students for the rest of the term.

We not only have a responsibility to teach subject matter, but also to teach respectful ways to communicate with fellow scholars. Under our care and attention, our students have the opportunity to become scholars and to become good citizens. They have an opportunity to develop their own voice and the courage to come forward and speak when it is important to do so. The college classroom is a unique place in which to practice thinking, being brave and speaking out.

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How we behave as teachers in the classroom, colleagues in our departments or neighbors on our streets resides in what we believe and embrace regarding welcoming, valuing and respecting others. If we believe in encouraging and supporting the success of all our students, we will be open to the self-reflection, education and development of new ways to teach which lead to that success.

Classroom climate has become an even more important issue on our campus. In redesigning TEP's GTF teacher training, we decided to focus on the inclusive classroom by raising awareness of ways in which we teachers may include and exclude students in our teaching.

To address this issue, it is important to know your audience. I asked GTFs to think back to their undergraduate days. In groups of four, I asked them to develop a composite of the entering fall term freshman. This exercise was designed to help our international GTFs in understanding American freshmen and to let all of us revisit many of the issues and challenges these students face.

We identified some topics and then the groups had five minutes to brainstorm and flesh out specifics within their topic. They included: motivators, interests, health issues, challenges, social life. Here are the results.

The Entering University Freshman

Motivators (Why do freshmen choose to attend the university?)

They want to build a future, figure out a career

They have been inspired by a mentor, or they are following someone they love

Parental expectations, or the desire to please their parents

They are building self-esteem

They have been awarded an academic or sports scholarship

They are out to prove something

For some the motivation fluctuates over time

They feel a college degree is a societal expectation

They feel pressured by their peers

They are putting off entering the “real world”

They come out of curiosity, out of passion to follow a certain path, or a love of learning

Challenges

Time management, study skills, discipline

Personal finances

A more challenging academic workload than high school

Difficulties dealing with educational technology

Difficulties dealing with bureaucracy

Being unable to discriminate what is important to know in their courses

Not having the courage to ask for help (afraid to go to office hours)

More demands to think critically, solve problems and make decisions

Fear of speaking up in class

The temptation to skip classes and spend all day watching soap operas

Living under the illusion that they're doing well until they fail first midterm

Not understanding academic language, expectations

Test anxiety, math anxiety, science anxiety

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Poor writing skills, poor discussion skills, poor group dynamics skills

Health and Wellness Issues

Difficulty adjusting to a NW winter
Depression, anorexia, bulimia
Bi polar disorder and schizophrenia
Poor diet and sleeping habits
Difficult diet transitions for international students
Smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction
Suicide
Weight gain
Allergies
Pregnancy
Health insurance problems
Sexually transmitted diseases
Seasonal affect syndrome
Difficulty finding and affording good healthcare

Interests

Sports, sex, drugs, music, beer, pizza
Dancing, partying
Outdoor recreation (kayaking, rafting, hiking, backpacking, snowboarding, mountain biking, skiing, rock climbing)
Movies, television
Computers, e-mail, and the internet

Social Needs

Fraternities/sororities
They are trying on new personalities, experiments with image, values
Some are making a transition from living in small town to living in Eugene/Springfield
Dealing with the separation from family and friends
Experiencing dorm life for the first time (noise, roommate problems, distractions)
Trying to find a place in a social circle
Dealing with romance issues (lack of, loss of, stress of, excitement of)
Being in dysfunctional relationships

Being involved in playing sports/ supporting sports
Adjusting to a diverse campus community
Balancing school, social life, studies and other responsibilities
Figuring out where things are (getting a feel for the campus, for the city, where to find basic services)
Trying to build a support network for hard times
Working and going to school and managing a family

Our lists seemed overwhelming. It was amazing that any freshmen made it through the first year. Then we considered being an international student—new to the language and culture, spending all day trying to understand a foreign language spoken differently by countless people everywhere you go. Or we tried to imagine being a 47-year-old mother of three returning to school after two decades away from the classroom while caring for a home and family. We thought about this experience for students with nontraditional gender preferences, or those whose ethnic groups are not well-represented on our campus or in our city.

The better we know our students, the better able we are to assist their learning process. We will know how to provide a context for information that is outside the culture and understanding of certain groups. We can adjust our pace, use more visuals, provide more supplementary handouts to accommodate different learning styles and international students. We can examine our materials with an eye to what may be excluding or offensive to some students.

The following materials are excellent resources to educate teachers on ways to let all voices be heard.

Saunders, Shari and Diana Kardia, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, *Creating Inclusive College Classrooms*

(<http://www.umich.edu/~crltmich/gsibook/F6.html>)

Davis, Barbara Gross, *Tools for Teaching*, "Responding to a Diverse Student Body," San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Cannon, Lynn Weber, "Fostering Positive Race, Class, and Gender Dynamics in the Classroom," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 1990.

Beginner's Mind: Surviving The Gauntlet of a Thousand Techniques

Sam Porter, Sociology

I came to TEP as an adjunct faculty member in Sociology, two years after completing my Ph.D. I'd been a Teaching Assistant, but never carried a lecture course by myself. I spent five years off-campus doing fieldwork and writing my dissertation, so it had been years since I worked with students.

One of my former UO professors is the philosopher Don Levi, whose teaching I admired. Several years ago, I read in the *Daily Emerald* about his experience of being videotaped and how that gave him a valuable perspective on how he was coming

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across to his students. With a sense of my own naivete and a cue from Levi, I went to TEP.

With an infectious love for their subject, my best professors drew students into an ongoing conversation/argument across generations about things ranging from the physical basis of life (DNA) in the natural sciences to the moral bases of social life in the social sciences and the humanities. They also drew us out by challenging us to give reasons for our positions on given issues—and they'd do so in ways that helped us state our own positions in relation to different, even opposing positions—better than we had ever done before. Some of my more able teachers had such capacities even with the traditional, monological style of teaching. So, when I began to teach, I tried to emulate this traditional model.

Perhaps that model is more appropriate for when, after years of teaching, research and writing, one has a more mature, comprehensive, accurate, fluent and integrated grasp of one's field—and one's audience. But the scripted style didn't work for me no matter how much I tried to seem like I was "speaking" and not "reading."

Some teachers, using the scripted style, can draw students into an ongoing conversation with our best minds about the most important things. But by focusing too much on your carefully written text, there's a danger of blotting out awareness of who your audience is and what your students' frames of references are. You can end up having a conversation with great thinkers that doesn't address students.

Some students are so unprepared they are hard to reach, even in elite universities. Indeed, the frames of reference of most students today are not the classics but Seinfeld, ER, the NBA and MTV. And most are not able to deal with long, extended, abstract arguments, however much in the pre-TV days university students may have done so routinely.

This doesn't mean pandering, but after two terms of trying to seem as if I were "speaking" rather than reading and going too fast, I finally began to let go of the old model on which I had been weaned. I began to loosen up and relax. I started to teach from an outline e-mailed to students in advance and put on the overhead during class to follow along as I introduced and explained some of the more salient features of various complex social theories of religion. My teaching style became more conversational. Students responded more

to what I was saying and interacted more with the material I presented and with each other.

I even found myself talking off the top of my head with people who had, though in varying degrees, a commitment to learning about a subject I loved. I felt guilty because I was enjoying myself too much. That I wasn't presenting students with long and abstract arguments didn't seem rigorous enough. Yet, students seemed to learn more from my conversational, rather than scripted, style of teaching. Learning appeared more in the interaction.

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I wouldn't have made such a breakthrough, however, without submitting to a portion of the gauntlet of resources TEP offers—teacher training, website development workshops, a videotaping service and customized-designed student feedback instruments. I also benefited from many one-on-one consultations with both Georgeanne Cooper and Michael Sweet. In short, TEP facilitated my attaining a teaching fluency on which to build teaching excellence.

All of the resources, suggestions, and techniques that TEP puts at your disposal can seem overwhelming. Like reading the New York Times from front to back every day, you can't do it. Georgeanne and Michael were very good at helping me to discern techniques and teaching strategies that fit me and my subject matter best—and they had the exemplary patience (a key virtue in teaching) to work with me as I broke through my blind spots about what it means to be a good teacher.

Yet, however patient, effective and knowledgeable Georgeanne and Michael are, you still need to have the courage and humility to immerse yourself in what TEP has to offer. You have to go through the gauntlet. However

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experienced you may be, you need to take the attitude of what the Zen Buddhist teacher Shunryu Suzuki called "beginner's mind." For without the courage and humility to submit to being videotaped, for example, you cannot receive what TEP has to offer about what it means to teach well.

What TEP does best is to help you imbue your teaching with the passion that drew you to your discipline in the first place. Otherwise, why teach your subject at all? Without such passion, your subject becomes an embalmed antiquity inside a museum. It's such passion in response to the subject that draws students (and teachers) out of themselves.

The upshot is that, in spite of or maybe because of the gauntlet, TEP helped me to better communicate to my students the passion I feel for sociology—and hence what sociology is about. As literary critic Helen Vendler puts it: "We owe it to ourselves to show our students, when they first meet us, what we are; we owe their dormant appetites, thwarted for so long in their previous schooling, that deep sustenance that will make them realize that they too, having been taught, love what we love."

Did I Miss Anything?

Question frequently asked by
students after missing a class

Nothing. When we realized you weren't here
we sat with our hands folded on our desks
in silence, for the full two hours

Everything. I gave an exam worth
40 percent of the grade for this term
and assigned some reading due today
on which I'm about to hand out a quiz
worth 50 per cent

Nothing. None of the content of this course
has value or meaning

Take as many days off as you like:

any activities we undertake as a class

I assure you will not matter either to you or me
and are without purpose

Everything. A few minutes after we began last time
a shaft of light suddenly descended and an angel
or other heavenly being appeared
and revealed to us what each woman or man must do
to attain divine wisdom in this life and
the hereafter

This is the last time the class will meet
before we disperse to bring the good news to all people
on earth

Nothing. When you are not present
how could something significant occur?

Everything. Contained in this classroom
is a microcosm of human experience
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder
This is not the only place such an opportunity has been
gathered

but it was one place

And you weren't here

Wayman, T. (1993). *Did I miss anything? Selected poems 1973-1993*. Vancouver, BC: Harbour Publishing.



Growing as a Teacher

We grow as teachers each time we learn something new about teaching and learning. One of the best ways to grow is to listen to what our students can tell us about their experience in our classrooms. Another way is to seek the help of someone very interested and experienced in the teaching/learning process.

The Teaching Effectiveness Program can facilitate your growth as a teacher in many ways. The following services are offered each term to give you valuable feedback on your teaching. Please take advantage of these opportunities to raise your awareness and target areas of growth and improvement for this term.

The Midterm Analysis of Teaching (MAT) is an instructor-designed student feedback form given midterm while there is time for teachers to make improvements in their teaching.

The MAT contains a menu of more than 150 teaching behavior statements from which you can choose. You may also add statements/questions of your own or modify the wording of existing statements/questions.

The MAT menu is available online (http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~tep/services/student_form.html) or in hardcopy (email your request to gcooper@oregon.uoregon.edu)

Designing Your MAT

After you read the instructions, you will be ready to build your MAT student feedback form. Please consider the following guidelines:

Use the confidential MAT to collect information that will contribute most to your professional growth as a teacher. Avoid selecting only those items to which you anticipate a favorable response.

The menu items focus on specific teaching behaviors. When your students answer these statements and questions, they are telling you how much improvement they think you need for any particular teaching skill:

- A. No improvement is needed
- B. Little improvement is needed
- C. Improvement is needed
- D. Considerable improvement is needed
- E. Not a necessary skill/behavior for this course

Select around 25-30 statements. There are no restrictions on the number of items you can choose and if you want your students to pay close attention to each statement and question, you may not want to overload them.

Look over the entire menu once before you start choosing items to see what's available. Administer your MAT sometime during weeks 4, 5 or 6 of the term. This way you maximize the value of the instrument and can make constructive changes well before the end of the course.

The Class Interview is an in-class survey conducted by a TEP staff member to seek information from students on what's working well in the course and suggestions on how the course can be improved. It also demonstrates the instructor's commitment to course quality.

What distinguishes the class interview from other forms of teaching evaluation is that it is student-driven. Students identify what they feel is going well

and make suggestions for ways to improve their learning experience.

To request a class interview, contact Georgeanne Cooper (gcooper@oregon.uoregon.edu).

Inform students beforehand that you have requested a class interview and tell them why. Students will be asked to work in small groups for the interview. When the TEP staff person arrives introduce him/her and let your students know that you will return in 20 minutes when the interview is finished.

Students will be asked to come to consensus in their groups on these questions: What is going well? What is not going well? What suggestions do you have for improving the class? The TEP staff person will take accurate notes on what is reported and ask clarifying questions if necessary.

When the interview is finished, the anonymous results are emailed to the instructor. If an instructor chooses, an appointment can be arranged with TEP to go over the responses.

Class Videotaping—Watching oneself teach is an excellent way to assess teaching behaviors and classroom interaction. TEP will videotape your class and provide a follow-up consultation. The tapes and consultations are strictly confidential. Please note—we provide the videotaping service ONLY for UO faculty and GTFs and only for the purpose of teaching improvement.

Videotaping can be used to:

- assess presentation strengths and weaknesses
- look at questioning strategies and student responses

-see the balance of lecture and interaction
-experience the class from your students' perspective

Arrange for to have your class videotaped by emailing gcooper@oregon.uoregon.edu or filling out the online video request form at: <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~tep/services/videoform.html>

Regardless of the method you choose, acknowledge your students' input and have a discussion about the improvements you intend to make in the course as a result of their feedback.

New \$500 GTF Teaching Awards

The Graduate School and the Teaching Effectiveness Program are proud to introduce a new award for new teachers. This award honors GTFs who have done an excellent job in their first teaching experience.

Eligible GTFs will be those who participated in UO teacher training this year (Beginnings: Insights, Tools and Strategies for New Teachers, or other UO departmental teacher training), and who will have their first classroom teaching experience during the 1999-2000 academic year.

Eligible GTFs will need to provide the following information to be considered for one of the two \$500 awards:

- 1) A full description of your teaching training program
- 2) The results of a class interview conducted through TEP
- 3) A classroom videotaping conducted through TEP
- 4) End of term student evaluations of the course(s)

Additional information and application forms will be available at TEP and the Graduate School by November 15. Applications will be received until the end of Spring term 2000. Winners will be selected by a committee of faculty and GTFs during summer, 2000. The awards will be announced at the Fall 2000 GTF Orientation.

New Weekend Teacher Training

TEP will pilot a pre-winter term teacher training on Saturday, December 4 from 8:30am to 5pm. Register by emailing gcooper@oregon.uoregon.edu. For more information on Beginnings: Insights, Tools and Strategies for New Teachers, check our website at:

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~tep/beginnings/index.html>

Harnessing the Power of Group Learning in Higher Education

Imagine knowing for certain that all your students have read the material for that day, discussed it carefully with each other and are dying to ask you specific questions about it.?

This is the experience most teachers have each time their students complete a special sequence of individual and group activities known as a Readiness Assurance Process (RAP).

Several teachers on the UO campus have implemented the RAP and some have even published about it.

Come learn about the RAP from teachers in Economics, Anthropology and Music. Experience the RAP for yourself, develop some RAP materials for your own classes and have lunch on us!

TEP will offer this RAP workshop twice—Friday, November 5 in 227 Chiles and Friday, November 12 in 228 Chiles. Both workshops will run from 10:00am to 3:00pm and lunch will be catered.

Registration is required. Contact Georgeanne Cooper (gcooper@oregon.uoregon.edu or 346-2177).

Ease of Making Course Websites Makes Quantum Leap

When the first web-page editors like Claris Home Page came along, the ease of making a course website took a quantum leap. Before these software packages, teachers who wanted to enrich their classes with web-based resources had to tediously hand-code their pages using HTML tags. This often meant that they had to spend so much time on the technology that there was little time left to seriously reflect on the teaching issues involved.

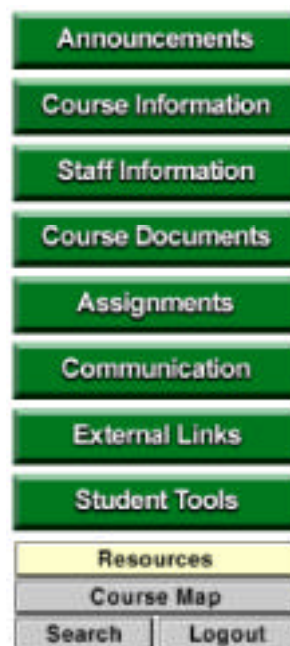
Fortunately, word-processor-like software packages like Claris Home Page became available in the mid-90's. This software was relatively easy to use, thereby freeing teachers to customize their pages and develop new ways to integrate the technology into their teaching. Although they have made web-publishing easier, these packages still require more than their fair share of technical knowledge and patience from the average user. Furthermore, the software packages are sold individually: a copy must be purchased and installed by all teachers who want to maintain their web site from their own computer.

These factors combine to make the library's recent purchase of Blackboard server software very exciting. Blackboard is a

piece of software that resides on a library server, and teachers access it using a web browser. In other words, you can create, access and maintain your course web-site from any computer that can browse the web—no additional purchase is necessary. Additionally, Blackboard provides a ready-made infrastructure for a course web site: no links need be written, no code debugged. You simply insert your content into the provided framework, and your course web site is ready to go. Blackboard includes all the expected features like course information and communication tools (e-mail and message board). It also has built-in quiz features with which you can generate on-line assessments for your students.

To maximize ease of use, individual control over the look and feel of the site is limited primarily to button colors. If you want to embed any sophisticated web page that you have already created, there are a few extra steps to take. However, from the students' point of view this template structure will be a real advantage. Courseware like Blackboard can offer institutional consistency in course web site design and create comfort and familiarity for faculty and students in using these instructional technology tools.

For more information on Blackboard, see the Faculty Instructional Technology Training Center's Web-site at: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/fittc/blackboard/index.htm>



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