



Collecting Colleagues for Teaching and Learning

Colleagues can play such an important role in our development as teachers. Most of the time, though, many of us don't make use of them in ways that really help us grow pedagogically. As noted in other articles in the newsletter, we don't have the kind of rich, provocative exchanges that challenge our thinking and take us to places of new insight. More often we share pedagogical pleasantries, noting our successes and those of our students, or we complain, waxing eloquent about the lack of institutional support for teaching or the poor performance of this year's entering class. But there's another problem beyond the caliber of our talk about teaching. We don't systematically assemble a collection of colleagues who could really help us pedagogically. Most often we spend time with faculty who inhabit offices near ours and who share the same departmental home.

What might a set of carefully selected colleagues look like? Of course, the collection must start with those with whom we can share openly and honestly. Teaching is so much about who we are as persons that discussions that really challenge our thinking and take us to new places must be with those we trust—true teaching colleagues are those with whom we can establish meaningful relationships. Beyond that given, who else might be good choices to populate a support network for teaching? Here are some recommendations.

A departmental colleague—Not necessarily the one next door, not necessarily the one you need to impress, not necessarily the one with whom you raise a glass at week's end, but you do need a colleague who knows, loves, and understands the content. Colleagues with the same content backgrounds can help each other with all manner of instructional details, from good examples, sample problems, and test questions, to experiences with texts, explana-

tions that ameliorate confusion, and questions that get students thinking.

A colleague from another department but at the same institution—I think there's great potential to learn from colleagues who teach content very different from our own. It's not that the physicist is going to start teaching like the studio artist, but very different content delivered in very different instructional settings often makes our instructional realities so much more apparent. Besides that, so many aspects of teaching transcend disciplines. Colleagues other than those seen most regularly have new ideas, have tried different approaches, and use other kinds of policies. And it can be very refreshing to just talk teaching without always digressing into content details.

A good teacher—You need a good teacher in your network. By good teacher, I mean one who is better than you are. That teacher might be better at the delivery of instruction. There are a couple of caveats here: sometimes even very skillful teachers do it by the seat of their pants. They aren't reflective or explicit in their understanding of what they do and why they do it. That doesn't mean they aren't good, but you may not be able to learn a lot from them. Second, some good teachers have very eclectic teaching styles—they play games, dress in customs, gesticulate wildly, and accost students in unusual ways. What they do may be highly effective at promoting student learning, but it may not be something you can ever pull off. Most of us do need to stretch ourselves pedagogically, but if the stretch compromises who we are, it's not worth attempting. Bottom line: if you opt to find a teacher who delivers instruction better than you do, select one with a style you can actually see yourself emulating.

Another option is a good teacher who is better because that person knows more about teaching and learning. Maybe they read more, have had more exposure to educational research, or regularly interact at conferences or online with those who have pedagogical knowledge. Of course experiential knowledge is valuable, but it's not the be-all, end-all in the pedagogical knowledge domain. There's a larger world out there, and some faculty can share its wisdom. They can point to resources, share good articles, recommend good books, or direct to relevant research.

A teacher from elsewhere who shares a pedagogical interest—The electronic environment is such a boon to colleague collaboration. If you have any sort of pedagogical interest, be it instructional technology, problem-based learning, learning communities, or clickers, there are colleagues out there with whom you can connect and share. Here too, every now and then it is really nice to get beyond local issues, politics, and perplexities to communicate with someone about a shared

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- We are interested in a wide range of teaching-learning topics.
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- Write with the understanding that your audience includes faculty in a wide variety of disciplines and in a number of different institutional settings; i.e., what you describe must be relevant to a significant proportion of our audience.
- Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsLETTER.
- Keep the article short; generally between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages.
- If you'd like some initial feedback on a topic you're considering, you're welcome to share it electronically with the editor.

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Daily Experts: A Technique to Encourage Student Participation

By Angie Thompson, St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia
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If you're interested in approaches that encourage students to speak in class and develop their public-speaking skills, as well as techniques that help you learn student names, then my "daily experts" strategy may be of use to you.

What are daily experts? I list five or six students' names on a PowerPoint slide at the beginning of my classes (which are large, 65-150 students). These individuals, assuming they are in class, then become my daily experts—the first ones I ask questions to or opinions of before opening discussion to the whole class. The approach provides for one-on-one dialogue in the midst of a larger class creating an environment that encourages interaction. In my first-year class, I tend to pose questions that review materials covered in the previous lecture. These questions are listed on PowerPoint, and I ask them at the beginning of class to remind everyone of the content we worked in the previous class session. I often build on the students' responses, asking related questions and/or adding depth to the material myself. In my fourth-year classes, I may use daily experts to review as well. More frequently, though, I ask them questions or inquire about their opinions in the middle or latter half of class after new content has been covered. These queries tend to be more application-oriented, often requiring lengthier responses from which I can build a class or small group discussion.

Why use daily experts? For my first-year class, the main reason is to break the ice, which hopefully helps students realize that I am approachable. It also ensures that each student has at least one opportunity to speak in front of the class. In my fourth-year classes, I use the daily experts concept to provide the same speaking experience, but more as a tool to ensure

that all students have the chance to share relevant experiences and opinions with me and the rest of the class.

How does the professor benefit from daily experts? I get to know my students' names and I am more likely to remember them outside of class as well. Indirectly, my use of daily experts encourages class attendance. Students want to be there when their name appears on the PowerPoint. They don't want to hear from their classmates, "You missed being a daily expert today" or have me say, "I missed you in class today; you were one of my daily experts." I also benefit because using daily experts forces me to teach in another way—a way that gets me focused on individuals. Every interaction with a daily expert becomes a teaching opportunity. It may be a chance to help that student become a bit more confident when he or she interacts with a professor. It's a chance to help students face and conquer that fear of speaking in class. Most important, the strategy gets students actively engaged with the class and its course materials.

What about the rest of the class? There are benefits to the whole class when I interact with my daily experts. It gives others the opportunity to learn classmates' names. They also benefit when they consider how they might have responded differently. They can learn from others' experiences and see how to ask questions in a nonthreatening way. The technique helps everyone engage more actively in the course material. So if you want your classes (even large ones) to be interactive, a daily expert approach might be just what you're looking for. 🍎

PollEverywhere.com: Turning Cell Phones into a Tool for Student Engagement

By Michelle Freeman, Tusculum College, TN and Kent N. Schneider, East Tennessee State University

Cell phones often are a source of distraction in the classroom. Despite admonitions to turn them off, someone forgets and everyone hears the incoming call. Text messaging, on the other hand, tends to distract the instructor but no one else. Rather than fight the texting, perhaps instructors can engage students by encouraging them to text about the class subject matter. Obviously, this needs to be done in a structured and meaningful way, and Audience Response Systems (ARS) provide a promising model.

Using audience response systems

Audience response systems, like the one used in the TV show “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” have been used in classrooms for years. “Clickers,” infrared devices resembling television remote controls, are provided to students to communicate answers to teacher questions. These clicker signals are recorded by a receiver in the classroom and processed by special software running on a classroom computer. The results are immediately available to the instructor and, if projected on to a screen, to the entire class as well.

Instructors using clickers identify numerous advantages. By injecting an element of competition or collaboration, an audience response system (ARS) encourages all students to participate in classroom discussions. By permitting anonymity, an ARS lets even the very shy students contribute. The ARS also makes it possible for instructors to assess classroom participation objectively. Even better, an ARS allows the teacher to monitor class comprehension of content. A quiz lets the instructor know immediately who does and doesn't grasp the subject matter.

But ARS technology has disadvantages as well. The most significant problem is the cost; clickers for every student (typi-

cally purchased by the student), the classroom receivers, and the software for recording student responses. Other obstacles include the time required to set up and maintain the system and the “dog ate my clicker” excuses offered by some students.

Texting on cell phones as a surrogate for “clickers”

For those without access to an ARS system, cell phone texting can be a useful substitute when used in conjunction with PollEverywhere.com. Students send their text message to a special number from PollEverywhere.com, starting their message with a code word that identifies the class. Their responses can be in the form of a multiple-choice answer or free text, depending on how the professor sets up the poll. The website then compiles the student responses in real time and displays the results on the instructor's monitor. If desired, the results also can be projected onto a large screen for the entire class to view.

Our classes enjoy watching their multiple-choice answers appear in the form of a bar graph that constantly changes as the number of responses increases. The free-text form is also a wonderful option. It allows teachers to solicit both questions and answers from students. It offers a safe way for reluctant students to speak in class. However, the professor probably should not project the submissions for everyone to see, unless she does not mind the occasional prankster who asks, “Who is the girl in the front row?” instead of a sincere question.

The advantages of this alternative to a dedicated ARS are numerous, starting with the fact that students do not have to buy clickers. Cell phones are ubiquitous, and the majority of students already know how to use them. The instructor benefits, since the polling website provides and maintains the infrastructure for the ARS. In addition, PollEverywhere.com permits

the instructor to use fill-in-the-blank and short-answer questions that could not be used with most ARS systems.

Disadvantages to the cell phone ARS also exist. First, not every student may own a cell phone, and those who do may not have unlimited texting as a part of their cell phone plan, thus incurring additional charges for each text message sent. Furthermore, depending on classroom location, signal strength may not always be adequate. Finally, some students may not be adept at texting. However, with a little assistance from classmates or the instructor, all students should quickly feel comfortable with the texting technology.

From the institution's perspective, only two costs are associated with the cell phone ARS. PollEverywhere.com offers several subscription plans, with monthly fees ranging from \$9 for a class of 50 students to \$370 for 10,000 participants. The company also provides a free plan for classes with fewer than 30 students. More significantly, the classroom must have Internet access in order to obtain the survey results in real time. Without real-time feedback, a cell phone quiz is not significantly different from an online quiz posted on a class website. Fortunately, the lack of classroom Internet access is a rapidly vanishing problem.

After piloting the use of text messaging in class, we found that cell phone texting is a wonderful method for engaging the students in the discussion at hand. Moreover, we believe they enjoyed the fact that we are trying to speak to them in their language, at least occasionally. PollEverywhere.com provides instructors with an opportunity to use student texting to enhance the learning process. ♥

Five Questions from Missouri

By Christopher Baker, *Armstrong Atlantic State University, GA*
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Students too often write “for the teacher” instead of imagining a critical reader, who can be hard for them to conceive of and even harder to convince. I help my students to conceptualize an interested yet judgmental reader by asking them to think of that reader as being from Missouri, the “Show Me” state. This nickname originated with Congressman Willard Vandiver, who declared in an 1899 speech that “frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me.” Vandiver’s distrust of “frothy eloquence” is shared by readers who expect thoughtful content, efficient structure, and clear sentences. I challenge my students to imagine a skeptical reader who expects them to answer five important questions that will demand critical writing and thinking. These questions can help students with a variety of writing assignments across a range of disciplines.

1. What’s your point? Tell me directly, and fairly quickly, what you want to con-

vince me of. Don’t make me guess, assume, or wonder what your thesis is. If you do not show me exactly what it is that you want to argue, how will you convince me to accept your side of the issue? If you don’t have a clearly stated thesis, you can be sure I’ll start to think you don’t really know what you want to say—or perhaps that you may not even know what you’re talking about.

2. Who are you? Show me what gives you the right to talk about this subject. I expect you to establish your own credibility or authority to influence my thinking, because I’m not likely to agree with you if I don’t respect your knowledge about the subject. Do you have a personal link to this issue that makes it important to you? Did you come up with your ideas alone, or are you aware of others who have written about this? (If I care deeply about this issue, I’m probably going to have read them, and I’ll expect you to have done so too.) Show that you are part of the conversation on this topic by referring to what others have said and presenting your view of their ideas.

3. But what about *this*? I’d be more strongly persuaded if *you* had anticipated some of my objections. Don’t simply tell me what you think; tell me why the arguments that *oppose* yours are weak. Try to demolish possible critical replies to your thesis; make your stand defensively as well as offensively. This will show me how deeply you’ve thought through the issue and how well you can look at your own ideas from a perspective different from your own.

4. Why should I care? After I read your essay, I should not be left thinking, “So what?” Show me the relevance your thesis has to address larger issues—those that keep it from being trivial, specialized, or remote. What other problems does it solve or create? Have you revealed some deeper level of the topic most people would not have noticed? I won’t be persuaded by stereotypical thinking that reaches obvious conclusions easily arrived at by anyone.

5. Are you wasting my time? As the king said to *Alice in Wonderland*, “Begin at

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Expectations: Students Stepping Up

Some years back the newsletter contained an article highlighting Mano Singham’s wonderful piece describing how he moved away from a very authoritarian, rule-centered syllabus (reference below). It’s one of my very favorite articles—I reference it regularly in presentations, and it appears on almost every bibliography I distribute. Since its publication in 2005, Singham has continued to explore the role of the syllabus in his courses (and elsewhere) and has become even more convinced that many faculty are using the syllabus in ways that more effectively hinder than promote learning.

In a presentation at the recent International Society for Exploring Teaching and Learning (ISETL) confer-

ence, Singham described an activity he now undertakes on the first day of class. Instead of distributing the syllabus then, he passes out a list of readings, a tentative schedule for the readings and a proposed list of paper due dates. Then he asks students this question: “What do you expect from an instructor who is giving 100% to the course?” Here’s the list students came up the first time he tried this approach:

- Give students their papers back in a timely way
- Give students lots of criticism and feedback on their work
- Have passion for the material
- Listen and respond to student concerns

- Care not only about academics but also about students as people
- Realize that students have a life outside of class and not make unreasonable demands on them
- Not stick only to the class readings for discussion
- Take all questions seriously and not fake answers
- Provide inspiration to students so that they will want to change their minds

He followed that question with this one: “What would you expect to see your peers doing if they were giving 100% to the

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Text Highlighting: Helping Students Understand What They Read

By Lydia Conca, Saint Joseph College, CT
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Do you have students who have difficulty understanding assigned readings? Do you have students who don't complete the readings or don't even bother bringing their books to class? A better question might be how many? Many college students struggle with their reading assignments.

As a teacher educator with expertise in reading development and disability, I find it useful to model effective reading strategies and provide immediate feedback on those strategies frequently used by students. One versatile method I use with undergraduates involves examination of their text underlines—most of those who read do underline. Throughout the semester, I ask students to refer to their assigned readings and share with the class passages they underlined and reasons for their selection. In this way, the types of thinking that accompanies purposeful, active reading become more apparent.

Students underline passages in the reading for a variety of reasons. They may underline based on prior knowledge. For example, a student might highlight text that relates to a personal experience or something they already believe. In these cases, my feedback explicitly encourages them to make these connections and prompts them to draw upon what they know as they read in all their classes. Other times, students underline what they

think is an important point. I see this as an opportunity to build content knowledge. My feedback often takes the form of questions and aims to help them examine concepts and relationships expressed in the text in greater depth or from a different perspective.

Sometimes students underline what they don't understand. They might highlight secondary points or, more typically, they highlight too much, leaving few sentences untouched. On these occasions, I try to demonstrate how I approach the text. I think aloud as I read and make my thinking visible as I switch back and forth from actually reading phrases, sentences, and passages to interpretation. I make predictions and confirm or revise them as I read on. I paraphrase and evaluate my own ability to infer the author's points. In this way, students observe a model of active meaning construction. When it's apparent that several students are having difficulty, I might parse a complex sentence and analyze its relationship to the passage or chapter, or clarify an abstract concept or position through use of surrounding context. Through my demonstrations and feedback, students learn to become more purposeful and selective about what they underline. They become more aware of their level of understanding, knowing when to reread and seek clarification.

I use material from the text selectively but consistently, and the approaches I demonstrate evolve across the course.

Passages selected for class examination relate to essential content. Thus, reading demonstrations and discussions are targeted and kept short, usually lasting less than 20 minutes. At the beginning of the semester, an examination of text underlines is used as a review; later it is a previewing strategy before a reading assignment is completed. After a few demonstrations, I ask students to work with a peer and compare passage underlines, noting what was of interest, of importance, or would benefit from clarification. The approach includes other reading comprehension strategies, such as self-questioning. Following instructor modeling, students write questions that they have about the text in the margins or on sticky notes. Through repeated practice, students become more independent and confident readers.

By semester's end, there are fewer students who fail to bring the assigned reading material to class and even fewer with clean texts, free of markings and notes. Students quickly learn that assigned readings are an integral part of class and become more accountable for their own learning. They are willing to take more risks and seem to better understand that comprehension is a dynamic process. I interpret these changes as evidence of positive growth. It reminds me that today's college students benefit from models of good reading and feedback that informs their efforts. 🍀

FIVE QUESTIONS

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the beginning and go on until the end. Then stop." Make your case efficiently and economically, but show me enough supporting evidence to be convincing. If you want to persuade me of your thesis, make sure you have my full attention at all times. Beware of digressions and writing that tries too hard to impress. Don't drown me with too many thoughts from

other people that I could just as easily look up for myself and that muffle your own voice. Remember that there is a persuasive elegance in simplicity and directness.

Certainly other questions "from Missouri" might be imagined, but these five have been helpful in getting students to envision a critical reader and to create the quality of writing we expect of undergraduates. The questions do not require detailed knowledge about what readers may already know about a topic or what

their individual biases might be. Instead, they focus on the qualities of a well-constructed essay and on the attitude of an author who is eager to meet the real expectations of serious readers.

Ed.'s note: If you're interested in distributing these questions and responses to your students, they may be copied and used by individual faculty for instructional purposes. Permission to republish the article in other venues must be granted by the publisher. 🍀

Caring about Students

Most faculty (especially those reading a publication like this) do care about students. We wouldn't be doing all that we do if we didn't. However, some semesters are long, some students are difficult, we get behind, we have too much on our plates, and we get stressed and tired. When that's how we're feeling we don't always show that concern in tangible ways.

The article referenced below provides a wealth of reminders and good advice. The authors surveyed students asking them four simple questions: "1) Have you ever had the feeling that a faculty member or instructor had "given up" on you and your learning in a course? 2) What did the faculty member or instructor do or not do to give you that feeling? 3) What did you do as a result of that feeling, perception? 4) What are ways that a faculty member or instructor can communicate to you that he or she has not given up on his or her commitment to you and your learning in a course?" (p. 318)

Forty-four percent of the students in this sample reported that they did have the feeling that an instructor had given up on them and their learning in the course. They reported a variety of ways professors com-

municated this message from mildly severe things like making no effort to find out why a student is missing class to strongly severe actions like bluntly telling a student that passing a class was impossible no matter what action the student took. There was also a range of answers in the middle like giving short, curt answers that made students feel as though the inquires held up the learning of others to just plain not communicating with a student.

It's hard to imagine instructors doing some of the things students listed as evidence of no concern. Perhaps overly sensitive students are in some cases misinterpreting the messages. Not knowing the whole story should stop us from drawing definitive conclusions. However, the lists offer a good way to reality check.

The positive and helpful part of this study are the many concrete things instructors can do and say that these students said did convey concern and a belief in a student's ability to succeed. Students noted the value of establishing an encouraging environment and said that instructors do so by giving personal words of encouragement as well as encouraging the class as a whole. They reported that instructors who recog-

nize student learning differences convey caring and instructors can do that by listening actively and attentively to students, by recognizing that each student is unique, and by taking time to learn new ways to help students learn.

Instructors also communicate their commitment to students when they regularly check for comprehension, whether that's asking students individually or monitoring the progress of the class as a whole. Caring instructors guide students to solutions, rather than just giving them the answers.

Most of the suggestions made by these students and by the authors are not new. On a good day, most faculty could generate lists like those contained in the article. But not every day is a good day, and on those other kinds of days it pays to be reminded that despite all we have to do, some things matter more than others when our goal is helping students learn.

Reference: Hawk, T. F., and Lyons, P. R. (2008). Please don't give up on me: When faculty fail to care. *Journal of Management Education*, 32, 316-338. 🍀

EXPECTATIONS

FROM PAGE 4

course?" And here's that list:

- Doing the readings
- Listening to others and appreciating diverse opinions
- Learning from each other's ideas
- Keeping things lighthearted
- Not putting down others if you disagree
- Showing up for every class and being on time
- Showing respect for everyone's ideas
- Going beyond just academic conversation, bringing personal elements into the discussions too

Singham added three items to the students' second list: responding thoughtfully

to weekly journal prompts; being conscientious about sending weekly private emails to the instructor; and regularly checking the course website for information about the course. The activity confirmed for Singham that students do know what's expected of them and have a good sense of what professors can do to support their efforts to learn in a course.

In a more recent article (reference below) Singham challenges still further current thinking about the role of syllabi in courses. "The typical syllabus gives little indication that the students and teacher are embarking on an exciting learning adventure together, and its tone is more akin to something that might be handed to a prisoner on the first day of incarceration." (p. 52) He and students jointly create the syllabus he uses in his courses. "What is inter-

esting is that the more I delegate decision making about course structure and rules to the students, the more discretion and leeway they give me to make judgments about their performance." (p. 56)

If you need a couple of articles to challenge your thinking or provoke good lively discussion with colleagues, these two articles will definitely fill the bill. As the person sitting next to me observed at the end of Singham's session: "I'm not sure I can do this, but you know what? He's absolutely right."

References: Singham, M. (2005). Moving away from the authoritarian classroom. *Change*, 37 (3), 51-57.

Singham, M. (2007). Death to the syllabus. *Liberal Education*, 94 (4), 52-56. 🍀

Peer Assessment: Making It Work Well in Small Groups

“We cannot assume ... that students will learn how to become better group members simply by participating in group activities.” Diane Baker (reference below) makes this observation in a first-rate article on peer assessment in small groups. Here’s a sampling of the ideas, information, and resources included in her article.

Based on an extensive review of the literature in which Baker analyzed published peer-rating forms, she found that most included one or more of these eight categories.

- Attended group meetings on time and did not leave early
- Was dependable, as in met deadlines
- Submitted quality work or made high-quality contributions to the group
- Completed a fair share of the group’s work
- Cooperated and communicated with other group members, sharing information and listening
- Helped resolved interpersonal or group conflict
- Made cognitive contributions using knowledge and skills to help the group accomplish its goals
- Helped establish group goals and monitored progress as the group worked to achieve them

After I posted this list of items in *The Teaching Professor* Blog (www.teachingprofessor.com, see the September 4 entry—the blog is free; please check us out and feel welcome to join the conversation), a blog reader responded with a thoughtful email (parts of which are included in the September 23 entry). Basically, his point was that groups work well because people bring different strengths to the group and make different kinds of contributions to the group’s process. If you create a form that describes a certain set of behaviors and use that form to assess the contributions of each group member, you are in fact suggesting that everyone in the group should do exactly the same things. The point is well taken. However, as Baker notes in the

opening quote, group experiences in classrooms should be developmental. Students must be taught how groups function and what members do that contribute to their successes. The unique contributions of individuals doesn’t matter a whole lot if there’s an attendance problem in the group or if one or two group members are doing all the work.

Appendices to this article contain two sample peer-evaluation instruments developed by the author. They are noteworthy because Baker assessed their validity and reliability empirically. One is long and detailed, providing students the kind of specific feedback that can be very helpful in their development as effective group members. The other is much shorter. Her statistical analysis revealed that “there are few meaningful differences between the short and long rating forms with respect to reliability, relationship to individual performance and grade outcomes.” (p. 195)

The article also covers a variety of issues related to grading when peer assessments are involved. “When peer evaluations are used for development or to inform grading decisions, instructors have an obligation to ensure fairness.” (p. 199) One such issue involves leniency, which becomes more serious when students give everyone in the group the same scores. Baker cites one study that found that students did this 26 percent of the time. Baker recommends not allowing students to give everyone the same score. One way to prevent this problem is to establish a total number for the group (say 10 points for each member). Students are instructed to divide those points among members, not giving any two members the same

score. Students can assign themselves points. Some instructors ignore those self-assessments or compare them with the points awarded by other group members, adjusting the self-assessment if it is significantly higher than the group’s assessment.

To encourage students to take the peer assessment process seriously, Baker suggests placing an honor pledge at the bottom of the evaluation. There is a sample provided on the short form. It includes a place for the student’s signature.

This is one of those truly superb articles. It contains a wealth of information, including a lengthy list of references. Regular readers know that this endorsement appears rarely: if you collect good resources on teaching (which, of course, you should) this is an article that belongs in your collection. I’m making this recommendation based on the quality of the article. Baker offers another reason: “An instructor has many choices with respect to peer assessment tools and processes. To increase learning and ensure fair grading, decisions about peer assessment should be made intentionally, with a clear understanding of the goals of the course and the objectives of group assignments.” (p. 200)

Reference: Baker, D. F. (2008). Peer assessment in small groups: A comparison of methods. *Journal of Management Education*, 32 (2), 183-209. 🍀

Online Seminar Call for Proposals

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Teaching Transformation

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When I started college teaching 27 years ago, like the scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* I believed that just having a brain would make me successful. And so each class session I would literally “take the stage” on a raised platform to deliver what was in my head and on my papers. Although I tried to emulate the professor who had taught me introductory sociology, I never seemed to reach his performance level. Nevertheless, I stood behind the podium and waxed eloquent about social interaction. I prepared diligently. Even though there were 60 students in the class, there could just as well have been none because I basically ignored the students. They were objects, sponges whose task was to absorb course content. Over the years my approach has changed. A description of this transformation may guide others to a more effective kind of teaching.

I started making progress once I realized that a brain alone was not enough. To teach well I also needed a heart and courage. I learned to be comfortable just being myself. I no longer used the podium and came to class with a one-page plan. I lectured less and students talked more. I invested more of myself in teaching. Let me share how I reached this point.

As I’ve developed as teacher, my attention shifted from self to students. Although this is a natural progression for teachers, it is not automatic. Some teachers remain the focal point of the learning process. This transfer of focus has been the impetus for changing how I teach. In planning for classes now, I continually ask how I can get students out of the stands and onto the field. This means I design simulations to highlight important information and processes, create games to explain content, and use small-group activities to engage students. I want my students to grasp concepts, and being in an active role helps them do that. Much

about education has changed, but two aspects of teaching remain constant—interacting with human beings and deciding how best to facilitate their learning.

Placing students in the center of the teaching-learning environment requires that teachers have a different attitude and a new way of relating to students. Effective teachers are comfortable with both the cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching. Being at ease with the emotional side of teaching fosters the development of rapport with students. Achieving more genuine relationships means being available to students, being glad to be in class with them, sharing with them what’s happening in our lives that is relevant, and investing the time it takes to prepare meaningful activities.

A major factor in facilitating learning is credibility. The prospective teachers in my classes see this essential quality as “practicing what you preach.” My awareness of the need to match what I say with what I do has increased over the years and has changed how I teach. Modeling the behaviors of effective teachers directs my actions in the classroom. Were I in a different field, the behaviors of other respective professionals (e.g., scientists or historians) would be just as significant. To build credibility, teachers should model the skills of practicing professionals.

As a college teacher, I see my role as one of enabling others to become their best. I have come to realize that it is not so much what students know as what they can do. Likewise, teaching is not about what I know but what I enable others to do. Thus, I have changed the ways in which I teach to build students’ capacities. The critical question now is: “How can students show their understanding?” Finding ways to allow such student demonstrations influences my choice of course activities and assessments.

Finally, I want students to know that I reflect on what I do. I respond to their feedback; I talk about my mistakes in teaching. I agree with Parker Palmer when

he says that “...teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability.” Because of this personal exposure, teaching demands courage and honesty. It is vital to view the process of teaching as a developmental journey and to share the belief that we have not “arrived” in the practice of our craft. In this way we present ourselves as more approachable; our arrogance (perceived or real) thus declines. Students become more accepting of us.

One’s transformation as a teacher should not be a one-time event but a continual process that spans the career. Focusing on students, reinforcing credibility, building their capabilities, and examining our own practice can transform our teaching and students’ learning. The evolving nature of becoming a teacher definitely makes the journey more enjoyable.

COLLECTING COLLEAGUES

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pedagogical interest.

A teacher you can teach—It doesn’t matter how new you might be to college teaching, chances are good that somebody else at your institution is newer. It might be a student starting out as a peer tutor or a part-timer coming to teaching with years of experience in a profession. The value here derives from how sharing expertise develops expertise. It’s what many of us learned when we first started teaching: you don’t really understand something well unless you can explain it clearly to someone who does not.

Obviously, collecting colleagues is a first step. The process of collecting doesn’t do much to develop pedagogical prowess, but it’s a step that can make growth and development a much more pleasant and promising possibility. If we are purposeful about how we teach, then we ought to purposefully select those colleagues who can truly support our efforts.