Insights and Ideas for Teaching and Learning

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Gender Equitable Teaching Behaviors: *How Are You Doing?*

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When presented with the idea of gender-equitable teaching, if your first reaction is to think, "I treat everyone the same," or "There isn't a problem in the 1990's," or "Who cares? This is the university. Get over it," then stop reading now (How is my reverse psychology working?). If your first reaction is, "I think I do a pretty good job," or "Hmm. I never thought about it," then keep reading.

Generally, teacher education programs do not adequately prepare preservice teachers to be aware of and implement gender-equitable teaching behaviors (GETBs). Further, most university instructors and professors are not required to have studied pedagogy, the study of teaching and learning. So basically, we are all in the same boat of gender-inequitable teaching behaviors unless we have actively taken steps to counteract years of socialization.

For the past three years we have been taking active steps to teach all K-12 preservice teachers in the School of Education and Human Services some simple, but highly effective techniques to help encourage GETBs. Through the use of two self-evaluative instruments, the Gender Equity Observation Form and the Survey of Gender Equitable Teaching Strategies, we have determined levels of awareness and implementation of GETBs of 341 preservice teachers. They performed more equitably than the national data suggest in: (a) acceptance phrases, (b) use of praise, (c) use of higher-level questions (d) wait time, and (e) proximity. They were not able to use positive and negative criticism in a gender-equitable manner.

> *"...We are all in the same boat of gender-inequitable teaching behaviors unless we have actively taken steps to counteract years of socialization..."*

While there are few studies at the university level examining gender-equity, an early 1990s study characterized the university learning environment as a "chilly" one. Take a moment to reflect upon your teaching style (not curricular choices, or assessment techniques or physical classroom space-that's another article). If you can improve even one of the GETBs, you may well encourage more students to achieve concept mastery and/or greater emotional health.

Praise and Acceptance Phrases

Teachers tend to respond differently to their students' good ideas and thinking by praising ("fantastic," "super idea," etc.) males' answers and merely accepting ("uh-huh," "right," etc.) females' answers. Even though the quality is comparable, it can send a subtle message that answers from some are more highly valued than answers from others (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Higher-Level Questions

Teachers may ask more higher-level questions of their male students than their female students and give females less critical feedback on their answers. Students who receive less critical feedback may infer that their teachers have lower cognitive expectations for them (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Wait Time

When teachers fail to use effective wait time (i.e., the length of time between questions posed and acceptance of student responses), they often call on males in a disproportionate number (Shmurak & Ratliff, 1994), leaving females to feel ignored and unimportant and males to expect immediate attention. In addition, many teachers attend to the superficial attributes of their female students including appearance, social behavior and handwriting (Sadker & Sadker, 1994); yet, they do not give the same degree of attention for these students' active participation in the learning environment.

Proximity

When teachers stand within an arm's length of students, this proximity nurtures the development of rapport. National data shows that teachers more often use proximity with male students than with female students as a classroom management technique. Female students may feel less important (Sadker & Sadker, 1994), be denied the chance to develop a rapport with the teacher and receive less critical feedback about academic work.

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Criticism

Males receive up to three times the positive criticism and eight times the negative criticism that girls receive. Positive criticism is really the essence of teaching and learning. Females may not get enough of it. However, negative criticism is often emotionally damaging and usually uncalled for in a public learning environment. Males receive far more than their share of this . Teachers may hold back negative criticism directed toward women because it may "hurt their feelings;" yet many teachers do the exact opposite for men thinking that it will "toughen them up."

Fortunately, teachers do not intentionally teach in a sexist manner (Sanders, Koch & Urso, 1997). We are products of our own gender-role socialization, teacher education programs and sexist learning environments that ignore the existence of gender inequities in schools (Rose & Dunne, 1989).

Possible Solutions

Use a self-evaluation tool as found in Dianne Horgan's (1995), Achieving Gender Equity: Strategies for the Classroom. Or request a copy of the Gender Equity Observation Form from me.

Praise and Acceptance Phrases

Self discipline is a must here. Try to increase your use of synonyms for praising answers.

Higher-Level Questions

Be extra mindful of how many times you respond to a student's response with a higher-level question. If you have 63% females in your class and 36% males (the ratio at Oakland University), then your use of high-level questions should be proportional to each gender. Additionally, pose a higher-level question to the entire class immediately followed by a 60-120 seconds of chat time among students. This will reduce your feelings of "putting students on the spot."

Wait Time

Quit calling on students with their hands up. Use a systematic approach to calling on students. Expect that everyone in your class will have a reasonable answer to your questions. Again, pose the question to the class; allow 30-120 seconds of chat time; call on the student whose name appears next in your system. I use half-sized index cards with each person's name written on it. This allows me to shuffle occasionally and also to randomly assign various students to groups throughout the semester.

Proximity

Walk around your classroom to observe more closely in what your students are engaged.

> ***"...We are products of our own gender-role socialization, teacher education programs and sexist learning environments that ignore the existence of gender inequities in school..."***
>
> ***(Rose & Dunne, 1989)***

Make sure that you take a path that allows you proximity to ALL students at least once during the class session. If that is impossible, then start rearranging the furniture! If you have chairs bolted to the floor, request a different room. If you have a class of over 50 students, then get a remote mouse or a student assistant to switch your slides from one to another. Bottom line: The overhead projector and chalkboard are not magnets and you are not made of steel.

Criticism

For written work, ask students to use their class number or last four digits of their phone number rather than their actual name(s) as author(s). For live, verbal criticism, try to NEVER use negative criticism. Make an effort to phrase criticism as positively as you would give your most talented, yet sensitive students.

If your interest has been truly piqued and you'd like to know of other resources available on campus, feel free to e-mail me at dtracy@oakland.edu.

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Bad Dream Meets Golden Opportunity: *The Challenges of General Education*

By Natalie Bell Cole
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As Oakland University faculty reshapes curricula for working, commuting students for whom general education courses often seem like thorns strewn along their academic paths, the teaching of general education courses becomes increasingly problematic. As one student in English 112, "Literature of Ethnic America" wrote in the fall of 1997: "I think the ethnic diversity requirement should NOT be a requirement. I enjoyed the class but maybe should have an extra class in my major. The class is not going to help me make money." Students sometimes perceive such classes as purgatories through which they are required to suffer. Faculty may fantasize about giving students a "taste" of a new, delectable discipline in a general education course, only to discover that one precious dollop has led to massive indigestion. Perhaps to a greater degree than in majors courses where some degree of shared interest may be expected to exist, students and faculty seem to have very disparate expectations and experience of general education. What follows are some ideas about general education courses, based on my own experiences as a teacher of literature.

How can narrating or storytelling give us a way of re-imagining classroom experience? "To narrate is to link A to B, to see causal affinities, to draw out and develop comparisons and harmonies, to deduce and project possible outcomes" (Anthony Paul Kerby, Narrative and the Self, 1991). Perhaps professors in general education courses can encourage students to see "causal affinities" between their majors course work and their general education courses. Meanwhile, professors might identify harmonies and disharmonies of majors courses and general education courses, which share many of the same goals. Since both faculty and students narrate the educational experience to themselves and others in a continuous process of interpretation, why not make such narration a part of classroom discussion? Different versions of these narratives appear in course evaluations, assessment documents and lengthy conversations with peers. The "plot" of the academic semester offers a ready-made structure, with an embedded sub-plot of grades (from the professor's viewpoint). In contrast, students may see the grading plot as a dominant, not at all embedded, plot structure.

> ***"...Faculty may fantasize about giving students a 'taste' of a new, delectable discipline in a general education course, only to discover that one precious dollop has led to massive indigestion..."***

We can invite students to make their own narrative links between general education and other educational or life experiences, in discussion and writing. Giving students the chance to make a case "against" and "for" general education requirements can clear the classroom air. Even Matthew Arnold, champion of the liberal arts model many late twentieth century colleges and universities have abandoned, believed it was important to ask about literature, "but what does it do for you?"

General education courses urge me to add a twist to my classroom plot. Simply put, I try something new when my students' interest flags: a new pedagogical method strategy, a song, a temperance ballad, a painting, a photograph, a film clip, a contemporary parallel to an historical trend or event, a charge to students to locate the academic problems they are considering in class, beyond the classroom at work or home.

I look for discontinuity between material covered on a test and time spent on material in class (thanks to my English Department colleagues for this reminder). I am reminded of Pip's experience at Christmas dinner in Great Expectations: "I was regaled with the scaly tips of the drumsticks of the fowls, and with those obscure corners of pork of which the pig, when living, had had the least reason to be vain." Both students and professors probably want their tests to be a full, well-balanced meal of the most crucial academic material.

I think of Sherlock Holmes, who likened the human brain to a room with only so much space for furnishings. Students have a lot of information to process, and sometimes a narrative stays with them when other information gets lost. The lives of women and men important to our disciplines, the histories of those disciplines or particular moments of those histories, even our own stories of intellectual challenge or discovery, are important stories to tell.

Most importantly, we need to listen to what our students tell us, in class discussions, in their written work, after class, in our offices, on our course evaluations. Since there is only so much professor to go around for so many students, class size in general education courses needs to be monitored and gradually lowered. Controlling class size in these courses would underscore the university's commitment to a quality undergraduate educational experience, and help to transform the students' "bad dream" of an unwelcome general education course into a golden opportunity for intellectual discovery.

The Teaching and Learning Committee would like to thank the 1998 recipients of the Teaching Excellence Award, Natalie Cole, Associate Professor, English and Dyanne M. Tracy, Associate Professor, Curriculum, Instruction and, Leadership for writing articles for the newsletter *Insights and Ideas.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EDITORIAL INFORMATION

"Learning Communities: What is Good for Students Can Be Good for Faculty!"

A Teaching and Learning Luncheon
March 24, 1999
12:00-1:30p.m.
Gold Room A of the Oakland Center

Faculty are invited to attend a teaching and learning luncheon, given by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee on March 24, 1999. The presentation will be given by Susan M. Awbrey, Ph.D., Vice Provost, Oakland University. Dr. Awbrey is an Associate Professor in the School of Education. The session will provide an overview of student learning communities and their effectiveness in promoting student success. It will also present the benefits of developing a learning community environment for faculty and staff and the positive impact that such a working environment can have on both faculty and students. To make reservations, e-mail Carole Terry at terry@oakland.edu or call Sandy at X3285 by March 15, 1999.

Call for Articles

The Teaching and Learning Committee is requesting articles for the newsletter, *Insights and Ideas*. The Oakland University community is planning a year-long conversation about writing in 1999-2000. Please consider submitting an article which would promote ideas and discussion on the teaching and learning of successful writing. Articles are due by September 15, 1999 for the fall newsletter and by January 15, 2000 for the winter newsletter. Please submit the articles to Kris Thompson, Program in Physical Therapy, School of Health Sciences, Oakland University. Questions may be directed to Kris Thompson at (248) 370-4096 or send an e-mail to kathomps@oakland.edu.

Insights and Ideas Newsletter

Kristine Thompson, Editor
Becky O'Connell, Design

Call for Proposals
1999 Educational Development Grants

The Senate charge to the Teaching and Learning Committee is "to promote the teaching and the learning process." In accordance with this charge, the Committee invites the Oakland University faculty to apply for grants in educational development. Funding may be requested for projects whose primary purpose involves one or more of the following:

- Development and/or use of new teaching techniques.
- Development of a new instructional approach.
- Faculty development related to curricular responsibilities.
- Investigation of a teaching/learning problem.
- Evaluation of a method of teaching.

Individual awards will not normally exceed $750.00. The committee will not fund preparation for accreditation or program reviews nor will it fund faculty salaries or travel costs. Change from previous years: *Student labor in conjunction with preparation of teaching materials may be funded.* Forms are available in 205 Wilson Hall or by e-mail from fran@oakland.edu.

The deadline for applications is March 10, 1999.

Insights and Ideas is published twice a year by the Oakland University Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, Office of Academic Affairs, Oakland University, Rochester, MI 48309-4401. The newsletter is distributed free of charge to the faculty at Oakland University. Letters, news and requests for additional copies should be sent to the address given above.

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