

The Mental Groundwork

Overview: You've received your first teaching appointment or teaching assistantship. Congratulations. Now, how do you start preparing for that first class?

Before selecting a text or creating a syllabus, before planning assignments or requesting audiovisual resources, it is imperative that the new instructor takes some time to thoughtfully consider the process of teaching—that is, to examine assumptions and beliefs about how students learn, how they differ, and what exactly the role of the educator is. Along this line, Brookfield (1995) has written:

We teach to change the world. The hope that undergirds our efforts to help students learn is that doing this will help them act toward each other, and toward their environment, with compassion, understanding, and fairness. But our attempts to increase the amount of love and justice in the world are never simple, never unambiguous. What we think are democratic, respectful ways of treating people can be experienced by them as oppressive and constraining. One of the hardest things teachers have to learn is that the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice. (p. 1)

This chapter is designed to introduce the new educator to foundational considerations about the teaching enterprise before tackling the “nuts and bolts” typically associated with teaching.

How Do You View Yourself as an Educator?

A sociologist by the name of Austin L. Porterfield maintained that in every interaction with another person, a family of eight is created. There is, for example, the person I am, the person you are, the person I think I am, the person you think you are, the person you think I am, the person I think you are, the person I think you think I am, and the person you think I think you are. The point, of course, is that there are multiple ways of viewing ourselves. And not only that, but the image we think we project may be different from the one students perceive.

As an instructor in a classroom, you will convey a definite persona to the students. Back in their dorms, or walking across campus, or in the cafeteria, or as they drop coins into vending machines, students will discuss the character you portray before them. Unless you have exceptional students and are on a pinnacle by yourself, it is likely they won't be talking about your towering intellect or the frothy cerebral discussions you orchestrate three times a week. If you were to overhear their discussions, they would be likely conversing about how "hard" the last test was, perhaps how today's assignment was "a breeze," or how "nice" you were in giving them a take-home exam.

How do you want to be viewed by students? Almost all of us want to be liked. However, at times our notion of the educator's role may work against our winning any popularity contests on campus. How will your students view you?

To be sure, some faculty in every college diligently work to create a reputation not unlike that of a Marine Corps drill instructor. They assign 14 books to be read in a single semester, require 50-page term papers, and design final examinations that few can pass. These educators often love the power associated with being in charge and want to intimidate students. One such instructor introduced herself to every new class by bragging that she had been elected as a faculty trustee on the university's Board of Trustees—which is, she went on to explain, "a very important position, indeed." Students generally are afraid to challenge these instructors and may not ask questions in their classes or stop by their offices to ask for assistance.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are the popular faculty whose offices are almost student lounges. Whenever these faculty are in, the foot traffic in the hall is a steady stream to Mecca. All day long there is a procession of students waiting to share something personal, a story of mistreatment from a boyfriend or girlfriend, the death of a cat named Mephistopheles. At times laughter cascades from their offices, causing scholarly neighbors to shut their doors against the noise. These popular faculty complain a bit too happily about their work not getting done because of students dropping in to chat. "I'm going to set aside just a *few* hours every week to meet with students," they say disingenuously.

Besides these, there are other types you may have encountered in higher education: the serious researcher for whom teaching is not a high priority; the conscientious instructor who tries to encourage and empower students; the eager novice; and the burned-out, been-teaching-too-long academic. Each one has certain priorities and goals, and can be identified by distinguishing characteristics.

Whether we want to be viewed by students as "tough" or "easy" is often a conscious decision. We may, for instance, decide to be hard-nosed because we feel that the curriculum needs to be upgraded, or that our colleagues aren't asking enough of students. Sometimes when there are too many pupils in a course or enrolled in a given program, assignments and tests may be designed to weed out the weaker students. The opposite can happen, too. A faculty member going up for tenure may lighten course expectations to minimize the risk of student complaints and to help guarantee good course evaluations.

How do you want to be viewed by students? If the first thought that jumped into your mind was, "I want to be their friend," then you need to understand that students, being naturally perceptive, will realize this. And, there are two main drawbacks to having a friendship type of relationship with your students. First, students may attempt to use that relationship to their advantage, perhaps convincing you to cancel certain assignments or quizzes. When there is something akin to a equality of power in the classroom, students will find it easier to disagree with you about the educational value and importance of whatever you've planned.

Second, it is hard to be objective with our friends. You will find it difficult to give a low grade to a favorite student with whom you

play tennis twice a week or to the one you meet for coffee every Friday morning. This is not to say that you shouldn't get to know your students—learning about them, their life experiences, and goals is one of the pleasures of teaching. However, just be aware that how students relate to you and perhaps even what they learn will be dependent on how you view yourself as an educator.

If you want to be considered as the “hardest instructor” in the philosophy or chemistry department, that’s fine—just be clear in your own mind why you want that reputation. Particularly if you are new to a faculty, you need to think about what you gain and what you lose. Often, the more demands you make and the less flexible you are in accommodating students, the more problems you create for yourself. But you have to judge the climate at your institution. If you sense that the department is wanting you to go in with guns blazing, or if your mentor, dean, chief advocate, or best friend on campus is giving you advice to be less of a marshmallow—then you’ve got to toughen up. But all of this is a little premature. We don’t need to worry about how tough we’re going to be yet. Let’s begin by thinking about what’s important to us as educators.

Developing a Philosophy of Teaching

Imagine, for a moment, the best instructor you encountered during college or graduate school. How did that individual teach? What teaching style did he or she employ? If you were somehow able to interview your nominees for “The Best Teacher Ever,” what would they reveal about their philosophies of teaching?

It almost goes without saying that excellent teachers, as well as poor ones, have influenced your thinking about what makes a good teacher. Specifically, they’ve furnished vivid examples of successful and not so successful ways to teach and treat students. Maybe you even decided on a teaching career yourself because of an exposure to a truly inspirational teacher or one who was so pathetic that you concluded that you could do better.

Do you see yourself (with apologies to Yeats) as “filling empty pails” or “lighting fires”? Do you view your mission as that of a dispenser of information or a facilitator who brings together resources and opportunities enabling students to make their own discoveries? Is teaching a process of mutual inquiry? Schoenfeld

and Magnan (1992) have observed: “Faculty tend to teach as they themselves were taught; it’s what they know and it has worked for them. But there are other approaches and techniques.... Approaches and techniques handed down from one generation of faculty to the next need to be examined and revised (p. 113). Similarly, Palmer (1998) has noted, “The way we diagnose our students condition will determine the kind of remedy we offer” (p. 41).

What do you believe is important in teaching and what do you want to accomplish with your teaching? Indeed, what is the faculty member’s role in the educational process? It might be helpful for you to jot down your thoughts. Do that now, and then we’ll compare notes.

My Philosophy of Teaching: What I Believe Is Important

Writing out your teaching philosophy is an exercise in making your unconscious assumptions explicit. Reviewing what you’ve written, you might discover that what emerged was a concern with imparting knowledge or skills. Or perhaps your philosophy centered on the importance of your students learning to become independent, creative thinkers. Maybe even a particular teaching approach (e.g., collaborative learning, problem-centered instruction) materialized. When I engaged in this exercise myself (it was

required when I went up for promotion), these were some of the elements I identified as important to me as an educator:

Creating a Sense of a Community: *Students have a more enjoyable and more profitable learning experience when they feel connected to each other and to the faculty member.* To build a community of learners, students need to know something about each other. (An activity that I often do at the beginning of each semester is to have students introduce themselves—sometimes in a word or two. Often, it becomes great fun as students say unexpected and outrageous things, such as “pizza delivery boy,” “chocoholic,” or “married five times.” In every class there are several who describe themselves as “quiet” or “shy.” Sometimes it’s appropriate to tell a quick anecdote about myself. It seems only fair to share something about myself if I ask students to reveal something about themselves.)

The use of ice-breakers assists the instructor in remembering students’ names and also helps students to break down barriers and to get to know each other. On many occasions, students are surprised to find someone in the classroom from their hometowns or with similar interests. Especially when students move into a new city, not knowing anyone else, even a wobbly link to another person can be strangely gratifying and reduce one’s anxiety. When there is no longer a sense that “we’re all strangers,” human resources within the classroom are made more available. Students who can draw on the support of others are less likely than those without comrades to fail or drop the class. Knowing a little about each of the students personalizes the experience and makes teaching far more gratifying. (Note: More discussion on ice-breakers is found in Chapter 3.)

Even after the first meeting, the instructor can continue to build a community within the classroom by such activities as dividing the class into pairs or small groups and creating opportunities for them to interact with each other. By the end of the term, students will not only know each other’s names but they will also have become study partners and often friends as well.

Viewing Education as a Two-Way, Interactive Process: *I am not infallible, unerring, or The Authority On All Matters.* When I first began teaching, I erroneously believed that I had to be The Expert. My mission, I thought, was to transmit knowledge and it flowed only one way—from me to the students. The problem with

that perspective is that occasionally I would be asked a question that I couldn’t answer. It made me very uncomfortable, until I realized that I don’t know everything. Now, almost 20 years later, I am comfortable saying, “I don’t know. What do you think?”

Over that span of time, I’ve had students who have flown jet fighters, been professional tennis players, and worked for escort services. A few have been alcoholics and drug addicts. Even before coming into my classroom, some students have received degrees in law, nursing, or theology. One student left a lucrative job as a chemist when his best friend committed suicide. Another was an accomplished engineer who conducted state-of-the-art laser experiments before an airplane accident left him a paraplegic. Each student has life experiences and knowledge that I don’t—and so I don’t worry about being an authority on every issue. Sometimes someone in the class is more knowledgeable than I am on the topic being discussed. If the right atmosphere is created, the classroom is a forum where information can be shared openly and intelligently and issues discussed in a way that invites, not imposes, learning.

A major responsibility of the instructor is to ask good questions—not solely to disseminate information. As students tackle hard questions, they will respond with questions of their own, which will often stimulate new insights or learning—even on the educator’s part.

Respect for the Individual: *Because I care about every one of my students, I take attendance at each class meeting.* Students are asked about extended absences if they don’t volunteer an explanation. It’s not in students’ best interests to miss a lot of lectures. I try to respect each student—to realize that they may have jobs or family responsibilities that occasionally take priority over their assignments and tests.

I also try to show my respect by welcoming and completely listening to each question raised or comment spoken in class. The classroom is a laboratory, and each participant should feel free to speculate, to try new ideas out. I don’t want anyone to leave the class feeling that he or she asked a stupid question. Usually, if one student raises a question, other less vocal students are probably wondering the same thing. Just about every remark or question provides the opportunity for a mini-lesson or a “teaching moment.”

I want to hear my students' stories, to encourage their creativity, and to empower them to find their own solutions.

Accountability: *The instructor should be accountable to his or her students.* I have a responsibility to be prepared each and every class meeting. Being in the classroom well before time to start, starting class on time, stopping on time, specifying in the syllabus when readings will be discussed and when assignments are due communicates early on that there are expectations attached to *this* course. It is important to role-model accountability and so promptly returning all tests, assignments, and so forth—usually at the next class meeting—should be a goal. Being accountable also means that students have sufficient information to be able to compute their grades at any point during the course, because they know the points they received and the specific criteria used in evaluation. The syllabus should be regarded as a contract that is followed unless extenuating circumstances arise. Even then, the class is entitled to an explanation and the opportunity to discuss the necessity for making changes.

Accountability also means giving students the opportunity to evaluate the instructor, even when it's not required. Using this information for continued improvement of the educational process is valued, even though from time to time students' comments can be petty or barbed.

Humor: *Learning can be and probably should be fun.* It's not unprofessional to start a class with a joke or to project a comic strip or cartoon on an overhead transparency—particularly if it is relevant to the topic being discussed. In most lectures, I incorporate a little bit of "show and tell" to gently introduce the topic of the day. For instance, when I'm lecturing on questionnaires and survey design, I usually bring in examples I've received over the years. My favorite is a mailed poll from the Beer Drinkers of America, which included a wallet-sized plastic membership card, a decal of the American flag, and a request on their "opinion poll" that I contribute money to their organization. Sometimes I embellish these with hypothetical scenarios (e.g., having students think about being stopped by the police and instead of pulling out a driver's license, handing the officer their official membership card in the Beer Drinkers of America).

The point of any effort at humor is always to make the time together more enjoyable. If you have students' attention and interest, then you *can* teach them.

Timeliness: *Students hunger to see how the material they are learning applies to issues and problems today.* They want to know if it is relevant, to be shown how they can use this information. To be credible, the instructor should demonstrate current applications and uses of what is being taught. It's a good practice to scan the local newspaper and the campus paper everyday for articles that can provide vivid illustrations. Look for ways to connect students to the topics being discussed.

The opposite of this orientation was practiced by a professor I once encountered. This tall, dignified woman with a slow southern drawl wasted just about all of our time together. Close to retirement, this unimaginative faculty member brought to class the notes that she took as a graduate student some 40 years earlier and read to us from them. The class's boredom was so thick it could have been cut with a ruler. Students deserve much better than this.

Continuing My Own Education: *I have not learned all I need to know.* A philosophy of teaching should probably consider the importance of the educator's own learning and how much there always is yet to learn. Is it critical to stay current by reading journals, attending workshops, and examining new texts? To talk with faculty who teach in other disciplines to discover what teaching techniques they employ? Many excellent instructors feel that they are still evolving as teachers—that they are better each semester than they were the one before and that next year will find even more improvement. Good teachers read and consult with others in order to continuously improve.

What Research Says about Effective Teaching

Chickering and Gamson (1987) took on the task of boiling down 50 years of research "on the way teachers teach and learners learn" with a task force of scholars, and they identified seven broad prin-

ciples of good teaching practice. Cross and Steadman (1996) have called these “the most succinct, comprehensive, and respected research-based conclusions about learning to be widely distributed to discipline-oriented college teachers” (p. 19). Sorcinelli (1991) has cited additional research findings that support and validate the seven principles. Included here is a brief summary. Good teaching practice involves:

1. Frequent student-faculty contact: Faculty who are concerned about their students and their progress, who are perceived as approachable and easy to talk to, serve to motivate and keep students involved. On another level, informal contacts where students have opportunities to talk with faculty members outside of their classrooms and to discuss such things as career choices seems to improve satisfaction with college and aids in retention of students.

Things you can do to apply this principle:¹

- a. Attend events sponsored by students.
- b. Serve as a mentor or advisor to students.
- c. Take students to professional meetings.
- d. Learn students' names.
- e. Keep “open” or “drop-in” office hours.
- f. Arrive at class early and engage a different student in conversation every time.

2. The encouragement of cooperation among students: Chickering and Gamson (1987) noted: “Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. . . . Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding” (p. 3). As discussed later in Chapter 4, there is a wealth of research indicating that students benefit from the use of small group and peer learning instructional approaches.

Things you can do to apply this principle:

- a. Have students share in class their interests and backgrounds.
- b. Create small groups to work on projects together.
- c. Invite students to share their ideas and views.
- d. Encourage students to study together.

3. Active learning techniques: Again, Chickering and Gamson (1987) have written: “Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening. . . . They must

talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives” (p. 5).

Things you can do to apply this principle:

- a. Encourage students to challenge ideas brought into class.
- b. Encourage students to bring in newspaper articles, new readings, and ideas for new assignments.
- c. Give students actual problems or situations to analyze.
- d. Use role-playing, simulations, or hands-on experiments.
- e. Require students to compare and contrast different theorists, authors, and so on.

4. Prompt feedback: Learning theory research has consistently shown that the quicker the feedback, the greater the learning. Sorcinelli (1991) has observed, “Prompt feedback in college courses shows a clear and positive relation to student achievement and satisfaction” (p. 18).

Things you can do to apply this principle:

- a. Return quizzes and exams by the next class meeting.
- b. Return homework within one week.
- c. Provide students with detailed comments on their written papers.

5. Emphasize time on task: This principle refers to the amount of actual involvement with the material being studied, and applies, obviously, to way the instructor uses classroom instructional time. Faculty need good time-management skills. This includes, but is not limited to, starting and stopping on time. Activities such as watching brief excerpts from a film provide more academic learning time than having the class watch an entire two-hour movie.

Things you can do to apply this principle:

- a. Require students who miss classes to make up lost work.
- b. Communicate the amount of time needed to prepare for particular assignments.
- c. Require students to rehearse before making oral presentations.
- d. Don't let class breaks stretch out too long.

6. Communicating high expectations: “Expect more and you will get more” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 5). The key here is

not to make the course impossibly difficult, but to have goals that can be attained as long as individual learners stretch and work hard, going beyond what they already know. Knowing where to set expectations that aren't too high or too low takes some practice, and you might not get it right the first time teaching a new class.

Things you can do to apply this principle:

- a. *Communicate your expectations orally and in writing at the beginning of the course.*
- b. *Explain the penalties for students who turn in late work.*
- c. *Suggest supplemental reading.*
- d. *Identify excellent work by students; display exemplars if possible.*
- e. *Help students set high academic goals (e.g., publishing a piece of research or encouraging those who ought to consider graduate school).*

7. Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning: Not only do students differ in life experiences, skills/abilities, and personality but they also have sensory modality preferences (e.g., kinesthetic, visual, auditory) for learning and will vary in terms of how they process new information. Some students will come across as open and flexible; others will be closed and rigid. This principle suggests the necessity for the instructor to be sensitive to the various ways students acquire information. Within any classroom, there will be students who have latent talents and some with skills and abilities far beyond any that you might imagine. Understanding your students as individuals with their attendant idiosyncrasies and showing regard for their unique interests and talents is "likely to facilitate student growth and development in every sphere—academic, social, personal, and vocational" (Sorcinielli, 1991, p. 21).

Things you can do to apply this principle:

- a. *Use diverse teaching approaches.*
- b. *Allow students some choice of readings and in their assignments.*
- c. *Try to find out about students' backgrounds and interests.*
- d. *Provide extra material (readings or exercises) for students with gaps or deficits in their learning.*

Of course, you would do well to recognize that there is a formidable body of research literature on teaching. These seven princi-

ples are not all that you need to know or practice, but they will take you a long way.

In a related vein, Perlman and McCann (1998) surveyed undergraduate students (N = 671) enrolled in psychology courses at a public regional university one semester. All students were given index cards and asked to write down their pet peeves about faculty: 65 percent of the comments fell into the "teaching" category. In ranked order, what annoyed the students most were poor organization and planning, poor teaching mechanics (speaking too fast or softly, poor use of the board), lecture style and technique, testing procedures and exams, poor use of class time (coming late, stopping early), and monotone voice. All of these problems can be easily addressed when the faculty member really cares and wants to improve his or her teaching.

Quite honestly, you should expect to make many mistakes in your first year of teaching. Many, if not most, seasoned veterans of the classroom would be terribly embarrassed to watch videotapes (if they existed) of their first semesters. But once you have taught the same course three or four times and learned a bit about what works and what doesn't in managing a classroom, then you can begin to aspire to becoming a *great* teacher. This is what Moseley (1998) has said about the process:

A great teacher is a person who cares deeply about teaching, who wants to be teaching, and who wants to become a better teacher. Great teachers love their field of study intensely and have been working in that field long enough to know it almost unconsciously. They know the material and the ideas so intimately that they can focus on finding out where the students are, what they know, and how they learn, and then communicate in a way that students can respond to. Great teaching emerges from the passions of their lives. (p. 9)

Respecting Differences: Diversity in the Classroom

It would indeed be an unusual classroom if all the students were completely homogeneous. Most of us, thank goodness, will never experience such a situation. Variety is good—whether we think

about eating the same food (e.g., oatmeal) meal after meal, or whether we think about diverse points of views, environmental surroundings, or cultural experiences. In politics the different parties help provide a system of checks and balance. Often, we are attracted to those who are not like us but somehow very different—more extroverted, more athletic, more detail-oriented, whatever. So the problem is not diversity, per se, but distills down to (1) how to deal with differences of opinion and lifestyle and (2) how to help students (particularly those who have been raised in settings where tolerance was not practiced) identify and overcome their biases and prejudices.

Instructors who are not themselves members of any minority groups (e.g., those who have grown up with “white privilege”) need to be alert to demonstrating subtle forms of discrimination. For instance, white instructors might unconsciously make less eye contact with minority students, call on them less often, or tend not to remember their names. The minority students will notice if you never refer to one of their comments, yet consistently praise and bring the class’s attention to the remarks of a white student. It is also important to provide readings and assignments that involve authors who are not just “dead white guys” but inclusive of women, persons of color, and gays or lesbians.

Members of nondominant groups will also be attuned to phrases and expressions that can be experienced as *not* inclusive. For instance, if you are heterosexual, don’t assume that everyone is. Don’t use terms like *girlfriend* and *boyfriend*. Instead, use *partners* or *significant others*. Similarly, gays and lesbians have a particular *sexual orientation*, not a *sexual preference*. (Preference implies choice, but gays and lesbians do not choose their sexual orientation; there’s as much deciding involved as with eye color or right- or left-handedness.) Asian American students don’t like being referred to as *Oriental*s. Women don’t like the diminutives *gal* and *girl*. Also, don’t assume that everyone celebrates Christmas and Easter.

Students can be invited to identify “triggers” (words or phrases that tap into their own anger or pain about false or stereotyped perceptions) as a way of educating each other about their differences. Examples of some prejudicial remarks are:

“People of color are blowing things way out of proportion.”
“If everyone just worked hard, they could achieve.”

“Men are better suited for leadership roles than women.”
(Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997)

It is helpful to remember that no one wants to be called hurtful names or to be branded with inflammatory language. Do not permit your students to use “loaded” terms. For instance, even if a student joked about drinking too much on occasion, he or she would very likely become angry if called a “drunk” or an “alcoholic.” Even a strong fundamentalist Christian might resist the label of “fanatic” or “zealot.” No one wants to be a bigot, a prude, a fag, or a slut. Establish ground rules in your class that include no name calling or group labels.

Weinstein and Obear (1992) recommended implementing a ground rule that if anyone feels “triggered” by an oppressive attitude then he or she should identify it by saying “trigger” or “there is one for me” (p. 45). To help the class understand the notion of triggers, it is useful to have the students brainstorm their own individual triggers and to list these examples.

An exercise that can be employed to help make the point that everyone in the class is a unique individual and not just a member of some easily identified reference group is to ask the class to look around the room and to identify some of the ways students differ from each other. Jot these down on the board. Usually, the first 10 or so are easy: gender, skin color, hair color, height, weight, eye color, whether or not they wear glasses, right- or left-handedness, and so on. As the comments begin to slow down, you may note that the students have listed only observable characteristics. Ask again, “How else do the members of the class vary? Perhaps in terms of not directly observable traits?”

This time you’ll typically get responses such as grade-point average, major, religion, income, marital status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, birth order, and so on. These suggestions also provide great opportunity for scoring points about diversity. For instance, you can ask, “You mean you can’t tell I’m a Democrat by looking at me?” or “You can’t tell I’m the first-born?” or “Don’t you know what my father did for a living?”

At some point, the class begins to understand the broad diversity represented in any class of pupils. It’s possible then to ask several more questions: “So how many different ways are there that we can be different? Want to guess?” Of course, this is a rhetorical ques-

tion—there is no single correct answer. (It would depend on how many variables there were, the attributes of those variables, and whether we are interested simply in combinations or permutations.) If you want to be a little bit of a ham and drive the point home, you can walk up to a student who is physically different from you and ask, “Do we have to agree on everything? I mean, can we disagree on some things and still be friends?” What this does is to acknowledge that there are differences within the classroom but at the same time it sets the expectation that differences of opinion or point of view ought to be respected.

Minorities in the classroom may or may not speak up when there is an issue that you think they should weigh in on. Do not, however, single out minorities and ask Latonya, for instance, to represent the “African American” perspective. Don’t ask, “Latonya, what do blacks think about . . . ?” Latonya may feel very uncomfortable having to speak for all African Americans and resent your asking. Similarly, do not ask someone who you think *looks* gay/lesbian to speak pro or con on an issue dealing with sexual orientation. It is permissible, however, to ask open-ended questions that invite: “Does anyone else have another opinion?”

Try to create an open environment where even strong feelings can be expressed. Encourage students to give reasons or examples, to make logical arguments without personal attack. Sometimes in heated arguments students may be unable to explain rationally their beliefs or positions. At such times it may be helpful to ask the student how he or she arrived at that conclusion. The student may be able to relate a story from childhood that reveals a great deal about the social and environmental forces at work in that person’s life. The class may be better able to accept even extreme views once it is known how they were shaped and influenced.

Diversity needs to be addressed on another level because faculty must also be sensitive to invisible disabilities (e.g., dyslexia) and the various ways in which students learn. For instance, the *concrete sequential learner* prefers step-by-step directions and touchable, hands-on materials; the *random concrete learner* does not want cut-and-dried procedures and does not respond well to teacher intervention; the *abstract sequential learner* desires extensive reading assignments and substantive lectures; and the *abstract random learner* has a predilection for movies, group discussions, short lec-

tures, and multimedia sensory experiences (Kaplan & Kies, 1995). Students may not even be aware of their preferences and learning styles, and certainly you won’t either until you get to know them as individuals. But what can happen when there is a mismatch between your teaching style and a student’s learning style is that the student can become disgruntled and scapegoat you for his or her difficulties in the class.

In such situations, try to listen *nonjudgmentally* to the student’s complaint. If possible, try to take the student’s perspective. Misunderstandings can arise over differences of perception. A student who is assertive and a strong advocate for himself or herself in a particular disagreement (e.g., a grade on a written paper) can be experienced as threatening by the instructor. Sometimes there is a fine line between *intimidating* and making a spirited argument. Don’t jump to the conclusion that you are being picked on because you are female or first-generation American, or whatever. Suspend the part of your mind that wants to rebut, to prove the student wrong. Instead, when all the information has been provided, think of it as a problem to be solved. Be flexible, particularly if several students are complaining about the same thing. Look for a middle ground, a compromise where there can be a win-win solution.

Suggestions for Inclusive Teaching

Inclusive teaching begins with the stance that differences (of opinion, ethnic cultures, lifestyle, and so on) are not only okay but, in fact, *necessary* for a vibrant and healthy society. How bland and uninteresting our classes would be if all the students looked, thought, and spoke the same way.

Here are a few suggestions to help you model the kind of open, accepting attitude within your classroom where students will feel it is safe to engage in give-and-take discussions:

- Don’t assume that all, or even most, students in your class are Christian or heterosexual.
- View students as *individuals* instead of representatives of separate and distinct groups. Group classifications often serve as a basis for discrimination.

- Cultivate a climate that is accepting and respectful of diverse viewpoints and perspectives. Show students how to listen with an open mind; don't expect everyone to agree with you.
- Don't allow ridicule, defamatory, or hurtful remarks.
- Encourage everyone in the class to participate.
- Be constantly alert to showing favoritism. Don't show a preference in calling on mostly men or women, whites or nonwhites.
- Try to provide students with a variety of ways to learn; don't think one approach is going to reach every student.

Graduate versus Undergraduate Teaching

Faculty fresh from their own doctoral programs who are presented with undergraduates to teach for the first time often are disappointed that their new charges don't seem quite as highly motivated as one recalls being as an undergraduate. There's two points to remember here. First, those who have obtained doctorates are not representative of most undergraduate students. Persons with advanced degrees probably do have a greater capacity for self-discipline and concentration and are likely to be more conscientious about the details and fine points so necessary in academic discovery and writing. We probably *did* put in more hours and study more than did most of our peers. Hungry for learning, we ravenously consumed book after book and still were left eager for more. This is not true of all undergraduates.

Second, it is good to keep in mind what undergraduates are not. They are *not* graduate students. Many of them have not figured out what career path they will choose or what they want to do with the rest of their lives. They may know relatively little about your area of specialization. If your course is an elective, they may want to "try out" the subject matter to see if it will hold their interest. It is not uncommon for undergraduates to be in courses for all the wrong reasons: because it was offered at a convenient time or day and doesn't conflict with a job or sleeping late, because a friend is in the class, because Dad wants his son to follow his footsteps and become a CPA, or because the class meets in a building within a easy walk of the dorm. It almost goes without saying that some students enter college knowing that they may not succeed—and it doesn't bother

them. They know ahead of time that if they don't make good grades, they'll return home to work in the family business. It shouldn't come as any surprise to discover undergraduates who come to college primarily to devote themselves to the pursuit of fun and social activities. And even if that group is relatively small, one recent survey found that 44 percent of all U.S. college students engage in binge drinking. Those who get most involved in drinking miss classes, get behind in their work, and do poorly in school.

Faculty who have the opportunity to teach graduate students after teaching undergraduates often marvel at the differences. Because of the amount of time and effort it takes to obtain a baccalaureate diploma (to say nothing of the expense), most of the lesser motivated students remove themselves or have been removed from the classroom; thus, faculty teaching graduate courses can usually assume that their students will be highly motivated. Graduate students are usually older, more mature, and self-directed. They generally read all of their assignments because they want to learn. This may or may not be true of undergraduates. Graduate students may be more eager to express their ideas and want to discuss intellectual questions. Undergraduates can be reticent to speak up in classes—especially beginning, first-year students who are often painfully aware that they are the "new kids on the block." Undergraduates tend to complain more about the amount of work you require and have a keen sense of injustice if they feel that another section of the same course is getting by with a lighter load. And finally, undergraduates generally don't have the same appreciation for theory as do graduate students. Although a good instructor should always be imaginative and constantly thinking about new ways to present material that may have lost its luster, it is probably more important to be creative with undergraduates than with graduates. Because of their interest in the topic, graduate students will often take responsibility for learning what they need to, with or without the assistance of the instructor.

Last, both undergraduates and graduate students differ in their stages of cognitive development. Some may be "stuck" in dualistic thinking and have difficulty appreciating the perspectives of others. If your students don't seem to be thinking on as complex a level as you think they should, it might be worthwhile to do some reading on the stages of cognitive development. See, for example, Perry (1970, 1981) or Baxter-Magolda (1992).

Common Anxieties of Beginning Instructors

Part of developing the right mindset prior to entering the classroom entails not becoming too anxious about our efforts. But it's easy to worry—every new instructor does. Almost all of us fear the unknown and each class (even for veteran teachers) is unfamiliar until the bell rings and we walk inside the classroom. The night before the start of a new term, we might not sleep well. The next morning, our stomachs might have too many “butterflies” to let us eat. That same logical, analytical mind that got us into graduate school poses question after unanswerable question about the students we've yet to meet: We wonder if they will “like” us, if they will talk when we are speaking, if they will be easy to control and manage? Will they sit there glassy-eyed and silent or will they smile and raise intelligent questions? And if they ask good questions, we worry that we might not have the right information to respond authoritatively.

Those unaccustomed to public speaking sometimes brood about the possibility of making misstatements—embarrassing ourselves by saying things like “orgasm” instead of “organism.” And these things happen—most of us have made such mistakes or heard speakers make such blunders. Will it happen to us, too?

Worrying about negative evaluation is okay, to some extent. It's not good, however, when apprehension becomes so high that we are immobilized, unable to speak or think clearly, afraid to make eye contact, or deviate from a carefully prepared script of lecture. On the other hand, a little anxiety is quite natural and assists in getting us “pumped” for the preparation and presentations that we need to make. It's important not to appear too nervous to students, as at least one study found that students' estimates of instructor effectiveness were inversely correlated with the teacher's anxiety—the more anxious the instructors appeared, the less effective they were assumed to be (Erdle, Murray, & Ruston, 1985).

How do you reduce the first-day jitters? Here are some practical suggestions:

- Be prepared. Know what you want to accomplish, have your materials ready, make an outline or a “to do” list, and give yourself plenty of time to arrive early. Be familiar with the location of your class. If it is an early-morning class and you must drive,

allow for the possibility of traffic jams or difficulty in finding a parking place. Have a back-up plan in case the bulb in the overhead projector burns out, or if you unexpectedly run out of lecture material with 35 minutes left in the hour. Always have on hand some discussion questions to toss out.

- If you arrive early, engage the students present in conversation. Find out something about them, introduce yourself. Shake hands. Smile a lot.
- Don't try to be perfect. Everyone makes mistakes, and you will, too. If you blunder, don't be terribly defensive and try to blame it on someone else. Laugh if possible. If you can't do that, admit that you goofed. Students are pretty forgiving if you're not arrogant and mean-spirited. It's hard to lecture for a whole semester without making a single misstatement—so don't even try.
- Talk with a friend, companion, mentor, or colleague whenever you need a “reality check.” Those who know you well can sometimes say exactly the right thing to calm and reassure you. If your confidant makes you feel more nervous, then don't confide in that individual any more.
- Try not to get flustered, but take your time to consider a response before speaking. Don't rush yourself. If you are confused by a student's question, ask for additional information or explanation. It is okay to say, “I don't understand. . . .” If you are asked a question that is impossibly difficult, *deflect* it by opening it up to the class. Say, “I'd like to hear some different perspectives on this issue. What do some of you think?”
- Wear a watch so that you can pace yourself and not have to guess what time it is.
- Avoid unrealistic expectations. Not every one of your new pupils will have a scholar's curiosity or be highly motivated. Expect that students will come in late or not show at all during the first meeting. A minority of students may be uncooperative and indicate their disinterest by talking, sleeping, or reading something quite unrelated while you are talking. Don't take it personally.
- Visualize yourself doing a superlative job, being confident, poised, and in command.

Each time you master your fears and “survive” that first class, the better prepared you will be for the next time. As with most things, the more experience we acquire in performing a skill or

behavior, the better we become. By the time you become a “seasoned veteran” and have taught four or five courses, you’ll find that there’s less first-day anxiety. But if you are conscientious and eager to do a good job, you’ll probably always have a twinge of anxiety at the beginning of a new term.

This is what Palmer (1998), a teacher of “thousands of students” has observed about his own apprehensiveness:

After thirty years of teaching, my own fear remains close at hand. It is there when I enter a classroom and feel the undertow into which I have jumped. It is there when I ask a question—and my students keep a silence as stony as if I had asked them to betray their friends. It is there whenever it feels as if I have lost control: a mind-boggling question is asked, an irrational conflict emerges, or students get lost in my lecture because I myself am lost. When a class that has gone badly comes to a merciful end, I am fearful long after it is over—fearful that I am not just a bad teacher but a bad person, so closely is my sense of self tied to the work I do. (p. 36)

Later on, Palmer adds:

As a young teacher, I yearned for the day when I would know my craft so well, be so competent, so experienced, and so powerful, that I could walk into any classroom without feeling afraid. But now, in my late fifties, I know that day will never come. I will always have fears, but I need not be my fears. . . . I need not teach from a fearful place: I can teach from curiosity or hope or empathy or honesty, places that are as real within me as are my fears. I can have fear, but I need not be fear—if I am willing to stand someplace else in my inner landscape. (p. 57)

Being a new faculty member is stressful—there’s no getting around it. You will feel pulled in 17 different directions at times. Besides the classroom issues, there’s often pressure associated with your research and publication. Keep in mind, however, that you were hired because the faculty had faith in your abilities. You were not brought in with the expectation that you would fail. Quite the contrary—you were hand-picked by a very particular group of

highly educated individuals. Your colleagues want you to do well because they will benefit almost as much as you from your success.

Everyone probably knows intuitively what helps in alleviating stress. For some, it is time away from the task—for instance, going to a movie, taking a long walk or a run, or conversation with a friend over mugs of steaming hot chocolate. Be kind to yourself: Take breaks and walks. Set a little time each day for fun or inspirational reading. Go to a conference or plan a short trip. Discover what works for you.

References and Resources

- Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice. A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.
- Baxter-Magolda, M. (1992). *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in students' intellectual development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Boice, R. (1992). *The new faculty member: Supporting and fostering professional development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Center for Teaching and Learning. (1997). *Teaching for inclusion: Diversity in the college classroom*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39, 3–7.
- Chickering, A. W., Gamson, Z. F., & Barsi, L. M. (1991). Inventories of good practice in undergraduate education. In A. W. Chickering & Z. Gamson (Eds.), *Applying the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning #47. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cross, K. P., & Steadman, M. H. (1996). *Classroom research: Implementing the scholarship of teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice. A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.
- Eble, K. E. (1983). *The aims of college teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Erdle, S., Murray, H. G., & Ruston, J. P. (1985). Personality, classroom behavior, and student ratings of college teaching effectiveness: A path analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 394–407.

- Gutek, G. L. (1988). *Philosophical and ideological perspectives on education*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Kaplan, E. J., & Kies, D. A. (1995). Teaching styles and learning styles: Which came first? *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 22, 29–33.
- Menges, R. J., & Associates. (1999). *Faculty in new jobs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moseley, J. G. (1998, Spring). What makes a great teacher? *Transy Today: The Magazine of Transylvania University*, p. 9.
- Ozmon, H., & Craver, S. (1995). *Philosophical foundations of education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Perlman, B., & McCann, L. I. (1998). Students' pet peeves about teaching. *Teaching of Psychology*, 25, 201–202.
- Perry, W. G. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Perry, W. G., Jr. (1981). Cognitive and ethical growth: The making of meaning. In A. W. Chickering and Associates (Eds.), *The modern American college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schoenfeld, A. C., & Magnan, R. (1992). *Mentor in a manual*. Madison, WI: Magna Publications.
- Sorcinelli, M. D. (1991). Research findings on the seven principles. In A. W. Chickering & Z. Gamson (Eds.), *Applying the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning #47. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Svinicki, M. D. (1990). *The changing face of college teaching*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning #42. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weinstein, G., & Obear, K. (1992). Bias issues in the classroom: Encounters with the teaching self. In M. Adams (Ed.), *Promoting diversity in college classrooms: Innovative responses for the curriculum, faculty, and institutions*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning #52. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Endnote

1. These suggestions were largely derived from Chickering, Gamson, and Barsi (1991).