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CONTENTS

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE:

The Niceties: Scripted Provocation, Michelle L. Boettcher, Erica Kelly, and Sydney Reed, p. 1. Using *The Niceties* by Eleanor Burgess to provoke dialogue about academia, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, power, privilege, and other identities in the classroom.

E-LEARNING EXPLAINED: *Mental Health, Wellness and (Online) Learning*

Carly M. Lesoski, p. 3. Focusing on mental health and wellness, especially online.

BAD IDEAS ABOUT TEACHING:

Don't Give Yourself Any Space, Rebecca Weaver, p. 5. This issue's bad idea: not planning for down time.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE:

Chalk and Talk: An Outdoor, Socially Distant Way to Be Social, Patrick Cafferty, p. 6. Taking the classroom outside.

PRACTICING PEDAGOGY: *How Do You Know You're a Good Teacher?*

Thomas J. Tobin, p. 8. Guidance on evaluating your own teaching practice.

NEURODIVERGENT THOUGHTS:

Remembering Access, Lee Skallerup Bessette, p. 11. Our editor reminds us that access should still be at the forefront of our pedagogy and practice.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

The Niceties: Scripted Provocation

*Michelle L. Boettcher, Erica Kelly, and
Sydney Reed*

The *Niceties* by Eleanor Burgess is an ideal reading to provoke dialogue about academia, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, power, privilege, and other identities and topics. We used this play in a graduate course on contemporary college students, but it would fit for English, history, political science, social justice, gender, equity and a variety of other courses. The play explores an exchange between Janine, an older, White woman history professor at an elite institution and Zoe, a Black woman who is an undergraduate junior student in Janine's course.

In both sections of our course this spring, we read this play aloud in class. We are a White woman faculty member, and two Black women students in the class. Students in the course select from a list of texts and present on the text they choose. In this case, we decided to read the play to the rest of the class and then debrief. It served as a catalyst for

important conversation related to a variety of issues in higher education and the larger society.

Course

The contemporary college student course is a graduate course in the student affairs program. Graduates of our program will work in higher education housing, fraternity/sorority life, student activities, academic advising and a variety of other student affairs functional areas. Additionally, students may work in higher education-adjacent jobs and non-profit agencies. Students graduate with skills including event management, programming, advising, supervision, teaching, leadership development, crisis management, and so on. They will provide academic support and resources for students for their out-of-class learning experiences.

This particular course is designed to give students not only an overview of current college students, but historical perspective about students and higher education. In addition to their selected texts, students engage in activities such as creating podcast episodes, engagement around current events, and an examination of college students through the lens of popular culture. The play is an option because it not only touches on the issues above, but also speaks to student activism, social media and how identity informs experience in higher education.



Play

The play is two acts both set in Janine's office. It begins with Janine and Zoe discussing Zoe's paper. Janine tells Zoe to redo the paper because Zoe has made assertions about the role of slaves and slavery in the American Revolution without the appropriate sources and citations. When Zoe asserts that there is not information from the personal perspectives that Janine wants, the discussion escalates into an argument about race and power and Janine's ignorance about the experiences of Black students in her courses.

The scene ends after a heated fight between the characters when Janine realizes that Zoe has recorded the conversation. After trying to get Zoe's phone to delete the recording, the first act ends with Janine asking, "Where is it? Where is it?" and Zoe responding, "It's too late. I hit send."

Act two takes place 3 weeks later. The women discuss their experiences as Janine invites Zoe to write a statement with her to the community. Janine's tenure is under review, she has lost a book contract, and her son who is also a student at the university is not speaking to her. Zoe's parents are disappointed. She received first praise and then death threats because she recorded and released the conversation. The play does not provide closure, but concludes with the inability for either woman to fully understand the perspective of the other.

Performance

We use the word "performance" loosely here. In each section of the course, we read the play (Michelle in both sections with Erica in one and Sydney in the other). We did not act out the blocking but read what was relevant to the class so they understood what was happening. I (Michelle) have used the play before in class as an assigned reading, but I thought it would be interesting and potentially more engaging to read it aloud.

I approached Erica and Sydney as partners in the work. It was important that the people reading the parts fit the description provided by the playwright. This was especially true given the powerful role that race plays throughout the script. This outreach was possible because we had courses together before. It would have been uncomfortable and probably inappropriate to offer this option if we did not have a pre-existing relationship. Additionally, I made it clear that this was an *option* (students had a list of books to choose from, the play would count for the reading for Erica and Sydney). Neither of them was obligated to this assignment and they could opt out at any point. Fortunately, they were both interested. We communicated about the play in advance, in preparation for the reading in class.

The play does not provide closure, but concludes with the inability for either woman to fully understand the perspective of the other.

Suggestions

Ours is a course that met once a week for 2.5 hours. Reading the play took about 2 hours with a short break between acts. This gave us time to do the play and discuss in the same section. Because there were two sections and I (Michelle) taught each of them, we were able to make some adjustments and learn a few things between the Monday and the Wednesday class.

A challenge in processing the first time we read the play was that students did not have time to discuss with a partner or in small groups. We went immediately

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E-LEARNING EXPLAINED

Mental Health, Wellness and (Online) Learning

Carly M. Lesoski

Nearly three quarters of university students in the United States report psychological distress (Abrams, 2022). There is no shortage of articles floating around about the mental health crisis that students, instructors and support staff are facing at institutions across the nation. Universities and colleges are working to expand access to mental health care for their communities, especially for students (Aslanian & Roth, 2021). Although exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, mental health has been an issue of ongoing concern, with rates of anxiety and depression rising among student populations (Lipson et al., 2022).

Instructors have become the “first line of defense” in combating the rise in mental health challenges among college students (Abrams, 2022). The college mental health crisis we’re seeing is not something that an individual instructor can solve. Yet, the power of an individual connection cannot be understated. By building in even a couple of the following strategies, you can show your students you care, fight stigma surrounding mental health, and foster deep learning in your courses.

Share Resources Strategically

As instructors, we often share a plethora of resources for students at the beginning of the term, typically as lists within our syllabus, and then jump into the course content. Of course, this approach makes sense given the stress of packing the terms’ work into a few short

into a large group discussion. As a result, people were hesitant to speak as they did not have time to process what they had just seen. We highly recommend giving students a chance to talk through things before sharing with the entire class. Some possible small group discussion prompts include:

- The playwright asks you to see both women in this play as being noble and both having faults. Did you experience the characters this way or did you feel that one character was “more right” and one was “more wrong”? Why?
- What is the role of truth in *The Niceties*? How does it show up in different ways throughout the play?
- Why do you think Zoe recorded the conversation and why do you think she shared it? Do you think if she had it to do over again that she would do the same things?
- What (if anything) do you think Janine and Zoe learned from this experience?
- The play ends with Zoe saying when she hears Janine speak, she hears “A death rattle.” What do you think she means by that?
- If you could rewrite the ending, how would you like to see the play conclude? Why? What are some reasons you think Eleanor Burgess ends the play the way she does?

A further suggestion is to provide additional copies of the play during class for students who may need to read to follow along in terms of accessibility accommodations. We had an extra copy on hand.

Note that there is a brief reference to rape in the play as well as multiple racial microaggressions. Provide any relevant warnings or comments to students in advance of reading the play.

Response

The class response to the play was overwhelmingly positive. Not only were students actively engaged in the content, but they shared a lot of feelings and reactions

through discussion and mid-semester feedback for the class. When asked what we should “keep” as a part of this course, more than half of the students shared that they would like the play to be kept in the course. Nearly all said that performing the play provided a different way of engaging with the material than readings, watching videos, etc.

Conclusion

The Niceties powerfully engages students in a different format than what they may be used to in the classroom. The content covers a variety of current issues and the characters in the play are simultaneously realistic and have depth while also being vulnerable and having faults. Reading the play rather than assigning it to be read or assigning students to watch it on video provides a forum for emotional response in the moment. That said, there is significant planning, intentionality and critical thinking that needs to take place before bringing the play into the classroom. With the right preparation, this can be a tool to generate tremendous learning and thinking. ❖

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Erica Kelly is a community coordinator at Stanford University and a recent graduate of Clemson University’s student affairs program. As a graduate assistant, she worked with various offices and institutions including housing & dining at Clemson University, student activities at Furman University, and pre-college programs at Harvard University.

Sydney Reed works with the Machen Florida Opportunity Scholars Program at the University of Florida. She is a recent graduate of the M.Ed. program in student affairs at Clemson University where she served as the graduate assistant for social justice education in the Harvey & Lucinda Gantt Multicultural Center. Sydney centers equity in her practice and has a passion for supporting marginalized student success.

weeks. However, it is important to remember that the beginning of the term can overload students with new information, including long lists of resources from multiple instructors.

Prior to the term, consider creating a page in your learning management system (LMS) or a separate document of mental health and wellness resources to share with students. Including these resources in your syllabus adds to the density of your syllabus, making it even more likely that they will be missed. In addition to your institution's resources, include the following:

- Crisis Text Line: <https://www.crisistextline.org/>
- LGBT National Hotline: <https://www.lgbthotline.org/>
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: <https://hotline.rainn.org/online>
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: <https://988lifeline.org/>
- Trans Lifeline: <https://translifeline.org/>
- Veterans Crisis Line: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

Certainly highlight the list of resources you have curated at the beginning of the course, but also remind students about these resources at strategic points throughout the term, such as before exams, midterms and finals. Prior to holiday breaks is another time when students may benefit from a reminder about supports that exist.

Integrate Mental Health and Wellness into the Curriculum

While our curricula are already packed full of essential information for learners, studies show that spotlighting mental health in the classroom can benefit students' wellness (González-García et al., 2021; Theurel et al., 2022). As with any assignment, be sure to frame this work by sharing *why* you are assigning such an activity.

Mays Imad (2021) shares a variety of strategies for supporting students in times of ongoing trauma, including emphasizing the emotional aspects of learning, along with the intellectual aspects. In a recent workshop at Dartmouth, Imad shared a video titled "Understanding Trauma: Learning Brain vs. Survival Brain" (Ham, 2017). Consider sharing this with your students to underscore the importance of mental well-being for learning.

Create small assignments that ask learners to engage in activities for their mental health and wellness. At the beginning of the term, you might ask students to engage with Ryerson University's Thriving in Action Online (<https://>

**Learning is
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We learn from
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tia.torontomu.ca/) resources by choosing one or two of the principles, reading and watching the related resources, and sharing two or more salient strategies or messages. The share-out can happen in a live synchronous session or via asynchronous methods, such as a discussion board. This can also be a time when you invite students to share how they combat stress in their lives and/or mental health resources they find particularly useful.

Some instructors also find content-relevant ways to raise awareness of mental health and wellness, which will look different depending on your field. In a statistics course, one might

include exercises working with mental illness-related data. In a language course, students could engage with target language texts discussing mental health and students their age in the target culture(s). Journalism students could compare language around mental health and mental illness in various sources.

Create Space for Relationships

Learning is an inherently relational practice. We learn from our relationships to one another and by mapping relationships between concepts. Research has long held that instructor-student and student-student interaction are key for student learning. Beyond the basics of discussion boards, one-on-one meetings, and other often-suggested strategies for building rapport with and between students, consider what your policies and language are communicating to them. Strict attendance and no late work policies can unintentionally communicate with students that their well-being is not important, thus removing any space for relationships to form.

Offer flexibility within the structures you've created and communicate that with students. Some instructors offer one or two homework passes that allow students to submit their work late, often with a deadline of a week after the due date, with no questions asked. You might also consider implementing mental health days for your students, allowing them to miss a certain number of synchronous activities, should your course include such elements.

If you're teaching a smaller course load or have smaller course sizes, consider sending out individual check-in emails to your students around the midterm. In my own courses, I have shared with students what their current grade is, how I see them thriving, and areas where I can provide them with further support. However, I fully acknowledge that not everyone has time for individual emails. Instead, you might consider

sending an email or LMS message to all students (remember to use BCC) sharing general comments on what is going well in the course and potential areas of improvement. Include an invitation to students to respond and schedule a meeting with you, along with a reminder that your goal is their success.

Don't Forget Yourself

Individual actions, paired with larger cultural and institutional shifts, can support students' mental health and well-being through their learning experience. Yet, it is key to the success of our institutions that we center instructor mental health as well. I have previously offered my thoughts on kindness and setting boundaries with students as a method of self care for instructors (Lesoski, 2021). Be sure to center your own health, physical and mental, as much as you can. Your wellness is as important as student wellness. ❖

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BAD IDEAS ABOUT TEACHING

Don't Give Yourself Any Space

Rebecca Weaver

The other day I had a hard-scramble morning—the sort of morning where things don't start or become right. I'd slept poorly due to allergies and was trying to alleviate my sinus headache when, for the second day in a row, a chainsaw and woodchipper started up before 8 a.m. in a neighbor's yard. I scrambled for my noise-canceling headphones and then went to get my glasses, which, I discovered, I'd left at my office.

When I give myself time to think about it, the air rushes in and the flames rush out.

Then I went across the street to feed our neighbor's dogs and they were ... gone. Chewed tissue was splayed across the living room carpet, indicating they'd been there since I'd locked the door the night before. I went through the house, calling their names. I went out on the back porch, and still nothing. I went and checked the gates: secure. I ran back into the house, looked again, and then back outside, panic rising. I then ran around the perimeter of the yard, checking the fence for holes, not caring if neighbors spied my boxer/flannel morning couture. I rounded the corner of the garage and the dogs were there—they had chased something under a woodpile and were huddled around it,

deadly silent until they saw me and realized they'd missed breakfast.

I waited while one of the dogs v-e-r-y slowly ate, then looked at my phone and realized I only had about 15 minutes to get dressed for school and leave—no writing time. I drove in thinking I'd somehow not been good enough to write that morning, knowing the deadline for this issue was coming up. I was also chiding myself for other projects or items I had wanted to get more of done by this point in time, and for being so thrown off by these small things when my friends and colleagues are struggling with major health issues, family crisis care, institutional precarity and all kinds of other issues.

I'd stopped giving myself room. I parked and twisted in my seat to reach for my bag and a familiar twitch of pain began to rise in my shoulder. I paused for a breath and readjusted my arm. I remembered in that small moment that it was a bad idea to not give myself any space. The dogs were fine, I made it to school on time, and I'd left the chainsaws behind me!

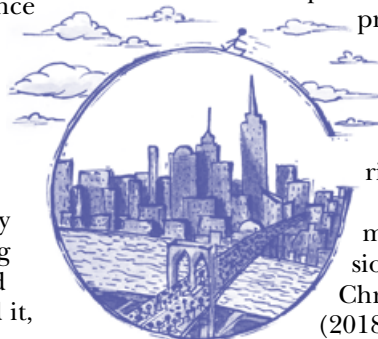
It's a bad idea to not give ourselves any space.

In a powerful thread about grace on Twitter on October 24, Karen Costa, a faculty development facilitator specializing in online pedagogy and trauma awareness, said that "Grace is the space between what we think should be done and what we are able to do" (2022). This rings all the bells for me: Here I was, in this cycle of panic, rushing around and dealing with a crisis and being down on myself for not getting some "work" done. That morning was a metonym for how I've felt all year.

A better idea is to give ourselves some space: room to have a less

productive morning, to not look at the checklist the second that coffee reaches our brains, to not shift right away to the desk.

In their book on mindful self-compassion, Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer (2018) talk about the idea



of “backdraft,” where someone who’s begun some purposeful work around self-compassion might feel moments of anxiety or fear when they practice moves of self-compassion, such as diaphragmatic breathing or putting a hand softly on one’s chest. They call it backdraft because it’s about what we create room and space for. The authors describe it in firefighting terms: backdraft “happens when all available oxygen and fresh oxygen is introduced through an open window or door. The air rushes in and the flames rush out” (p. 57).

For me, these moments are where a flash of anger or sadness comes up as I think about everyone we’ve lost and how systems and institutions let us down and continue to do so. Many faculty are burned out and cosmically exhausted—so exhausted that long sleeps, poolside drinks or mystery novels won’t help much. This raises the importance of purposeful rest here—taking a break while also doing some active reflection in that space—asking, as my therapist would put it: What did we need from institutions and systems that we didn’t get? As a colleague and I were discussing the other day, we learned where the limits of support are, we learned about the limits of trust in our expertise and abilities, and we learned who our friends are. We’re currently learning, in our classrooms, about the depth and reach of the cumulative effects of the pandemic on first-year students.

Rebecca Pope-Ruark, in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* essay adapted from her book *Unraveling Faculty Burnout: Pathways to Reckoning and Renewal*, argues that burnout is a “workplace problem, not a worker problem,” and urges for the importance of cultural changes: “even if the individual coping strategies are working for you or for many on your campus, the pervasiveness of the challenge means we must undertake a larger cultural change” (Pope-Ruark, 2022, p. 3). The structural change we need won’t come without the cultural change that we’ve already seen signs

of: reducing the tendencies toward toxic productivity and toxic rigor.

How would it feel to pause, just for a minute? Usually, I reserve my mornings (before going to school) for writing. This term I have two mornings where I don’t go in until a little later, and recently, have begun using one of those mornings to pause. Instead of trying to jam in a couple hours of writing before heading off to class, I don’t write more than a few minutes of freewriting. Then I intentionally move—walk or stretch—and clean. This does a few things for me: it lowers stress, spurs me to reflect and helps me feel better for the rest of the week.

Intentional pausing can also benefit our students. This semester, as we’re all getting used to things in the third year of the pandemic, I find we’re all slower. I’ve ratcheted down the “weight” of a major project so that we spend time working on it in class without needing a lot of time outside class. So many of our students need time and space yet aren’t getting that from institutions—at least we can do a little in the classroom itself. This empowers more students to turn the assignment in, and makes it a little easier for me to assess.

What if grace is the point?

Another moment of pause I’ve introduced is “take an actual break”: during work sessions in class, I set a loud phone timer and enthusiastically urge my students to separate themselves from the work they’re doing for 5 minutes (which feels luxurious in a 75-minute class period). They can talk to their neighbor, stretch, get up and walk outside, open their Insta, but *not* work. Taking intentional breaks helps our metacognition, to be sure, but breaks are grace. What if grace is the point?

Returning to the question of “What did we need that we didn’t get?”, it’s likely that we might be grieving as we answer. Despite the experience of “backdraft,” Germer and Neff advocate that we not stop attempts at self-compassion, but

instead, take the pressure off to do it “correctly.” How would it feel, they ask, to try a less intense move toward self-compassion?

We need to remember that, as Pope-Ruark (2022) says, “institutional problems deserve institutional solutions” (Pope-Ruark, 2022, p. 3). But in the absence of those solutions (in some cases, in the face of absolute rejection of those solutions), how would it feel for faculty to take the pressure off ourselves and each other: to pause, to breathe, and give space and grace? In what small ways can we show up for each other? How would it feel to lead with space and grace?

Speaking of giving ourselves some room, the next two Bad Ideas columns will be guest-written while I take some time to deal with a health issue. The January columnist will be Dr. Liz Hutter, Assistant Professor of Technical Communication at University of Dayton. She is one of the best pedagogical thinkers I know. The February columnist will be Dr. Jacinta Yanders, Associate Professor of English at the College of DuPage. I return over and over to her blog *Teach to Learn. Learn to Teach*. ❖

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SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

Chalk and Talk: An Outdoor, Socially Distant Way to Be Social

Patrick Cafferty

Ten years ago, I began running with my students every week to better get to know them and

to let them better get to know me (Cafferty, 2021a; FOX5 Atlanta, 2016). Stripping away the formality of the office and auditorium let students speak more freely with me about their college experiences and future plans. This program, called the Active Office Hour, was often the highlight of my week. Students also enjoyed the Active Office Hour and frequently mentioned this informal opportunity to chat in their course evaluations and to their peers and siblings who would then enroll in my courses. I lamented the loss of my program in spring 2020 when my institution fully transitioned to emergency online learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Downey, 2020).

My efforts to reach out to my students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have been inspired by my 6-year-old child. One day, while coloring illustrations of unicorns with my daughter, I remembered I had a set of physiology coloring books on my bookshelf (Kapit et al., 2000; Marieb, 2015). It occurred to me that my human physiology students might enjoy coloring, too. During the fall 2020 semester, while all my classes were fully online, I dedicated one office hour a week, called the Artistic Office Hour, to coloring figures from physiology coloring books and chatting using videoconferencing software (Cafferty, 2021b). My daughter would join us whenever she was home from preschool and to this day still talks about coloring pictures of human brains, different body cells, and getting to speak with my students. Student reactions to the Artistic Office Hour were overwhelmingly enthusiastic so I continued this program in fall 2021.

Face-to-face classes resumed in fall 2021 and when the semester began, COVID-19 cases rose on campus due to spread of the coronavirus Delta variant. At this time, I held all office hours and meetings for my students online, including the Artistic Office Hour. When the number of COVID-19 cases on campus declined in October

(St. Clair, 2021), I sought a way to bring my students together in person while outdoors at a social distance. Inspiration for a new program came to me while attending the birthday party of my daughter's classmate on a warm autumn weekend. While patiently waiting for cake and the unwrapping of presents, my daughter and her friends drew and colored pictures all over a driveway using sidewalk chalk. I suspected my students would enjoy an opportunity to review class material by drawing class content on campus sidewalks using chalk. Thus, I pitched my idea for an in-person, outdoor form of the Artistic Office Hour, that I called Chalk and Talk, when I returned to class. My students were excited to try it.

Promotion and preparation

In late autumn 2021, I held Chalk and Talk sessions on days when the weather was favorable during the scheduled weekly Artistic Office Hour time. On rainy days, I held the Artistic Office Hour online. I communicated the date and time, campus location and weather forecast for Chalk and Talk sessions as announcements before classes and on the front pages of class sites on our institutional learning management system. The only supply required for Chalk and Talk sessions was sidewalk chalk; however, on some days I also brought snacks, including Halloween candy at the end of October and candy canes at the end of the semester. Students appreciated snacks and this contributed to a festive atmosphere. Additionally, I printed handouts with images used in class that I could provide for any students who asked for recommendations on what to draw during Chalk and Talk.

What we drew

During Chalk and Talk sessions, most students drew images of their favorite subjects or challenging topics

they wanted to discuss with their peers and myself from our human physiology class. Most often, individual students drew human organs like the brain, heart, or kidneys; different cell types; or concept maps of course material. Occasionally, students and I would draw larger, more complex illustrations as a team. For example, one week we drew representations of brain regions responsible for processing different forms of information called homunculi (Catani, 2017). On a subsequent week, we drew a figure that relates electrical and mechanical events of the heart called the Wigger's diagram (Mitchell & Wang, 2014). Team drawings required some planning and discussion, which allowed for review of class material and the opportunity for students to ask questions.

Reactions by students and the campus community

My human physiology students completed an anonymous survey following course completion ($n = 120$ survey respondents). This survey revealed students viewed the Chalk and Talk program positively. For example, 90% of students responded they would recommend attending Chalk and Talk sessions to others and 95% of students recommended continuing the Chalk and Talk program during the spring 2022 semester. Students indicated they attended Chalk and Talk to interact with their peers in person and to review course material in a novel manner. For instance, one student wrote, "I wanted to interact with my peers in a different environment and

thought it would be a great way to review information we had been learning in class." Students also attended Chalk and Talk sessions to have fun; for example, another student stated, "Over the course of the semester I realized



how therapeutic drawing was during online artistic office hours, so I thought it would be more fun to draw things out with chalk on a bigger scale. It was a lot of fun and also collaborative to come in person and draw your own drawings with someone else. I also thought it would be cool to interact with Dr. Cafferty and other students in person outside of class.”

Interestingly, the impact of the Chalk and Talk program extended well beyond my classes. Frequently, passersby would stop to talk to my students and I, ask questions, and take pictures of drawings during Chalk and Talk sessions. On numerous occasions, graduate and medical students introduced themselves and discussed course material with my undergraduates. During the final Chalk and Talk session of the year, a medical doctor introduced herself to me and congratulated us for our work. She then explained that her memories of learning human physiology while isolated in a library carrel were “extremely painful” and exclaimed that our program appeared far more fun. Later that day, the Emory School of Medicine posted pictures of our chalk drawings on Instagram with a caption that read, “When med geeks do chalk drawings. Another beautiful installment!”

Discussion

A number of studies have demonstrated low office hour attendance is common regardless of evidence that students benefit from office hour visits (Guerrero & Rod, 2013; Smith et al., 2017). To make office hours less formal and more inviting, some faculty have held office hours during campus walks (Rawle, 2017; Steinhaus, 1999) or at a café (Glynn-Adey, 2020). Similarly, the Chalk and Talk program is an informal way for my students and I to gather, review course material and chat. Positive and enthusiastic reactions to Chalk and Talk came not only from program attendees, but also from the greater campus community and students who were unable

to attend. In an end-of-year course survey, one student exclaimed, “I loved this idea so much!!! I was never able to attend because I had a conflict, but I really appreciated that it was offered.”

Due to the strain upon the health-care system caused by spread of the COVID-19 Omicron variant, all spring 2022 courses have begun virtually at my institution (Tagami, 2021). Consequently, I am currently holding regular office hours, meetings and the Artistic Office Hour online to meet with my students. I greatly look forward to gathering outdoors with my students to work on artistic projects in the future once face-to-face instruction resumes and the campus prevalence of COVID-19 is low. ❖

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PRACTICING PEDAGOGY

How Do You Know You're a Good Teacher?

Thomas J. Tobin

For many instructors, teaching is a practice handed down in a “see it, do it, share it” model that has perpetuated many unhelpful practices—sustained lecturing (French & Kennedy, 2017), simple multiple-choice assessments (Nicol, 2007), narrated bullet-point presentations (Manning & Amare, 2005)—and a few harmfully racist, sexist and ableist frameworks (Grant & Zwier, 2011).

So, how do you know you're a good teacher? Educational researchers agree on five indicators: standards, success, expertise, engagement and feedback. In each, we can update common—and mistaken—ideas about teaching.

Sign 1: High Standards

Egyptians and Greeks in antiquity used memory aids, goals and guided exploration toward “ideal” knowledge (Houston, 2009). In the 19th and 20th centuries, the eugenics movement focused on nurturing the most talented (usually White and male) learners—and supervising children while their parents worked (Stoskopf, 2002). Vestiges of this shift remain in today's classroom patterns.

The Wrong Way

We equate “high standards” with classroom discipline. Learners able to sit quietly, attend to lectures and repeat the teacher's model get rewarded. Teachers become strictly

rule-based (Colander, 2016), preparing learners for the perceived harsh realities of the “real world.” The “winners” are best able to navigate school’s processes and systems, and it gets tougher to succeed as learners progress. Recall the last time a colleague argued against an inclusive practice as dumbing things down: “students won’t get this kind of coddling on the job.” Rigor in service of institutional structures is misplaced.

The Right Way

Yes, we should have shared norms (Macdonald et al., 2016) about how our learning spaces operate. Tying grades to actions that aren’t part of learning is, in Moro’s (2020) memorable phrase, “cop shit.” Instead of late penalties and infractions, good teachers assess learning based on students’ abilities, questions and diligence in the face of challenges. Good teachers keep the rigor level high—for the subject matter—while explicitly lowering the anxiety and pressure of artificial structures. They structure the course as a guide for learners, rather than a gauntlet they must survive.

Sign 2: Student Success

Good teachers produce successful students, and poor teachers don’t, right? Not true (Eells, 2011). Student ratings reward popular teachers (Strumm, 2019) and show significant biases against women, people of color and differently abled instructors (Chisadza et al., 2019). Learners’ perceptions seldom correlate with actual progress (Aditomo & Köhler, 2020). Good teachers can’t overcome poorly prepared students, scant resources or limited time to accomplish outcomes. Poor teachers can succeed with already-high-achieving learners, rich resources or sufficient time for learners to work through difficulties.

The Wrong Way

Because instructors are rewarded when students earn good marks, we can mistakenly equate assessment success with success in learning. Learners who earn their Cs will

rate us highly: job security for us (McMurtrie, 2022). Low performers must not be very smart or capable in the first place.

The Right Way

The most consistent hallmark of good teaching is strong learner performance in the year or semester *following* their work with you (Shavelson et al., 2010). The best teachers give learners strategies that serve them throughout their learning journeys. When students enter without skills or background knowledge, we make the effort to bring learners up to speed. Put plainly, instructors’ performance is affected by the characteristics of the students assigned to them.

Good teachers recognize that “gains in student achievement are influenced by much more than any individual teacher,” such as “class sizes, curriculum materials, instructional time, availability of specialists and tutors, and resources for learning (books, computers, science labs, and more)” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Good teachers don’t measure everyone by the same yardstick. We establish starting points for each learner and measure progress against those baselines. Not everyone will earn an A, and that’s all right—good teachers help students make measurable gains against prior states.

Sign 3: Content Expertise

Our specialized graduate study prepares us to perform our expertise (Watson, 2018)—mostly by lecturing. As instructors, this is problematic. We must help learners move toward professional understanding. How do we stop showing what *we* know and shift the focus onto our students?

The Wrong Way

There is nothing wrong with lecturing (Phoenix, 1987) *per se*. But we can assume we must be in control in the classroom, via sustained lecturing without pauses for reflection, questions and discussion. When I first began teaching, I was so focused on covering the content that I rigidly worked

my way through my notes during class periods. There was nearly no interaction. I spent so much effort trying to pour information into my students’ heads (and prove I was the expert in the room) that I omitted time for them to experiment and practice.

The Right Way

Good teachers share how they moved from beginner knowledge into expertise. This is “instructor fluency” (Serra & Magreehan, 2016), wherein we show not just the end points of our scholarly journeys, but also where we are in conversation with colleagues about big questions in our fields. You have to have expertise to be a good teacher—but wear it lightly. Make space for learner voices, ideas and questions as you guide students toward professional-level practice.

Sign 4: Classroom Engagement

Good teachers spark engagement, interest, persistence and “reciprocity and cooperation among students” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). We inspire and provide models for good practices that learners can emulate and practice.

The Wrong Way

Often, only our well-prepared, outgoing, privileged students are active in class conversations. We may wait only 5 seconds (Micari & Calkins, 2021) after asking “are there any questions” before returning to presentation mode. Even using active learning techniques (Lombardi & Shipley, 2021), we can unintentionally sabotage learning by asking only for volunteer contributions to the whole-class discussion.

Under such conditions, White male students from affluent socioeconomic backgrounds tend to dominate classroom interactions (Cooper et al., 2018). This leads to self-policing among other students, who shut down and avoid participation, feeling “less smart than” or “not as quick as” their more privileged peers.

The Right Way

Good teachers design interactions ahead of time to make space for variability among learners. Adopting differentiated instruction (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2020) or universal design for learning (UDL; CAST, 2018) allows learners from a variety of backgrounds, levels of preparedness and social groups to take part in classroom activities. Good teachers intentionally recruit student interest, help them stick with challenging topics, and share ways to self-regulate—time management, task chunking and setting expectations.

Sign 5: Prompt Feedback

Good teachers provide feedback so that learners can benefit from guidance, strengthen their practice, and build their portfolio of skills toward expertise. Feedback is more effective the closer it occurs to the actual activity (Smitherman, 2020). Instructors must balance the speed of their responses against the time it takes to provide detailed and meaningful responses.

The Wrong Way

In a 200-person lecture course, or across five separate class preps, we can't provide individualized feedback for every learner on every activity, so we rely on recall-level multiple-choice questions (McKenna, 2019) to keep students on track. Those measure low-level thinking skills, and even with automated feedback, students don't often understand their knowledge gaps.

Further, we create unintentional anxiety and stress when examinations or large projects carry enough grade weight to potentially sink learners' final grades. By adopting punitive anti-cheating measures—exam time limits, browser lockdown software, artificial-intelligence remote exam proctoring—instructors raise pressure and anxiety for learners as well.

The Right Way

Some of our feedback should be assessment of students' learning, but most should be assessment for

learning (Schellekens et al., 2021). Make the majority of activities opportunities for practice, with brief, targeted feedback. Don't respond to every tiny thing in every given activity. Offer students options, voices and choices by decoupling feedback from grades. Lower time pressure: don't put time limits on activities, including exams. Lower due-date pressure: allow late submissions, even if you lower the grade. Lower grade anxiety: spread out points across activities, or consider minimalist grading (Elbow, n.d.), specifications grading (Nilson, 2015) or ungrading (Stommel, 2018).

Conclusion

Each of these five signs of good teaching can be done in poor or skilled ways—and lots of combinations in between. If you recognize that you've been using a problematic practice, don't beat yourself up about it. We tend to teach in the ways that we were taught, and in ways from which we ourselves benefited when we were learners.

There is no "perfect" teacher out there. We can strengthen our teaching by paying attention to the gaps that our students show us, both overtly and in the "missing pieces" of inaction or disengagement. That's a great place to engage in conversation about what works well: connect with your fellow teachers and your institution's support staff—especially your librarians, media-support, instructional design and data-interpretation colleagues—and use these signs of good teaching as a springboard for conversation, research and experimenting together. ❖

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NEURODIVERGENT THOUGHTS

Remembering Access

Lee Skallerup Bessette

The Fall 2022 semester is now more than half over, and when you read this, it will almost be time for the winter holiday break. Things, at least on campus and in the world of higher education, have largely returned to normal. At least, something closer to normal than what we've experienced the last few years. Classes that are meant to be in person are back in person, all activities have returned, and our campuses are once again busy hives of activity.

Except of course where they haven't.

The pandemic is still impacting lives. Inflation is hitting those at the bottom of the economic ladder the hardest. People are still disabled, immunocompromised, neurodivergent, racialized, gendered, etc. Normal for many of us wasn't working prior to the pandemic, and as we rush to get back to some semblance of what life was like before, we are often forgetting or erasing the hard-earned access that was introduced because of the pandemic.

Structural Changes

The majority of faculty made structural changes to their courses during the pandemic to provide more equitable

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access—reducing or eliminating high-stakes exams, providing more scaffolding, shifting overall assessment practices, experimenting with different modalities, relaxing attendance policies, etc. These were made necessary because the *majority* of our students (well, ok, *all* of our students) were suffering in the face of all the changes due to the pandemic. And many larger, institutional barriers were lifted or at least temporarily changed or suspended in order to help students succeed.

But now that our students are back in the classroom, if not on campus (depending on your institution type), it's easy to slide back into old pedagogical and structural habits where disability, neurodiversity, etc., is the largely invisible exception rather than part of the expected norm. The pandemic, however, has empowered those largely left in those invisible margins to increasingly speak out and ask the important question: If we were able to do this during the pandemic, why can't we keep doing it?

Here's where we need to look at the structural changes that need to take place at our institutions to truly center access as a value and as the norm.

Imagining Different

I recently participated in a speculative exercise around diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). We were asked to imagine what our campus would look like in the future if our efforts around DEI and pedagogy were fully implemented

and successful. The facilitator was coming from a background in speculative fiction and Afrofuturism, which was music to my ears. I leaned all the way in on the assignment and let my imagination run wild.

Would we still need an academic resource center? A financial aid office? Certainly, all our buildings would be accessible, as would our classroom spaces. What about the Honor Council?

My mind went immediately to various stuck points that students run into (sometimes literally) that can prevent them from being successful at university: physical accessibility, accommodations, money and academic integrity. Many of these services exist to address an accessibility need *after the fact* and require extensive documentation and can also be quite punitive, invasive and intimidating.

As for the building, well, many campuses can barely keep up with differed maintenance, let alone make learning spaces as physically accessible as possible; this is probably the most radical part of my imaginary future.

But just think if there wasn't an arduous process for students to get accommodations, to have enough money to live, to not worry about being kicked out because of academic pressure... That these elements were a more integral part of the learning experience and not an add-on service?



Our Future Students

In the last issue I wrote about the book *The Stolen Year* by Anya Kamenetz (Public Affairs, 2022). Pair what was written about these K–12 students' experience with the falling number of college-bound students every year, and we are going to have to make structural changes to our teaching and our institutions if we are going to stay in business. And it's not because the students will expect it, it's because they will need it to be successful.

That's the reality. We can lament about "students these days" all we want but that doesn't change the reality of the students and their shared experiences over the past 3 years when they show up in our classrooms. They did not have a "typical" educational experience, if there ever were such a thing. To expect not to adapt is foolish and shortsighted.

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I don't have any easy answers; the present reality is constantly shifting and hard to predict, and it can be easy to just fall back on what we know, what we're used to, what's familiar, what's worked before. Except it didn't work, not for everyone at least. And if we keep that in mind, if we keep accessibility at the forefront of our minds as we work to address current and future challenges, then I think there's a chance we can truly make a difference. ❖

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