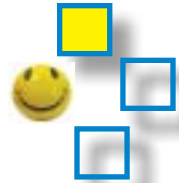


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Teaching Concerns of New (and Not So New?) Teachers

THE LIST OF CONCERNS was compiled from a qualitative analysis of 10 years of graduate teaching assistants' online discussion posts. The 120 students wrote the posts in a three-credit course that prepared them to teach beginning communication courses. It's a list that raises some interesting questions. Are the concerns legitimate? They are listed in order of importance. Does that order change as teaching experience accrues? Should it change? Which of these are ongoing concerns, and perhaps, most importantly, how do we deal with the issues raised by the concerns?

Here are their top teaching concerns.

Exhibiting command of the material – It's about those questions new teachers are afraid they can't answer and what that does to their credibility. At what point do we start realizing that what we don't know enables us to join students in the learning adventure?

Balancing authority and rapport – "I don't want to be some Patton-like instructor that rules with an iron fist," writes one TA, but he also doesn't want to get emails that greet him with "Yo" and call him "dude." (p. 91) How do we balance being caring and empathetic with upholding standards? We can strike the balance with one student or in a course, but it tips easily, often unexpectedly.

Dealing with communication anxiety – Teaching involves public speaking, and that makes most people very nervous. After teaching for some years, we learn to control the anxiety. But does it ever go away? How do you feel on the first day of class?

Engaging students – The concern here: how to teach and not bore students. Perhaps this should be of greater concern to some faculty who either don't know or don't care that they're boring students. The challenge is getting and keeping students interested in subject matter they pretty much expect to be boring. We acquire strategies. Some of them

work, some of the time. It's another of those ongoing quests.

Managing students' perceptions – New teachers often look like students. It's a concern that passes all too quickly.

Juggling roles – Interesting that right from the start, these new teachers weren't so much concerned about transitioning between roles but about finding time for all of them. It's another balance issue—finding time for all the responsibilities of an academic position and for life beyond work. If you care about teaching and want to do it well, it demands a lot of time. But how do we know when it's consuming too much time?

Resolving grade complexities – The hodgepodge of concerns here started with making the judgment calls grading requires. It also included having high but reachable standards, being challenged about grading policies, and dealing with irate students who are firmly convinced they have been graded unfairly. Again, we acquire strategies along the way. Some of them work, some of the time. We get caught in the grades-matter conundrum. As long as they do, we have to be concerned, but being concerned inflates their importance still further.

Being memorable – These new teachers aspired to be remembered by their students, not just for course content but because the course had value beyond the content. Most of us begin teaching careers with high aspirations. Most of us discover that we infrequently end up changing students' lives. Should we abandon attempts to be memorable for something more realistic?

Negotiating flexibility – It's about when to enforce a course policy and when the student deserves a pass. It's also about when to change an assignment that isn't working, or when to adjust the calendar to tackle some major confusion in a class. Now it's about cell phone policies—to take a stand, cave

in, or find something in the middle. Is being appropriately flexible a skill that can be mastered?

Overcoming cultural differences – It was last on the list of concerns for these students, but at least it's on the list. It's a concern if you're from a different culture and a concern if you're teaching students who don't belong to the majority group. It can be as straightforward as coming from the country and teaching urban students, or as confounding as cultural norms about gender and race. It's an ongoing concern and deserves a place higher on the list.

Reference:

Dannels, D. P. (2015). Teacher communication concerns revisited: Calling into question the gnawing pull towards equilibrium. *Communication Education*, 64 (1), 83-106.

Maryellen Weimer, PhD; Teaching Professor Blog: Teaching Concerns of New (and Not SO New?) Teachers"; Faculty Focus; October 7, 2015; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/teaching-concerns-of-new-and-not-so-new-teachers/>]; October 14, 2015.

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Taking the Tech Out of Technology

DISCUSSION BOARDS. Google documents. YouTube videos. TED Talks. Khan Academy. These are just a few of the many resources some of us have used in our ever-growing arsenal of techie tools. We want to stay on the cutting edge. The Sloan Consortium (now Online Learning Consortium) predicts this trend toward an increased usage of technology will continue into the foreseeable future. So we continue to hone our skills, taking advantage of an ever-increasing array of technological options. We attend conferences, exchange ideas with colleagues, read up on the latest innovations—all in the interest of keeping our teaching on the technology edge. But I sometimes worry that we may have gone over the edge.

Recently I presented at one of these technology conferences. I started off talking about the essence of technology from a theoretical viewpoint. The audience's eyes glazed over as if I were presenting sociological theory to my Monday morning class. I moved on to suggest specific tools for the classroom, and when I did, something strange happened. Heads bowed in unison as everyone feverishly wrote or typed notes. I got the message: they wanted tools—exciting and cutting-edge tools!

Many of us are looking for tools that add ease and efficiency to our teaching endeavors. I admit to bursting out of conference sessions myself stoked with a new armament of tools

ready to be used in my classes at a moment's notice. Nothing could stop my infatuation with tech tools before my experiences in Virtual College.

Virtual College, run by the college where I teach, aspires to enhance student learning with cutting-edge technology. Virtual College has been given the resources that make state-of-the-art technology available to our students. I was asked to coach faculty who are teaching in this Virtual College. So I decided I'd start out by doing what any good coach would do. I'd get to know the faculty and the students they serve. I created surveys and sent them out. When they came back, I coded the data and ran tests. I couldn't wait to get the results. Faculty and students would tell me what technologies worked well, and I would recommend more widespread use of these in the Virtual College. However, after combing through the results, one theme emerged, and it was not at all what I expected.

Technology is great, but it is only a means to an end—it is not the end! That theme kept percolating through the data. Students wanted and needed something more out of their courses, and it wasn't technology. They wanted instructor contact. Students wanted to know they could talk to their instructor, get feedback, and perhaps engage in a level of social (albeit professional) bonding. So what originally turned out to be a tool-seeking expedition in the name of

good course development ended up being something more fundamental and basic—social connection. And faculty wanted the same thing. They wanted to know how students were progressing in the course just like students wanted to know how they were doing in the course.

Somewhere along the line, our excitement over the latest technological tools has started focusing on the wrong thing. The excitement ought to reside in the praxis of teaching, not the use of technology. I see many of us at a crossroads of sorts. Do we invest our time, energy, and other resources in technological tools, or do we invest in teaching? Somewhere in this chasm of choices lies the answer. A blend of teaching practices, technology, and basic human contact just might be the recipe needed. I don't think this should come as a surprise to us. We are indeed social animals. No matter what new technological bells and whistles become available, I expect that teachers and students will continue to need and cherish those moments of connection.

Samuel Buemi is an instructor at Northcentral Technical College.

Samuel Buemi; Teaching Professor; "Taking the Tech Out of Technology"; Faculty Focus; October 2, 2015; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-with-technology-articles/taking-the-tech-out-of-technology/>]; October 14, 2015.

Actual misphrased excerpts from student science exam papers

[<http://www.ahajokes.com/answers.html>]

Charles Darwin was a naturalist who wrote the organ of the species.

Benjamin Franklin produced electricity by rubbing cats backwards.

The theory of evolution was greatly objected to because it made man think.

Three kinds of blood vessels are arteries, vanes and caterpillars.

The process of turning steam back into water again is called conversation.

A magnet is something you find crawling all over a dead cat.

The Earth makes one resolution every 24 hours.

The cuckoo bird does not lay his own eggs.

To collect fumes of sulfur, hold a deacon over a flame in a test tube.

Parallel lines never meet, unless you bend one or both of them.

Algebraical symbols are used when you do not know what you are talking about.

A circle is a line which meets its other end without ending.

The pistol of a flower is its only protection against insects.

We believe that the reptiles came from the amphibians by spontaneous generation and study of rocks.

English sparrows and starlings eat the farmers grain and soil his corpse.

By self-pollination, the farmer may get a flock of long-haired sheep.

Dew is formed on leaves when the sun shines down on them and makes them perspire.

Vegetative propagation is the process by which one individual manufactures another individual by accident.

A super-saturated solution is one that holds more than it can hold.

A triangle which has an angle of 135 degrees is called an obscene triangle.

Blood flows down one leg and up the other.