



## Lifelong Learning: Discovering and Developing Your Teaching Skills

“SELF-KNOWLEDGE IS THE beginning of all knowledge,” writes C. Roland Christensen, one of the true masters of discussion teaching. He is referring to his development as a teacher—how he arrived at the techniques that made him so effective. Most teacher accounts of growth are not as instructive and insightful as this one. Best of all, the approach he used to develop his discussion leadership skills is one that can be used to develop many teaching skills.

“Slowly, I learned to make my classroom observations more productive by focusing them. I started to try out tiny experiments. Instead of waiting for the class to assemble before making my appearance, for example, I tried arriving early to see what that might teach me about my students. The exercise proved valuable.” (p. 103) It helped Christensen get to know his students—who played sports, who had three tests that week, who had some experiences relevant to the day’s topic. That knowledge of individual students enabled him to stop calling on students alphabetically and start calling on those with relevant backgrounds and interests.

He notes that “much of what we teachers do in the classroom seems intuitive. My task was to examine this apparently automatic behavior, show its workings, and identify areas in which judgment might play a part.” (p. 103) He found it all but impossible to reflect on classroom discussions as they unfolded, saying that it was “like trying to meditate on a speeding fire engine.” (p. 103) Progress was also limited when he looked for general principles to guide his understanding. He discovered that he needed to be much more concrete and specific. “When I came

to class with a simple, practical teaching experiment in mind—something like evaluating the effect of calling on students seated in different parts of the room—I got results. Sometimes I focused on the art of questioning. What happens when I ask the same question of two students in succession? ... Sometimes I concentrated on phrasing. What is the difference between using a student’s name and simply gesturing?” (p. 104)

His approach makes sense, and, as he discovered, the classroom offers countless opportunities for this kind of experimentation and observation. “The classroom proved to be a perfect laboratory for my nuts-and-bolts experiments with the discussion process. As an observer, of myself and of other instructors in action, I truly began to learn.” (p. 104)

Most of us aspire to teach well. However, even though we want to continue to improve and grow throughout the years, most of us devote precious little time to our development. We look for new techniques and regularly try new strategies and approaches, but Christensen challenges us to start someplace else—to acquaint ourselves with ourselves as teachers.

Christensen believes in “the teachability of teaching. For the past two decades my pedagogical research, statements, and teaching objectives have centered on this fundamental conviction: good teachers are made, not born.” (p. 117) What he says next should be a source of inspiration for all of us: “My belief in the essential magnificence of teaching grows ever stronger. What I have learned about the abiding conundrums of discussion pedagogy makes me even more

certain that teaching is a great learning experience. And for the study of teaching, what better laboratory than the classroom, where the teacher can experiment with the real ‘stuff’ and test, modify, and retest all the hypotheses?” (p. 110) He concludes with a telling question: “Is a lifetime in the classroom really long enough to figure out what effective teaching is all about?” (p. 111)

Reference: Christensen, C. R. (1991). “Every Student Teaches and Every Teacher Learns,” in Christensen, C. R., Garvin, D. A., and Sweet, A., eds., *Educating for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Maryellen Weimer, PhD; *Lifelong Learning: Discovering and Developing Your Teaching Skills; Faculty Focus* November 2, 2010 [ <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/faculty-development/lifelong-learning-discovering-and-developing-your-teaching-skills/> ]; February 16, 2011

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Peace Studies Conference - Mar. 18  
Fall Registration - Mar. 21  
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# Helping Students See Correlation Between Effort and Performance

ONE OF THE STUDENT engagement techniques described in Elizabeth F. Barkley's Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty has students predicting and reflecting on their exam preparation and performance. It's a technique that helps students see the correlation between their efforts and their exam scores, as well as one that helps them assess the effectiveness of the study strategies they use.

Here's how the activity works. After students have finished the exam, but before submitting it, they complete a short post-test analysis questionnaire—you may need to state that you won't accept the exam unless the analysis sheet is attached. Barkley suggests having students respond to items such as:

- Predict your exam score.
- Rate your effort in studying for the exam on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).
- List the specific learning strategies you used to study for the exam (Did you make flash cards to help you memorize definitions? Rewrite your notes? Create outlines of assigned readings? Discuss the readings with other students?).
- Identify what you found easiest and most difficult about the exam and explain why.

After the exam has been graded and returned, students do a second analysis—you might want to not record the exam scores until students complete the second analysis, or you might want to offer some bonus points to those students who complete both analyses thoughtfully and carefully. Here are some of the suggested items for this second analysis:

- Describe your emotional response to your exam score (Surprised? Disappointed? Relieved? Pleased?).
- Compare your actual score with your predicted score and comment on how well or poorly you predicted your score.

- Identify where each question came from (in-class material, book material, online resources) and then calculate the percentage of questions missed in each of the categories. What do these percentages tell you?
- Reflect on the strategies you used for studying for this exam and the amount of time you devoted to study. Describe any changes you plan to make in your approach to studying for the next exam.
- Do you have any suggestions for how I or your classmates could help you better prepare for the next exam?
- Based on your performance on this exam, set one goal for the next exam. Make the goal specific and concrete (e.g., "I plan to get at least 75 percent of the questions from the reading materials correct.").

An activity like this is most beneficial if it's completed early in the course so that students can act on what they have learned. Although the advantages of such an activity may be perfectly obvious to the teacher, don't assume that students will automatically see the value of this kind of analysis. Introduce the activity with a discussion of things students can do to improve their exam performance in this (and other) course(s). If students do the activity for more than one exam, you might want to add an item that has them track their performance across the exams, asking to what they attribute their improvement (or lack thereof).

Reference: Barkley, E. F. Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009, 336-339.

*Maryellen Weimer, PhD; Helping Students See Correlation Between Effort and Performance; December 20, 2010 [ <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/helping-students-see-correlation-between-effort-and-performance/> ] February 16, 2011.*

## RESOURCES

BELOW IS A short list of books related to teaching in higher education. They are available at Lander University's Jackson Library - several titles are new to the library. Below each title you'll find its call numbers.

### On Course:

#### A week by week guide to your first semester of college teaching

LB2331 .L245 2008

### Tools for Teaching

LB2331 .D37 2009

### Student Engagement Techniques

LB2331 .B34 2010

### Teaching What You Don't Know

LB2331 .H875 2009

### Teaching the Large College Class

LB2331 .H47 2007

### The Joy of Teaching

LB2331 .F493 2005

### What the Best College Teachers Do

LB2331 .B34 2004

### Creating Significant Learning Experiences

LB2331 .F495 2003

### Teaching With Your Mouth Shut

LB1026 .F49 2000

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### Lander Faculty BOOK REVIEWS

Articles should be 700 +/- words to fit on one page. Currently the White Board consists of two pages. One article could fill the whole issue if it is deemed valuable. If an article requires more space than the two pages of an issue, an option could be to continue the topic over a couple of months. Topics must be related to teaching in higher education.