

# JOBTP

Journal on Best Teaching Practices

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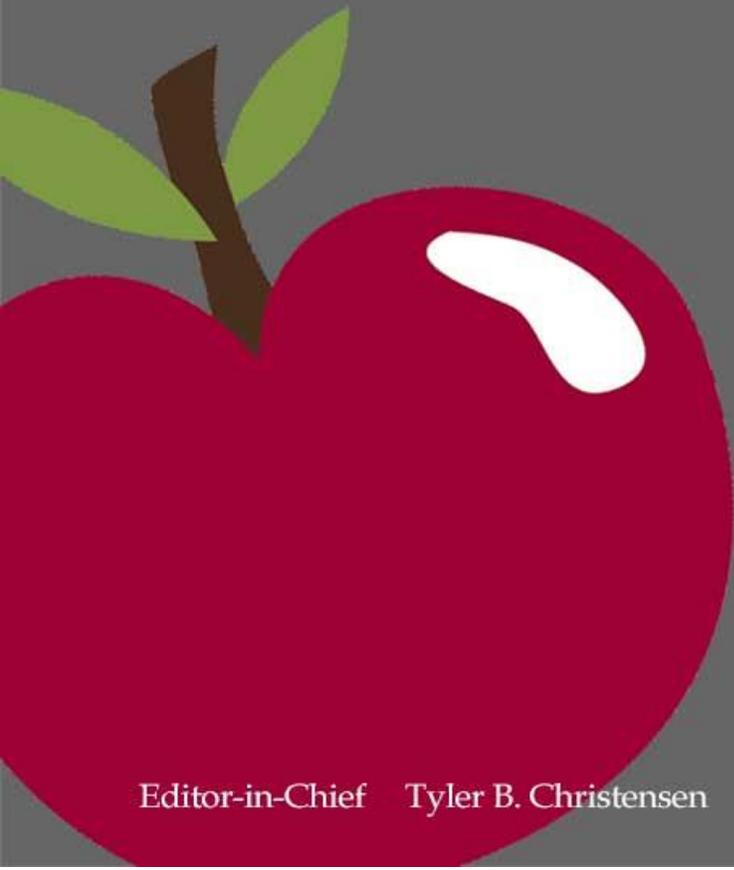
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*A Journal for Pre-service Teacher Candidates  
by Pre-service Teacher Candidates*



Editor-in-Chief Tyler B. Christensen



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# Creating an undergraduate academic journal: A Message from the Editor

Tyler Booth Christensen

I am pleased to present the first issue of the online *Journal on Best Teaching Practices*. This journal is created by pre-service teacher candidates for pre-service teacher candidates, teachers, and anyone else interested in “Best Teaching Practices.”

## **Authentic teaching**

As an instructor on introductory level teacher education courses it is my responsibility and privilege to help students decide whether entering a career in teaching is right for them. One of the greatest obstacles I face in introducing undergraduates to the teaching profession is providing them “authentic” opportunities to experience the life of a teacher.

One of the greater adjustments undergraduates have to make in transitioning from High School to College is the kind and level of writing they are expected to achieve. The five paragraph essay they are used to writing is not as useful when undertaking technical writing, email correspondence and memos, and other writing they will use in “the real world.” In teacher education there is a hope and expectation that students will become adept at academic writing and engage in research and writing throughout their teaching careers.

## **Finding teaching resources**

It is common for pre-service teacher candidates to express that they have always wanted to teach. While the reasons for entering the teaching profession vary the desire to make a positive impact on children is one constant. Many of these students plan to replicate what they have observed from outstanding teachers in their own experiences in the classroom without giving much thought to empirically “proven” best teaching practices. Part of the problem lies in the lack of access to good resources about teaching. An online search will reveal a lot of teaching blogs and editorials on teaching but finding proven strategies is a little trickier. Many of the best articles on teaching are included in journals that students either don’t have access to or don’t know how to find. So many resources are password protected and require purchase but teaching doesn’t seem to attract the financial independent so those resources often go untapped.

## **The online *Journal on Best Teaching Practices***

This writing assignment requires students to do a somewhat detailed literature review—something many of them have never done before. Additionally, it introduces them to the research, writing, and dissemination process that many teachers engage in. Finally, it gives them the opportunity to critique others work and participate in real-world collaboration which results in a product that is useful to them as well as others.

Creating and maintaining an academic journal for pre-service teacher candidates makes a lot of sense because it addresses each of these issues. It engages the students in an authentic writing experience for a real audience that can benefit from their work. It introduces them to the scholarly writing process expected of them as teachers and puts them temporarily on the “other side of the desk” as they review and critique the work of others.

### **How it works**

Students enrolled in our Introduction to Education course (TED 120 and TED 155) are introduced to the concepts of “white papers” – short papers written to sell a product or service, most often used in business and government. We frame the writing assignment with white papers to encourage students to find answers to real teaching problems while writing in a concise manner. The expectation is that they (and others) will be more likely to read a two page paper that is useful than a twenty page paper that is filled with unfamiliar academic language.

As a class we discuss online research strategies, including the use of our university library, Google Scholar, and other academic databases. Students self-select topics from a list of potential “best teaching practices” or come up with an idea on their own. They are required to find at least four academic papers that address their topics and to take notes on each of those papers. They then construct a first draft that they bring to class and workshop with their peers. With peer feedback they continue to research, write, and revise until the final draft is due. Each student submits three blind hard copies which are then distributed to students in other sections of the course, resulting in each student receiving three different papers to review. They complete a blind review just as reviewers for any other academic journal would: making notes on the article, completing a rubric, and assigning a score to each paper. I enter each of the scores into a rubric and rank order them. The top twenty are identified and letters are sent with the reviewed copies back to the original authors requesting a revise and resubmit. The remaining reviews are also returned to the other students. The top candidates then have approximately six weeks to consider the feedback given to them and to revise and resubmit. As managing editor I review the final submissions and select ten for publication in the journal. The students who are chosen receive a congratulatory letter and a request for final revisions, an author’s biography, and a release form. Once those are all submitted I put them all together and upload them to the website.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect for me in creating this journal has been relinquishing control to the students. At the end of the day it did not matter which articles I felt were best suited for the journal, the initial decisions regarding publication were made by the students through their blind reviews.

### **Where do we go from here**

Creating an academic journal has been no small undertaking, especially given the relatively short timeline from inception to publication (less than one year). The students at UWRF have been supportive and enthusiastic about the project which bodes well for the long term sustainability of the publication.

This journal is a work-in-progress and we are learning as we go. We will continue to tweak the process in order to improve the product. I expect that the submissions will improve from semester to semester as expectations are made clearer and the writing, review, and editing process is refined. Once a few issues are available we plan to market the journal to other institutions and teachers so that the resource can be useful to its intended audience. Ultimately we expect to open submissions up to students at other institutions as well as practicing teachers. We hope you find this publication to be a valuable resource in your quest to become an outstanding teacher.

# Teaching is No Laughing Matter. Or is it?

Kara Mallizzio

It is no secret that one of the biggest issues teachers everywhere deal with is getting students' attention. And if teachers are not getting, and keeping students' attention, then students are not learning. So how does one captivate a disinterested audience? Humor. At least this is one tactic suggested by numerous educators to encourage students to be more attentive in class. But does it really work?

## What is Humor in the Classroom?

The teaching practice of humor is when a teacher chooses to take a more comical and light-hearted approach to teaching as a tool to educate students. By using humor, educators hope to relax, relate, and connect with students; therefore, making the process of learning fun and easy. Humor can be used in a number of different ways while teaching. There are many common humor practices used by teachers, among them are: funny stories, funny comments, jokes, puns, cartoons, pictures, movie clips and silly outfits or costumes (Hellman, 2007, p. 37). These tools not only engage students, but also help them make life long connections. Humor can be used connect unknown material to something relatable.

## What are the Benefits?

Besides making learning more enjoyable, humor has many benefits that are not quite as obvious. First there are psychological effects produced as a result of this practice. "...humor and laughter have been shown to reduce anxiety, decrease stress, enhance self-esteem, and increase self-motivation" (Garner, 2006, p.177). Under these conditions there is a very great possibility for learning. The more relaxed

and confident a student is, the more likely they will be willing to engage and participate in not only learning, but also interacting in class.

Another unseen effect is what happens physiologically. "Humor and laughter can aid in learning through improved respiration and circulation, lower pulse and blood pressure, exercise of the chest muscles, greater organization of blood and the release of endorphins into the bloodstream" (Garner, 2006, p. 177). It is no little known fact that the healthier you are, the better you feel, and the better you feel, the more willing you are to learn or at least pay attention.

Aside from the psychological and physiological benefits, humor has been shown to help out in other ways, such as in future careers. In the article, "Using Humor in the Classroom," Girdlefanny quotes an administrator for marketing and career development of the Van Buren Intermediate school district in Lawrence, Michigan named Marilyn Mitchell who says, "Recent studies show that a sense of humor is the most consistent characteristic among executives promoted in major companies, and that managers showing a sense of humor advance faster than those without one" (2004, pg.23) Therefore, it is not off base to suggest that showing students how approaching tough situations with a light-hearted attitude can not only help them now, but also in their future careers. In addition to helping with a child's future, humor has a huge impact on their present situation. A classroom which has a humorous environment has actually been shown to have better attendance records (Garner, 2006, p.178). Having a fun, yet

educational learning environment is a sure way to make students want to come to class. If classroom attendance increases there is a very good chance that learning is increasing as well.

Making strong connections to information is a known benefit of using humor in the classroom, but there is another connection that is being made of equal importance, and that is the student/teacher connection. If a teacher is able to laugh at themselves and make a student feel more comfortable, the student will be more willing to take risks and ask questions in class. The relaxed environment created by a humorous teacher breaks down the barriers and allows students to be less afraid of getting an answer wrong and more willing to speak up (Girdlefanny, 2004, p.23).

### Why Humor?

First of all, humor is just plain fun. Who doesn't like laughing, enjoying themselves and having a good time? But above the simple fact of enjoyment, humor allows students to make strong connections. If something is funny we are more likely to remember it, or even possibly repeat it. If a person lists off a number of statistics, facts and figures, the audience will most likely not care, or worse, not remember. If the same information is shared in a fun or humorous way, the learner is not only enjoying themselves, but also unintentionally gaining the information being presented to them.

### Disadvantages

Although humor is a great tool to use while teaching, there are some downsides to this practice. First of all keeping a student-teacher relationship is very important. Becoming more of a friend in students' eyes is very easy when you act more like a comedian than an authority figure. Because of this, it is very easy to lose respect of

students in the classroom if one is cracking jokes all of the time. Above this a teacher must ALWAYS make sure to be politically correct as well as age and audience appropriate. As Hellman says in his article, *Humor in the Classroom: Stu's Seven Simple Steps to Success*, "One needs to be sensitive to diversity, and if possible embrace that diversity. Any attempt of humor that marginalizes a group should be avoided" (2007, p.38). A teacher must always be aware who they are speaking to and be careful not to cross any lines. Making jokes at a student's expense is usually not appropriate and should be avoided in most situations.

Overall, creating a classroom environment that is informative, yet fun, generates the opportunity to engage students while equipping them with the proper tools for learning. As a teacher, providing a bit of comedic relief in the classroom may just be what it takes for a student to land that big corporate job somewhere down the road or maybe even just pass their next math exam. Finding the right moments to put a classroom full of anxious students at ease with a bit of laughter can be not only good for their health, but yours as a teacher too! So, whether it be holding students' attention, helping make connections or just simply making kids want to show up for class, this teaching practice is sure to be a helpful tool. So go ahead, make them laugh!

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# Authentic Teaching

Erin Dailey

A popular complaint in high school is “Why do I need to learn this, I’m never going to use this outside of school?” however, this is something that teachers struggle with at every grade level, not just high school. One way to minimize hearing this complaint is by using real-world application in the classroom. This can help kids focus on the topic at hand and give them a better understanding. There have been many theories on what should be done to improve students’ “actual learning” not just what they need to memorize for a test. Coming up with projects that apply to the information being taught is a great way to expand their knowledge because they’re not only learning about what the book says.

Often it is thought that if students can answer questions on paper then they must know the information, but as teachers are finding out, that is not the case. When we ask students how they came up with their answer, or perhaps what method they used in solving the problem students tend to have a difficult time. The problem doesn’t seem to be the students’ ability to do the work, they just don’t understand the work, and if you learn something without fully understanding it then what’s the point in learning or teaching it at all? Spitting out information and memorizing facts and numbers is only going to take students so far.

So what can be done to help students learn and retain information not just recite it back to pass a test? Using “authentic activities” is something that Brown et al recommends; authentic activities can be defined as “to learn to use tools (i.e. the concepts and procedures) as practitioners use them, a student, like an

apprentice, must enter the community and its culture” (p. 166). Using real-world application can help engage students in what they are learning. If students were to know what they learned in the classroom could be used outside of the classroom, it would keep them interested in class according to Brown et al, rather than just paying attention so they can answer the questions on their homework assignment.

In Newmann and Wehlages’ article *Five Standards of Authentic Instruction*, they discuss the importance of authentic teaching. The first standard stating that students engage in Higher-Order Thinking (HOT) during lessons, this means:

“Higher-order thinking (HOT) requires students to manipulate information and ideas in ways that transform their meaning and implications, such as when students combine facts and ideas in order to synthesize, generalize, explain, hypothesize or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation”. While tutoring at an after school program at Meyer Middle School in River Falls, WI in the fall of 2013 I helped a student with his math homework and while looking through his book found that each lesson had a “HOT” section in which they (the students) were asked to create their own problem and explain how they came up with it. This proved to be very beneficial to the 8<sup>th</sup> grader I was working with because the next week he told me he got a 90% on his math quiz. Adding these kinds of problems allows students to actually solve and understand them instead of merely reciting what is on the black board.

The second standard is Depth of Knowledge, Newmann and Wehlage explain that “knowledge is deep when the

(students) make clear distinctions, develop arguments, solve problems, construct explanations..." One way teachers could help with this is by taking on fewer topics and explaining those topics more, giving examples, and going more in-depth so that students can understand each one. Instead teachers are covering multiple topics in a short amount of time and tend to move on before the concept being taught is fully grasped by the students.

Moving on to the third standard which is Connectedness to the World. This standard places importance on applying real-world situations to in-class learning. Some ways to do this would be to let students talk about real-world problems i.e. the environment or helping the poor. Another way to involve students is to let them discuss their own personal experiences as it relates to the subject being taught.

The fourth standard is Substantive Conversation, the main focus of this standard is to encourage class participation. If there is interaction between teachers and students and/or student to student about the topic, then the information being taught will be better understood and more easily retained. Making this standard beneficial for both students and teachers, students will be able to talk through either what they understand or are having trouble understanding. This benefits teachers by

giving them (the teachers) an idea of what they can move on from or if they need to spend more time on a specific topic.

The fifth and final standard is Social Support for Student Achievement, this is important from the beginning of kindergarten until high school graduation. Newmann and Wehlage say that having the teacher convey their high expectations of everyone in the class is important, as well as stating that all students can learn important knowledge and skills. Another way to contribute to a students' achievement is to make mutual respect a crucial part of everyday learning.

When you consider all of these things it shows that there is hope, that we can teach children something they will remember and understand, not just something they can recite and then promptly forget. If teachers and students alike put more effort into the information/material instead of the almighty test(s) everyone will probably enjoy school a bit more.

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# Classroom Design

Hannah Zurn

A first year teacher is walking into their classroom for the first time. All the desks are pushed to one side and it's up to them to pick the "perfect classroom design". There are many possibilities, however which would best suit the environment being taught in?

## Taking Into Consideration

Classroom size, how many students attending class, and what area being taught are a few important factors needed in order to create a suitable teaching environment for the students as well as the teacher.

- **Classroom Size-** Most of the time teachers are not able to pick the classroom they will be teaching in, so they have to make do with what they are offered. Big or small, a teacher wants to make enough space for everyone and accommodate every student's needs. Each student needs a certain amount of desk space for the tools used and a certain amount of floor space, leg space, and elbow room to perform the required tasks (Kaya & Burgess 2007). A teacher needs to make his or her students comfortable while being able to teach them effectively.
- **Class Size-** Depending on the school district, school and subject, the amount of students attending class will vary year to year. Looking at a class list before classes start will help teachers determine the number of students in each class. That will influence how many desks are needed in the classroom and how much space is appropriate for the given situation.
- **Area being taught-** The subject being taught in the classroom is a good

indication on how the teacher will be setting up the arrangements of the desks. Teachers need to decide if their class will be doing a lot of interacting with one another where students will need to be in groups and pairs or if their students will need to pay close attention to lecture where they will be in rows of columns.

## Type of Desk Arrangements

From groups to pairs, to rows and columns, each classroom seating arrangement is different. Choosing the "perfect" classroom design is very important when it comes to teaching. A lot depends on what sort of teaching method a teacher intend to do: more group work or more individual work.

### Individual Work

When a teacher has a class that's noisy, difficult to control or is just a rather large class, they should put the desks into neat rows or columns. This arrangement is very simple. The main advantage to this setup is it minimizes distractions among students. Intervention studies have consistently found that seating in rows for individual task work improves time spent on-task (Hastings & Schwieso 1995). Sitting in rows or columns will increase the student's focus and listening. Student sitting in this position creates more personal space between one another increasing comfort and making it simpler to move around the classroom. The teacher will have an easier time seeing each student and getting attention when needed.

The biggest disadvantage to the row and column arrangement is it limits group work and student-student interaction when

necessary to the lesson. When students are instructed to get into groups there will be a lot of classroom chaos in order to get into the appropriate format for the activity making things a lot harder on the teacher.

### **Group Work**

When a teacher knows their class will be doing a lot of interacting between one another, placing them in small groups would be the ideal arrangement. When the desired behavior is interactive, like brainstorming or questioning the teacher, seating arrangements that facilitate interactions by proximity and position, such as clustered desks or semi-circles, should be utilized (Wannarka & Ruhl 2008). The biggest advantages when placing students in groups is the efficiency of communication among peers. As long as they are on task, sharing ideas with one another is a lot easier. As the teacher meets with each group, her or she would be able to focus their on a small group of students without disrupting other students around them.

The number one disadvantage to small groups is it leads to lots of distractions among students and disciplinary problems. Sitting that close to someone will increase talking, lack of focus, noise and will invade comfortable, personal space between students.

### **Best for the Class**

The solution to finding the most efficient classroom is simple. What works best for the class! In order to find the "perfect" classroom seating arrangement, the teacher needs to figure in the type of class they are intending to have and weigh out their options. Remember, once a teacher arranges their classroom and doesn't feel it fits the needs of the class they can always rearrange. If plan A does not work, there are 25 other letters in the alphabet. Have fun designing an ideal classroom!

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# Classroom Designs to Accommodate ADHD and Learning Disabled Students

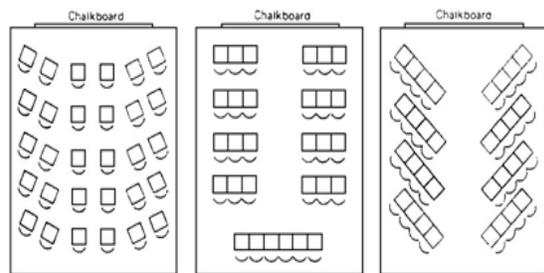
Ashley Dewitz

Franklin never paid attention in class and seemed to move around more than all the other kids. He was always staring off into space or kicking the chair in front of him. Franklin has Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and because of this his classroom needs to meet special requirements. As teachers we must accommodate our room designs to fit our students. The educational experience for all the students in our classroom begins with the attention to details of learning styles and with the teacher's desire to make that experience the best it can be for every student. If you had an ADHD student like Franklin, or any other learning disabled student in your classroom, how would that influence your classroom design?

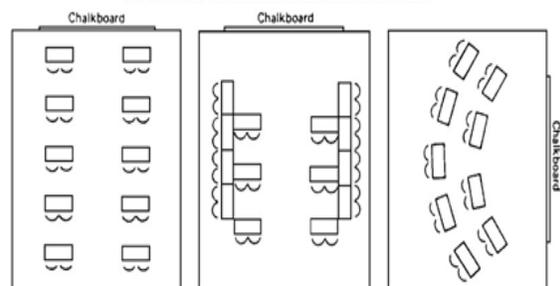
**Desk Placement.** The answer is yes. Desk placement is one of the most crucial part of classroom design when you have kids with ADHD. Desk placement depends on the child. Usually kids with ADHD learn the best placed closer to the teacher. Another option would be to "surround the child with ADHD with well-behaved, attentive classmates as desk neighbors" (Carbone, 2001). Only very rarely do kids with ADHD work best sitting in the back area of the room (Doberman, 2011). Children with ADHD work better with single seats, it is less distracting then the long tables meant for more than one child. Also, it is best to sit them away from windows or open doorways if possible as it is much easier for them to have wandering minds sitting next to open doorways or windows

Kids without ADHD also have desk placements that work best for them too. Desk placement also depends on the type of desk you have. Are they for individual students or desks for two people? Paul Denton said, in his article *Seating Arrangements for Better Classroom Management*, "Flexibility is the key word in arranging the classroom for effective instruction" (1992). This is very true as kids with different learning strategies need

**FIGURE 1**  
ROOM ARRANGEMENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL DESKS



**ROOM ARRANGEMENT WITH SMALL TABLES**



different desk arrangements. Figure 1 and 2 are the two best methods, according to Paul Denton, of having desks with a classroom of kids without ADHD.

**Seating.** Would it be more distracting if you used therapy balls instead of the more conventional but uncomfortable chairs? According to a study done at the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Washington, kids with and without ADHD who that have used therapy balls found it actually helped them to be better behaved and have improved listening skills.

**Visuals.** Studies first done on kids with ADHD claimed that if you have a classroom with ADHD students in it, the room should be empty and plain. However as more research has been done about visuals in classrooms, this has been shown to be untrue. "A basic rule to follow is that visual distractions should be limited within the child's line of sight from his or her work areas..." (Doberman, 2011). As a teacher, keep in mind that too many visuals on walls distract students with ADHD; however, not having enough visuals when they are learning was actually boring for the students. When teaching, teachers should use charts and tables to help clarify what they are talking about and keep the child's interest.

**Cleanliness.** Carol S. Weinstein and Anita E. Woolfolk say "Pupils associated with neat classrooms were judged to be happier and better behaved" (Weinstein and Woolfolk, 1981). In their studies of neat vs. messy classrooms, they found, it really doesn't affect student's learning but kids prefer clean rooms. Basically they are saying a clean room seems to be better than a messy room because a messy room feels lazy and unorganized and this will rub off on the students. Soon the class won't want to do any homework because their environment portrays being unfocused. "A disorganized classroom can pull a student's attention to

irrelevant details and interrupt his/her ability to sustain focus" (Hume, 2007). When there is a classroom with students that have ADHD it is even more important to have a clean and orderly classroom in order to insure they are learning as much as they can.

**What should teachers do?** As a teacher, when you are planning your room design, you need to consider who will be your students. If you have ADHD students, or students with other learning disabilities, the plan should include a way to maximize their potential by using a good room design. The room should be organized, neat and clean so the students will see that when they walk into the room. It should be visually appealing and not distracting. Use these considerations to set up your room in a way that will be both satisfying and productive for you and your students!

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# The Importance of Feedback

Stephanie Norlin

The use of feedback has become an important practice by teachers in the classroom. Though research has proven it to be beneficial, it is not always practiced by teachers. The type of feedback, timing of its use, and way it is used can have positive effects on students in the classroom.

In their research article *The Power of Feedback*, John Hattie and Helen Timperley define feedback as “information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback often occurs after a student’s response, or when information is provided about the specific task at hand. Simplified, it is a teacher’s response to a student’s work.

Feedback can work in several different ways. If there is a challenging task at hand, receiving feedback can produce more efforts from students on future work. Feedback has a higher success rate when there is a clear goal set. The more specific the goal, the more effective it is because it produces more focus and feedback from the students.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) state four task levels of feedback. They say that feedback can be about a task or product and can include direction on how to improve. For example, when a teacher hands back a paper with notes about how to improve written on it. Secondly, feedback can be directed to assist the learning process to help students better understand a task, such as answering a question. The third level of feedback can be looked at as personal feedback. It can have a focus on the self-evaluation part of an assignment to see if a student can work through a task by themselves by using techniques that were

already taught. This level can increase student’s self-efficacy and boost self-esteem levels. The last level of feedback is personal feedback that is unrelated to a task. It is usually a general form of praise such as saying “you are a great student!”

The most common form of feedback, which is also the first level explained earlier is often called “corrective feedback”. This form of feedback focuses on the correctness of behavior or other factors pertaining to a task accomplishment. Written comment feedback on work in conjunction with a grade has shown to be more effective than just one or the other. A comment such as “good work” is vague and doesn’t contain task-related information. Therefore it doesn’t lead to higher levels of commitment or higher self-efficacy or understanding about the task.

Teacher praise is a popular reinforcement method that is placed in the personal feedback category. Burnett reported that praise is recommended for teachers because “it can build self-esteem [and] provide encouragement” (Burnett, 2002, p. 7). Though praise can strengthen self-efficacy, it is being argued as to how providential it is. Paul Burnett’s study on teacher praise and feedback says “teacher praise...is a more intense, detailed response to student’s behavior than feedback” (Burnett, 2002, p. 6). In opposition, Hattie and Timperley say that praise isn’t that effective to students because it doesn’t carry a lot of information or provide answers. But they say if it is specifically directed to the task and performance of it, it can help with self-efficacy.

Burnett found that 91% of elementary students he measured liked to be praised.

69% of those same students preferred not to receive public praise (Burnett, 2002, p. 7). This suggests that students may find public praise to be embarrassing. Hattie and Timperley's (2007) measurements of students found that while elementary students enjoyed being praised for their achievements, older students tended to think the teacher thought they had lower abilities because they were being praised. Feedback and praise produce positive effects on students. Feedback gains the upper hand because it gives students more specifics as to what can be improved, helping them learn the lesson better. Praise on the other hand may encourage the student, but may not influence them in other ways.

Using feedback in a classroom can be as simple as writing a few notes on a student's essay, math homework, quiz, etc. Correcting a paper and writing or telling a student how to find the right answer allows the student to understand the concept better and know why they got it wrong and how they can correct it. Feedback is an important factor in today's classroom, and should be implemented in every classroom.

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# Come On, Evaluate Me

Carlie Melstrom

The simplest description of a teacher is a person who performs the tasks of teaching by showing or explaining how to do something. They explain ideas, concepts, guidelines, and ways to accomplish assignments or specific responsibilities to their students. It seems simple enough. All a teacher has to do is figure out what they need to explain to their students each day, teach it the best way they see fit and go on worrying about the next class plan afterwards. But is it really that simple? Does a teacher have to think about anything else besides what they are teaching? Do they need to worry about which teaching tactics work best, how their approachability is reflected in the classroom, or keeping the class under control and student behavior? They sure do. The key is to find the best way to hit those exact areas in addition to effectively teaching.

## What's the Key?

So what is the answer to that question? What is the best way to show or clarify a subject matter to a group of students while being approachable and keeping the class under control and out of confusion? What techniques will help the students actually learn just what the teacher is trying to explain? The answer to that isn't exactly solidified. However, one very efficient way to learn which tactics work best is to reflect upon student feedback provided through teacher evaluations.

## Why Evaluations?

Evaluations can specifically echo how well and effectively the teacher taught the class through the use of student feedback. Student feedback is one of the best ways to reveal how well a teacher explained the subject matter to the students, and if their strategies were effective or not. In fact, within Wilbert J McKeachie's article, he stated, "All of the authors, (and I join them) agree that student ratings are the single most valid source of data on teaching effectiveness" (McKeachie, 1997). The validity of that statement falls under that fact that McKeachie included more than 50 authors within his article. So when he said, "all of the authors," he was really saying 'at least 50 other authors.' Let alone, the primary purpose of evaluations is to

provide feedback to teachers that will be helpful for improvement (McKeachie 1997). Student feedback can help a teacher improve their teaching skills and ideas for as long as they are teaching.

## What IS an Evaluation?

An evaluation is an examination or survey that observes and assesses something carefully. In this case, the evaluations are the student's assessment on their teacher's strategies and teaching effectiveness.

The evaluation should be made up by the teacher, but collaboratively with other faculty and possibly administrators of the same district. Among the school district, evaluations should have little differences, if any at all. This allows for equality of student feedback that can be used to compare one teacher from another, as well as allow a teacher to receive feedback on specific teaching practices that they may have been experimenting with.

## Does a Teacher get Rated?

The questions included on the evaluation should be specific, while the options for answers can be broader. When collaboratively formulating evaluations, "if personnel committees sensibly use broad categories rather than attempting to interpret decimal-point differences, either a single score or a weighted combination of factors, comparable results will be provided" (Lin, 1984). This means a numbering system should be neglected because deciphering which value each number had could be difficult and should be ignored. McKeachie recommended using only crude judgments of instructional effectiveness like the words exceptional, adequate, and unacceptable for responses from the students (McKeachie 1997). It is most important to understand the feedback, and that can be easily done when the evaluation includes components that don't need to be deciphered from.

## Is it All-Inclusive?

An evaluation provided to the student asking for feedback should tackle only the following components: the effectiveness of the teacher and specific teaching practices they chose to use, how

personable and approachable the teacher was, and classroom management.

The questions should provide responses that directly reflect the effectiveness of any teaching practices each teacher decided to use. It was stated that “specific behavioral items are most likely to result in improvement” (Murray 1983). Therefore, it is more beneficial to evaluate the behavior in which the class was taught versus what exactly the students understood and didn’t understand. The feedback then allows for clearer instructions on ways to improve.

Also included in the evaluation should be the components of how approachable the teacher was. A teacher should want to interact with their students. They should strive to help them any way possible especially when it comes to their success in the class. If a teacher comes off as intimidating, causing students to stray away when they have confusion, it should be brought to the teacher’s attention. Bringing attention to the problem allows for the teacher to attempt to behave more personably. If a teacher doesn’t have at least an approachable character students are going to leave questions unanswered that he or she could have easily clarified. Again, this problem can be brought to the teacher’s attention through student feedback in evaluations.

Classroom management should be included in the evaluations as well to help the teacher see how comfortable their students were. Besides just how well a teacher taught, how productively a teacher held the attention and cognitive perception of students is just as important. Different strategies of teaching could affect the attentiveness of students. That’s something a teacher should look for in evaluations in order to see if they need to improve in that area as well.

#### **So What’s NOT Included?**

Evaluations should not include any judgments on personality. Aspects like a teacher’s enthusiasm or even organization don’t need to be included because teaching effectiveness can be achieved in many different ways by teachers with very dissimilar personalities. It is clear that, “Judging an individual on the basis of characteristics is just as unethical as judging an individual on the basis of race or gender” (Scriven 1981). Evaluations should be looking for student feedback that

provides answers to teaching efficiency, not how well liked a teacher was personally.

#### **Put it all Together**

Just as students are evaluated on the knowledge of material taught to them, teachers need to be evaluated on how well they did everything in the classroom. They should know exactly what they intended to do in each class and how they intended to do it. Asking the students questions specifically on what he or she tried to do in the classroom gives a final grade on how well it was done. That grade is the feedback.

Nobody other than the students in the class had the full impact on how the class was taught and managed, just like nobody other than the students in the class had the full learning experience of the material provided to them. So, why not allow the students to reflect on how they were taught the material? There is no good reasoning to argue against that question. Students should be given the opportunity to report their thoughts, opinions, and reflections on everything in the class. And, as much as it is important to allow for the students to provide feedback, it is even more important that the teacher take the responses in sincerely and notice areas that do and don’t need improvement.

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## Effective Classroom Discussions = Engaged Students

Joseph Ian Lee Grinols

Typical lecturing in a classroom setting has its place and time, but its overuse can be hurtful to a healthy learning environment. Many teachers are perceived by their students as overly attached to the standard lecture format. Whether that is true is a subject of teaching philosophy; however our focus should be on helping teachers improve students' perceptions of them, by encouraging diversity in their teaching styles. One practical solution to this problem is increasing the usage of classroom discussions.

Classroom discussions come in many shapes and sizes. There are peer-to-peer with pairing, small group with many variations such as having teams, whole class, either student or teacher lead, and a combination of any of the above (*Comments from CRISS*, Fall 1994). For this overview whole class discussion will be the focus of our learning which can be applied to both teacher, and student lead discussions.

Before we can go into particular teaching strategies, general guidelines should be discussed and stressed. It is important for teachers to:

- Make each student feel valuable,
- Plan good questions
- Discourage students from shouting out answers
- Wait an appropriate amount of time before calling for answers
- If possible allow the class to answer each other's questions
- Include practical examples
- Focus the discussion
- Personalize content with students
- Use closure effectively by summarizing and/or foreshadowing.

(Gail, 1990)

The focal point of classroom discussions is the first general guideline: making each student feel valuable. If this is not woven into every other aspect of classroom discussion, the end result will not be desirable. The students will feel valuable when you know their name, give everyone eye contact, promote many types of answers regardless of your own understanding and opinion, thank your students for contributions, such as "That is a good question".

If a situation arises where the question asked might seem inappropriate or immature, it might be that the student truly does not know the answer and desires to learn (Gail, 1990). The answer you give depends on your students' maturity, and class setting. If the question, statement or behavior is excessively inappropriate, suitable disciplinary actions according to your school policies should follow.

After teachers have made the students feel valuable, other aspects of discussions can be tackled. Teachers should have good questions planned prior to the class discussion. Other questions can be introduced by questions, but core elements should be addressed if students do not bring them into conversation. Students should be politely discouraged from shouting out answers, because it is important that everyone's voice is valued, and when students shout out answers, other students do not discover the answer on their own. Coupled with this is allowing an appropriate amount of time to occur before calling for answers. Prefacing the discussion with foreshadowing comments allow the students to formulate longer and stronger responses to your questions (Gail, 1990).

There are many forms of classroom discussions, but only three will be introduced here. These forms are *Reciprocal teaching*, *Elaborative Interrogation*, and *Collaborative Reasoning*.

*Reciprocal Teaching* is a back-and-forth discussion strategy where the teacher chooses specific text about the subject for the class to read, then the teacher, and the students take turns teaching the class about the material by summarizing important elements (VanDeVeghe, 2007).

*Elaborative Interrogation* is a previewing type of discussion model where the teacher prompts the students to “tell anything that comes to mind when “(Langer, 1995) relative to the subject that is going to be discussed or lectured upon.

*Collaborative Reasoning* is a discussion type that has a large group setting, where students gather evidence prior to discussing, and everyone then comes together to make an argument for one position (VanDeVeghe, 2007). During this process the students are asked whether they still defend their previous position or if their mind has changed based on the evidence shared.

Overall any type of discussion strategy that is utilized must enhance the teaching environment, by stressing the value of their students, and the opportunity that the educators have to help their students grow.

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# Active Learning: Producing Enthusiasm in the Classroom

Rebecca Hartung

*"We learn by example and by direct experience because there are real limits to the adequacy of verbal instruction."*

-Malcolm Gladwell

In today's society, for current and future teachers, an active learning approach to teaching is essential for students' success in the classroom. Learning that contains student-based inquiry versus teacher-based inquiry allows the students to develop their own understanding of the content with little facilitation from the teacher. Unfortunately, active learning in many classrooms has always consisted of the teacher directing the learning, which inhibits each student's growth and potential.

Active learning refers to a method of learning where active student participation is encouraged through project-based exercises. Research studies indicate that teachers typically dominate classroom conversation, consuming nearly 70% of classroom time (Northeastern Illinois University). This happens even though other research studies have shown that student learning correlates with the quality and quantity of student involvement (Cooper and Prescott, 1989). Instead of students listening to lecture over large amounts of time, active learning:

- allows students immediate feedback from their teacher
- engrosses students in activities (reading, discussing with peers, writing)
- builds self-directed learning skills
- teaches problem-solving and critical thinking skills

- develops student's own inquiry and heightens interest in the material which tends to improve their motivation
- engages students with other peers

The practice of active learning techniques in the classroom is critical because of the remarkable impact on the student's learning.

Active learning is a helpful method to use in the classroom for a variety of different reasons. One reason is students benefit from experiencing the material first-hand. Research has shown when active learning is compared with traditional teaching methods (regardless of the subject matter) students learn more material, store the information longer, and are more likely to attain higher grades (Get SET). Higher grades lead to student satisfaction, which tends to give students more determination to learn. Studies have shown active learning should be used more in the classroom. After two weeks of instruction students can recall more information from what they learned through active learning than they do through passive learning (Anderson, n.d.). As seen in the graphic below, "The Learning Pyramid," the highest percentage of remembrance is produced from what students say and do, which is a mere definition of active learning.

Benjamin Franklin put it flawlessly as he said, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." Not only do we, as teachers, want students to remember what we are teaching them, but most prominently we want them to learn the material. We want them to be able to take lessons that are taught and apply them to

everyday life. Through active learning, involving students in classroom discussions, and hands on experiments, they are not only remembering, but also learning.

There are numerous ways that active learning can be incorporated into the classroom. Simply modifying a basic lecture in different ways, such as: inserting brief demonstrations, having short ungraded writing exercises, and as well as class or group discussions. Having discussions throughout the class period is one of the most collective strategies of including active learning within the class (Eison, 1991). "Think-pair-share" is an incredible technique used for discussion among classmates (Mikaela, 2011). Students take time to think about the material, turn to their neighbor to discuss what they thought and then share their results with the rest of the class. This method is a great way for shy students to build up the courage and raise their hand because they have gained new confidence from discussing it with another classmate, thus making it easier to participate. Brainstorming also involves the entire class. You can start by introducing a problem, theme or topic and then ask the students for their thoughts. The class could collect the data on the board and discuss which ideas fit the material the best. This gets each student thinking even if they don't all share their thoughts.

Other excellent ways to include active learning into classrooms is through group work, various forms of writing activities, and even educational games (Davis, n.d.). Group work is a productive way to give every student the chance to speak and share their ideas. A convenient way to include this in lessons would be to give each group their own topic. Have them read the material, answer questions and find information in which later they can share and teach to the rest of the class.

Students' success in the classroom is dependent upon the amount of active learning they are involved with. Educational classrooms should be moving their courses beyond lecture and into learning spaces that allow for this to happen. Therefore, educating our future teachers is critical so they can, in return, help students to display academic growth and achievement.

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## Engaging Students in Rich Content Through Play

Katlin Hastings

In today's society academics is introduced earlier in American school curriculums. The world is changing and children are expected to know more and reach higher standards to move on to different grade levels. Teachers are so focused on academics that there is less time and chance for play than students in former generations. What some educators do not realize is the importance play has in the developing mind. It helps with cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). Another aspect of play being integrated into school curriculum is that it directly affects how children are shaped into adults (Ailwood, 2003). It opens student's minds to think more creatively throughout their lifetime (Hartmann and Rollet, 1994).

There are two types of play that usually happen in the classroom: structured and child driven play. Structured play happens when there are activities assigned to children to go along with the material they are learning. Child driven play is when children are given free time to play with different toys in the classroom (Ginsburg, 2006).

Teachers are professionals who assist children's brain development. In the early years especially, play is a big part in cognitive development. Play has been linked to children improving their attention, planning skills, and attitudes to teachers and peers in the classroom. It also helps with creative thinking, divergent thinking, and language development (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). A study done in 1999 called "*The effects of storytelling and pretend play on cognitive processes, short-term and long-term narrative recall,*" found that in storytelling, pretend play is more effective

in helping students recall complex narrative structure than pictures. The pupils that had dolls available to them did significantly better than those with pictures to re-tell the story. In addition, the pretend playgroup gave more complex narratives than those in the storytelling group (Sook-Yi, 1999). These findings show that play is crucial in cognitive development, particularly in reading. If educators put more play in activities students are learning about, children's minds will have a better chance at growth and development.

It is no surprise that children like to play. If teachers put more play into their practice, there would be a strong benefit in children's gross and fine motor abilities, plus it helps with body awareness. Playing with small toys, like Legos and putting together puzzles, helps children develop fine motor skills. Riding bikes and playing catch helps children develop gross motor skills. By letting students have free playtime, it allows them to feel more confident and secure about themselves and their bodies because it helps children develop skills essential for everyday life (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). Allowing children to actively play is a big part in keeping children healthy. With the world becoming increasingly aware of the obesity problem in America's society, letting kids be active and playing outside is a great way to encourage children to exercise in and out of the classroom (Ginsburg, 2006).

Parents do not only expect school to educate their students on academics, but also on how to be good people and a responsible citizen in today's society. School is responsible for social and emotional development, which largely contributes to

the way people act. Through play, children learn to interact with others around them, it helps them learn about the importance of sharing and taking turns. It gives children the chance to match their actions with others and take in different viewpoints from peers that do not match their own (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). Child driven play helps children develop negotiation skills, resolve conflicts, and self-advocacy. Play allows children to take on adult roles, while still being a child. It is just in a make believe situation (Ginsburg, 2006).

In the book "Play: Positive Intervention in the Elementary School Curriculum," Hartmann and Rollet experimented in preschool through second grade classrooms and how having or not having toys in a classroom affected students throughout their school years. It was found that children who had toys implemented into the school curriculum found more contentment in going to school and adapted to their new environment better. Those in the play program were also found to be more creative in the way they did projects and solved problems in school and every day life. Teachers in the playgroup stressed the joy, good mood, and gratification in children's play. This study proves that play is beneficial to children learning and makes teaching more enjoyable for educators.

Play is essential for children to grow and develop into respectable citizens. Not only does it help children become adults, but it also has important affects on a child's brain and the way they act. Allowing

children time to play and correlating play into the curriculum has many crucial benefits that are too important to be left out of the school day. Before taking play out of your curriculum, be sure to think of the consequences it has on your student's development.

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## The Importance of Learning Students' Names

Tamara Glenz

Knowing and using a students' name during and outside of class recognizes that a student exists and is important. In an article by Professor Kent Syverud (1993), he challenges educators to "ask yourself: who is the one teacher in your entire life who made the biggest difference for you--who taught you so well that you still think about him or her as your best teacher. I bet that for almost all of us, that best teacher was someone who knew you by name" (p. 247). Many successful educators agree that learning students' names is fundamental to developing a sense of community in the classroom. A teacher that doesn't take the time to learn their students' names is often perceived as disinterested and unapproachable. By calling on a student by name, it gives the impression that the teacher cares about their success and develops a sense of trust. It also has an effect on student interactions. Knowing the names of peers by either activities in which they learn each other's names or by hearing the teacher address them promotes interaction between students. "When the professor engages the student in personal conversation, recognizes her by name, and seems to include her in the domain of attention, the subject matter seems more accessible. The nonverbal message goes out that the student is a part of the community of people who can do mathematics, statistics, chemistry, or whatever the subject is." (Willemsen, 1995, p. 15).

**Getting Started.** Learning your students' names is the first step in knowing who they are. Calling students by name communicates respect, helps them feel recognized as individuals, and helps to

draw out and include shy students in class discussions. There is a variety of useful techniques to assist you with learning your students' names.

**Check your roster.** Read through your class roster several times before the first day of class so they sound familiar when you meet them in person.

**Take a visual approach.** Create name tents to set on the desks or tables. This approach assists both the teacher and the classmates with remembering names. Collect the tents after each class to keep track of attendance. (Kees, 2008, p. 22)

**Use a seating chart.** This can be temporary until you are able to match names with faces.

**Passport for class.** Have the students create a passport for class. Provide them with a notecard and ask them to attach a small photograph of themselves as well as some specific information about themselves (i.e. a brief biography, interests, something they know a lot about). Collect these cards and review them to help memorize names and learn more about your students. (Hardy, 2008, p. 27)

**Student introductions.** Have a few students introduce themselves. Then stop the introductions and ask another student to name all the classmates who have been introduced. Once the first few names have been recalled move on to a few more, until everyone has been introduced.

**Student interviews.** Have each student pair up and introduce themselves using questions such as unique traits, unusual hobbies, future goals, etc. After a few minutes, students introduce their partner to the class.

**Don't be afraid to ask.** Ask students to say their name before asking or answering a question. This gives both you and their classmates a change to learn names and can be continued until everyone feels they know the people in the room.

**Use association techniques.** If a student has the same name as someone you know, or has any characteristic that you can distinguish, they can be associated together. For example: a thin student named Jim can be remembered as "Slim Jim".

**Use students' names often.** Greet your students by name when they enter the classroom or use their names as you pass back homework.

Most importantly, keep a positive attitude! Set a goal to learn a few names per day. Don't get discouraged or overwhelmed. Try different techniques until you find what works best for you.

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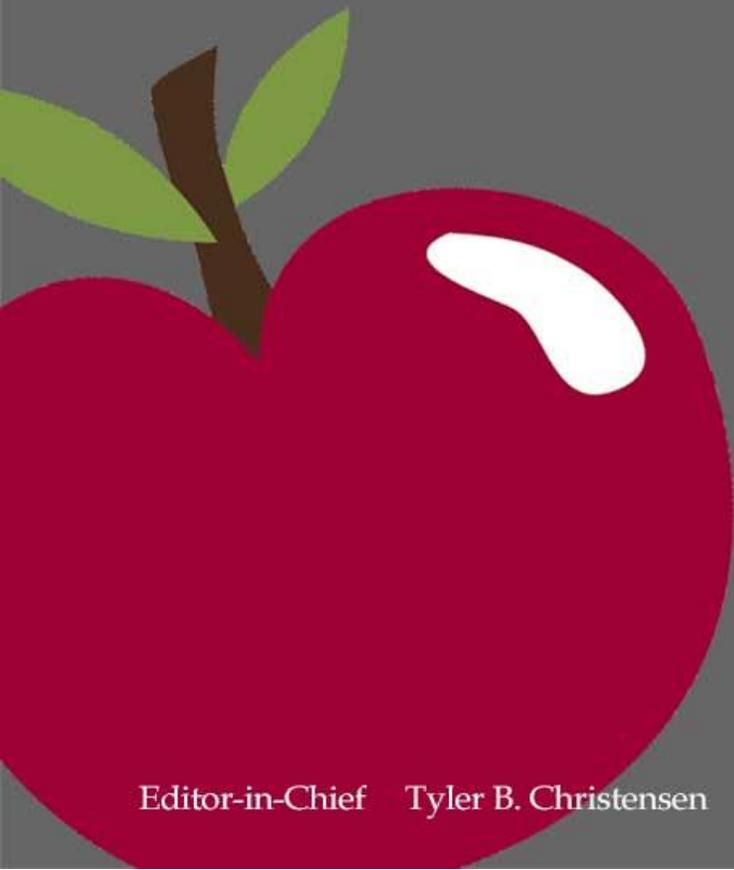
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