

Teaching and Learning Technique Review by Direct Observation at Schoolcraft College

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Leadership for Teaching and Learning

IDSL 880

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February 10, 2019

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical analysis of the effectiveness of teaching and learning as observed in three different college classes. The basis for the critique are the learnings provided in IDSL 885 – *Leadership for Teaching and Learning*, the course textbook by Bain (2004), and elsewhere. The following classes were observed at Schoolcraft College during the current winter term: *ACCT 202 – Principles of Accounting*, *POLS 105 – Survey of American Government*, and *MATH 150 – Calculus & Analytic Geometry 2*. In each case, the “Classroom Observation Checklist Template” (2019) was utilized and detailed notes and observations were derived based upon course content and teaching technique. Additionally, assignment questions were addressed to the extent possible.

#### **ACCT 202 – Principles of Accounting 2 – 25 students – row of tables, white board/projector**

The instructor was present at the appointed hour indicating her state of preparedness to engage the students while effectively modeling her expectations for presence and punctuality. At the start of class, she informed her students about opportunities on campus; namely, Wayne State University’s 4-year program and employment prospects at the St. Joseph’s Urgent Care facility— all of which demonstrated her care for the student’s future, her resourcefulness, and the promise of what student could attain (Bain, 2004, p. 74). Afterwards, she immediately began discussion of the practical applications of corporate finance. The instructor made good use of the classroom technology by utilizing the projector as she logged into the internet to assist her in voting her proxy shares of Walt Disney common stock. The students were fully engaged in the activity and continued to demonstrate their involvement with discussion of the pros and cons of Board of Directors candidates, stockholder issues, and other corporate initiatives, which were all relevant to the course topic.

Moreover, she demonstrated understanding of the importance of continuity by reviewing the previous day's lesson and drawing parallels to the Walt Disney activity as they discussed the various types of stock dividends and distributions. The instructor made good use of the whiteboard to offer examples to the class. Her technique was comprised of posing probing questions and soliciting meaningful responses from students. Responses would be shared on the whiteboard and she proved very effective in drawing responses from reluctant students and having them recall information from their readings and previous class content. Through gentle prodding, guidance, and encouragement, the instructor was able to obtain active participation from each of her students. When a student appeared uncertain or unable to answer the question, the instructor quickly reviewed the concept and re-asked the question showing the value of each student (Bain, 2004, p. 72). This method proved most effective towards ensuring mastery of the learning concept.

Towards the end of class, the instructor implemented a fun game-like (Rouhiainen, 2016, p. 45, 64) and purposeful activity which she described as "quizzing" using an online tool called as "Quizzizz™." The instructor divided the students into groups of 2 and 3—I was also in a group—and each group used a smart-device to navigate to the Quizzizz™ website using a code she had provided. She made the task both relatable and entertaining by asking the students to invent a name for their team and granting extra credit for the best team name; *retained learnings* won, a play on *retained earnings*. For this particular exercise, the students agreed to a class goal of 83% correct on the quiz questions related to class content. They would also receive an extra credit point for achieving that goal. The students were visibly enjoying the exercise and, while they did not achieve their intended goal of 83% (73%) the activity proved a great success. Not only were the students collaborating and contributing, the teacher was able to review the most frequently missed

questions and their answers deepening interest (Bain, 2004, pp. 9-11). She concluded class by reviewing the syllabus and front-loading her students with expectations for the next class. The instructor masterfully deployed all of the effective teaching and learning strategies on the checklist and in Bain's (2004) book.

**POLS 105 – Survey of American Government – 12 students – row of tables, white board/projector**

The instructor arrived to class on time indicating his preparedness to engage and setting an example for presence and punctuality. He began by suggesting some extra-curricular activities; namely, watching the Presidential State-of-the-Union Address on television that evening and perhaps attending an on campus guest lecture on the future of professional development. He discussed the Presidential Address, remarking on the significance of the various attendees, their positioning in the chamber, and the atypical attendance compared to daily activity. This discussion became a catalyst to discuss American Government, comparing Dual Federalism of the 1930s with Cooperative Federalism of the 1960s. The instructor's primary teaching mode was lecture and he chose to guide the lesson utilizing primarily PowerPoint Slides, which were limited in number. He conducted his lecture from the front of the classroom, as opposed to maneuvering amongst the students, for the duration of the lesson. While he did pose content-related questions to his students, he made little effort to solicit responses. Overall, this method of instruction did little to engage the active interest nor the participation of the students as evidenced by at least two students whose attention focused their smart phones.

While the instructor did review previous content, he did not break for questions to establish mastery of the concepts before moving onto new material. The instructor concluded class by having his students come to the front of the classroom to sign the attendance form. Of

the students that were engaged, I believe approximately two-thirds of them to be intrinsically motivated, required little prodding by the instructor. Their participation seemed more inclined from a desire to succeed/pass the class, rather than an inspired passion for the content. This was unfortunate, as we know that an essential component of deep learning and long-term retention occurs from passion and relatability to the course material while inspiring a desire to know.

Given the qualities of effective teaching, I believe the instructor fell short in actively engaging his students, inspiring interest, and creating substantial questioning and deeper relevancy. Remaining at the front of the classroom and subjecting students to a lengthy lecture, weakened the sense of shared community and common purpose. With a subject as pervasive as American Government, and especially around this particular lesson examining a historical, precedent-setting Supreme Court case, he missed the opportunity to engage in meaningful and enlightened debate. What could have been a lesson that inspired some students to consider a career in politics, law, or various humanitarian causes, was instead, perhaps relegated to nothing more than a throw-away elective class in which the, albeit personable, instructor did little to contribute in the way of deep and retained learning.

**MATH 150 – Calculus & Analytic Geometry 2 – 20 students – row of tables, white board/projector**

Once again, the instructor was present on time for the start of class. However, his mannerisms appeared more reserved compared to his peers. He began class productively by announcing the date of the first exam, reviewing previous class material, and providing a brief summary of the day's lesson content. Afterwards, he invited students from a pre-determined list, to present their solutions to homework problems using the document camera. Three students in all, were invited to share their solution methods to three different problems involving function

integration, ending each with a hand drawn plot of the resultant function solution. The instructor provided encouraging constructive criticism after each subsequent presentation. The learning objectives for the class were clearly defined and he kept on pace using an outline displayed for the duration of the class with the document camera. The students appeared to be actively engaged with the course material by taking notes, comparing their solutions with those presented, and asking clarifying questions.

The instructor's techniques were limited to use of the whiteboard, document camera, and an online graphing calculator display utilizing the document camera. Unfortunately, this limited use of resources and resourcefulness, did little to address the needs of different learners. Nonetheless, the methods deployed seemed effective enough to capture the students' attention. However, adequate is not synonymous nor conducive to deep and retained learning. Where I found the instructor to be lacking is in building relationships with his students, and thinking creatively to engage and measure the students' mastery of content material. The lesson could have been more relatable, with a better chance of retention, if he had drawn parallels with the material to elements within the students' lives, rather than springs and cables on a wench to make the lessons more relevant and memorable.

### **Conclusion**

Direct observation as a means of faculty teaching assessment is highly valuable and fun when the instructor cares and is good at what they do. The instructor's attitude makes all the difference. The first accounting instructor was the best, most engaging through a variety of teaching techniques, constant prompting of all the students and making accounting, of all things, so very interesting through the examples she chose and the manner in which they were presented. The effective use of the internet and projection to include different methods as described by

Rouhiainen (2016), like websites for corporate proxy voting and the game-like quizzing applications made for memorable emphasis, engagement, and caring. By contrast, the latter two instructors seemed locked into a time-honored method of “sage on the stage,” only breaking with this less engaging pattern sporadically and briefly. These latter two instructors seemed to care, but tended to pore in knowledge and failed to make student care to the point of asking deep questions that would encourage deep learning.

The value of direct observation, as an evaluation tool for teaching effectiveness cannot be understated. Direct observation brings to life and makes lasting impressions regarding the topics and conclusion described in Bain’s (2004) book. It was apparent which teaching techniques would promote rote memorization of problem types and patterns, and which would engage, interest, and cause students to care enough to truly desire, consciously or unconsciously, to learn and retain the content and concepts deeply and long term. The instructors that earn student’s trust by encouraging questioning without risk of embarrassment, have faith in them while showing genuine interest in their progress and expecting more from them, and partnering with students in a way where student take control of their learning create a deep learning environment (Bain, 2004, pp. 70, 141)

We live in an exciting time where advanced methods in student engagement like those I saw in ACCT-202 made the learning environment more intimate, collaborative, and effective.

## References

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