# EXCELLENCE IN COLLEGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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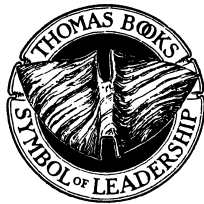
## Classroom and Online Instruction

*By*

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*and*

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# PREFACE

In 2006, there were more than 1.1 million faculty employed in approximately 3,400 U.S. degree-granting higher education institutions. And they taught more than 15 million students. Less than 30 percent of the full-time faculty received comprehensive instruction on how to teach before their appointments. Even fewer part-time faculty, sometimes referred to as "gypsy faculty" or "freeway flyers," received appropriate preparation. The seriousness of this situation was underscored by the fact that approximately 35 percent of all U.S. college and university faculty were part-time, including 66 percent in two-year schools and 20 percent in public research institutions. The rest of the schools averaged about 30 percent part-time faculty.

We do not cite those statistics to praise full-time faculty members or to belittle their part-time colleagues. There are good and bad teachers in both groups. Our point is this: The quality of instruction that college students need is too important to be left to inadequately trained teachers, no matter how small or large their numbers. We are aware that a growing number of schools have implemented preservice and in-service professional development programs for their new and experienced teachers. But that is not enough. All colleges and universities should have professional development staffs or at least adequate resources to assist their teachers to become better in their professions.

There is an undercurrent of frustration among a sizeable number of college freshmen in particular, especially those who completed Advanced Placement courses in high school. They are more likely than their peers who did not complete such courses to complain about uninteresting or unchallenging introductory college courses. Their expectations are not overblown. Formal education is like a sword that can be used to prune ignorance, to emotionally wound students, to

amputate bigotry, or, if undrawn, to leave fragile scholars to fend for themselves. There is no single best way to teach, but there are many ways to fail. We have written a book that we believe is a ségue to professional development initiatives and also the readings found in our bibliography.

Numerous things must be tended to when teachers instruct students. For example, in this book, we speculate about ways teachers can present what may at times seem to be a mountain of information without burying students under it. Also, we explain why teachers must continually update their Internet skills. And whether courses are taught on-campus or online, they should not be academic fluff or pedagogical gimmicks. This is one of few books that gives equal attention to teaching classroom and online courses. There is something bubbling over on many campuses: The greatest number of college instructors prefer teaching students face-to-face, and only a few of them volunteer to teach online courses. Yet the employment trends in local, national, and international workplaces are for college graduates who are proficient in face-to-face and computer interactions.

Unflattering comparisons are plentiful concerning effective and ineffective teachers, whether they teach on-campus or online. That is inevitable. Individuals who would be good teachers must first be diligent learners. They must learn their craft, hone their skills, and have passion for their careers (Day, 2004). Rephrasing a trite cliché, we postulate that those who can should teach; those who can't should not. And the only way to know for sure is to try it. On a more fundamental level, we believe that teaching is like an itch: those who have it, should scratch it. But just because people try something does not mean that they will like it, however. Nor does it mean that they will want to make a career of it even if they like it and are good at it. This is where passion for one's career comes in—and realism.

About 35–45 percent of human communication is verbal, and 55-65 percent is nonverbal. And there are approximately 100,000 discrete gestures that have meanings to peoples around the world. Thus, as you can see, it is easier to communicate course information face-to-face than online where words are almost the sole means of sending messages. Words are full of human relations traps. Their meanings are often distorted. Consider, for example, the fact that there are approximately 600,000 words in the English language, and a literate adult uses about 2,000 of them in daily conversation. Of those words, 5,000

of the most common ones have 14,000 dictionary definitions (Drafke & Kossen, 2002, p. 58). These are some of the reasons all teachers must use their words with great care when communicating with students.

A teacher's influence, positive or negative, transcends the courses taught. Although a teacher's career is usually 20 to 30 years, his or her influence may last for the lifetimes of students or, in rare instances, centuries. An inquiring scribe might rightfully ponder, "What shapes of students' thoughts and intellectual textures do teachers spawn?" The answer: many varied ones. Throughout this book we punctuate sentences and paragraphs with metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and ironies. If we had adhered strictly to a manual of scholarship style, using only professional journal-like sentences, it is unlikely that we would have adequately captured a panoramic view of the consonance and dissonance that characterizes effective and ineffective teaching. Face-to-face teaching is more art than science, so part one is interpersonally expansive. Online teaching is more technology and science than art. Therefore part two is a bit more straightforward, less interpersonal.

One method of course delivery is no better than the other. They are just different in certain ways. There is no reason to choose between them. Both merit a place on a school's schedule of courses. But they are similar in many ways, too. Despite differences in teaching philosophies, methods, and delivery formats, there is a sameness to effective teaching: syllabi must be created; lesson plans and instructional strategies must be designed; and, ultimately, student-teacher interactions must culminate with course-specific information being taught. Effective teaching is often eloquent in its simplicity of explanation but frustrating in its difficulty to operationalize in practice. There are rousing debates over which is easier to do: effective online or face-to-face teaching? We will not blithely dismiss the possibility of both of them being equally difficult to do well. Both are shaped by group dynamics: words spoken or written, gestures seen or imagined, and collaborations completed successfully or botched all contribute to effective or ineffective teaching. This is not surprising but it is too easy to overlook those things.

As artists, classroom and online teachers consciously manage sounds, movements, colors, and the other aspects of teaching. For example, the voice (sounds), which is the classroom teacher's major

instrument of instruction, determines to a great extent how attentively students will listen. And the manner in which a teacher presents information (forms) contextualizes it; how a teacher uses his or her body when lecturing (movements) embellishes the academic prose. Occasionally, a teacher will use charts and graphs (color) to frame information. Therefore it seems perfectly reasonable, even obligatory, for us to describe those aspects of teaching as though they were like drama, music, ballet, or literature. At an extreme, in terms of ineptness, some courses seem like theaters of the absurd; others are examples of perfect mimicry of real-life situations. Although most classes, whether on-campus or online, are somewhat fulfilling, the artistry of teaching is always a work in progress.

There are no secrets to being a good college teacher. Hundreds of journal articles and dozens of books, including this one, provide helpful tips and techniques (see also, for example, Davis, 1993; Brinkley et al., 1999; Provitera-McGlynn, 2001; McKeachie & Hofer, 2002; Lynch, 2002; Weimer, 2002; Bain, 2004; Filene, 2005; Brown & Race, 2006; Kahn & Walsh, 2006). The hard part is for each teacher to find out what will work for him or her. Almost all courses begin like a musical overture. A syllabus of fanfare introduces students to things to come. That usually gets them excited about what they may learn. But sometimes teachers do not deliver all of what their syllabi promise. Although no course is supposed to unfold that way, that is exactly what happens sometimes: they fall short of their goals. This then is a book for people who are scratching their itch to be teachers but are uncomfortable with or unhappy about their performances. They are hungry for new insights. Most teachers are reluctant to talk about themselves. But they find it useful to read about other teachers. That is why we provide a lot of information about other teachers, including ourselves.

Increasingly, college teachers are expected to perform well in whatever instructional delivery methods they use. There are all kinds of students who are happy to talk about the good courses they enrolled in; and there are an equal number of them who freely discuss the bad ones. How to effectively meld an interactive instruction process with course information makes for excellent theories that are often difficult, even impossible in some situations, for most teachers to achieve. It sometimes requires recalibrating teaching techniques to accommodate course content. And that is done best by individuals who are multidi-

mensional. Scattered throughout this book are suggestions about ways teachers can become more responsive to students. The challenge is at once daunting and chilling, but not overwhelmingly so. It can be accomplished with adequate training and institutional support.

In his greatest work *The Republic,* Plato cautioned that knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the learner's mind. He spoke of true education affecting students' inner beings. For Plato, education had to be both a profound and a freeing experience or else it was nothing of significance. Nearly 2,500 years later, John Dewey (1916, 1935, 1938), another philosopher-educator, took up Plato's prescription and expanded it to construct a pedagogical system relevant to the needs of the students in vastly complex industrial democratic societies. Our book owes much gratitude to Plato and Dewey. Like them, we believe that complete freedom for students is not the correct approach. Each teacher must find out how much freedom his or her students can accept responsibility for and then allow them to assume it. Also, students should be in learning environments that stimulate their willingness to learn. This means that they need genuine, realistic problems to solve if they are to engage in academically meaningful self-discovery. And they must be given opportunities to test their knowledge through classroom or online applications or presentations in order to make clear to their teachers and themselves the meanings and validity of the learning.

With those thoughts in mind, we provide succinct overviews of several instructional methods, including their theoretical foundations, that can be used independently or together to enhance the education of college students. While emphases are placed on proven tips and techniques, we offer the caveat that teachers ought to adjust their interventions to fit their own teaching styles and also the readiness of their students. Many of the topics discussed in one chapter are revisited in later ones. This spiral approach to learning is actually repetition and supplementation for knowledge transfer. Thus the academic meal that we have prepared is basted with old and new insights that are allowed to simmer throughout the book. Overall, our book is relatively small in its number of pages. But we believe that there is ample helpful information for would-be, new, and experienced teachers as well as professional development staffs and librarians.

The exercises at the end of each chapter serve dual purposes. They are both self-assessments and summaries of selected data. Some of the

information uncovered through the exercises may not be new to you, it will only reinforce what you already know. Whether they trigger old or new insights, the exercises and the chapters that precede them can help you to get better acquainted, or reacquainted, with the best friend that you may ever have during your teaching career–yourself. They have certainly done that for the authors of this book. Obviously, what you do with this information is up to you. Ideally, the foremost beneficiaries will be your students, many of whom may find useful information in the Appendices A-G. Please feel free to reproduce some or all of them.

We thank the editors of these publications where some of the e-learning articles have appeared: *International Journal of Knowledge and Learning Objects,* Xplanazine, elearners.com, and eLearningQueen.

Finally, we are indebted to Betty Leverich for typing and retyping several drafts of our book.

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# EXCELLENCE IN COLLEGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

# Part I

# TEACHING CLASSROOM COURSES

# INTRODUCTION

GEORGE HENDERSON

Writing this book has been somewhat cathartic for me. It has allowed me to put my own professional teaching career in clearer focus. And during the process, I was reminded of a basic psychological principle: people repress negative memories and more easily recall the pleasant ones. Five years as an adjunct instructor of sociology at Wayne State University and two years at the Harper Hospital School of Nursing, both in Detroit, and almost thirty-nine years as a full-time sociology, education, and human relations professor at the University of Oklahoma's Norman campus afforded me a lot of positive and negative teaching moments to remember. As learning experiences, both the good and the bad memories are enlightening.

I did not have any formal instruction or supervised preservice teacher education training to prepare me for my career. But it didn't bother me. My mentor, Professor Leonard Moss, then chairman of Wayne State's Anthropology and Sociology Department, assured me that formal training was neither a prerequisite nor a necessity for being a college or university teacher. Afterall, as he periodically told his students, he abandoned a lucrative career as a plumber and became an accomplished college professor. That was enough assurance for me. He was indeed an outstanding teacher. "You've got lots of social services and administrative experiences, a baccalaureate degree, and a M.A. One day you will have a Ph.D." he told me in 1962. "And like the rest of us, you can make it [teaching] up as you go along."

## A HORRIBLE BEGINNING

For five years (1962–67), I did indeed "make it up." Armed with thoughts about a few gifted teachers, especially Leonard, I set out to teach. Actually, I joined the ranks of the self-deluded, vain, stern adjunct instructors who, mixed up in my mind, became composite role models. I was a modern Dr. Frankenstein. I created an image of an ideal teacher: bits and pieces of several university professors. For a brief period of time, I actually became my own monster. Indeed, early in my career, I believed that inordinately difficult–even convoluted– course syllabi and excruciating exams supplemented with enthralling lectures were the hallmarks of good teachers. So I taught from the textbooks, read generous portions of course assignments to the students, and used a standardized lecturing style to fit all courses. In each class, I taught continuously, spitting out so much information in rapid fire that not even students who took notes in shorthand could keep up with me. Sometimes, similar to a self-infatuated party guest, I babbled on about things that I knew would not serve the students well. Also, my booby-trapped exams and curve grading destroyed a lot of students' grade-point-averages.

Why then did so many students enroll in my courses? Perhaps it was the novel experience of being taught by an African American college instructor. There were so very few of us at Wayne State or any other predominantly white college or university in the 1960s. Or maybe they wanted to hear the occasional stories I told about my social services and civil rights activities. I believe it was both of those reasons plus a desire to attend well-taught courses. I delivered on the first two expectations but seldom on the third. At most, I was a rough neophyte teacher in dire need of classroom attitudinal and behavioral changes.

Whenever I did not adequately prepare a lecture, I would disguise the missing content with minutia, puffery, and sometimes outright misinformation. But there were always a few students in each of my courses who were courageous enough to publicly question my missteps. Those brave souls would not be hoodwinked by my lectures or bluffed into dialogical retreats during classroom arguments posing as discussions. Nor did they forgive my deliberate faux pas. If I was their self-appointed Moses, they wisely decided to not follow me through my shallow Red Sea courses of half-truths. After losing a few verbal skirmishes with those students, I did a half-hearted reality check. As

painful as it was to acknowledge, I reluctantly concluded that I was at best a mediocre teacher who could possibly get much better. But in the end, I decided that my critics were just poor students. So I did not become a better teacher.

Simply stated, during those first five years, I did nothing to reinvent myself. That is, I did not seriously consider adopting more effective teaching methods. Instead, I refined the distorted Socratic questioning technique that I used to win arguments with students at the expense of their self-esteem and grades, and my own professional growth. Those were hollow victories that honored neither Socrates nor me. Also, unlike the most effective of my mentors who were cool during verbal exchanges with students, I was an overheated, fragmented inquisitor. No, those were not my finest moments. I was so full of myself that I thought the foul smell of rotten egos was coming only from the classrooms adjacent to mine. Quite frankly, I was like an alcoholic behaving badly and who had not yet hit bottom.

A few years later, I would regret embarrassing numerous students during those classroom battles of will. Countless individuals lost more than grades; they lost their heart for further study with me. During those encounters, the clashes often were similar to an untidy playground fight over whose game rules should prevail. And the arguments cooked up on both sides were neither fresh nor fully prepared. When I was sucked into the adolescent-like rebellions, my lectures became anything but well-focused. I used the encounters as opportunities to deliver bogus verbal whippings to students. Yes, I was professionally and emotionally out of control. My tirades were menacing extremes of pitch, volume, and gesticulations. To an outsider looking in, it might have seemed that I was at war with myself. It was impossible for me to orchestrate the kind of classes I really wanted to teach because I, the person in charge, was out of control.

Toward the end of my stay in Detroit, I began to sense within me a nagging need to abandon the highly direct, visceral style of lecturing that had come to be my identity as a teacher. Thank goodness for the student who blurted out during the last semester before I left Detroit, "You're full of crap. You say things that are not true and punish us on tests and papers for not agreeing with you." And then she ran out of the room crying. She was right! I had lost my way. Or more correctly, I had never really found it. And then life-changing things happened to me.