



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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A Teacher Evaluation Plan

Background

Thirty-three years ago in a comparative anatomy class at St. Lawrence University, Robert Crowell asked me to create an animal that would survive the rigors of change and evolve by learning to swim in the sea. I felt energized by his challenge. My mood in the classroom changed from apathy to the excitement and joy associated with active learning. The heavy feeling I had so often experienced as I walked to school lifted as I discovered that learning can be fun, something to celebrate rather than something to dread. I began a colorful journey back to the sea. I began creating a unique animal—me.

Doug Michell teaches classes in death and dying, the psychology of aging, and love and the human condition at California State University, Sacramento. He believes that he does not teach his students anything, that students teach themselves, and that students learn more under certain kinds of conditions. He provides a caring and supportive environment in which to learn, and his students are asked to be responsible for their own learning.

At the beginning of each semester, Doug asks each student to make his/her own learning plan. He offers suggestions and provides information—such as, reading lists, kinds of community projects, and group discussions; however, almost anything related to the course subject that has the potential of benefitting the student or society is acceptable. I learned more and probably did more work in Doug's classes than I did in classes where I had been given specific assignments, because I had the opportunity to choose projects in which I had a strong interest. At the end of the semester, Doug asks each student to evaluate what he/she has learned during the semester and to assign himself/herself a theoretical grade.

Dean Moore is head of the mathematics department at Lee Junior High School and teaches evening and summer session mathematics and statistics at Yuba College in Woodland, California. He is also involved in Ph.D. studies in mathematics at the University of California at Davis.

Dean noticed that one of the students in his summer session Algebra II class was motivated, did his homework assignments regularly, seemed knowledgeable of the subject as evidenced by his classroom participation, but did poorly on tests. When the student wanted to drop the class, Dean made him a proposal which would be beneficial to each of them; he wanted to use the student in an experiment as part of his dissertation. He started working with the student, giving him oral rather than written tests, at first. Gradually, the student, with extended time in which to complete the tests and a quiet place where he could verbalize the questions and the answers, became confident and proficient enough to do B work on the tests.

Jim Lawson teaches speech and English at Yuba College. In his beginning speech class, Jim addresses the issue of anxiety in public speaking. His premise is: The more we do it, the easier and better it gets. A student's grade depends on the number of times he/she attends class (one point) and the number of times he/she speaks (two points for speaking one to five minutes, and one extra point if the student has researched a topic). The maximum number of points per class session is four. Everyone who wants to speak gets a chance to do so each class period. Those who want to work simply sign in on the board when they arrive. Not only do Jim's students learn to speak, they learn to listen. People have a marvelous array of tales to tell and talents to share. Jim writes sensitive feedback on 3 x 5 index cards which he gives at the end of each class session to those who have presented that day. Most of us looked forward to those cards containing the "pats on the back" that we rarely give ourselves. Gradually, the students build confidence; and their speeches get more interesting, informative, humorous, and open.

Jim's approach in his advanced composition and critical thinking class shares some of the elements of Doug Michell's teaching philosophy. He creates a comfortable, caring environment, while asking us to work. We write! Like Doug, Jim suggests topics or areas of writing for assignments. There is room for individual choice within the boundaries of the suggested topics and for the expression of original opinions and styles of writing. Jim focuses on strategies of writing and the process of writing, as well as finished



products. I feel creative and alive in this class.

What have Robert Crowell, Doug Michell, Dean Moore, and Jim Lawson learned from their teaching experiences? *Only they can say! And I think they should!*

An Evaluation Plan

A realistic criterion for evaluating teachers is that teachers have *learned something significant* from the act of teaching. Teachers need to evaluate themselves, and I suggest that each teacher be required to write an essay entitled: "What I Have Learned From Teaching (course name and number) During (semester and year)."

In writing this essay, the teacher must focus on himself/herself, he/she will discover that the quality and style of the essay will say much about him/her, and the specific teaching experiences will become the major foci of the evaluation.

By focusing on, observing, and writing about themselves, teachers may learn to attend to details which they may not ordinarily notice or think important, see more clearly what does and does not work, and be more sensitive to such things as the level of enthusiasm in the classroom. They may become aware of problem areas and think of ways of solving these problems.

The quality and style of a teacher's essay will be revealing. Does he care about teaching; does she care about students? The essay itself provides the evaluator with information about this teacher's commitment to teaching, enthusiasm for the job, organizational skills, and style of expression.

What teachers learn from teaching a course will be as varied as the classroom experiences. Writing the evaluation essay will give both new and experienced teachers feedback about where they are and provide insights into new directions for their teaching. I believe that a good teacher, beginning or experienced, needs to be interested in teaching as an *ongoing process of learning*.

By whom would the teacher essays be evaluated? I don't have a good answer, but I think that somehow teachers need to evaluate themselves and each other. I think that self-evaluation, honesty, and the sharing of these essays would be a valuable learning experience for teachers and would generate some exciting new approaches to teaching.

The ideas in my teacher evaluation plan originated from my disenchantment with traditional education. They grew out of the pain, fear, and anger I have felt at gobbling and regurgitating information. They grew

out of the joy of experiencing real learning, of creating—the kind of learning I have experienced by working with Robert, Doug, Dean, and Jim.

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