

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **TEACHING: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT**

### **Orientation to College and Adult Teaching**

In the coming decades, teachers of college and adult students will be faced with many challenges. Compared to the classroom of former years, the evolution to the modern classroom has resulted in significant changes. The influx of multicultural, multi-generational and multilingual students, the impact of technology, online learning, and the admission of students with differing academic preparation have demanded the attention of educators. In addition, changing economic and political pressures throughout the world have impacted education and, you, the instructor.

You will feel the impact whether you teach in a continuing education program for business/industry or the military; in a liberal arts college with time-honored traditions and values; in a community college with an open door policy; in a public research university with postgraduate programs; or in a distance education program. Your students will be more highly motivated, more challenging and in many ways more enjoyable to teach.

With the focus on accountability and the realization that there are established strategies and techniques for instruction, there is greater emphasis upon quality instruction. Adult students employed in business and industry expect a planned and organized classroom. It is no longer a question of whether there are going to be instructional objectives and strategies for teaching; it is a question of how skilled instructors are in developing and delivering them.

One of the most important factors, however, remains the human element of teaching. If you enjoy being a teacher, there is

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nothing wrong with telling the students that you are there because you enjoy teaching. Being cheerful, open, and understanding is always an asset to good teaching. Students will like to hear your experiential anecdotes — share them. Look upon the class as a project. Adult students expect planning and preparation and will not rebel if they are required. Be aware of your cultural and intellectual environment. Strive to be a good and successful instructor and your teaching experiences will be exciting, rewarding, and satisfying.



It might help you to take a few moments before your first class to meditate about your reasons for teaching. This will do two things: it will encourage you to more clearly identify your personal goals and it will increase your confidence.

There may be students who question why someone with your expertise would spend their time teaching a college course. Be prepared. Have a few answers ready if students ask. If they don't ask, you might want to include it in your personal introduction. You certainly have good reasons. It might be to your advantage to communicate them. You may just enjoy teaching, like interaction with others, like the stimulation, enjoy being in front of a group, or feel it improves your own skills.

You should also give thought to your role in your institution. In short “what is an adjunct/part-time instructor?” Too often adjunct faculty, and thus their students, feel their place within the institution is a temporary and unimportant one. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Adjunct faculty in recent years have assumed a greater responsibility to the educational mission of their colleges and universities. Many institutions depend upon adjunct faculty for 50 percent or more of credit hours of instruction taught. Also in many institutions, adjunct and part-time faculty serve on com-

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mittees and accept other non-instructional assignments. Finally, adjunct faculty often teach in specialized areas where specific qualifications and expertise is needed. Yes, whether you are a continuing adjunct or a last-minute part-time replacement, yours is an important role and necessary to the integrity and success of your institution.



As with their full-time colleagues, teaching is still a vocation for many adjunct instructors, a calling to those individuals who enjoy being with people and feel an intrinsic satisfaction in helping others to grow.

In your role as an adjunct/part-time instructor, you will realize many of the intrinsic rewards of the profession. You are repaying your profession for its contributions to your own personal and professional development. There is satisfaction in providing service to your community and you will find that teaching builds self esteem, offers personal rewards, and keeps you intellectually alive. Teaching can provide intellectual growth, community recognition and respect, and the development of new professional contacts. The satisfactions and rewards of being a good adjunct instructor are real and many.

### **Establishing a Teaching Environment**

Over the past decades, there has been a major movement in higher education called “the learning college” movement or community-centered learning. Quite simply, this means that learning has become student-centered rather than instructor-centered. This is especially important to adjunct faculty members, most of whom come from the surrounding community and thus are aware of community mores.

When establishing a student-centered learning environment, one should first examine the teacher-student relationship. The simple and most obvious way to develop a relationship with your

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students is be yourself and be honest, establishing communication in the classroom the same as you would in any other human endeavor. There are, however, additional specific steps that can be taken to establish a proper learning environment. Helen Burnstad describes four areas in which the learning environment should be examined: teacher expectations, teaching behavior, physical space, and strategies for creating an environment for learning (Burnstad, 2000). Although it is impossible to describe these areas completely in this handbook, some of Burnstad's major points are examined below:

- **Teacher expectations.** It is important first, that each instructor have a clear picture of his or her own style and expectations. The expectations that you as an instructor have of yourself may differ considerably from those of the students in your class. This does not mean that you need to change your style. However, you need to examine the expectations of your students in terms of their position (rather than your position) on issues and principles that may arise in class. Also it is important that you consider your own teaching goals. From this you can frame your philosophy and intent regarding the content of the course.
- **Teacher behaviors.** It is important that you examine your presence in the classroom. Students will sense whether you really love your subject matter or are teaching the course to reach some unrelated professional goal. A pleasant personality is important. Enthusiasm may be demonstrated through energy and engaging in activities with students. Remember, your feelings concerning the expectations of your students will unwittingly be reflected in the success or failure of your students.
- **Physical space.** Although in most cases you will have little control over the physical aspects of the classroom environment, there are several things that can be done by the instructor. If possible, you may physically move

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seats so that dialogue and eye contact are easier. You should monitor the attention span of your students; sense the need for reinforcement; calculate the time-on-task; and encourage students to move, interact and ask questions.

- Environmental Strategies. Some strategies that can improve the classroom environment include:
  1. **Introducing yourself** to your students with some personal anecdotes.
  2. **Being prepared** for students with diverse backgrounds.
  3. **Using an activity for getting to know** your students, whether a game, a writing assignment, or reference card, etc.
  4. **Learning each student's name** and providing ways for students to get to know one another.
  5. **Preparing a complete and lively syllabus.** You can have your students from a previous class leave a legacy by asking them to write a letter for incoming students then sharing it.
  6. **Using classroom assessment** techniques.

Finally, whether one is establishing a classroom environment or doing day-to-day activities, it is important that you be as positive in your student-teacher relationships as toward your subject matter. Make yourself available for student contact, either personally or electronically. Take a personal interest in each student and never judge or stereotype students.

### **Characteristics of Good Teaching**

Using one's mind in the pursuit of knowledge and at the same time sharing it with others is very gratifying. The responsibility for a class and the potential influence on students can be very stimulating. It remains stimulating, however, only so long as the instructor continues to grow and remains dynamic.

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The qualities of good teaching are quite simple:



- Know your subject content.
- Know and like your students.
- Understand our culture.
- Possess professional teaching skills and strategies.

Knowing your subject means simply that you have a command of your discipline and the capability of calling upon resources. Knowing students is part of the teaching process and is aided by formal and informal communication within and outside the classroom. Understanding our cultural milieu has become increasingly complex for today's instructor. Sensitivity to the diverse cultures in your classroom is necessary to succeed in teaching. Finally, it is necessary that you continue to develop and improve strategies and techniques for the delivery of instruction in the classroom.

Some characteristics that students look for in good teachers are:



- Being knowledgeable, organized, and in control.
- Getting students actively involved in their learning.
- Helping students understand the course objectives and goals.
- Being a facilitator, not a director.
- Knowing the latest trends and technology.
- Stimulating discussion utilizing ice breakers.
- Preparing professional materials and handouts.

### **Setting the Tone**

Education professionals and teacher trainers agree that creating positive feelings about the course is an important goal for any instructor. Often instructors assume that students know they intend to be pleasant, cooperative, and helpful. However, this should not be taken for granted. With differing personalities and types of students in the classroom, faculty members must realize that a positive comment or gesture to one student may in fact be negative to another student. Thus, you should make a concerted effort to be friendly. A smile, a pleasant comment, or a laugh with students who are attempting to be funny will pay great dividends.

In setting the tone of the classroom, permissiveness is sometimes a good strategy. We are all familiar with the old classroom where students were essentially “passive” learners. We are also familiar with situations where excessive permissiveness became a distraction to other students. Teachers of adults must realize that flexibility and permissiveness are important to a proper learning environment and that encouraging creativity and unexpected comments is part of the learning and teaching process. The instructor has ultimate authority so excessive distraction can always be controlled. Instructors need not exercise authority for its own sake. Remember, permissiveness and flexibility requires considerable skill to work. Authority comes with the title of instructor.

### **Teachers as Actors and Actresses**

In reality, teachers are on stage; they are actors or actresses whether or not they recognize and admit it. A teacher in front of the classroom carries all of the responsibility for the success of the performance, and this requires all of the talents of anyone on the stage. Due to modern technology, unfortunately, students compare faculty to professionals they have seen in other roles. Thus, adjunct faculty must be alert to the ramifications of poor presentation. Faculty members have within themselves all of the emotions of stage performers but with greater audience interaction. There may occasionally be an emotional reaction in class and you should prepare for it. As an instructor, you will experience fear, joy, and feelings of tentativeness, but also feelings of extreme

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confidence and satisfaction. Handle fear with good preparation; confidence brought forward with good preparation is the easiest way to lessen fear. Remove anxieties from the classroom by developing communication systems. Some adjunct faculty members are effective at using humor.



As a general rule, however, humor should be used delicately. Jokes are completely out. Almost any joke that is told will offend someone.

### **Classroom Communication**

Many kinds of communication exist in every classroom situation. You must be aware that facial expressions and eye contact with students, as well as student interactions, are all forms of communication. It is your responsibility to ensure that classroom communication is structured in a positive manner. Communication starts the moment you enter the classroom for the first class session. The communication methods you use during the first class and the initial interaction with students are indicative of the types of communication that will exist throughout the course.

The amount of student participation as the course progresses is an indicator of the direction in which the communication is flowing; more is always better. Since many students today are adults, there is greater opportunity to call upon their experiences. The discussion of facts, events, examples, analogies, and anecdotes will often elicit an association for your adult students. This will encourage students to share experiences and anecdotes of their own.

Do not assume that classroom communication can only be between the instructor and students. Communication in the classroom can take any number of forms. It can mean a room full of small group activities where students are discussing and interacting with each other as the instructor stands silently by. It can also include animated and serious discussions and even disagreements

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while addressing a specific problem or issue presented in class. As the instructor, one of your major responsibilities is to provide a setting where students can communicate freely and provide an instructor-directed vehicle that maintains positive goal-oriented communication.

Some specific instructor-led communication activities include the use of open-ended questions, critical thinking techniques, anecdotes, and problem-solving activities. Communication activities between students include buzz groups, a partner system, student panels, collaborative learning activities, student group reports, brainstorming and group discussions. Remember, a good class is dynamic, participative, and interactive.

### **The Three Rs of Teaching**

Everyone remembers the three Rs of learning. For any instructor, however, the three Rs of teaching, are equally important.

The three Rs of good teaching are: repeat, respond, and reinforce. Very simply, student comments and contributions, if worthy of being recognized in class, are worthy of being repeated. A simple repeat, however, is not sufficient. You should elicit an additional response either from the class or the student making the original statement. After the response, you should offer a reinforcement of the statement or add your own conclusions. These three simple rules improve class relationships by emphasizing the importance of student contributions, relationships between students, and the instructor's respect for all the students. This promotes two-way communication and represents the application of one of the basic tenets of learning—reinforcement.

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### **Teaching Styles**

Just as students have styles of learning, faculty have their own styles of teaching. Whether your style is one of planned preparation or a natural development, your style is important. For example, an instructor who emphasizes facts in teaching will have difficulty developing meaningful discussions with students who have progressed to the analysis stage of their learning. It is not important that part-time instructors modify their behavior to match that of students. It is important, however, that part-time faculty recognize their own teaching styles and adapt teaching processes, techniques, and strategies to enhance their most effective style. Some questions to assist you in determining your teaching style are:

- Do I tend to be authoritative, directional, semi-directional, or laissez-faire in my classroom leadership?
- Do I solicit communication with and between students easily or with difficulty?
- Am I well-organized and prepared?
- Am I meticulous in my professional appearance or do I have a tendency to put other priorities first and show up in class as is?



A common mistake for many instructors is that they assume their students will learn in the same manner in which the instructor learned as a student.

Therefore, it would be wise to examine some of the basic learning styles of students, discussed in detail in Chapter 2. By understanding student learning styles, you can modify your teaching techniques to be certain that your presentation style does not turn off certain students.

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For example, if you tended to learn best from a direct non-sense instructor, then chances are you will lean toward that type of behavior in your own teaching. This would satisfy students who learn in that manner; however, there will be students in your class who are more successful in a more laissez-faire-type environment that gives more freedom of expression. If you thrive on open communication and discussion in your learning process, expecting this from all of your students may be a false hope since many students are silent learners and may be intimidated by the need to verbally participate in class.

These are only a few examples of the types of teaching style adjustments that may be necessary to become an effective facilitator of learning. I have found that teaching styles are not static. Many of the techniques I used early in my career with younger students who appreciated humor and diversion were not as effective later with more mature students who felt they were there to learn, not to be entertained. I also noticed later in my career that although I was well-organized, had well-stated objectives, used good class communication, and observed the characteristics that I deemed important to good teaching, I had become too serious. For that reason I now occasionally mix in with my lesson plan an additional sheet that says to me, “smile, be friendly, smell the roses.”

Also, I have found an evolution in the use of anecdotes. Strangely enough it was the reverse. Early in my career the use of anecdotes sometimes drew criticism from students as “too much story telling,” or “more war stories.” Later I began to put the question on my evaluation questionnaires: “Were the anecdotes and stories meaningful?” The overwhelming response from adult students was “yes.” They were pertinent, they brought meaning to the class, and they were valuable because the adults were interested in real life experiences rather than rote lecturing.



One note of caution, however, the use of anecdotes should relate to the topic being discussed and not simply stories of other experiences.

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In general, however, most of today's students will approve of anecdotes and may have their own to contribute.

If you wish to do a quick analysis of your style, it can easily be done using the Internet. One such survey is "Gardner's Multiple Intelligences," available on most major search engines. This survey allows you to examine your strengths in eight categories, allowing you to analyze your own strengths and weaknesses in relation to your students. Although you need to be aware of copyright restrictions, many sites have surveys available with copyright permission granted so you can even use them in class.

A meaningful exercise might be to have your students complete the survey on their own (it is non-threatening) and discuss the composite results and what they mean in class.

### **Professional Ethics**

Although the teaching profession has been slow (compared to other professions) to address ethical issues, developments of the past few decades has encouraged an examination of the ethical status of college faculty. Although the recent attention has been inspired by legal or public relations concerns, there has always existed an unwritten code of ethics for teachers based upon values that have evolved both within the teaching profession and our culture.

Dr. Wilbert McKeachie states, "Ethical standards are intended to guide us in carrying out the responsibilities we have to the different groups with whom we interact" (McKeachie, 1994).

Some institutions have adopted written standards of ethical behavior expected of all college faculty. A compilation of some of

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these standards is listed below as an example and all adjunct/part-time faculty should check with their department director or dean for information on their institution's standards. For clarity, the guidelines are presented in two categories: those pertaining to the profession of teaching and those pertaining to students.

**Ethics and the Profession.** This section is an attempt to emphasize the ethical expectations of the profession and the institution in which part-time faculty are employed.

Adjunct faculty:

- Will attend all assigned classes with adequately prepared materials and content as described in the course description.
- Will not attempt to teach a course for which they are not qualified and knowledgeable.
- Will present all sides on controversial issues.
- Will conduct a fair evaluation of students, applied equally to all.
- Will not promote outside entrepreneurial activities within the class setting.
- When reasonably possible, will attend college orientations and other development activities presented for the improvement of their role as an instructor.
- Will avoid behavior that may be interpreted as discriminatory based upon gender, age, social status or racial background.
- Will hold their colleagues and institution in highest respect in their actions and communication within and outside the institution.

**Professional Ethics and Students.** This section relates to ethical considerations concerning students.

Adjunct faculty:

- Won't discuss students and their problems outside of the professional structure of the institution.

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- Will refer student personal problems to qualified staff.
- Will maintain and honor office hours and appointments with students.
- Will respect students' integrity and avoid social encounters with students which might suggest misuse of power.
- Will not attempt to influence students' philosophy or their positions concerning social and political issues.
- Will not ask students for personal information for research purposes.

These guidelines are quite general; however, they provide a vehicle for examining more closely the expectations of the institution in which you teach. Unfortunately, in today's world, there is sometimes a fine line between ethical issues and legal issues.

More formal statements of professional standards are available from the American Association of University Professors, "Statement on Professional Ethics," adopted in 1987, <<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubres/policydocs/contents/statementonprofessionalethics.htm>>, as well as the National Education Association. For purposes of brevity, only the NEA's "Commitment to the Student" under the Code of Ethics of the Education Profession is presented here. <<http://www.nea.org/home/30442.htm>>

The educator strives to help each student realize his or her potential as a worthy and effective member of society. The educator therefore works to stimulate the spirit of inquiry, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals.

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In fulfillment of the obligation to the student, the educator—

- Shall not unreasonably restrain the student from independent action in the pursuit of learning.
- Shall not unreasonably deny the student's access to varying points of view.
- Shall not deliberately suppress or distort subject matter relevant to the student's progress.
- Shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety.
- Shall not intentionally expose the student to embarrassment or disparagement.
- Shall not on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation, unfairly:
  - a. exclude any student from participation in any program.
  - b. deny benefits to any student.
  - c. grant any advantage to any student.
- Shall not use professional relationships with students for private advantage.
- Shall not disclose information about students obtained in the course of professional service unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law (NEA, 1975).

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty usually appears in two forms: outright cheating or plagiarism. The problem of cheating in college classrooms has probably become more common in the last few years due to the pressures on students to succeed. Adding to the problem is the fact that we offer student instruction in conducting research online, which in turn leads to temptation to copy and paste materials found online rather than to conduct original research.

To minimize cheating, some instructors place a significant percentage of the student evaluation in the form of shared or active student participation. These activities are evaluated for all members of the group, thus providing no incentive for individuals to attempt to cheat to better themselves. It is important also that in

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the classroom environment ethical responsibilities requiring trust and honesty are emphasized. Of course, the traditional method of countering cheating is to develop multiple tests with different questions and to not repeat the same test or test questions term after term.

Regardless of the amount of trust built in a classroom situation, all exams should be proctored and you should never leave the room in which an exam is being conducted. The instructor is ethically responsible for this commitment to the students who are striving honestly to achieve their goals and make their grade and to the institution. Obviously, extra time spent by the instructor to devise an evaluation plan in which written tests are only part of the final grade is time well spent. Lastly, on the final exam, students may be asked to write in their own words the two or three principles that affected them most in the course and what they feel they may gain in the future. This question could represent a significant part of the final grade.

If you suspect or encounter a student in the act of cheating or plagiarism, the student should be made aware of the situation. This should be done in confidence in a face-to-face meeting.



In the legalistic world we live in, there can only be one conclusive bit of advice: as an instructor, you must be aware of your institution's official procedures and the legal status of your position.

Suspecting someone of cheating or actually seeing is an unpleasant experience; however, it will likely happen in your teaching experience sooner or later. Usually, reasonable rational procedures will adequately cover the situation without the destruction of the student's academic career or standing.

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To learn more about academic dishonesty and how to deal with it, refer to the ERIC Digest “Academic Dishonesty and the Community College,” published in 2001, <<http://www.ericdigests.org/2001-3/college.htm>>

In addition, you may want to visit the web site of the Center for Academic Integrity at <<http://www.academicintegrity.org>>.

### **Checklist for Part-Time Faculty**

There are many things that you need to know when receiving your teaching assignment. Each teaching situation may call for new information. There are, however, basic items that will almost assuredly be asked sometime during class. This section lists information you may wish to check before entering the first class.

(After reviewing this list, it is recommended that a personal timeline be developed including these and other important dates related to teaching the course.)