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Partners In Pedagogy: Faculty Development Through the Scholarship of Teaching

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The Partners in Pedagogy project uses a three-pronged plan of action to address faculty development through the scholarship of teaching: a) the formation of faculty pairs to conduct classroom observations of each other's teaching, b) interviews with three of each other's students, and c) collegial discussion, both between faculty pairs and cross-discipline at monthly meetings. The combination of monthly meetings to discuss pedagogy, feedback from peers concerning teaching methods and techniques unrelated to evaluations, student interviews, and cross-discipline participation contribute to the powerfulness of this campus-wide program.

Enhancement of teaching through faculty development is hardly a new idea. As early as 1978, Centra reported that of 2,600 accredited degree-granting institutions, 60 percent responded positively to an inquiry asking if the institution "had an organized program or set of practices for faculty development and improving instruction" (p. 152). Faculty development is defined in very broad terms and often takes the form of evaluation, as when a peer evaluates another's class for

promotion of tenure decisions (Weimer, 1990). While evaluation is useful for the institution, it does not result in teaching enhancement because of the inherent problems, such as reliability of peer observations and confidentiality issues (Weimer, 1990). Evaluating a peer's class for the purpose of providing information used for promotion or tenure results in different information than if the evaluation is for the purpose of improving teaching with an eye on specific points requested by the one being observed! Observations, for the purpose of evaluations, infrequently lead to dialogue about teaching concerns (Weimer, 1990) or pedagogy. Alternately, faculty development specifically related to teaching enhancement often is a "one shot, call in the expert approach." In this case the institution (or college, committee, teaching center, etc.) pays for an acknowledged expert on instruction to present a talk or a workshop. This can be very worthwhile if it is part of a package of activities related to the enhancement of teaching. However, as a one-shot deal it may excite faculty to try a new idea but rarely results in a long term examination of pedagogy. The enhancement of teaching is not something that happens due to blindly trying a new idea, but is a process of careful examination of what occurs in the classroom, the methodology of teaching, a concern for students, ongoing assessment, and honest feedback over the course of a semester. The remainder of this article describes a project implemented at a state university to address teaching enhancement through peer collaboration.

Partners In Pedagogy

Partners in Pedagogy is modeled after the highly successfully New Jersey Partners in Learning Program (formerly called The New Jersey Master Faculty Program). Through peer observations, student interviews, and organized discussions of pedagogy (Katz & Henry, 1993) teaching effectiveness is enhanced, one of four general views of scholarship suggested by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer, 1990). Enhancing one's teaching without the involvement of others is very difficult. Teaching is a public process; therefore it needs to be evaluated by "the public," either students or peers. Feedback is the cornerstone of change. King and

Waggoner address this issue and provide a rationale and a call for formative evaluation (1994, cited in *The Teaching Professor*, 1995). Peers provide a comprehensive evaluation of a colleague's teaching enabling the colleague to accurately assess the impact of his or her teaching. Many researchers in higher education concur that teachers can be a valuable resource for each other. Soloman and Soloman note that "They need to learn from each other, evaluate each other, and students lose no respect for a teacher whom they see as also being a learner....Professors ought to sit in on each other's classes, so that it becomes a regular part of the scene. It will improve teaching and surely enrich the intellectual life of the university" (1993, p. 225). Improving instruction is the core issue.

Another means of providing valuable information about the success of one's teaching methods are interviews with students during the semester. Most student course evaluations provide quantitative data and sometimes qualitative data returned to the professor after grades are given, too late to be of use to the class. Yet students can provide good data about teaching skills, such as appropriateness of pace, usage of overheads or films, clarity of content, and so forth; information which can be utilized during the semester to enhance the course. Often student input also addresses the classroom climate and perceptions of fairness. An added benefit is that "Professors become aware of the variety of their students, the great differences in cognitive and emotional ways of responding to the course and teacher" (Katz & Henry, 1993, p. 14). Good teaching is multifaceted and addresses both cognitive and affective concerns.

In addition to peer collaboration on teaching, discussions of pedagogy with colleagues engaged in the same professional activities generates a "shared vision of intellectual and social possibilities-a community of scholars" (Boyer 1990, p. 80). The need to collaborate can be seen by the multiple forums developed to help teachers talk with one another. Conferences on teaching have burgeoned, many of which are discipline specific; computer bulletin boards are increasing in number; institutions are continuing to appropriate money for teaching centers; numerous books and journals are devoted to the enhancement of teaching; and colleagues continue to clamor for opportunities to discuss pedagogy. Yet, at my own institution "we" rarely make time

to discuss cross discipline issues of pedagogy with one another. I suspect this is not an isolated phenomenon. As faculty we suffer from the same problems we accuse students of: procrastination, missed appointments, and poor planning.

The Partners in Pedagogy Project fosters faculty development with a three-pronged plan of action, a) the formation of faculty pairs to conduct classroom observations of each other's teaching; b) interviews with three of each other's students; and, c) collegial discussion, both between faculty pairs and cross-discipline at monthly meetings. The combination of monthly meetings to discuss pedagogy, peer observations, student interviews, and cross-discipline participation contribute to the powerfulness of the program.

Professional Development Through the Enhancement of Teaching

Twenty faculty members volunteered to participate in the program. Pairs were assigned on the basis of scheduling convenience and discipline (pair members should be of different disciplines to encourage the focus on teaching style, not content, thereby removing much of the threat observations may pose). Partner observations took place three times a semester, with the observer/observed role switching during the winter semester break. After each observation, pairs met and shared information. The format of the observation was decided upon by the pairs; some asked their partner to focus on specific aspects of their teaching, others asked for more general comments. Arguments can be made for a more structured format for observations. However, for this group it was felt that a more open-ended format might be best for the initial trial run. Observation focus points were distributed to facilitate the observation process for those who felt unsure how to proceed. At the first meeting, prior to any observations, methods for reporting both positive and negative feedback were discussed with an emphasis placed on nonjudgmental feedback of teaching.

Student interviews emerged as a powerful tool in gathering information. Researchers are increasingly recognizing the value in and importance of student feedback (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Katz & Henry, 1993). Soloman and Soloman state "Peers can evaluate the

quality and accuracy of the material and the 'competence' of the presentation, but teaching is primarily a relationship between the teacher and the students, and it is the students who are in the best position to evaluate this relationship" (1993, p. 130). Peer dyads solicited student feedback in a variety of ways. Students were either randomly selected or volunteered for interviewing. Interviews took place in person whenever possible. Some participants preferred to interview each student individually while others preferred a group method. Personal comfort was stressed as it was felt that participation in the program is more important than everyone completing the program in an identical fashion. Regardless of method used for solicitation, students were assured of confidentiality and most responded with such enthusiasm that some project participants "complained" that once students started talking they tended to overstay their scheduled appointment times! Many of the students expressed surprise that professors were interested in their comments. As one faculty participant wrote in her journal, "Students seemed more anxious than I had expected to clearly air their views about the professor being evaluated, and they were anxious to have similar input for other professors participating in the program. Even when they clearly had a good deal of positive feedback about the evaluated professor, they also offered constructive input on how this professor could improve."

Monthly meetings were held over dinner to provide participants with an unencumbered meeting time and to provide a small incentive for participation. Particularly enjoyable was the diversity of tenure among participants. The number of years of teaching varied, as did standing at the university. Dialogue at these meetings took an interesting turn, one which was initially alarming before settling into what became a familiar routine. As participants arrived at the meetings, they sat with people they knew or met new peers and complained about scheduling, students, grading, etc. Groups would gradually merge into one large group discussing a topic of common interest related to the project. Meetings would progress from complaining to sharing, to strategy identification, and topic discussion. Most often, topics for discussion evolved as a natural outgrowth of problems related to the project or from frustrations encountered in the classroom made more glaring by participation in the project. These meetings served to foster

a community of individuals with a broad variety of interests sharing common concerns. It quickly became apparent that what started as an individual concern was usually a common concern. Many of us realized that our classrooms are not really unique.

Major costs for this project included a director's stipend, two books on the enhancement of teaching, and dinners. The costs for this project were covered by a state grant and institutional contribution, although similar programs could be run through a school's center for teaching. Books could be available for loan through a school's center or library and the costs of monthly dinners could be offset through institutional contribution or be minimized by only supplying dessert and beverages for "brown bag" dinners. A director, or someone willing to take charge of scheduling, is necessary. Voice mail or e-mail can greatly simplify announcing dates or changes.

The Scholarship of Teaching

Participant testimonials provide ample support for the worthiness of this project as one vehicle to address the scholarship of teaching. Nine participants returned an end-of-project evaluation form and 10 separate personal interviews were conducted. Twelve of the participants found the program so meaningful and satisfying that at the end of the year they committed to continuing in the fall and three new participants joined the group upon hearing about it from colleagues. One hundred percent of those who returned the evaluation form and/or were interviewed said they would recommend this type of a program to a colleague. As a result of their participation in the program, 8 of the 9 who returned their evaluation forms said that they made changes in their teaching, with the ninth indicating "not yet." Seventy-eight percent saw themselves as better teachers and more enthusiastic about teaching. One question from the personal interviews, "What did you learn from participation in the program?" prompted two types of answers. Some interviewees indicated that they now have a better understanding of students and expressed surprise at the quality of the student evaluation feedback. Others talked about learning about themselves, increasing their awareness concerning their beliefs about teaching, student/teacher responsibility, and personal style. For these

individuals, participation in the program prompted self-reflection and careful examination of their role as "teacher," a highly desirable outcome of the program. While I will acknowledge that we all think about our teaching, for some, without support and the continual prompting of peers it may become a taken-for-granted activity.

Dinner meeting discussions were a valuable tool for the enhancement of professional growth. Issuing a schedule of monthly dinners at the beginning of the semester enabled participants to set aside time and assured their presence. Participants ranked dinner meetings as the most important component of the Partners in Pedagogy Project. Giving voice to fears, concerns, and frustrations, without the concerns of evaluation for tenure and promotion, provided a much needed outlet to address the goal of serving our students to the best of our ability. Most often, the data from the peer observations provided the basis for much of the discussions.

Opening the classroom door and exposing one's teaching baggage is generally agreed to be a valuable start to enhancing one's teaching. Twenty faculty have directly benefited through their involvement with the project. More importantly, students in the classes of those involved have been the beneficiaries of excitement and renewed interest in the art and science of teaching. Additionally, many participants stated that they continued some of the dinner meeting discussions with colleagues from their departments.

Lest this description sound like a panacea for mediocrity in the classroom, a caveat emptor is in order. The time commitment for successful involvement in the Partners in Pedagogy Program is substantial. Many participants expressed their frustration concerning the time involved to "do it right." While the dinner meetings entail only a small commitment, the peer observations and student interviews involve a greater block of time, possibly 12 to 15 hours per semester. Even those, who at sign-up time thought they would have ample time, found that as the semester progressed, time became a precious commodity. On a more positive note, even those who did not fully participate believed they gained from the program and would consider participating in the future. At worst, the program increases cross-discipline collegiality. At best, it leads to the enhancement of teaching

through the examination of pedagogy, core to the scholarship of teaching.

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