1982

The "First Day" Workshop

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Time:

   A one-day workshop, best done within a week of the actual first day of classes of a new term.

Size:

   Any number, but perhaps preferably 20-30.

Goals:

(1)   to exchange our experiences and ideas on introducing ourselves and our courses to new groups of students

(2)   to plan, try out, and get constructive feedback on a 5-8 minute slice of teaching from the first class meeting of a course starting (next week)

(3)   to experience the value of working together as colleagues to meet the common challenges of classroom teaching

Assumptions:

1 -   that first impressions are important in setting the tone for our courses, that when students enter our classrooms on the first day, they want to know*

- Does the teacher care?
- Is the teacher fair?
- Is the teacher competent?
- Is this course for me? Will it be useful? valuable? relevant? appropriate?

- Who are these other students in the class?
2 - that there are many different effective ways of addressing these concerns on the first day
3 - that we can learn from each other and that we learn best from doing something immediately applicable in our teaching.
4 - that prior to the workshop all participants will know that they are expected to teach a 5-8 minute segment from the first day of an upcoming course to colleagues. They should have the following instructions: Feel free to select your segment from either a portion of the first day class which you feel most comfortable with, or by experimenting with something new. Some will describe the goals and mechanics of the course; others will begin the substantive content and themes of the course; still others will introduce themselves and the students to each other. Some will lecture; others will engage student participation immediately. Remember: there are many different effective ways to begin.

Your colleagues will listen, learn, and offer constructive feedback. Bring any necessary handout, if you wish to use one for your teaching.

Schedule: (and variations)

9:00 - Brief introductions and break into small groups (3-4) to share ideas and experiences about the first day, and to brainstorm ways of addressing the several student concerns

10:00 - Coffee and informal sharing among groups (or more formal debriefing)

10:30 - Instructions in Giving Constructive Feedback (See Handout), and (with a volunteer teacher and 5-6 "students") model the process of presenting a slice of a first day class, with feedback and discussion.

11:15 - Either free time to prepare (or change) one's presentation, or go right into the Presentation Groups (6-8 in each, including one trusted leader skilled in facilitating a microteaching group).

12:00 -   Lunch together

1 - 4:00 + -   Presentations (long enough for each person to have an opportunity to teach and receive feedback). Each presentation, including establishing the setting, the actual 5-8 minutes, feedback, and general discussion of the content and pedagogical issues raised, takes a minimum of *30* minutes.

4 - 4:30 -   Conclude by bringing all the groups back together for a brief sharing of experiences and insights. (Possibly end the day with a reception and/or dinner.)

Evaluation:

Best done a week later, *after* the first class has met (see attached example)

Workshop Variations and Adaptations:

-    Add a half or full day workshop *before* this one, and do course goals and design, and/or student learning styles.

-    Focusing on course goals and the same set of student concerns and expectations, or on "problems in mid-term," repeat the workshop in mid-semester.

-    The last day?

* See Stanford Erickson, *Motivation for Learning* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1974), pp. 241-42.

Guidelines for Giving Constructive Feedback in Microteaching Sessions

Two basic premises:
  *There are many different ways of being an effective teacher.
  *We can expand our effectiveness by observing other teaching
      styles and by getting immediate feedback on our own style.

1. Before teaching, the person to whom feedback is to be given has an opportunity to state those specific things he/she wants feedback on; after teaching, that person goes first in commenting on how he/she felt about it.

2. Feedback from others is most helpful when it is *descriptive* and *specific,* expressing the student's experience (in "I" statements) in reaction to the teacher's behavior. Let the teacher, then, decide what to do with the information received.

    Examples of helpful comments:
      "I felt very nervous when you explained that the paper was
          worth 50% of our grade."
      "I felt relieved when you said you wanted to have a conference
          with each student about the paper."
      "I understood the principle when you repeated it that third
          time."
      "I saw the point clearly when you put the diagram on the
          board."
      "I was lost and stopped listening when you read that long quote
          from whats-his-name."
      "I needed a visual reinforcement of that point you made
          about X."

General and evaluative comments do not help: "that was really good."

3. Helpful feedback *focuses on behavior* rather than on the person, and on behavior which the receiver can do something about. "Your voice is too nasal," or "you're a sophisticated intellectual

who likes big words," or "you are a dominating personality" are not helpful.

4. Feedback should be *checked with others* to determine the extent of agreement about a particular experience or observation. Is this one person's impression or is it shared by others?

DO NOT role play being a student; just be yourself.

DO NOT make evaluative, judgmental comments.

DO NOT offer advice and solutions unless specifically invited to do so.

DO NOT start sentences with "you..."

DO NOT overload with more feedback than can be reasonably absorbed at one time.

DO NOT state too many DO NOTS.

REMEMBER: Pointing out strengths is often more constructive than describing weaknesses.

Evaluation of Workshop on "The First Day"

1. What specific activities/interactions/ideas of the workshop were MOST USEFUL to you? And why?

2. What specific activities/interactions/ ideas of the workshop were LEAST USEFUL to you? And why?

3. Did the workshop have any impact—direct or indirect—on what you actually did on the first day(s) of class(es)? (goals, format, style, content, etc.)
   Yes, directly _____ Yes, indirectly _____ No impact _____
   If yes, please give specific description or examples (briefly):

4. Please make any additional comments you wish to about the workshop on "the first day" and about future activities of the

Teaching and Learning Committee. What should we be doing next that would be helpful?