

Proceedings of the First Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching



ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

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Preface

*Steven Meyers, Connie Donovan, June Lapidus,
Heather Dalmage, and Nona Burney*

The First Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching (RUMCOT) was held on April 30, 2004. Approximately 80 full-time and part-time faculty members, administrators, and staff attended the event, which focused on enhancing teaching at the university. The conference featured workshops, teaching roundtable discussions, and a showcase about online learning. These proceedings provide a summary of several presentations from the conference. The authors of these abstracts focus on topics that are relevant to teaching at Roosevelt University, such as addressing social justice in the classroom, using peer coaching to receive supportive feedback on your teaching, and developing a thorough course conceptualization and syllabus.

This conference was made possible in part by the Teacher Quality Enhancement (TQE) Grant awarded to the College of Education at Roosevelt University. We hope that you find these abstracts helpful. For additional information about effective college teaching, we encourage you to explore related book and video holdings that were recently purchased by the university libraries. The complete list of titles is available by clicking the link labeled "Resources for Effective College Teaching" under the Special Collections heading of the Library's webpage at www2.roosevelt.edu/library/.

For more information on the RUMCOT 2004, contact Steven Meyers, Associate Professor of Psychology at (312) 341-6363, or email smeyers@roosevelt.edu.

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Finding Key Tools to Teach for Social Justice

Diana F. Ryan
BGS Program, University College

Susan J. Katz
College of Education

We designed and conducted a study to discover if specific pedagogical elements in university coursework could change students' definitions of social justice, recognition of social justice practices, and sense of responsibility for social justice in their workplaces and communities.

Five major elements defined the study: pre- and post-course surveys; focus and roundtable group activities; explorations of a model of socially constructed categories and the classroom discussion guidelines; reflective journaling (online and offline); and selected texts and readings.

At the RUMCOT Roundtable, we chose to present and explain how we used two key elements in our study: a model of socially constructed categories of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (GRECSO) and reflective journaling. Both of those elements are described below. We developed rubrics to grade reflective journals and have included two of those rubrics in an appendix.

GRECSO

GRECSO¹ (Dalmage, 2003) highlights six socially-constructed categories of gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation plus the category of "other" which became "ability" in a special education leadership class. The GRECSO model was introduced early in the semester as an interactive process for exploring social construction of diversity categories. Before the model is introduced, students are asked to write their definition of social justice. The acronym GRECSO is written on the board vertically with each term written out. A horizontal line is drawn and students are asked to come up with the traditional categories for each of the terms. As the categories of privilege and power are placed on top, the model ends up looking something like the grid below.

As the model is drawn on the blackboard, students were asked, "Where do you place yourself on this grid? What do you notice about the values society assigns to the different categories?" After the first presentation and discussion of the model, students are asked if their definition of social justice has changed, and if so, to rewrite it. GRECSO was

addressed throughout the semester to promote critical thinking about the categories in relation to students' personal contexts.

REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

Students submitted reflective entries in their offline journals or online in the course website group discussion forums on Blackboard. Researchers in critical thinking contend that reflective journals provide an opportunity for metacognitive self-correction. Rather than mindlessly repeating one's own errors of reasoning, or being misled by the errors of others, one is able, through metacognition, alone or with the help of others, to reflect on one's own thinking. By applying critical thinking skills to the products of one's own critical thinking—namely the judgments formed—one is able to analyze, interpret, explain, and evaluate one's thinking by the standards of good reasoning (Giancarlo & Facione, 2002, p.18).

Professor Diana Ryan had students in both of her courses record their reflections on readings and dialogues in a journal that they brought to each class meeting. At the end of the semester, her students scanned the journal and in a one-page conclusion reflected on the themes and issues that emerged in relation to leadership, diversity, and/or social justice. On the fall course evaluations from the ProSeminar in Critical Skills, several students had comments about their metacognitive experience. For example, one student said, "I really enjoyed this exercise...gave me an opportunity to think about the way I think." Other comments regarding thought processes were, "Really a positive experience, helped me 'feel' my thoughts." "Good to be able to look back at how my thoughts and process has changed over the class time."

Students welcomed the chance to write in their offline reflective journals. In the course evaluations, students said that the journal activity "connected my personal experience to the content (social justice)." "...loved them, keeps me grounded;" "I loved these and wish I had more time to reflect . . ." "A very good experience—encouraged me to process on a personal level." The negative comments from students indicated that they did not want their journals to be evaluated by the professor.

In the fall course in educational leadership, ELOC 411 Social Foundations of Diverse Communities, Professor Susan Katz's students were required to write their reflective journals offline and then post them online on Blackboard. The reflections were in response to readings. In addition to posting their own reflections, students were required to post a response to a classmate's reflection. In the course evaluation, one student responded, "I loved them. I en-

Gender	Race	Ethnicity	Class	Sexual Orientation	Ability
Male	White	American	Have	Heterosexual	Abled
Female	Black/People of Color	Alien/Foreigner	Have not	Homosexual	Disabled

joyed reading the reflections of others. Also I enjoyed how others responded to my thoughts.” Another student liked reflection and felt it allowed her “to express my feelings and actually see how this is affecting me now.” The negative comments revolved around issues of grading personal reflections and using the online forum. Students would have preferred sharing in person for “authentic assessment/reaction.”

¹Note: Heather Dalmage, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences, Roosevelt University introduced this exercise at a Teacher Quality Education (TQE) workshop Spring semester, 2003.

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Appendix A

Online Reflective Journal Rubric

Reflection on readings and responses to class members

Department of Educational Leadership and Organizational Change

College of Education. ELOC 411 Social Foundations of Diverse Communities

Reflections	Novice 1	Developing 3	Accomplished 5
Major Point	Major point not clearly discussed	Major point discussed with some response to author’s point	Major point discussed in detail giving emphasis on your own reactions to what surprised and/or puzzled you; discussion of your own learning
Idea of fit	No comparison of author’s major ideas to your own experiences	Some discussion of your own experiences and how they relate to the reading	Good discussions of how the evidence presented fit with your experiences of schooling, teaching, and other readings
Implications	No discussion of implications for educational setting	Some discussion of consequences or implications of the argument for educational setting	Good discussion of consequences and/or implications of the author’s argument for educational settings and how it might apply to your own developing philosophy of leadership
Responses	Questions posed in reflection not answered in response	Response to questions unclear	Clear response to questions are based on readings and experience

Appendix B

OFFLINE REFLECTIVE JOURNAL GUIDELINES UNIVERSITY COLLEGE: PROSEMINAR IN CRITICAL SKILLS

Another important way for you to develop your critical skills is through your reflective journal. Each week you make 300-word entries on RU's Blackboard. Your entries should be dated and posted to the Digital Drop Box before Tuesday's class. Many of the entries will be brief responses to the text's "Test the Idea" exercises. Other possible entries may be your responses to social justice issues in the news, responses to participation in course activities, thoughts about the changes in your thinking as you learn critical thinking concepts, thoughts about your personal growth as a citizen, parent, working person, and/or student as a result of your emerging understanding. There will also be three one-page essays reflecting your ideas on social justice.

I will examine your journal entries directly three times. Early in the semester I ask you to write a one-page essay on any social justice issue that concerns you. I may ask you to share it with the class and we will discuss writing techniques and tips, and consider what such examples teach us about critical writing. At this time I check off that you have started your journal.

Mid-semester you write a one-page essay on a social justice issue stimulated by a short clipping or article (copy or attach the article). Again, be prepared to share your reflections with the class as we consider critical reading skills. Again, I check off that you completed the assignment.

At the end of the semester, you scan your journal and reflect on the evidence of growth in your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. You write a two-page conclusion to your journal and turn the journal in for a potential total of 50 points. My grading criteria for your journal are that it records well-written descriptions and examples reflecting in-depth thoughts about your personal and professional development in critical reading, writing, and thinking. There must be one entry per week.

CONTRIBUTION AND PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Your contribution to the class is essential to your learning and your success. The discussions in class and in online groups ensure your opportunity to help build your understanding of critical thinking, reading, and writing concepts and practices.

In class: 10 points will be based on the fact that you made thoughtful, relevant, and helpful comments and entered into considerate and respectful engagement with class members and me. Only five points if you contribute, but do not regularly follow the Guideline Handout. No engagement, no points.

Online: 10 points for at least eight reflective relevant postings online; only five points if you have less than eight entries and are not going beyond "I agree with so-and-so." No entries, no points.

Conceptualizing Your Course and Developing a Detailed Syllabus

Steven A. Meyers
School of Psychology

June Lapidus
School of Policy Studies

DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR YOUR COURSES

Many college faculty members can easily state what they want their students to learn. For instance, professors who teach introductory psychology may want students to learn about the primary theories in the field, the scientific method, or well-established research findings. However, it is more difficult to describe what students should be able to do at the end of a course. There is a large difference between "knowing something" and the ability to use knowledge.

Many professors report that reflecting on their teaching goals is a productive experience that can organize their entire course. More specifically, teaching goals clearly articulate what you want your students to be able to do after completing your course. Good teaching goals describe student performance rather than course topics or instruction techniques. They also offer opportunities for assessing students' ability to apply what you think you have taught, thereby giving crucial feedback to us as instructors as well as to our students.

There are several tools or frameworks that can help you establish goals for your classes. The Teaching Goals Inventory, which can be completed in an online format at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~centeach/tgi> is one well-established measure. This questionnaire assesses the extent to which you value the development of students' higher order thinking skills, basic academic success skills, discipline-specific knowledge, liberal arts and academic values, work and career preparation, and personal development. Understanding how much you prioritize each of these areas in your own teaching allows you to select instructional methods consistent with your goals.

Another way to refine your teaching goals is to consider the level of understanding that you value the most for the particular course. Most of us say we want to enhance our students' critical thinking skills but are not always clear about how to operationalize that kind of thinking. Using Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of knowledge as a framework, instructors can inspire different sorts of understanding. At a fundamental level, faculty may want students to primarily recall (or comprehend) course material. This level of understanding primarily entails students' recognizing previously learned material or restating information in their own words. Alternatively, your teaching goals may focus on developing students' higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate information. These goals involve using previously learned material in novel situations, breaking down or putting course information together in new ways, or judging the value of course material for a given purpose.

Using this framework, you can transform a course or class topic (e.g., psychological disorders or research methods) into a goal (e.g., identify and categorize different types of psychological problems, or develop a well-controlled study that addresses a series of well-articulated hypotheses). This categorization scheme (recall, comprehension, application, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation) may raise the following questions regarding your teaching: Which sorts of understanding do you want to inspire? Are your teaching methods consistent with this form of learning? If we state our goals in terms of what students are able to do, are we providing opportunities in class and in out-of-class assignments for students to practice and receive feedback doing the type of analysis we value? Are the methods that you use to evaluate student performance assessing these levels of knowledge?

In structuring assignments and choosing pedagogy, it is important to recognize that students have different learning styles and we often need to approach the same material from different angles to reach a variety of learners successfully. Many of our students are also making the leap from high school or two-year colleges in which memorization and repetition are rewarded. If we expect more from them we have to explicitly teach the skills they need to succeed in our courses.

Another way to critically examine your course structure and content is to view your teaching as a form of scholarship. More specifically, the following questions are based on an exercise developed by Ken Bain (<http://www.nyu.edu/cte/Scholars.html>) and the work of Lee Shulman (Stanford University) and Patricia Hutchings (American Association for Higher Education). Consider the following:

1. Think of your course as a scholarly argument. How does it begin? Why does it begin like it does? What do you and your students do as the course unfolds? How does your course end? Why does it end there? What do you want your students to believe or question at the end of the course?

2. There are likely different ways to organize a course in your subject. How is your course different from one a colleague might develop on the same subject?
3. How does your course teach students the logic of your discipline (i.e., how scholars in your field reason from evidence, what concepts they employ, what assumptions they make)? What intellectual and reasoning abilities will your students develop? How do you spell out the standards you will use to evaluate their work, and how do these standards relate to the intellectual standards of your discipline?
4. What topics lend themselves to lecturing? Group work? Discussion?
5. How will you lead students to become conscious of the patterns of thinking and reasoning in which they have engaged?
6. What do you expect students to find fascinating about your course? Difficult?
7. How does the content of your course connect to matters your students already understand or have experienced?

CREATING A THOROUGH SYLLABUS

A thorough and well-designed course syllabus provides you with an opportunity to communicate your coherent vision of your course. It also provides you with the chance to verify that your teaching goals are addressed frequently. Moreover, a detailed syllabus can help establish a shared framework for the class—the syllabus is an opportunity for students to discover exactly what will be covered in the course, how you will teach the material, and the strategies that you will use to evaluate their learning. Finally, constructing a detailed syllabus allows you to anticipate, and often prevent, problems. For instance, clearly explaining the content, weight, and due dates for all of the assignments in your course minimizes the chance of students' confusion or classroom conflict. Here are some important issues to include:

Basic information about the course. This includes the course number, name, as well as the current year and semester. Listing the number of credit hours is also helpful.

Information about the instructor. This includes your name (and degree), office location and office hours, telephone number, e-mail address, and voice mail numbers. Some faculty specify the hours that they prefer to be contacted, especially if they list a home telephone number. In addition, some faculty provide more information about themselves, such as their area of expertise or professional interests. In general, students enjoy learning more about their professors.

A list of readings for the course. This includes full citations of the required and recommended texts. More information may be needed if there are specific instructions about how to access the material (e.g., where in the library are the reserve readings located?).

Describe the course prerequisites. Are students allowed to take these courses concurrently?

Provide students with an overview of the course. One starting point is to use the description found in the course catalog. However, this is frequently short and vague. Complement this information by providing more details. List your teaching goals for this class and the specific skills your students should be able to perform or demonstrate at the end of the semester that would indicate that they have mastered the material.

Describe the strategies that you will use to evaluate students' performance. This includes providing details about the content of tests, quizzes, essays, or projects (i.e., Which evaluation methods will be used? What material will be covered on each? How exactly will students' performance be graded?). List the relative weight of each assignment so that you (and your students) would be able to calculate their final course grade.

Provide a course calendar. This includes the topic of each class session, the readings expected for each date, and the dates that assignments are due.

List course policies pertaining to issues such as attendance, student behavior, late work, make-up work, and plagiarism. Don't wait until an issue arises in your class before you develop your policies! Describe opportunities for out-of-class help including the learning resource center, your office hours, the counseling center for test-taking strategies, and any tutoring your program may offer. Present students with the research on the role of study groups in academic achievement and encourage them to form study groups by providing class phone lists (with their permission, of course) and opportunities to arrange meeting times. Students also need to be encouraged to come see us during our office hours. They are often intimidated for a variety of reasons and you may want to consider something like requiring them to pick up their first graded assignment from you directly. (The feasibility of this obviously depends on class size).

In sum, developing an overarching course framework and detailed teaching goals help guide your choice of dissemination strategies and evaluation techniques. Constructing your syllabus gives you an opportunity to clearly communicate these important points, clarify students' expectations, and facilitate your own and your students' success in the classroom.

Teaching Students Critical Thinking Skills: Active Learning Strategies that Promote Critical Thinking

Christie Ahrens
College of Education

Connie Donovan
College of Education

The following critical thinking skills were addressed in our workshop:

1. **Learning from experience:** Participation in a shared experience that requires individuals to alter their perceptions—moving from the known to the unknown.
 - Close your eyes; use your mind's eye to picture a seagull. Notice how the seagull moves. Imagine you are a seagull. Now, open your eyes and move like a seagull. Stop; stand still to rest for a moment, and close your eyes again.
 - Use your mind's eye to imagine the road construction you drove through on your way here. Picture a jackhammer working on the blacktop in that construction site. Notice how the jackhammer moves. Imagine you are a jackhammer. Now, open your eyes and move like a jackhammer. Stop; stand still to rest for a moment, and close your eyes again.
 - Use your mind's eye to picture your seagull. Imagine you are a seagull holding a jackhammer. Now, open your eyes and move like a seagull holding a jackhammer. Stop; stand still to rest for a moment, and close your eyes again.

The purpose of this activity was for individuals to experience the challenges inherent in acquiring and assimilating knowledge. If we hold one image—that of a calm, serene, and graceful seagull, for example—it is nearly impossible to hold a dissimilar image—that of a seagull holding a jackhammer. To do so requires us to rewire our brains to generate new connections and develop a whole new paradigm.

2. **The jigsaw:** This strategy reinforces the development of social skills to work successfully in cooperative groups and is especially useful when students have a lengthy reading assignment to complete. In addition, it promotes and emphasizes individual accountability. Rather than reading the entire written assignment, students are only required to read a portion of the material. The whole (jigsaw [puzzle]) is divided into parts and put together again as a whole:

- The instructor divides a reading assignment into four (or more) different sections of similar length, and each student is responsible for learning one section.
- Students work together in groups (four students per group works well). This is called the “base” or “home” group. One student in each base group is assigned to read, study, and summarize one of the sections of the assignment.
- After each base group member has completed his/her reading independently, they reconvene to teach that section to their other group members.

3. **A critical reading/thinking strategy:** Read, encode, annotate, and ponder (REAP). This is a useful strategy when students are asked to read and take notes on difficult (or challenging) written material.

- Step one is to **read** to discover the author’s ideas.
- Step two is to **encode** or **paraphrase** those ideas by putting them into the reader’s own words.
- Step three is to **annotate** those ideas in writing for the reader alone or to share with others. A reader may annotate from several different perspectives:
 - a. Summary annotation: A summary of the author’s main points
 - b. Question: Focusing upon and sifting out the series of essential questions posed by the author and answered as he/she composed the text.
 - c. Thesis: An elaboration on the theme or thesis of the passage.
 - d. Intention or Motivation: A consideration of the author’s intention for writing the text, or his/her motivation, bias, or individual perceptions.
 - e. Criticism: A critical response that contains three key elements: author’s point of view, reader’s response to author’s position, and the basis or reason for reader’s response.
- Step four is to **ponder**, or think about the meaning of the passage and the reader’s annotation; then pose questions from the reader’s original thoughts that grow out of the content.

To *REAP* means to “gather a harvest” or “to get a result.” Each letter in the word stands for a step in a process of gathering the maximum results from one’s reading. Often, a graphic organizer is helpful for students employing the REAP strategy while interacting with text. The REAP Learning Log is an organizer which has been used successfully with students of all ages and reading levels:

REAP LEARNING LOG

Read to discern the author’s message.

Encode the message by translating it into your own words.

Annotate using one of the REAP annotation strategies.

Ponder, or further reflect on what you have read and written, through discussion and by reviewing others’ responses to the same materials, and/or your own annotation.

Text Source	Encoding	Annotation

Why teach critical thinking skills to university students? Everyone agrees that students learn in college, but whether they learn to think is debatable. University instructors must constantly ask themselves, “Are we preparing *educated* graduates or *instructed* graduates?” Because the mind set of many college students is that Success = Grades, and the instructor should “tell me what you want me to know,” the student’s learning goal is to remember and repeat. How does an instructor teach students to think critically?

4. **Teaching students to think critically:** Many instructors interested in incorporating critical thinking skills in their curriculum follow the model of Richard Paul, President of the Center for Critical Thinking in Dillon, California. His model, which he calls the “Elements of Reasoning,” posits that every subject area has its own logical structure. Learning how to think like someone proficient in a given field or discipline means learning to think and reason using the logic of the discipline. The Elements of Reasoning provide a guide to understanding the logic of something. The steps can be used singly or in any combination that makes sense based on the instructor’s instructional purpose.

- The instructor begins with a purpose, e.g., teaching the students how to interpret the Iraq War from multiple perspectives.
- The next step is to determine the students’ current assumptions about the issue, problem, or question.
- The instructor asks the students to articulate their own point of view, then question it by looking at points of view of others on the same issue.
- The next important skill in reasoning is to gather the data, evidence, and/or other requisite information required to solve the issue, question, or problem; and identify where to locate that information. The students can also be guided to identify and define concepts that are crucial to the interpretation of the issue, question, or problem.
- The next step is to draw inferences and/or make interpretations based on data, evidence, information that will lead to a reasonable conclusion; that will give meaning to the information that has been examined.

- Finally, the instructor can require that students identify implications and consequences that emanate from their reasoning/critical thinking process.

5. **Dispositions to foster critical thinking skills:** These dispositions are:

- Engagement: Looking for opportunities to use reasoning; anticipating situations that require reasoning; having confidence in their reasoning ability.
- Innovativeness: Becoming intellectually curious; wanting to know the truth.
- Cognitive maturity: Being aware that problems are complex; being open to other points of view; becoming aware of biases and predispositions.

A student who has learned how to think critically asks thoughtful questions, answers those questions with skillful reasoning, believes the results of his/her own skillful reasoning, and acts accordingly.

6. **Other instructional strategies** to include in your program which incorporate critical thinking skills are:

- Interpretation (categorization, decoding, clarifying meaning);
- Socratic discussion (asking questions, asking questions, and asking more questions);
- Analysis (examining ideas, identifying arguments, analyzing arguments, and analyzing assumptions);
- Evaluation (assessing claims and arguments);
- Inference (querying claims, conjecturing alternatives, drawing conclusions);
- Explanation (stating results, justifying procedures, presenting evidence); and
- Self-regulation/Metacognition (self-examination, self-correction, and self-reflection).

POINTS TO PONDER:

- The words “learn” and “teach” are verbs; that means they require action. Both the learner and the teacher must be involved.
- Attitude impacts achievement, and what we think about comes about.
- To be most effective, lessons must have an emotional connection.
- Beliefs are automatic. We (human beings) bring our individual sets of beliefs with us wherever we go, and those beliefs constantly influence our feelings and actions.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

- Constant attention is not only impossible, it is undesirable. The brain needs time to focus and to process. Students first pay attention to the information being learned, then they need time to make connections in their brains.
- Most children can focus for a number of minutes equal to their age plus two. That means that a six-year-old can focus for about eight minutes. After that, the brain needs time to process the information. Adults cannot focus for more than 15 or 20 minutes.
- Strong emotions make learning stick.
- Emotional stimulus and novelty are the two biggest attention getters, and maintaining students’ attention in the best way to involve them in learning.
- Negative emotions are more powerful than positive emotions.
- Learning is a social activity, and a social environment is a form of enrichment.
- There is no place for sarcasm in the classroom. “Laugh with anyone, but at no one.”
- For new information to be remembered, it must be repeated, and repeated, and repeated, and repeated... (some research suggests that it takes 21 days to master a task, just as it takes 21 days to create or break a habit).
- Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are good days for introducing information. Students usually forget any new concept introduced on Thursday or Friday because of the intervening weekend.
- The brain is always looking for new information. It seeks stimulation, and it is actually unnatural **not** to learn.
- Better learning will come not so much from finding better ways for the teacher to “instruct,” but from giving the learner better opportunities to “construct.”

REFERENCE

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Peer Coaching

Bethany Barratt
School of Policy Studies

Bonnie Gunzenhauser
School of Liberal Studies

Peer coaching is one of the least used and yet most helpful tools for improving teaching skills in higher education. Our students evaluate our teaching every semester (if not every day), but our colleagues do so far less often. And when colleagues do observe our teaching, the observations are usually for the purpose of making sure that some professional reward (reappointment, promotion, tenure) is warranted. Typically there is also some imbalance of power between the observer and the teacher, and the observation is a one-way street: the teacher performs, and the observer passes judgment.

Peer coaching provides an alternative way to get collegial feedback on one's classroom teaching. Its name suggests its two key differences from the observation scenario described above: it is a reciprocal arrangement, in which two faculty members agree to observe each other's classroom teaching, and the purpose of the observation is not to justify professional reward but to provide feedback on any topic(s) the teacher requests. The approach, as one commentator has said, "is intended to increase professional sharing, to refine teaching practices, and to enhance teacher reflection."¹

We led a roundtable discussion on peer coaching at the 2004 RUMCOT because we had such a positive experience with peer coaching when we tried it during the Spring Semester of 2004. We were introduced to the concept of peer coaching during the Spring 2004 Teacher Quality Enhancement (TQE) seminars, and after hearing one pair of peer coaches discuss their experience during a seminar meeting we decided to try the process for ourselves: Bethany asked for coaching in an introductory political science course, while Bonnie wanted coaching in an introductory literature course.

Our goals for this roundtable were to convey to participants what peer coaching was, describe why it had been useful for us and how it had worked, and give our colleagues some ideas about how they might embark on peer coaching themselves.

After soliciting our roundtable's prior knowledge about peer coaching—most had heard of it but knew relatively little about its specifics—we first established a shared definition of peer coaching. There are, as peer coach Pam Robbins points out, "a variety of approaches to peer coaching," but all approaches share three key points:

- Peer coaching is a non-evaluative process: the point is for the teacher being observed to receive affirmation for successful practices and constructive suggestions for improvement.

- Peer coaching is focused: the teacher being observed sets the agenda. If the teacher only wants feedback on how effectively he/she solicits discussion, for instance, the observer will gear all of his/her observations and comments toward that particular issue.
- Peer coaching generates a tangible product (notes, charts, diagrams) that will be useful to the teacher. The observer might draw a visual diagram of how students arrange themselves in a classroom, for example, or he/she might keep an approximate transcript of a discussion, or he/she might make notes about the precise wording of questions the teacher asks.

We emphasized these three points to reassure roundtable participants that peer coaching is not simply a free-for-all criticism of one's teaching style, but a focused and self-determined way of getting feedback. This fact, coupled with the requirement that the relationship is a reciprocal one (i.e., the person being coached will also coach the other person), removes the potential for the coach to be viewed as a judge.

We had such a positive experience with peer coaching that we wanted to encourage our roundtable participants to consider engaging in peer coaching themselves, so we spent some time discussing its potential advantages. One advantage we stressed is that the peer coach can provide feedback not only about the teacher's "performance," but on classroom dynamics more generally. In our own cases, Bethany wanted an extra pair of eyes to observe the level of student engagement in her often-quiet political science course, while Bonnie wanted an additional perspective on how (or whether) racial dynamics came into play during a student discussion of *A Raisin in the Sun*. A formal evaluator would (and should) confine his or her comments to the teacher and how s/he handles the quiet class or the racially charged class, but a peer coach can provide a more panoramic perspective. In our own experiences, this perspective proved very useful: Bethany learned that the students in her course were actually quite attentive even when they were non-participatory and that there were very specific strategies she used which sparked much higher levels of participation, while Bonnie learned that her students seemed to feel unconstrained in discussing the potentially sensitive racial issues raised by the Hansberry play. A second main advantage, we noted, is that peer coaching can provide feedback that is immediately useful. End-of-semester evaluations often respond to particular classroom dynamics that will never be exactly repeated and, quite simply, are after the fact: the instructor cannot change the particular version of the course to which the students are responding. Peer coaching, however, can be done at any point in the semester, thereby allowing the teacher to get feedback and make mid-semester adjustments in response to specific classroom dynamics.

Having made the case for the merits of peer coaching, we attempted to answer questions and provide some specific information about the nuts and bolts of the process. Three main questions emerged from this part of our time together:

Question One: How does the process work?

While there are a number of different ways to do peer coaching, almost every peer coaching experience will have three parts:

1. Pre-conference: teacher and peer coach meet to discuss what sorts of data the instructor wants collected. These may, as noted above, be about teaching style (“Am I going too fast?” “Do I wait long enough for students to answer questions before helping them?”) or about more general classroom dynamics (“When do people start to tune out?” “Is there anything you think I can do to encourage nonparticipatory students?”). The instructor and the coach may also discuss whether there are particular methods of data collection that might be particularly helpful, such as a running transcript of the class, diagrams of interaction between students and professor, counts of how many times each student speaks, etc.
2. Observation: peer coach attends class, observes, and gathers data in ways discussed.
3. Post-conference: coach and instructor meet again to discuss data collected and, with luck, to make plans for future iterations of coaching experience.

Question Two: How did you two pair up?

For us, the pairing process was fairly simple: since we were both TQE Fellows who learned about peer coaching within the supportive environment of TQE, we naturally connected with each other. Without that built-in structure, a faculty member would probably need to be willing to approach colleagues about the possibilities of peer coaching. We suggested that some considerations for thinking about whom to approach might include rank (choosing someone at a similar level would further assuage any sense of evaluation) and disciplinary area (choosing someone outside your area also attenuates the ‘evaluative’ potential and has the added benefit of allowing the coach to focus on teaching style and classroom dynamics rather than on his or her own interpretation of the class content).

Question Three: Was it disruptive to have a peer coach in your class?

Neither of us found the peer coach to be even a slightly disruptive presence. We simply explained to the class the rationale for the presence of our colleague at the start of class, and made no more reference to it.

One of the main points we wanted to convey during this roundtable is this: peer coaching serves as a useful reality check in a profession that can sometimes be very isolating. The merits of getting reassurance and advice about one’s teaching from a colleague are perhaps obvious, but the more hidden benefit of peer coaching is the opportunity it provides to observe other teachers at work. Seeing good teachers teach is one of the finest ways to reflect upon and

improve one’s own classroom practice, and peer coaching provides a regular, structured way to do that. For anyone who has ever sensed that they could improve a classroom dynamic or some particular element of their teaching but hasn’t been quite sure how, peer coaching can be an extremely enlightening and helpful tool.

¹Pam Robbins. *How to Plan and Implement a Peer Coaching Program*. 1991. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Inquiry-Based Learning and the Preparation of Future Teachers in Math and Other Subjects

Andy Carter
School of Science and Mathematics

Steve Cohen
School of Science and Mathematics

For the past two Spring Semesters, the School of Science & Mathematics and the College of Education jointly piloted a local field-placement project. Students enrolled in the course SEED 3/423 Methods of Teaching Secondary and Middle School Mathematics, taught one unit in the Introductory Algebra class, MATH 099. The MATH 099 class in which the field placement occurred was also involved in piloting a new inquiry-based algebra curriculum. Our roundtable discussion centered on preliminary results from these two pilot projects. We sought reactions, suggestions, and ideas for similar approaches in other courses from the participants.

Piloting the new algebra curriculum came about as a result of a review of institutional data which revealed that a high percentage of students in Roosevelt’s developmental mathematics courses were not successful in completing the mathematics requirements for graduation. To address this issue, the mathematics department began an in-depth assessment of its developmental mathematics program and a comprehensive review of current Introductory Algebra texts. Most of the texts that were reviewed were organized traditionally with a short section introducing a topic or procedure with several step by step demonstrations of its application followed by a long set of repetitive problems. However, there were a few texts that were inquiry-based and consistent with the principles of instruction as outlined in the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Standards. One of these, Diana Underwood’s *Beginning Algebra: An Inquiry Approach* (BAIA), a non-

traditional developmental mathematics text developed with NSF funding, seemed particularly appropriate for our program. The approach taken in BAIA does not rely on the routine application of pre-determined problem solving strategies. Instead, it provides opportunities for students to work together in small groups developing problem-solving strategies which they find meaningful. These strategies are then presented and justified in classroom discussions.

Our use of BAIA produced results that supported the following goals for MATH 099 students:

1. Preparing students to apply mathematics in a variety of content areas that use mathematics.
2. Providing a broader range of challenges to students in developmental math classes and accommodating a wider range of learning styles.
3. Consistently challenging students to think for themselves in formulating their own explanations and justifications for the correctness of their mathematical results.

As a standards-based curriculum, BAIA is in close alignment with a constructivist theory of learning, which is also a central component in the College of Education's conceptual framework. Thus, the MATH 099 field placement provides student teachers with an authentic teaching experience in mathematics in which they are using materials and instructional approaches that are consistent with the College of Education's conceptual framework. We found that having the student teachers involved in teaching MATH 099 addressed the following goals for SEED 3/423 students:

1. Establishing increased opportunities for more extensive and more intensive clinical experiences for pre-service teachers.
2. Establishing cross-college collaborations that inform content areas as well as educational methodologies.
3. Increasing opportunities for professional development of our faculty that prepare teachers.
4. Providing experiences that prepare student teachers to be practitioners of reform curricula.
5. Modifying SEED 3/423 Methods of Teaching Middle School and High School Math to more fully familiarize students with the NCTM Standards.

The first use of MATH 099 as a field placement for SEED 3/423 students took place in spring 2003. The student teachers enrolled in SEED 3/423 were given the task of teaching one chapter from the BAIA textbook in the Math 099 class. For this assignment the student teachers were organized into four groups, each of which was assigned one fourth of the chapter to teach to the MATH 099 class. In four consecutive weeks, each of the groups took a turn teaching for the first hour of the algebra class, which met regularly once a week for two and a half-hours. These are some of the indications that the pilot was successful:

- The classes went according to plan.
- The chapter material was covered.
- Students worked on activities as usual.
- All 11 of the MATH 099 students correctly worked out at least one of the two final exam problems related to the chapter's material.

In addition, this teaching experience produced a wide range of beneficial outcomes for SEED student teachers. From the experience of being in front of a group of students to the amount of preparation required for the execution of an effective lesson, every student teacher appeared to have gained valuable insight from their experiences. Even though a variety of teaching topics had been discussed in the SEED methods class, it was not until the student teachers were faced with real students in a teaching role that they began to truly understand the importance and the difficulty of effectively addressing these issues. In their reflections, students shared how this experience had helped them in understanding the vital role of student communication, inquiry, questioning, and assessment during a lesson.

The general reaction of the roundtable was a combination of interest and skepticism. There was interest in finding teaching activities for more advanced students in science but there was concern that such student interns would not be knowledgeable enough to actually teach. It was suggested, instead, that we use such students as lab or teaching assistants to help set up experiments and help students with their homework. Another suggestion was to develop a special course for these students to train them and regularly monitor their experiences working with Roosevelt students. It was agreed by all that a certain amount of training was necessary before the student teachers be allowed to work with students at the University. Everyone expressed interest in seeing how we progressed with our project in the future and felt that it was worth the effort since so many learning needs were potentially being addressed.

Regarding both the use of inquiry-based curricula and involving student teachers in the class, a major concern was with how to manage the time. Clearly, having students trying to solve problems and form coherent arguments during class will require a great deal of time. This raises the question of how to manage complete coverage of the course topics. Several ways to extend the time of the class were suggested such as an additional discussion section or lab section as is the case in most science classes.

The roundtable discussion confirmed our belief that this project was important as a way to provide an essential experience for our education students, as well as a way to help teach our own at-risk students. It also confirmed our sense that to continue to use inquiry-based instruction and involve student teachers will require additional time in both MATH 099 and SEED 3/423. Based on our preliminary findings, we plan to proceed with an investigation of the impact of using MATH 099 as field placement compo-

ment in SEED 3/423. In the fall, we also plan to bring this case before the faculties in the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education for further discussion as we work together in developing new ways to provide active learning opportunities for our students.

Embracing Diverse Learning Styles

Dawn T. Muhammad
School of Communication

Every person in the world has a unique combination of learning styles. As children, we begin as primarily kinesthetic (37%), auditory (34%), and visual (29%) learners. Over time, we become primarily visual—we are encouraged to color inside of the lines, read to ourselves, and sit down and fold our hands. Undoubtedly, our students experience the same thing. In fact, there is currently an increase of kinesthetic learners (those diagnosed with ADD and ADHD in some cases, present a unique challenge to instructors). At RUMCOT, we were able to discuss this challenge.

First of all, each of the roundtable participants acknowledged that they each had a dominant learning style. This is important because (of course) each instructor teaches from his or her dominant learning style (e.g., paradigm). After a brief overview, each participant identified the learning style that they believed to be representative of his or her learning style. Due to time consideration, the focus of this roundtable was not on Gardner's Multiple Intelligences but the VAK Attack as presented in the book, *Accelerated Learning for the 21st Century* by Colin Rose and Malcolm Nicholl.

VAK Attack is a phrase used to identify the commonly known visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles. The characteristics of each style are listed below:

Visual learners are those individuals who learn by seeing things. They thrive off of pictures, diagrams, graphs, video, and color.

Auditory learners are those students who learn by hearing. These students enjoy lectures, discussions, debates, and listening to presentations.

Kinesthetic learners need to do. These students need to move, touch, and experience the material.

During the session, we considered the fact that a faculty member will more than likely have a variety of students with different learning styles in their classes. Irrespective

of the content area the participant was from, each person agreed it was pertinent for faculty to recognize different ways to integrate these different learning styles in their facilitation methods.

- Strategies for the visual learner: There are many things that an instructor can do to integrate this learning style both in the classroom and online. In fact, using Blackboard itself is an excellent tool for visual learners. In the classroom, instructors may show a video, use a PowerPoint presentation, use diagrams, slides, posters, flashcards, mind maps, and different color markers on the whiteboard.
- Strategies for the auditory learner: Lectures and discussions naturally satisfy the auditory learner. Additionally, the instructor may assign recitations, play music, and allow students to work in pairs (discussing subjects with one another). Even online, an instructor may link audio streams for the auditory learners to use.
- Strategies for the kinesthetic learner: In short, to integrate this learning style, the instructor has to let the students actively (physically) participate. By allowing students to write on the board, present publicly, debate, role-play, and demonstrate techniques, the kinesthetic learner will be satisfied. Online, the kinesthetic learner is usually activated because he or she has to type.

The language that we use can activate a particular learning style as well. For instance, kinesthetic learners tend to like the words: feel, touch and hold. Visual learners like to hear the words: look, point of view, perspective, see, picture, and imagine. These students are likely to take very detailed notes during class and enjoy any story or narrative that the instructor provides. Auditory learners like the words/phrases: unheard of, rings a bell, hear, tune, and think.

By the end of the discussion, the participants reiterated that several of the activities above could satisfy a combination of the three learning styles. For instance, if a student gives a presentation it will satisfy his or her kinesthetic learning style while the students listening would be subjected to the auditory portion. All in all, we should consider the different learning styles that our students may have. Lecture has its place, but anytime lecture can be supplemented with additional activities (such as those listed above) we will provide a better learning experience for both us, and our students.

Conceptualizing Social Justice for the 21st Century

Heather Dalmage
School of Policy Studies

Nona M. Burney
College of Education

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this workshop was to begin a substantive dialogue about what social justice means in the 21st century, especially at Roosevelt University, where the term is so frequently used. “What does social justice look like, feel like? How is it made explicit in our society? And how is it operationalized in this institution of higher learning?” were the questions the facilitators raised, using quotes from our own conversations and those of other scholars.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the recent RU Student Government Association Presidential Campaign, one of the candidates promised to continue the “Roosevelt mission of social justice.” For the 20th century that meant social, economic, and political action that generated laws, executive orders, and court decisions for civil and human rights. Examples include Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, Harry Truman’s integration of the Armed Forces, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (and subsequent cases), the American Disabilities Act, and the implementation of Title IX. For the 21st century, the defining case may be *McGrutter*, the case that challenged the University of Michigan’s use of race as one of its criteria in its admission process. The Supreme Court, in a split decision, held that “diversity” is a value that colleges and universities may promote in their admissions decision making (“diversity,” yet to be defined).

SOCIAL JUSTICE DEFINED

“It seems that the lack of definition and understanding gives us license to act in unjust ways. Without definition and understanding we often default into reproducing the status quo.” — Nona Burney and Heather Dalmage

We began the workshop by brainstorming for a working definition of social justice. After much discussion, Vicky McKinley suggested, and the group agreed, that social justice includes many aspects that can be categorized broadly as access, representation, allocation of resources, and agenda building.

Access

There are various interrelated layers of access in a society: technology, information, decision making, and networking. For example, several years ago, a well-to-do western suburb

of Chicago bought each of its teachers a laptop computer and invested heavily to ensure that all children in this school district had easy access to computers. Meanwhile, in many urban schools, teachers are struggling with a severe shortage of critical resources. For the children, this often means a lack of access to up-to-date technology. Thus, we have inverted priorities: those with the greatest access are given more access, those without are left to struggle. Moreover, those with power (including the multinational owned and operated media sources) are able to determine how and if information is delivered. People with access to information and people with access to the propaganda have very different resources for decision making. On the local level, access to information could mean the possibility of a job that has not been announced publicly. Historically, this has been called the Old Boys Network, the covert form of affirmative action for white males. Those with power and privilege have access to networks of other folks with power and privilege. Again, those without live in “other” neighborhoods, attend “other” schools, and are (mis)educated for “other” types of (under)employment.

Representation

Barack Obama has successfully waged his campaign for the Democratic seat. His election places an African American in the U.S. Senate. The question of representation, i.e., whose voices are heard, whose ideas matter, and who’s invited to the discussion are central social justice concerns.

Allocation of Resources

A prime example is public educational funding, which has a long history related to religious, political, and community battles for control of schools. Ultimately tied to a capitalist system in which private property is the cornerstone, educational funding was largely based on property taxes. When this system of funding occurs in a society built around the devaluation of housing for people of color, the picture becomes clearer in our attempts to understand why some children have access to and representation in quality education and others do not. On a global level, the allocation of resources ensures that the vast majority of resources remain in the hands of those in countries of the north, while the folks from countries of the south struggle with the outcome of colonization, covert wars, and IMF structural adjustment policies.

Agenda Building

Decisions on what issues are even “brought to the table” of public discourse, to be addressed or embraced in policy making at various levels of power, is critical in a social justice model. For example, “welfare” has been legislatively eliminated, while poverty expands to more generations, especially to children and the elderly. “Quality of life” and “a livable wage” are examples of public policy agenda items that a socially just society would make priorities.

GRECSO

(GENDER, RACE, ETHNICITY, CLASS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION)

“We need to position ourselves somewhere in order to say anything at all.” — Stuart Hall

“Where do we position ourselves?” — Nona & Heather

As progressive educators concerned with social justice we must find ways to help students (and ourselves) better understand the complexity and ambiguity of categorization in a socially unjust society. This can be a difficult task for four primary reasons. First, the Western tradition of binary thinking, upon which the U.S. culture and politics have been constructed, works to essentialize differences and impede understandings of power relations. Second, despite clear evidence of social injustice, students are taught through their families, the educational system, and popular discourse, that they rise and fall based on individual merit. In other words, achieved statuses are acknowledged while ascribed statuses are deemed ultimately unimportant in attempts to make it in a meritocratic social order. Third, and related to the myth of meritocracy, is that students (especially those in privileged locations) have been taught that recognizing difference is wrong to do and thus default into color blind and gender blind discourses. Finally, when students do articulate privilege, power, and domination they often get caught in the pitfalls of universalizing experiences and simplify the complexities and subtleties of social relations.

Binary (either–or) thinking rests on the belief that people can be placed in one of two categories which sit in hierarchical fashion: male–female, white–black, straight–queer. These categories are often perceived as common-sense and “authentic” locations that give information about a person’s family, friends, culture, abilities, and intelligence. Many students believe that a person’s place in the binary system of categorization can be discovered either through appearances or through knowledge of genetic and biological history. Binary thinking misleads students to believe that people can be placed into discrete, biologically-based categories: one is either male or female, either white or black, either homosexual or heterosexual. Such thinking also leaves little room for individuals who live on the borders (e.g., multiracials, bisexuals, transgenders) and for understanding the complexity of power relations. These socially constructed categories used to maintain privilege and domination are masqueraded as natural, static, and discrete.

Interestingly, the ideology of individualism arose alongside the development of binary categories in the United States. The rugged individual has a long romantic history in the United States; it is a central defining aspect of American-ness. The rugged individual does not count on others and owes nothing to others. She or he is a fearless person who is freed of community obligation, and will to risk it all to prove a point and maintain a sense of integrity.

The myth of meritocracy is also upheld through the discourse around race, class, gender, and sexuality. The dominant discourse paints a scenario in which categories exist, but their power imbalance does not. This color-blind, gender-blind, class-blind and sexuality-blind discourse permeates current political and popular landscapes, leaving little room to explain social injustices that persist.

MAKING SOCIAL JUSTICE EXPLICIT

“It seems that the lack of definition and understanding gives us license to act in unjust ways. Without definition and understanding we often default into reproducing the status quo.” — Heather & Nona

Participants were divided into small groups and given a word or phrase on a card. They had this term and all its social justice implications. The terms we distributed, Affirmative Action, Diversity, Separate and Equal, Power, and Oppression, generated discussion on numerous concepts related to each. For example, Affirmative Action: fairness, bias, “reverse discrimination,” diversity, reparations; Diversity: ethnic differences, sexual orientation, plurality/melting pot; Separate and Equal: self-segregation/affiliation, inclusion, equal opportunity; Power: order, the world—“Who makes the rules?,” control of resources, responsibility—choice, abuse, domination, mercy, forgiveness; Oppression: individual/institutional/ideological, “The holding of someone out/down/back/away from opportunity, humanity (Freire).”

We then handed out an “Action Continuum” guidesheet to facilitate the practical use of the workshop’s content and activities. It describes behaviors that range from supporting oppression to confronting oppression, e.g., from telling oppressive jokes to working to change discriminatory actions and policies.

“Whenever and wherever we find ourselves in positions of power, we need to work toward social justice, social change . . . that’s our job.” — Nona & Heather

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