

Teach to the Whole Class: Insights from Law Students and Learning Theory for the New Law Teacher

By:

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Our main objective in this workshop is to provide new law teachers with practical suggestions on how they can use different teaching methods to reach a wider range of students. Specifically, we will:

1. Identify various factors that affect, promote, and interfere with learning.
2. Evaluate the quality and quantity of teaching methods designed to reach all learners.
3. Enhance interest in examining the teacher's own preferred teaching techniques and promote collaboration across the curriculum about teaching.
4. Model active teaching methods, including media, writing, collaboration, and summary and reflection.

FOUNDATION OF THE WORKSHOP

In the past several years, there has been increased interest in and literature about improving law school pedagogy. This is important given the changing demographics of law students. *Teach to the Whole Class: Barriers and Pathways to Learning* is a set of faculty colloquium materials designed to provide incentives and suggestions on ways to increase the effectiveness of law school pedagogy to help **all** students succeed and excel.

Included in these materials is the videotape *Teach to the Whole Class: Barriers and Pathways to Learning*.

This videotape contains excerpts from interviews of sixty-seven students from six law schools (Brooklyn, Hastings, Iowa, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Seattle University). The schools were selected to provide a cross-section (geographic, public/private, demographic, size, etc.) of experiences in legal education. A coordinator from each institution selected students who varied in age, ethnicity, gender, learning styles, physical and learning disabilities, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, year in school, and class rank. Most students were filmed in group discussions; however, a few were filmed in individual sessions. All of the students were asked to respond to the following questions: "What occurred in the classroom that interfered with your ability to learn? What occurred in the classroom that enhanced your learning?" Sixteen hours of videotape were edited into this 34-minute videotape.

Some of the students in this videotape are single, others are married, and some have partners of the same or different gender. There are mothers, fathers, single parents, and individuals with no children. Some of the students are Asian or African American, some are Caucasian or Hispanic or Native American, and others are multiracial. Some of the students have physical or learning disabilities. Included in the film are students who are in their 20's, 30's, 40's, and 50's. Some of them are in their first year of law school, others are in their second year, and others are in their third or fourth year, depending on whether they attend a full-time or a part-time program. There are students who, before entering law school, had just graduated college and others who had successful careers. The students have different learning styles – some learn best by writing, others by collaborating, and others are experiential learners. Some of the students have grades that place them in the top of their class; others have grades that place them in the middle of their class or in the bottom of their class. There are students who have received honors and students who have been disqualified or are on probation. In short, the students in this videotape are the students in our classes.

Included in the film are recurrent themes that were echoed by students at all the law schools. Law teachers from sixteen law schools reviewed earlier versions of the film and helped to identify the themes and issues most appropriate for inclusion in this videotape.

INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS

What follows is an outline of the recurrent themes that were mentioned by students at all the law schools:

- I. Barriers to Learning
 - A. Lack of Respect for Students
 - B. Excluding Content, Students, and Perspectives
 - C. Lack of Context

- II. Pathways to Learning
 - A. Learning in Context/Teaching Methods
 1. Practical
 2. Organized
 3. Writing and feedback
 4. Problems and hypotheticals
 5. Experiential/role play
 6. Visual tools
 - B. Including Students, Perspectives, and Content
 - C. Respecting Students

INSIGHTS FROM LEARNING THEORY

Learning theory supports the students' insights about effective teachers. Legal educators can improve their students' learning by understanding basic principles involved

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in adult education. These principles are more fully discussed in the videotape and handouts that accompany the session.