Teaching Techniques

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1. Building and enhancing a learning community in a classroom will help you to accomplish your learning objectives for students both in and outside of the classroom. The purpose of this outline is to provide you with some modest suggestions on how you can create a learning community in your classroom that supports and promotes student learning.

2. A learning community is one where both the professor and the students share the responsibility for the learning that occurs in the classroom. This sharing of responsibility is demonstrated by mutual preparation, use of a variety of activities and/or techniques to address different learning styles of your students, and guided respectful discussion. This is not a touchy feely place without form, substance or even structure but rather it is an environment that supports analysis, exploration, and risk-taking. Ultimately, however, if the learning community is successful for both your students and you then it is a place where relationships matter. The relationship between the professor and the class matters as well as the relationship between each member of the class. It is essential to pay attention to both relationships in each class.

3. While we share the responsibility for developing a learning community in the classroom, it is important to understand that the learning that occurs is something that students accomplish for themselves. Clearly, a professor cannot learn for the students. But, the professor can facilitate, coach, and support an environment within the classroom that makes learning a more likely outcome. Listed below are some core principles for building a learning community.

    a. "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." (Former NFL Quarterback and Congressman, Jack Kemp). In as many ways as possible, you need to demonstrate that you care about the students' learning and about their success. Remember this is a relationship, therefore one act of caring will not do. You need to demonstrate caring as an integral part of the way that you engage in your teaching on a regular basis whether in or outside of the classroom (e.g., office hours).

    b. Be prepared. This sounds obvious and yet often professor will spend more time trying to understand and master the content of the material (which is important) and very little time planning how to deliver the content in a meaningful accessible way to their students. You must update your notes, keep up with new developments in your field even if the casebook does not have a new edition containing that information. If you try a new methodology in your class, this will

require some time to plan and perhaps a dry run before you introduce an activity or exercise to your class.

c. Find a classroom style that works for you. You want to be your authentic self in the classroom.

d. Demonstrate and maintain high expectations for your students. Tie your expectations to the reality of the practice or personal experiences that you had in practice. In this way, you can help students to understand why you insist on high standards in their class work and in the conduct.

e. Explaining the rationale behind assignments, or rules in the conduct of your class (e.g., tardiness), will help them to understand

f. Be humble. All knowledge does not emanate from the fount, i.e., the podium that you are standing at in the front of the classroom. We can (and often do) learn from our students. Further, there may be an occasion (rare of course) when you do not know the answer to a question or you have made an honest mistake. "Fessing up" when you honestly do not know the answer to a question is an option that a professor can use and not undermine the learning community.

g. Set boundaries for the way(s) in which students will interact with each other and you in the classroom. For example, if you say that students must treat each other respectfully during a discussion then you may want to provide a concrete example of respectful discourse and one that is not. Name calling for example would never be appropriate, and would clearly seriously undermine the cohesiveness of the learning community. You must be prepared to reinforce those boundaries when necessary.

h. What can you do to help students to share the responsibility for creating and maintaining the learning community? There is much research on the kinds of conditions that need to exist in the classroom to help increase students' motivation, and help the professor to achieve his/her goals in the course.

4. Identify your student learning goals for your course. In addition to identifying goals for the overall course, also try to establish student learning goals for each class period and/or assignment. Consider how you will determine if the student has accomplished the goal. The more specific the goal then more likely can measure or identify outcomes. What assessment tool or method will you use and how will you provide feedback to the student? Finally, identify and/or select teaching techniques or methods that will help the students to achieve the learning goals or objectives. You do not need to select only one technique for a course for the entire semester or the entire class rather consider using a variety of approaches or methods.

5. Teaching Techniques/Approaches: Variety is the spice of a learning community.

    a. Lecture. The lecture cab be used effectively to explain or summarize points for students. If the lecture is planned well then it can be interesting and engaging. There are some recommended rules to have effective lectures: use the lecture for an appropriate purpose: limit the length of lectures (10-20 minutes); do not read the text and organize! Organize! Organize! See Roy Stuckey, **BEST PRACTICES FOR LEGAL EDUCATION** 231 (2007).

    b. The Socratic Method. You really must consider supplementing this method with other teaching techniques. Remember that this method assumes that one student is engaged in discussion with the professor while the others learn from listening in (and staying alert based on fear that they may be the next person to be called on by the professor). The assumption is that the student who is on the hot seat is learning something and everyone in the classroom is learning something from that student's performance (or is it the faculty member's performance?)

    c. The Problem Method. The use of a problem or a case file can be a very effective way for teaching content, process and raising other issues that may be important to your teaching objectives in the course, e.g., raising ethical issues. There is no need to use long involved problems to utilize this method. Casebooks often have problems in the notes that ca be just as helpful for the students. Problem method can be used with small groups or think, pair, share (two students) activity.

    d. Incorporating "Writing to Learn" Techniques. There is considerable research that writing can be used in the classroom to help facilitate and deepen students' understanding of a subject and encourage students to become active learners. There are many techniques that do not increase the paper load (i.e., grading/evaluation load) for the faculty member.   See http://wac.colostate.edu/intor/pop2d.cfm.

    e. Role-plays. I often combine a role play with a problem or case that I have previously assigned to the class. Usually, I select students to play the roles in the problem or case ahead of time so that they have ample time to prepare. The role-plays are a very effective form of active learning that can allow the students to provide their perspective of the facts, law and/or the roles of a client, attorney, or judge in a more meaningful way.   I have also been in a role-play with another professor with follow up journals reflecting on and critiquing the role-play.

    f. Use of audiovisual and/or audio materials in the classroom whenever possible. Increasing faculty can use videos from YouTube or other online sources as well as a DVD.   Remember to check the equipment before class to make sure it works and you know how to operate it as well (or the IT is on speed dial).

    g. Collaborative Work or small group work. Small groups (or buzz groups) can be effectively used in small, medium and large classes.   Group of 4-6 students can

provide everyone in the classroom with an opportunity to offer his/her opinion or viewpoint on the issue/case/problem. It is important to have some dialogue or follow up to the small group work each time so that important teaching points are identified and underscored for students. Also, you might consider preparing a document describing the ground rules (if you have any) for the small groups. For example, I usually have students to select a reporter (who will present the group's work product) and a facilitator (someone who will make sure they stay on task and that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the discussion).

h. <u>Show and Tell.</u> This technique works well for visual learners. Ask students to bring an example of an item in a case or assign students to bring something in so that the items can be used as a part of the discussion. For example, in the products liability course where we discuss warnings, students being in an example of a warning from a product. Based on the cases on purpose, adequacy and effectiveness of warnings, the students provide critiques of the warnings on their products. It can be a very rich discussion.

i. <u>Use of Technology inside and outside of the Classroom.</u> Increasing faculty are learning ways to maximize the time in the classroom by using technology to their advance like use of Poll Everywhere (student uses cell phone rather than clickers to participate in polls), use of Zoom or Skype to include a presenter or discussant from another country in the class discussion, Blackboard or other electronic classrooms, or developing a flipped classroom and there is so much more. Find out if your University has a teaching center or online courses that can expose you to different types and ways to use the technology to make the most of your face-to-face contact with faculty. See Jose Antonio Bowen, **TEACHING NAKED: HOW MOVING TECHNOLOGY OUT OF TOUR COLLEGE CLASSROOM WILL IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING** (2012).

6. Always debrief or engage in a self-evaluation of each class. How well did you accomplish your teaching objectives for that class? How did you assess student learning today? What result? Were there any surprises or new insights gained regarding the material or your class or even certain students? What might you change or improve upon the next time you are in class or cover this material?

7. The final word – you cannot please everyone so don't try. Your goal is to create, build, and support a learning community for your students. Many students will benefit or profit from this environment and there are likely going to be a couple of students who would prefer to be somewhere else. Who knows you might still find a way to stimulate their interest but focus on most of your class who will be interested in learning, and interested in learning from you.