Proceedings of the Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching

Volume Seven
2010
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Editorial Preface

The seventh Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching (RUMCOT 7) was held at the Chicago Campus on April 27, 2010. Full-time and part-time faculty members, administrators, and staff from many departments at Roosevelt University attended RUMCOT, which focused on enhancing teaching. This year we focused in greater detail on the theme of incorporating social justice into teaching practices.

The event featured 15 interactive workshops, teaching roundtable discussions, panel presentations, showcase demonstrations, and exhibit displays. These proceedings provide a summary of many presentations from the conference.

For additional information about effective college teaching, you can explore related book and video holdings in the University libraries. These resources can be found by accessing the library’s home page at libguides.roosevelt.edu/facultyservices, and then clicking on the links marked “Resources for Effective College Teaching” and “Resources for Transformational Service Learning.” The Center for Teaching and Learning, located in Room 1046 inside the Auditorium Library, has even more resources for you to peruse. Ask a reference librarian for the key code to enter the center.

RUMCOT 7 and these proceedings are sponsored by the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President.

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Using Universal Design to Teach Students at Different Learning Levels

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Universal design is a concept that was first applied to the field of architecture in the 1990s. For example, the most frequently used example of universal design in architecture is the street curb cut-out (Rose & Meyer, 2007). When curbs were cut low at the corners, it benefitted those with carts or baby carriages to use the sidewalks. Thus, the essence of universal design involves devising strategies to make a given construct more accessible to those with special needs and, in doing so, provide some benefit to the general population. Many have argued that this principle can be applied in an educational setting, whereby making curricula more accessible to students with special needs will also benefit average and above average students. Universal design in educational contexts has been effectively applied in special education and inclusion curricula. Others have attempted to apply universal design to postsecondary education, given the increasing cultural, cognitive, and affective diversity of students in college classrooms (Highbee, 2009; McGuire & Scott, 2006).

Increasing diversity in college classrooms means that the seemingly tried and true methods of education, which have mainly been gleaned from experience with those from the dominant culture, may not nearly tap into the strengths of diverse students. Therefore, when students do not perform well, it may be because a lesson or curriculum is not designed to tap into the strengths of diverse learners. In fact, inflexible and invariable expectations for learning can prevent students who need them from effectively learning. In fact, this principle has been effectively applied in special education and inclusion curricula. Others have attempted to apply universal design to postsecondary education, given the increasing cultural, cognitive, and affective diversity of students in college classrooms (Highbee, 2009; McGuire & Scott, 2006).

After the first “minute-paper,” 15 out of 32 students demonstrated a complete understanding of the concepts. However, after the second “minute-paper,” only 20 of 32 students demonstrated a complete understanding of the concepts. Moreover, the second “minute-papers” included more specific details on effective problem-solving techniques. It was concluded that lesson planning using various experiential learning strategies targets students at various learning levels by offering flexibility to target students with different learning styles and learning strengths. More students demonstrated comprehension in this way than with wording only. The second adaptation illustrated how universal design could be incorporated into a psychology research methods course. The course consisted of 37 students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, different learning styles, various levels of prior academic experiences, and different levels of knowledge (i.e., first-year students, sophomores, juniors and seniors), and various educational backgrounds and understanding of the field of psychology. Some of the students required academic accommodations, such as extended time to complete course material. Some of the other students were parents, first-generation college students and/or spoke English as a second language, which could correspond to a student who might affect both student retention and student class performance (Tinto, 2004). The challenge the instructor encountered while using teaching this course was developing a teaching strategy that could facilitate the best result in learning the course material. The two important experiential teaching strategies that were used were learning by doing and learning by thinking. Students were given case studies in developing and conducting their own experimental or correlational research design study, while using archival data or their classmates as participants. They were encouraged and assisted in finding a topic of interest while considering ethical implications of the kind of information that could be requested of their participants (i.e., classmates). Throughout the course they were also asked to review and critique experiments and study results in an effort to understand the different differences that could be made from experimental and correlational research studies.

The universal design principles for assessment of knowledge and skills are taken from the universal design standards for lesson planning. Principally, students should be given opportunities to demonstrate knowledge in ways related to their preferred learning style (Highbee, 2009). For example, assessment methods may include the oral expression of knowledge, written expression of knowledge, both written and verbal expression of knowledge, and written expression of knowledge. Universal design places particular emphasis on the communication of clear expectations.

Instructors can level the playing field in their classroom by providing students with an equal opportunity to know what they are looking for, how they will be evaluated, and examples of how they can achieve an optimal result (Highbee, 2009). Experiments (Rose & Meyer, 2007) are one example. Experiments allow for various ways, including written grading rubrics, sample assignments, and thorough, directive feedback. In addition, students should be given the opportunity to practice expressing knowledge in the form of reports, summaries, and presentations. During coursework, students should have opportunities to work on various skills and become more comfortable with multiple styles of learning and communication.

In conclusion, using universal design strategies, as well as experiential teaching strategies, can be used to guide both lesson planning and assessment in college classrooms. Such techniques assist instructors in targeting students with various learning strengths and learning styles. Students are given the chance to learn and demonstrate learning in various ways that engage them in the learning process and reflect their strengths.

References

Differentiating Instruction at the College Level: Gathering the Life Story
Margaret Mary Policistro
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Getting to know our students can have a tremendous impact on many aspects of the teaching and learning process. The following statement from the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University summarizes and captures the important role that transitions must take place in college classrooms:

“Our last days at school. The quality of the transition can make all the difference between our last successful day at school and our first successful day at the next place we go.” (Bok Center, 2002-2010).

As retention becomes an increasingly important topic and issue in higher education, some possible ideas in pedagogy that might help keep our students are explored here.

Differentiating our instruction combined with getting to know and care about our students can be a powerful formula for successful teaching and learning. The following statement from the Derek Bok Center combined with instruction that fits the learner is both critical and essential to retention. According to Tinto (1993), students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide academic supports, personal support, and support that is actively involved in their learning. Thus, thinking practices to include the life of our students can greatly enhance and enrich their learning experience. Developing these notions about differentiated instruction requires a shift in philosophy about the learning process, the course content and the delivery
Differentiated Instruction Defined

Differentiated instruction is not a new concept or idea in teaching, rather it is thought of as an educational reform to reach the academic diversity and variance of students. With historical roots in gifted and talented education, differentiated instruction is a philosophy about teaching and learning that is most often considered in elementary, middle and secondary schools. However, many aspects of differentiated instruction can be applied at the college level. In fact, the best practice alignment with college students fits quite well as their life stories are evolving and developing in interesting ways.

Tomlinson (2003) discusses differentiated instruction as a way of making sure that learning fits the learner; providing different avenues to acquire content, to processing ideas and developing an understanding of the material. These are critical and essential pieces to good teaching at any level, including college. A nonnegotiable aspect of differentiated instruction centers on respecting individuals. With this respect comes a deeper understanding that this is a journey and will take time. This is evolutionary change and is not a one-time event. Differentiated instruction is the result of a process that occurs through the evolution of the content rather than focusing on a product that can be created. As we get to know our students, a deeper development of differentiation begins to evolve and develop in interesting ways.

In conclusion, when we can get to know our students, how they learn best, their interests, etc. each class session takes on new meaning. Students arrive talking to me each day, and even those students who are unprepared and not engaged bring something to the class. Typically, I want to know as much as possible regarding their life, experiences, where they grew up, etc. In most cases, this process takes the entire semester to unfold as the students evolve naturally through discussions and conversations. Students will make text-to-self connections and share these connections in class and through other means of class communication. One recent semester, I learned from a student that her mother had just become homeless and was living day by day out of her car in the suburbs. Another student had just lost his mother and was learning how to cope alone and was worried about home foreclosure. The information from these two different students added real detailed details to me that allowed reflection and observations of the students. I made anecdotal notations during the semester about how prompt, even though they were both engaged and focused as active participating students in my class. I felt a special respect for them as they managed their daily challenges in a mature style and manner.

Facilitating the Academic Success of Traditional-Age, High-Risk Students

Jeff Helgeson
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Roosevelt University Academic Success Center

In the effort to facilitate the success and retention of traditional-age (18 to 24), high risk students, Roosevelt University has expanded its long-term commitment to academic support through new initiatives that augment programs which have been in place since 1976. Within the Academic Success Center, four programs (Disability Services, Learning and Support Services, Peer Mentoring, and Content/Skill Development Tutoring) currently provide assistance to both students and faculty as an outgrowth of the University’s commitment to meet the unique needs of currently enrolled students.

References


The Environment and Learning Experience

Acknowledging the influence of instructors who "appear to be human and caring," the receptive environment established within the Academic Success Center (ASC) has been guided by the principle that students seek out those who make them feel comfortable and avoid those who cause them to feel uncomfortable, or who provide unrewarding experience. It has also sought to recognize that the beauty of learning is greatly influenced by prior expectations, as well as whether the environment within which an interaction takes place will greatly influence its outcome. Taking these factors into account, the Academic Success Center plans to physically arrange a space, possibly a small conversation area with two chairs and a coffee table, which would provide comfort and avoid those who cause students to feel uncomfortable, or who provide unrewarding experience within the Academic Success Center (ASC) within which students can study, receive small group and individualized instruction, page through a magazine or newspaper, and have computer access. Additionally, the ASC is designed to be a place where students can talk out their ideas, receive non-judgmental study skills advice, and obtain specialized instructors, as well as from currently enrolled peers.

The advantage of this type of approach is that the specific needs of particular students can systematically be met. Chronic concerns that cannot adequately be resolved within a group setting, such as specific mathematical functions, particular editing applications, and issues related to reading comprehension can be successfully addressed.

Classroom Practices

With respect to faculty applications of these principles, the classroom, similarly, is an environment that can be used to facilitate a systematic approach to comprehension. Such routine practices as beginning on time, using the first several minutes at a meeting guided by "agenda items," the design of the course, and conducting a student "recall" session regarding the previous session, and closing the door following the completion of that session, and eliminating external, hallway distractions. Classroom, similarly, is an environment that can be used to facilitate a systematic approach to comprehension. Such routine practices as beginning on time, using the first several minutes at a meeting guided by "agenda items," the design of the course, and conducting a student "recall" session regarding the previous session, and closing the door following the completion of that session, and eliminating external, hallway distractions.

Physical environment can be modified, with respect to the environment of one class to another, orienting students who may have missed a class, discouraging late arrivals, and eliminating external, hallway distractions. Further suggestions for instructions include:

- Requiring notes to be taken during each session, like minutes at a meeting guided by "agenda items," the amplification of which can be developed through lecture/discussion, resulting in "generative note-taking" augmented by background information for references;
- Dividing the class experience into a series of purposeful, twenty minute activities (to accommodate contemporary student concentration);
- Providing assignments in writing, with attention to the process of their completion; and
- Providing a "style sheet" that is specific to the writing requirements/expectations for a given discipline/course statement, so that writing should be clear, well organized and exhibit the use of the standard conventions of written English.

In the effort to make increased support available for the growing numbers of traditional-age students enrolled at Roosevelt University, the Academic Success Center plans to continue to strengthen its affiliations with both instructors and students by working closely with its faculty advising board and by actively seeking to establish and maintain interactive relationships with currently enrolled students. Finally, it is believed that, through providing a comfortably structured, non-judgmental, self-contained classroom environment, as well as with the faculty and student resources that can be made available by the staff of the Academic Success Center, the gap between expectations and reality, "between the idea and the reality ... between the conception and the creation," between Sam Cooke's "Don't know much about ..." and Kurt Cobain's "Here we are now, entertain us," can and will be productively "over come."

Lessons Learned from an Ambitious Service-Learning Class

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Psychology of Close Relationships (PSYC 384) was a service-learning class that attempted to serve multiple goals. Our overarching goals were: (1) addressing the problem of risky behavior in adolescents and undergraduates, (2) helping undergraduates understand the life experience of low income adolescents, and (3) providing undergraduates with a service experience that would encourage future service and volunteering. In this article, we describe our success with Goals 2 and 3. These were ambitious goals, and if we were to run the class again, we would use what we learned to increase our chances of reaching these goals, and to reduce the labor intensiveness of the course.

As an overview, Psychology 384 was funded by a McCormick Tribune Service-Learning Grant awarded to the first author. It was intended as an accelerated learning experience, a service-learning course, in which undergraduates learned relationship skills, then taught the same skills to at-risk adolescents as a service to a local community agency, the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago (BCCG). Both the course and running the groups would teach the undergraduates key relationship skills as well as instruct them in how to teach these skills to teens in groups. The groups were comprised of male and female teen participants from student-concentrated in the BCCG.

So that others may learn from our successes and challenges, we provide the following about the process of implementing the course. First, we describe our partnership with a willing, long-term community service organization. Next, we describe the design of an undergraduate psychology course that included a service-learning component. Further, we explain the logistical challenges associated with the way. Next, we provide a summary of themes that emerged in the journal reflections from the undergraduates. Last, we cover some of the lessons we learned from this long process.

Problem and Approach: Relationship Skills

There is increased interest in providing both adolescents and young adults with "pre-marital" or relationship skills education to address the challenges that occur in later, long relationships. One format for these programs occurs at the college level, with students receiving course credit. We were interested in addressing relationship skills with a community partner who would find this content meaningful to its target audience.

Approaching a community partner interested in serving adolescents could take several forms. One could: (1) inquire what an agency's most pressing service need was, (2) develop an idea in partnership with the agency, or (3) come to the agency with a specific idea that appeared consistent with the mission. We utilized the last strategy in which we approached the BCCG with a relationship intervention that we might offer to their participating adolescents. This partnership appeared beneficial for both groups in that the BCCG saw a need for such an intervention and appreciated that we would provide the staff (undergraduate students) and the materials needed to run the program.

However, partnering with an outside agency for a service-learning course is not without its challenges. Approval occurred at multiple levels over a lengthy period of time. Initially, the executive staff of the BCCG approved the idea, followed by the central office BCCG youth coordinator, followed by each club's coordinator, followed by each club's youth programs director, and ended with the "buy-in" from the adolescents themselves who came to the groups.

Design of the Course

The course was designed to increase students' knowledge about marriage and intimate relationships, while also improving their abilities to navigate these relationships. Students did readings on close relationships and marriages as well as on group facilitation and adolescents. We utilized a pre-existing curriculum called "Love U2: Relationship Smarts Plus (LU2)" produced by The Dibble Institute (Pearson, 2007). As the service-learning component, the students provided a group-based on the Love U2 curriculum. The program was offered for seven weeks and included identifying healthy relationships, values clarification, dating violence prevention and safer sex. Graduate students served as teaching assistants/coaches who helped the undergraduates with their service.

Execution of the Program: Logistical Challenges

The logistical challenges we encountered were the product of running groups in four different clubs, using a material-heavy curriculum, and the requirement to collect research data all at the same time. Because of high interest among undergraduates, we ran groups across four different clubs of the BGCC, which increased the complexity of the program dramatically. Also, the LU2 curriculum, while appropriate and evidence based, required the creation of many materials, including flash cards, game pieces, question prompts, Play-Doh, handouts, etc. Needing all these materials across all clubs complicated the program. The next step was to collect and analyze the research data from the adolescents before and after the program. This required additional paperwork, time and coordination from the undergraduates and adolescents. Consider all of the above, with different groups starting on different days of the week, on different weeks during the semester, and with varying numbers of adolescents, and the complications multiply exponentially.

Journal Reflections

Despite these complications, we were able to reach our goals of increased understanding and appreciation of service among the undergraduates. After each session at the BGCC, the undergraduates composed journal entries based on reflective questions asked in class. The questions were:

1. What did the teens in the group teach YOU about relationships? And how are your experiences as an adolescent the same or different, and why?
2. What has been most challenging so far about running the groups and what has been most rewarding so far about running the groups?
3. What biases or misconceptions have you had about teens and their relationships, and how have these biases or misperceptions been altered?
4. Write a journal entry addressing your reaction to leading a group with other facilitators. What are the advantages and what are the disadvantages of facilitating with others?
5. Write a journal entry describing what it has been like to work with your Boys & Girls Club. How has the experience changed your thoughts about working in the community? What have you learned about non-profit service agencies (like the BGCC)?
6. Write a journal entry on how you might modify the Love U2 curriculum. What topics or activities might you add or delete? What do you think your group needs that the curriculum did not provide?
7. Write a journal entry regarding the MOST IMPORTANT things you learned during your service experience at the club and what you want to share with students who might take PSYC 384 in the future.
We read all the journal entries that varied in number based on number of sessions facilitated at the BCCC and coded for themes. The themes that emerged were: basic content summaries of the lessons, misconceptions about teens that were changed, advantages and disadvantages of group co-facilitation, community service/volunteering, reactions to the LU2 curriculum, and how they, as undergraduates, changed from the experience.

Below we present some representative quotes from the undergraduates’ journals on several themes. For example, while recounting her experience with community service and volunteering, one junior said:

“I found that going home after working with these teens is extremely rewarding. I feel like I’m meeting people I would never meet with my lifestyle and it’s exciting to hear what the kids have to say. I even talk about it to my co-workers and I love the reaction they give me when I say ‘I volunteer.’ It’s usually along the lines of, ‘I could never do something like that’ or they laugh at me because it is so out of my character. Especially with my crazy busy schedule, I feel like I would make time to do more volunteer work after this is over.”

There were both positive and negative reactions to the structured curriculum; the students liked some parts and pointed out flaws. A senior had both positive and negative things to report. She said, “One of the weaknesses that I have noticed throughout the LU2 curriculum is that there are parts where they are trying to display too many facts and statistics at once. It’s kind of a waste to try to stuff so much information in one lesson because the teens have a hard time concentrating and retaining all the information. Some of the lessons become boring for the teens and their minds wander off.” She also reported, “I also noticed that kids were more prone to remembering the catchy phrases that the LU2 curriculum had employed…This is something I think the LU2 program does well. They come up with easily worded names for the techniques and lessons.”

One prominent theme was about change from the experience. In recounting her experience, a non-traditional age student said, “I think that I took on the stereotypical viewpoint about them [the adolescents]. I thought that they wouldn’t be engaged and that they wouldn’t care about what we the facilitators were speaking about. Luckily, today I get to admit that I was very wrong about them. My viewpoint couldn’t have been further from the truth. I found myself learning from the teens and some of their comments made me do some self reflecting.”

Lessons Learned

After our own reflection on this course, we have discovered a number of things that if we were to repeat, we would change to improve the process for everyone involved. We discovered that when finding a community partner, it was helpful to network and be flexible, but plan for various contingencies far in advance. In addition, it was crucial to have the students visit the site in advance of the actual service so they could familiarize themselves with the sites and the administrators, and so the adolescents would recognize them when they returned for the sessions.

Some things we could not change along the way, but would improve if we were to do this again, would be to warn the students about the time commitment in advance (at registration) and to get help. It would have been much easier to have additional teaching assistants to help, or request a faculty course reduction for the semesters as the time commitment was much more than a regular course. Also, we learned the value of downsizing. Fewer undergraduates working with fewer adolescents would have significantly reduced the complexity of the course. We also found that a more flexible curriculum, or not rigid adherence to the existing one, would have been easier for all involved. Lastly, providing food for the adolescent groups and incentivizing them in other ways was invaluable.

Kozol’s Kids as Adult Learners: Implementing ‘Wraparound’ Instructional Practices

Vince Cyboran
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Borrowing from both health and social services models, we, as faculty in practitioner programs can move beyond the explicit curriculum of our programs and incorporate “wraparound” services for our students. That is, we can emphasize and magnify the natural strengths and informal supports of our students. We can do so by implementing the three guiding principles of what I term “a Model of Inclusive Education for Professional Development (IEPD)” - competency, connections and caring. This article briefly describes these principles and covers explicit methods and techniques used to foster professional development in students, eschewing “skill and drill” and stimulating students’ self-efficacy and potential. Specifically, it addresses how to provide students with the foundational skills they need to succeed in school and beyond, and how to avoid predatory admissions in higher education.

Competency

Much has been written about fostering competency in professional education (Houlé, 1980; Schön, 1987). Much has also been written about providing educational scaffolding for learners in those settings (Bonk, Lee, Kim, & Lin, 2009). Within the IEPD model, the fostering of competency is extended beyond past practices by addressing an additional focus — foundational skills — and a strong focus on learner self-assessment.

Foundational Skills

What to include under foundational skills will necessarily depend upon the profession or area being studied. For example, in the Training and Development Program, I offer the following suggestions for helping students improve their foundational skills.

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<th>Type of Foundational Skill</th>
<th>Strategy/Technique</th>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Writing for success: Choose key areas on which to focus. Provide a few minutes of direct instruction at the start of each class session. I covered one per class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Instructional reading: Help students understand the structure of any texts in use and how to make the most of examples, charts, etc. provided in the text. Give specific exercises that ask students to demonstrate an understanding of the text organization and examples.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization and Focus</td>
<td>Course packs: During the first session, distribute packets that contain the syllabus, feedback sheets, templates for and examples of assignments. Success paths: Create a graphic organizer of how the course works: that is, showing what work is done to prepare for class, what work is done in class, and what work is done following class. Discuss this during the first session. Course web sites: Keep the digital versions of the syllabus, templates and so forth there. Also, create forums for students to ask questions and to continue conversations between class sessions.</td>
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I offer the following suggestions for helping students improve their professional skills and level of competency.

Creating Deliverables

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<th>Type of Professional Skill or Competency Level</th>
<th>Strategy/Technique</th>
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<tr>
<td>Creating Deliverables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Templates: Provide professional-looking templates for students to use when completing their assignments. Example: Provide examples of all assignments. Examples will use the templates you have provided. Examples can be garnered from students in prior classes.</td>
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Self-assessment

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<th>Type of Connection</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
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<td>Within a curriculum</td>
<td>Use graphic organizers to show the relationship(s) among courses.</td>
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<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Informal curatorial work: Have groups of students create exhibits about important topics. Students post their exhibits on the walls of the classroom. Follow this with a 'gallery walk' by the entire class.</td>
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<td>Making thinking explicit: facts, predictions, inferences</td>
<td>Just-in-time journalism: Give students five minutes to write a headline and a supporting paragraph about a topic being studied. Use artwork: display a work of art depicting a situation. Ask students to list two or three facts about the work. Then ask students to make an inference based on the facts depicted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding concrete thinking</td>
<td>Have students match components of different models about the same topic.</td>
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Proficiency

| Alternative assignments: Create different sets of assignments that allow students to demonstrate proficiency in different ways. This should not be considered lowering the standards for certain students. All assignments must be tied to the stated learning and performance objectives. |

Connections

Science has demonstrated that human learning entails the growth of neural connections (Gazzaniga, 2004). Within the IEPD model, connections go beyond standard problem solving and make use of research on imagination and creativity (Clark, 2009; Livingston, 2010). I offer the following suggestions for helping students make connections of a variety of sorts.

Online Learning: Achievement and Challenges for Students and Professors

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Amelia M. Hicks
Department of Specialized Studies, College of Education, Roosevelt University

“I am getting my master’s degree online. I am getting all As because I can do the work. I just don’t feel like I am learning.”

– A Kaplan University student’s reply when asked about her course work.

The above statement may provide the quintessential conundrum for online education, which is how to provide a high-quality education that produces scholastic growth and is convenient for the student. As universities and colleges provide more online or distance learning, successes and challenges associated with this instructional medium arise. Indeed, traditional classroom instruction does not necessarily translate easily or seamlessly into electronic modes. To address this issue, the authors present an introduction to the rapidly growing medium of online instruction.

References

Enrollment numbers show that online learning is increasing among students of all ages. "More than 2 million pre-K–12 students may be enrolled in online schools this year. This is an increase of about 47% since 2011, when 31 states had virtual schools..." (Nagel, 2009). The Harvard Business School has speculated that half of all high school classes will be online by 2019 (Zucker, 2008). While these numbers are related to younger students, the current increase in college and university online classes suggests that the likelihood that the proportion of college-age students..." (Nagel, 2009).

Teacher Criteria for Online Learning

The authors believe and the literature supports the need to consider online learning as both a separate entity and as another medium for learning. For example, Collins (2004) identifies factors important for high quality online education:

- Teachers are certified and highly qualified to teach the course that they are teaching.
- Teachers are proficient in teaching in an online environment.
- Online teachers, like traditional teachers, are evaluated annually.
- Online course providers provide qualification documents to their client schools or districts.
- Appropriate metrics for teacher response time to students are established.
- Feedback to students is provided through appropriate communication vehicles.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning

As online learning environments are considered, it is beneficial to discuss advantages and disadvantages of electronic classrooms. According to BizHelp24 (2005), convenience, cost and time are distinct advantages of the distance format. Anywhere students have computer access (home, work, library) will suffice. Since enrollees do not need to travel to class, the cost is less and time is saved. Further savings occur if texts and other learning materials are in electronic formats. As an online student, you may spend a number of hours per day working on a single class. Broadwell and Washington (2003), online teachers and course designers at Roosevelt University, stated that students should plan their time for course work as they would for traditional classes: hours in class plus about four hours per week for homework. Broadwell and Washington suggest that both student instructors are required to enroll in training on how to participate in online learning.

The "human aspect" of learning can present another difficulty. "As online training is through your computer, there is no direct contact to training professionals or teachers" (BizHelp24). In a virtual environment, the verbal cues aren't there, and the visual cues aren't there, so you need to use the technology and the tools and good communication strategies to engage your learner and diagnose what’s happening around learning. (Ash, 2009).

Price (2008) further discusses this lack of human contact inherent in online learning.

"In education, arguably one of the most human of professions, there are already places where we are preparing students in isolation, connected only by computers..." I have profound misgivings about the loss of human face in learning.

The challenges noted above suggest that online learning might not be appropriate for every student or every instructor.

"It is necessary to look for not only the match or mismatch of technology uses with learning principles, but also its match or mismatch with learners and their diverse needs" (McComb & Vakili, 2005). Jeff Murphy, director of instruction for the Florida Virtual School, agrees: “Online teachers need to be comfortable with and passionate about technology.” (Ash, 2009). Glowa (2009) elaborates on this view, noting that teachers must use different knowledge and skills as they teach online since “research shows that a teacher’s skill in face-to-face teaching does not necessarily transfer to an online classroom.”

Designing Online Courses

In many ways, online courses are designed similar to traditional, face-to-face courses. Content, goals, outcomes, instruction and assessments must be determined if a viable, effective curriculum is to be created. Gersten and Knerr (2005) ask, “What are the unique characteristics of online instruction?” Traditional teachers must use different knowledge and skills as they teach online since "research shows that a teacher’s skill in face-to-face teaching does not necessarily transfer to an online classroom.”

• In the traditional classroom setting, do I empower students to pursue knowledge on their own? Do I routinely involve students in collaborative exercises and assignments into my courses?
• How do discussions generally go in my courses? Are they dominated by a few? Are my classes truly interactive?
• How comfortable do I feel with the concept of promoting self-knowledge in learners?
• How comfortable am I when students disagree with my point of view? How would I feel if a student suggested that I read material they have discovered in their learning process?
• How do I define learning? What do I hope to see as learning outcomes from an online class?

Cersten and Knerr (2005) continue with their action plan for creating a viable online course by articulating the following steps: (1) Determine course goals; (2) Determine how students will learn (considering the categories of instructional design: inquisitorial presentation, collaborative learning, expository presentation, generative learning, anchored instruction and problem-solving learning); (3) Determine breadth, depth and organization; (4) Determine the nature of course interactions; and (5) Determine how learning will be assessed.

The American Distance Education Consortium (2003) further notes that the following are characteristics of quality web-based teaching and learning:

1. Fosters meaning-making, discourse
2. Moves from knowledge transmissions to learner-controlled systems
3. Provides for reciprocal teaching
4. Is learner-centered
5. Encourages active participation, knowledge construction
6. Based on higher level thinking skills – analysis, synthesis and evaluation
7. Promotes active learning
8. Allows group collaboration and cooperative learning
9. Provides multiple levels of interaction
10. Focuses on real-world problem solving

Tools for Online Environments

As online courses are developed, the specific delivery system, instructional tools, teaching strategies and type of learning community formed must be determined. Kaplan (2002) identified two distinct types of learning communities:

"E-learning communities are groups of people connected solely via technology... Blended learning communities integrate online learning and face-to-face meetings.”

Kaplan (2002) created a detailed consideration for “features of a web-based environment,” which led to the goal of providing an easy-to-use collaborative environment: “E-learning communities are groups of people connected solely via technology... Blended learning communities integrate online learning and face-to-face meetings.”
Higher Learning and Presenting Social Justice in the Classroom: Cultural World Views, Communication Dialectics, and Ethical Frameworks

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At the beginning of the 21st century, institutions of higher learning in the United States should recognize, analyze and address the fact that student body diversity affects the delivery of higher education in the classroom. We educators who are the “gatekeepers” to the educational preparedness of students must recognize that the move from homogeneity to diversity among the student body also presents another set of circumstances in the classroom. More often we must be able to reach out to people whose universe and outlook bring different perceptions and realities. An analysis of those universes comprised of different perceptions and realities points us to a world whose citizens do not all have the same opportunities or access to equal income, equal participation in the political system, housing, medical care or education.

Importantly, our respective institutions recognize, analyze and address the fact that student body diversity affects the delivery of higher education in the classroom. We educators who are the “gatekeepers” to the educational preparedness of students must recognize that the move from homogeneity to diversity among the student body also presents another set of circumstances in the classroom. More often we must be able to reach out to people whose universe and outlook bring different perceptions and realities. An analysis of those universes comprised of different perceptions and realities points us to a world whose citizens do not all have the same opportunities or access to equal income, equal participation in the political system, housing, medical care or education.

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What is social justice? There are various definitions of social justice. For this discourse, the following is submitted as a definition of social justice:

Social justice is the belief that all within a society are entitled to the same rights and privileges socially, educationally and economically. There should be an agenda that is herein defined as a “positive measurement forward” not race-based obfuscatory (legal rhetoric generally applied as the definition of affirmative action). Social justice is recognizing and understanding that intersectionality produces an agenda of affirmative action and taking action to overcome oppression and inequality.

A social justice agenda should be considered a universal requirement in developing and maintaining a society that will function to overcome oppression and inequality. How do we address and integrate issues of social justice across curricula in the classroom? How do we teach social justice in the classroom?

We can address and integrate issues of social justice across curricula in the classroom through self-reflexivity, by gaining a basic working knowledge of cultural world views, through understanding and developing communication dialectics, and applying ethical principles.

It is imperative that educators develop self-reflexivity, Self-reflexivity is the process of learning to view their own actions from one’s position in society (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Educators must define and recognize their strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to understanding, delivering and receiving social justice agendas. Social dialectics are contextualized as a social, sociocultural and backgrounded. There is certainty factor into our presentation of social justice. Where do we as educators fit into society relative to social justice? Self-reflexivity will assist educators in recognizing if and when we may be tempted to take credit for our possible advantageous positions in society and deposit blame on the disadvantaged in society for their position in society. Besides assigning reasons for possible historical disadvantage, we may also provide explanations for our own behavior (Lane, 2008). Self-reflexivity promotes the qualities of understanding and empathy necessary to fulfill our duties under social justice.

Educators should gain a basic knowledge of cultures and their worldviews. Culture and worldviews form the basis of how one is socialized to relate to people. Culture is the sum of the values, rituals, symbols, beliefs and thought processes that are learned, shared by a group of people, and transmitted generation- to-generation (Cohutta, Gilly & Graff, 2004). A worldview describes how a culture perceives the world (individualistic vs. collective). We are all bound by cultural values as they represent a “set of deeply held beliefs” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). A basic knowledge of culture can assist educators in embracing cultural approaches to social justice. Educators can then attempt to anticipate behavior through possible cultural immersion approach, or learn to understand and value the historical contexts of another’s experience. Cultural knowledge makes the application of social justice more personal.

An understanding of communication dialectics, which influences how we engage the students, assists in our delivery. A dialectic is a type of logical discourse or argument that recognizes how we are influenced by and can hold onto contradictory ideas at the same time. There are a number of communicative dialectics to review, but this discussion will concern itself with three: Differences-Similarities dialectic, History Past/Future-Dialectic, and Privilege-Discrimination dialectic.

The Differences-Similarities dialectic recognizes that people are simultaneously both different and similar. Teachers may be simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged, or privileged in some contexts, and disadvantaged in others (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). This dialectic points one to identify differences in cultural values, language and nonverbal behavior (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Educators recognize that if we only view others within the trap of stereotyping and prejudice which obfuscates our ability to reason. Social justice requires educators’ willingness to reason and to understand people who may express the same concerns but in different contexts.

The History Past/Future-dialectic directs us to view simultaneously the past and the present in understanding communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Our divergent past and present experiences shape the view we have as they relate to society members’ present and future actions. This dialectic offers a brief but important opportunity to lead all to examine how different perceptions of the same stories of historical oppression and inequality, produce an agenda for the need for the call to enact social justice.

The Privilege-Discrimination dialectic recognizes that people may be simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged, or privileged in some contexts, and disadvantaged in others (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). This dialectic leads educators to view their roles and places in society. For instance, some educators may have traveled a less difficult road through life and academia than the students they teach. Although the educators may have faced more obstacles traveling the same path, the educators may have been less arduous, the educator is disadvantaged because he or she may not fully grasp the mind-set of students who may have faced more obstacles traveling the same path. Educators recognize that that one judge the rightness of an act by analyzing if and when we may be tempted to take credit for our possible advantageous positions in society and deposit blame on the disadvantaged in society for their position in society. Besides assigning reasons for possible historical disadvantage, we may also provide explanations for our own behavior (Lane, 2008). Self-reflexivity promotes the qualities of understanding and empathy necessary to fulfill our duties under social justice.

Educators must understand and develop a working knowledge of basic ethical theories and delineate their applications to social justice. There are numerous theories or ethical frameworks that can be referenced. This discourse limits its references to Immanuel Kant’s “Categorical Imperative,” William David Ross “prima facie duties of beneficence, nonmaleficence and reparation,” and John Rawls “Liberty and Difference Principles.” Kant’s “categorical imperative” finds motives to be of the highest importance, in that it expects persons to make the right decisions for the right reasons (Beauchamp, Bowie, & Cribbins, 2003). Among the things Kant suggests is that one judge the rightness of an act by analyzing if one would accept the same decision and consequence actions being applied to oneself. The categorical imperative creates personal connections to members of a society.
William David Ross “prima facie” (at first sight) duties are duties that constitute moral obligations. Under a paradigm of social justice, these duties are obtained through the happiness, virtue or intelligence of others (duty of beneficence), obligated not to create situations that may cause undue harm (duty of nonmaleficence), and actions that may have been placed or kept others at a disadvantage (duty of reparation).

John Rawls advised society that we must put into place fair methods for choosing how to resolve an issue. The focus of Rawls’ theory, then, is on social justice and a difference principle. Rawls explains it in much greater detail; but, society must see that (A) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive and total system of basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all; and (B) Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Boatright, 2009). Therefore, each within a society should be given an opportunity to experience the same equal shares of that society’s benefits and burdens.

How do we teach social justice in the classroom? We prepare ourselves through self-reflexivity; by gaining a basic, working knowledge of the discipline, we are able to understand communication dialectics and applying ethical principles. Some methods that this author has used or is using include the following:

1. “Who am I” heritage-based essays. After I have offered understanding communication dialectics and applying ethical principles to the students, also, it can be used in multicultural, languages, communication, English, history, global marketing and education classes.

2. Construct and deliver your own surveys or questionnaires with topics that relate to past, present or current social justice concepts/issues. This way one can gather data related to attitudes and perceptions held by the classroom “village” on the chosen topic and begin a brief discussion the next class. Self-reflexivity works for the students, also. It can be used in multicultural, languages, communication, English, history, global marketing and education classes.

3. In-class group discussion assignments. Again, deliver a topic germane to that day’s class assignment and have groups divide for point/counterpoint discussion.

4. In-class role playing/panel discussions. Provide the students with the time to lead the discussion and provide their own insights as to how they would enact social justice concepts for the named scenario.

5. Judicial use of movies/documentaries. Educators should attempt to obtain some visuals that a class discipline like other mainstream from the co-cultural perspective. I suggest the following television series (A Different World, view 1988–1993 seasons). (b) Fly Away films (White Man’s Burden, which featured portrayed social role reversals of African Americans and whites; (c) The Long Walk Home, which presented the Montgomery Bus Boycott through a personal narrative of white and African-American families affected by the events; (d) My Family, Latino/Hispanic generational family narrative; (e) Once Upon a Time When We Were Color, southern African-American experiences from PBS (Hawaiians, Chinese Americans and Puerto Ricans: Our American Story). If educators can face the challenge of presenting social justice issues, we can deliver social justice in the classroom as a norm. We are committed to social justice through social responsibility by instilling in our students a calling to lifelong service to our community that can be passed down from generation to generation.

References


Integrating Civic Engagement into an Integral Calculus Course

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Integral Calculus is a second semester calculus course (MATH 232) taken by all mathematics and actuarial science majors as well as by all biology, chemistry and computer science majors who are pursuing a BS degree. For the mathematics and actuarial science majors, this course is a transition to upper level mathematics courses. For the others, it is a terminal math course. Usually there are 8 to 25 students per section, and the students vary from freshman to senior level. As part of the course, all students are required to complete online homework problems in MyMathLab. The topics covered by this course are Riemann sums, the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus, integration techniques, separable and linear differential equations, applications of integration, sequences and series. Previously this course was a traditional four credit hour, content-driven, one semester calculus course. In Spring 2010, we offered a redesigned version incorporating a semester-long group project modeling the spread of HIV/AIDS. The project was adapted from Janke (1993).

Changes to the Course

In order to accommodate the project, we removed two sections on “Applications of Integration” that involved work, fluid force and center of mass. When dealing with separable differential equations, we focused on transmission of disease models rather than Newton’s Law of Heating and Cooling. We used Maple for all of the numerical integration and differential equation sections in order to give students more familiarity with the programming language. Although we followed the general structure of the calculus text, we reordered topics slightly in order to cover differential equations earlier in the semester.

We also incorporated weekly reflective journals where students wrote their thoughts and opinions on mathematics, HIV/AIDS, the relationship between mathematics and the outside world and their study habits. Overall, students’ grades were based on the following categories: weekly online homework and Maple labs (10 percent); participation (10 percent); weekly quizzes (10 percent); two midterm exams (25 percent each); comprehensive final exam (20 percent); project (15 percent); and weekly reflective journals (10 percent).

In particular, the group projects had the following components: biological background (15 percent, due week 3); differential equation background (15 percent, due week 6); data collection (10 percent, due week 8); model building (20 percent, due week 12); poster and presentation (15 percent, due week 13); and final paper (25 percent, due end of semester). By redesigning the course, we wanted students to improve their learning, interest and retention in integral calculus; gain critical thinking skills in interpreting integrals and derivatives in a real-world example; work with a team dedicated to solving real-world mathematical problems; and increase their sense of civic engagement and appreciation of the social relevance and practical applications of mathematics through modeling the spread of HIV/AIDS.

I’ve gained so much from doing this project. What I loved about it was that it forced me to think critically. It wasn’t just plugging numbers into a model. It was: Does this model make sense? Does it have realistic constraints? Does it make sense? Would this be a reliable method to predict future cases? I loved being able to apply concepts from the class to a different discipline. My favorite was Project 2. It gave the most solid understanding, like a little light bulb going on.

– Actuarial Science Major

Community Involvement

The students presented a poster of their work at the Roosevelt University Math and Science Research Symposium. They explained to their peers and community members the work they did to create the models, the insights they gained about the way the mathematics and biology connected to each other and to the world, and why they made their modeling choices. They discussed how they used mathematics to gain understanding of a civic issue and how this impacted them personally.

There was an optional field trip to the Illinois State Mathematics Association of America meeting in April; eight (35 percent) of the students attended. The experience was inspiring to the students. Most expressed interest in going again next year, and some wanted to begin a research project to present at next year’s meeting.

I had a great experience at the ISMAA conference and I really do think that people (even those who are not math majors) should go and experience it. I learned so much about math and how it applies to everyday life. This experience was even more. I know that this will help me and you in our future education/career.

– Biology Major

Lessons Learned

Our experience with this course in Spring 2010 showed that students benefited greatly from doing the projects. The main benefits from the project were: a greater appreciation for how mathematics is used in the world; an understanding of the basics of mathematical modeling and the issues involved; and an enthusiasm for communicating mathematics.

These preliminary results are anecdotal; there were a total of 23 students taking the course, so it is impossible to make statistical claims at this time.

Project Groups

Group creation and management were the greatest challenges. Each group consisted of 2 to 4 students. The optimal size was four students. We grouped the students so that each group consisted of at least one math or actuarial science major and at least one biology or chemistry major.

Typically, a small percentage of students drop after the first exam; this semester was no different. It was necessary to reassure the groups to try to get the largest possible group size; this caused stress among some of the affected students.

In future semesters, we plan to address this by creating new groups for each of the first two project parts. In the final groups, we would like to have students with different skill levels; we plan on surveying the students after each of the two project parts in order to determine their commitment to working on the project. This will help us to avoid inter-student conflicts.
Information Gathering

The students attended a mandatory library information session at the start of the semester. There they learned how to use print and online resources and to find reliable information about HIV/AIDS, epidemics, and modeling. During the project, students were required to collect approximately 20 years worth of data from a reputable source, typically the CDC website at www.cdc.gov. There were some issues with the data due to regular class periods in counting some of the revised data, variant over time. Student groups that used two different sources (even within the CDC website) found abrupt jumps between the two data sets. This helped students to understand modeling better: real-world data always has some inherent error. Our students were quite capable of combining their own error sources.

Technology

During weeks 3 and 4, the students completed Maple labs on the topics of numerical integration and differential equations. These were held during class periods in order to familiarize students with how to interpret data, use functions, and plot in Maple. Project Part 4 had students use Maple to fit their real-world data to a variety of polynomial, exponential, and logistic models. This worked well for all, but the logistic fit. We fit the data to a logistic function in Mathematica and gave this result to the students. This led to a discussion on the limitations of technology.

Course Structure

We plan to adjust the grading breakdown in the future. Currently, the three course journals are weighted too heavily; we plan on making the project worth 20 percent and the homework 15 percent. The score for the reflective journal will be included as a portion of the project grade.

Reference


Creating a Socially Just Democracy through Interpretive Discussion

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In John Dewey’s views, as expressed in Democracy and Education, and in his own views of a democracy characterized by social justice, learning to listen with respect and interest to views different from one’s own is essential. Several democratic practices are available through participation in interpretive discussion, and one can live peacefully and productively together in classroom and beyond, in our diverse, United States society. Too often, interactions between people of differing gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and political persuasion can lead to conflict, alienation, and even hatred. We witness this in divisive political rhetoric, in acts of overt, racial discrimination on university campuses and elsewhere, and in the increasing number of hate crimes in recent years. The structure of interpretive discussions promotes the democratic principles of listening to others’ views about a text with the purpose of understanding these views more fully; expressing one’s own views with the purpose of identifying and resolving a concern shared by most, if not all, participants; and working together to evaluate and improve upon the discussion process.

Why Is It Important to Value, Listen to, and Understand Ideas and Perspectives That Differ from One’s Own in a Democracy? What Does Dewey Say?

Two traits that “precisely . . . characterize the democratically constituted society” (Dewey, 1916, p. 87) according to Dewey seem to require that people listen to and understand perspectives and ideas that are both similar to and different from their own. These two traits are:

1. “. . . more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest . . . greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control” (Dewey, 1916, p. 86).

2. “. . . not only freer interaction between social groups . . . but change in social habit – in action, in persons who participate through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse” (Dewey, 1916, 87).

Dewey may mean that in order to co-create democracy, people need to communicate with one another about their goals in ways that allow them to identify those they have in common and to increase the number and variety of their common goals. Because people are unique (Dewey, 1916), there will be differing ideas about which aims to pursue and how to go about them in any social group. Therefore, group members need to express their own ideas and viewpoints and listen to those of others in order to arrive at a shared concern for the group. When Dewey writes, “. . . after a greater individualization . . . and a broader community of interest . . . have come into existence, it is a matter of deliberate effort to sustain and extend them” (Dewey, 1916, p. 87), he may mean that educators in a democracy need to help children, youth and adults learn how to sustain a democracy in terms of its two fundamental traits that require people to value, listen to and understand perspectives and ideas that are both similar to and different from their own as described above. The following practices may correspond with what Dewey would recommend that people learn how to do. Each practice is labeled with the trait it supports.

1. Communicate with one another in ways that help people realize their shared interests and multiply the goals that they hold in common. [Trait 1]

2. Communicate with one another and negotiate differences to accomplish common goals. This may be why people need to “participate through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse” (Dewey, 1916, p. 87). [Trait 2]

3. Interrelate with members of many different groups of people. [Trait 2]

4. Learn how to adjust their ways of living and thinking in response to new situations that arise when they communicate with members of groups other than their own. [Trait 2]

5. Communicate together to constantly reflect upon and work to improve the quality of life of all people in a group and society (Dewey’s definition of democracy). [Trait 2]

People Engage in These Five Democratic Practices in Interpretive Discussions

Interpretive discussion is a form of teaching and learning whereby teachers and students can engage in the above five democratic practices and thereby, learn how to value, listen to and understand ideas and perspectives that differ from their own. Haroutunian-Gordon (1991, 2009) has written about teaching through interpretive discussions, the ways in which these discussions can lead to shared concerns and the processes as a group to constantly improve them. [Trait 4]; Clarify their own ideas? [Practice 2].

5. Participants change their ideas about this shared question through the process of the discussion? [Practice 4].

Conclusion

Teachers can help students sustain a democracy by learning to value, listen to and understand ideas and perspectives that differ from their own through interpretive discussions. Teachers can encourage participation in the above five democratic practices by developing a shared concern and working together to resolve this shared concern, all are engaged in democratic practices that can be utilized both within and
outside of classrooms to sustain a democratic society and to improve it.

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