Teaching For Success

Full Expression

ARIZONA WESTERN COLLEGE

ALL NEW

Ideas for the Best Class Start Ever

Rational Exuberance

Jack H. Shrawder
Editor/Publisher
jack@teachingforsuccess.com

*T*he new look of *Teaching For Success* this academic year is born out of renewed rational exuberance for walking-our-talk of continuous improvement. Why bother improving teaching and learning and the resources that fuel the improvement movement, you ask?

Because education is vitally important to any society that wishes to maintain full expression and participation in the world today.

I would further assert that education should be the number-one national priority. The outcomes of good education lead directly to improved physical, economic, and social security.

Is total security the ultimate goal? Of course not: to improve anything one must risk a measure of insecurity, too.

There is no way to take all the risk out of life and still participate in the exciting journey of the development of civilization and the march of human history. We never have it made, and there is much to do; everything can be improved.

A NASA official once quipped that if we knew then what we know now of the dangers of space travel, we would have never landed a man on the moon. Attempting new things, shooting for new goals can be risky, but it's the price for progress and new learning.

You may resist jumping on any passing improvement bandwagon because you're comfortable with the way you have always done things, you may feel you know all there is to know about teaching and learning, or you may worry about being criticized by others if you try something new and it doesn't work out. All these reasons for inaction seem valid, but if you buy into a no-change philosophy, you will miss the exuberance, excitement, and exhilaration that experimentation, innovation, and change can foster.

If you wish to experience the rational exuberance of continuous professional development, the ALL NEW *Teaching For Success* is for you. Look for these improvement tools: QuickTips, SuperIdeas (SI) Five-Star Teacher Interviews (FSTI) and Trial Balloons (TB), insightful quotes and resource recommendations in this and all issues to come. No matter what the financial markets do, rational exuberance is always the best policy!

Getting to Know You

Audrey G. Lawrence
Information Technology and Business Div.
Tidewater Community College
Virginia Beach Campus
tclawra@tcc.edu

When the term begins, you most likely receive a class roster with limited information about your students.

However, success in the classroom often depends on knowing more about the student than what appears on the class roster. Sometimes during the semester, for instance, you might need to find an alternate way to make contact with a student.

When a class starts to get hard, some students feel overwhelmed and may just disappear. Or a personal problem unknown to you may cause a student to accumulate excessive absences.

With quick action, some of these students may be retained if you know more about what is going on and how to make contact with them. This is when you may need more detailed contact information.

One way to get to know your students better is to use a form to collect information unavailable on the official class roster.

The sample form provided here can be distributed at the first or second class meeting to collect information you will need later.

First Place, QuickTip Super Ideas Contest Winner

Quick Tip   **1st**

STUDENT CONTACT FORM

Class: _____
Name: _____
Major: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip _____
Primary phone number: _____
Secondary phone number: _____
School email address: _____
Secondary email address: _____
Do you have a nickname? If yes, what is it? ____
_____
Are there any known personal problems that could preempt course completion? _____
_____
Do you have any special concerns about this class?
_____

   NOTE: The information you provide is considered private and will only be used by the instructor.

You will find this form invaluable when a student's primary means of contact changes or when a student does not do well in class. Don't wait; be proactive. Communicate immediately with students having difficulty or missing classes.

Finally, to ensure you receive accurate information, emphasize that the data on this form is for your use only. ✺

Quick Tip   ## Calming First-Day Jitters

Calmness comes from being prepared and feeling confident about meeting your new class for the first time.

Whether this is your first or your twenty-fifth year teaching, you can probably feel the excitement and energy at the beginning of a new term. It's palpable with the students too. Use this energy to plan methodically for the first day's class, including each task you wish to complete. Look at this class session from the student's point of view. What do they want and need to know or experience?

More than likely they want to know who you are, what your experience is with the subject, how you will conduct the class, and what your performance expectations are for yourself and your students.

If you are new to teaching, there is no need to apologize. If you do, students will pick up on your anxieties and may choose to drop your course. So take a deep breath, go calmly about your introductions and syllabus familiarization, and enjoy! ✺

Quick Tip   ## Leadership: No Substitute for It!

In the 1970s educational theorists experimented with dropping leadership as a characteristic of the good teacher. Teachers were urged to give up class leadership and become just another resource the students could choose to use or not.

It all sounded good in the educational literature of the day. But trying this theory out in the classroom created a group of very angry, hostile students who came to class expecting the instructor to be a leader—one who knows the subject and its real-world applications and who is highly enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and able to create an organized learning process that reaches defined goals.

With each new class, you have a leadership opportunity, so lead well by insisting students state their learning goals in your class and commit to accomplishing these goals everyday. Leaders encourage others to see their potential for learning; they make sure they have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, and they give thoughtful, corrective feedback. ✺

SI

How to Create a Virtual Office with Instant Messaging

Dennis E. Pipper
Information Technology
and Office Systems Department
Lansing Community College
dpipper@lcc.edu

*1*nstant messaging (sometimes called IM or IMing) is the ability to easily see whether a chosen friend or coworker is connected to the Internet and, if they are, to exchange messages with them.

To accommodate students who are taking online and hybrid classes, I highly encourage the use of virtual office hours. Most students are already familiar with the use of IM software to keep in touch with family and friends, so there isn't much training needed for them to use this means of communication.

Moving into the Virtual Office

My virtual office utilizes a free software program called Miranda (http://www.miranda-im.org/) to interact with students during posted office hours and periodically throughout each day while I am online. Miranda IM is a multi-protocol instant messenger client for PCs (Mac OSX users could use Fire (http://fire.sourceforge.net/) or Adium X (http://adiumx.com)). Multi-protocol software allows users to sign on to different Instant Messaging services at one time. If students use popular IM services such as Yahoo! IM, AOLIM, ICQ, MSN Messenger and others, you can chat with them as if you were using the same service they are. However, you do need login accounts at these different providers to interact with each service (see links on page 5.) Another free multi-protocol software program for PC is Trillian Basic (http://trillian.cc)

The downside to using a single protocol—individual IM service—is that the software works only with its user's base (e.g. AOL user to AOL user). The multi-protocol system allows access for many different services at one time.

Rewards to Students and Teachers Alike

Instant Messaging offers many immediate rewards to the student. Typically, students work on assignments at home or away from class, and sometimes they may have a quick question that prohibits them from completing the assignment. An email may take too long to get answered, and a phone call may not be appropriate at that particular time of day. IM offers the student the ability to see if you are online and send you a quick message. What's more, you give an impression of being someone who is technologically hip, since instant messaging is a popular method of communication today.

Instant messaging can be unobtrusive, if you choose. When you are online but would rather not be disturbed, most programs offer an option that allows users to modify their online status: Away, Out to Lunch, etc. You can then come back with a click of the mouse when you are ready to return to your virtual office.

Since each chat session can be saved as an HTML document, you have a record of the conversation, word for word. This feature is big benefit to the instructor and can be used to remind students of a particular IM conversation you have had with them. In the Web Programming course I teach, students can ask a question via IM and post a web address of the page they are having trouble with. The programming code can be viewed and responded to in real time by simply copying and pasting examples of working web program code.

Disadvantages

The downside to the Miranda program is that the different protocols for each service are available via plug-ins that have to be installed individually. This is not difficult, but can be daunting to the new computer user. Trillian Basic does not require plug-ins.

Since each chat session can be saved as an HTML document, you have a record of the conversation, word for word.
[This may be why the model in this photo seems so pleased with himself.—Editor]

At times Instant Messaging can intrude on your computer work. From time to time, the service may pop up and interrupt you in the middle of something you are doing.

What's more, the pop-up window will then be the window your text is entered into. You can fix this by getting into the habit of changing the mode to offline when you're working on an intensive project and don't wish to be interrupted.

This is similar to closing the door to your office when you don't want to be disturbed.

It's also easy to forget to turn the service on each time you wish to be available. Plus, you may forget to login again after coming back from a break.

Depending on the software you use, you can login automatically when the computer boots up or after you've been away for a set amount of time.

Keeping the Focus During Research

Second Place, QuickTip, Super Ideas Contest Winner

Barbara A. Austin
Purdue University North Central
baustin@pnc.edu

Help your students stay focused throughout their research.

Research writing in a freshman composition class can become very intense for the students. Sometimes they get so involved in finding sources, documenting those sources, and writing a proper "Works Cited" page that the main idea of the paper gets lost.

Capturing the Point

Here is a QuickTip that can help students capture the most important points they make in their research papers and take a break from all the intense researching.

Before my students turn in the final draft of their research essays, I give them an assignment that lets them take a new look at their essays and tap into their creativity.

Advertise It and Retain It

The assignment is to design a flyer or brochure that advertises the most important points they've discovered about their topic through their research. This encourages the students to identify the essential points the essay contains.

After they synthesize the main points in their essays, the students can then decide how to approach the advertising project. They can either use a specific publishing software program or a simple word processing program to develop their advertisement. This choice allows the students to get as creative as they want. I do not grade on the creativity, just the synthesis of the main points from their essays.

Once they have completed their brochures or flyers, I post them on the bulletin board so other students can view them.

This gives the students another perspective on their own research essays and also allows them a chance to engage with the ideas of their fellow students. ✷

Preparing to Learn

Many people have negative feelings about learning. Their unconscious memories associate formal learning with pain, stress, humiliation, incarceration—who knows what. Unless they replace these negative suggestions (i.e. assumptions) with positive ones, their learning will be hampered. ✷

—Dave Meir
The Accelerated Learning Handbook
[Click for more information.]

Virtual Office   **SI**

Using the multi-protocol software Instant Messaging requires a login account for each of the IM services on which you wish to make yourself available. This requires visiting the web pages of the popular services and getting a free account. Links to popular services are provided at the end of this article.

Security Concerns

Security should be a concern as well. According to a recent *PC Magazine* article (http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149, 1217904,00.asp), "The best you can do to avoid exploits is to watch for advisories and keep your software (including browsers and e-mail programs) up to date. You should also be very skeptical of messages that ask you to visit a URL, accept a file, or run a program. IMers often fall victim to social engineering attacks, in which a message convinces a user to run a malicious program, reveal a password, or otherwise expose his system."

How a Buddy List works

Most IM programs allow you to choose which users to add to a buddy list, a list of people you wish to view online. You can also choose who you will allow to see your online availability. Don't take this feature for granted.

Be sure students know your user name on the system you use; tell them to be clear when requesting permission to have access to you. It is not wise to allow access to anyone until you approve them.

Usually my students need to send me an email message to get my access permission. I don't usually recognize an unconfirmed IM request for access as valid.

Bottom Line

You can make yourself more available to your students, and vice-versa, using this up-and-coming method of communication. Instant Messaging simply gives the student another method of contact and access to you in this ever-growing technological society.

Links to IM Services

❑ MSN Messenger—requires a Hotmail/MSN account (http://www.hotmail.com).
❑ AOL Instant Messenger—requires an AOL screen name (http://my.screenname.aol.com/).
❑ CQ—(http://www.icq.com).
❑ Yahoo! Instant Messenger—(http://im.yahoo.com/). Note: this software requires a Yahoo! account. ✷

Six Easy Steps to Increase Student Retention in Your Course

SI

Lynette G. Esposito
English Adjunct Faculty
Burlington County College
nichecom1@aol.com

When you enter the classroom and see all those new faces, do you remember what it is like to be a college student? When you do, the faces become individuals brimming with hopes and fears of a new term, and they rapidly thrust you back into the teaching role. Suddenly you're concerned about retention and how to keep them interested in the required subject you teach.

Communication Is the Key

First, communication is important in retaining students for the full term. Students need to have confidence in you as a knowledgeable teacher—this is crucial. Simple acts such as handing out and going over the syllabus in the first class give students the impression that you are organized, efficient, and willing to communicate. Plus, creating handouts and positive email messages throughout the term serve to maintain a high level of communication and boost retention.

Inclusion Can Make the Difference

In addition, work for across-the-board inclusion in all class activities. Otherwise some students will become discouraged and may not feel part of the class. One way you can achieve inclusion is to make sure every student has an opportunity to express him- or herself. Use the roster to recognize each student sometime early in the semester for a contribution. Some students do not like to be called on, but this method will give each and every student the feeling that they are part of the class and empowered to share knowledge.

In courses that are required for graduation, some students not only don't want to be there, but detest the subject. Offering some activities that involve the class as a whole or in small groups functions as a learning process and helps students to become acquainted. Group activities can be held early in the term or anytime. For example in English 102, I have the students participate in a poetry reading. They share their original poetry or poetry from the textbook. To encourage student participation, extra credit may be given. Another activity may be to have the students bring in current event topics such as election news, trust of the media or the effectiveness of the Amber Alert system—issues that can be debated within the classroom. Be sure to tie in current events to the current topic of study. Any activity that has the students learning together encourages them to stay in the class.

The following approaches may be used in any course to help retain students.

❏ **Value Privacy**—If you need to talk to a student, speak to him or her where there is privacy from the other students.

❏ **Listen to Students**—Do peer reviews. Peer reviews assists you to understand where the students are coming from, and they allow other students to hear what their contemporaries are thinking.

❏ **Sharing Opportunities**—Create projects where students can volunteer to share. Sharing allows the student who is reading or speaking to transmit their perspectives, and it helps you to evaluate how students feel about their own work.

❏ **Promote Involvement**—Plan discussions that require students to bring to class resources that support their positions on an issue.

❏ **Extra Effort**—Reserve some time for students who may wish to come up to your desk for expanded discussion. This lets the students know that you are approachable and willing to personally guide them.

Finally, if the students feel that what happens in the classroom stays in the classroom, especially if a subject is difficult for them, they are more likely to complete the course. ✺

Saving Paper

Dave Bequette
Adjunct Faculty
Butte College
dbequ@saber.net

I frequently observe wasteful examples during student online research. Students print many web pages when they only need one quotation from a single page. Butte/Glenn Community College, where I teach, recently imposed a fee for each page printed from the Internet, as have many other colleges around the country. The solution: teach your students to keep a word processing document open while researching on the Internet as a place to copy and paste notes. ✺

_____

What's Your Opinion?

Reader Feedback Urged!

*H*ow is *TFS* doing? Did one particular idea stand out above the rest this issue? Which ideas helped you the most? Do you have a teaching improvement story to share? What are the toughest teaching challenges you face?

What has *TFS* done right? What should *TFS* do better? Sending us your ideas would help us produce a better *TFS* for you.

Please, email your thoughts, opinions, comments, and stories to: Jack Shrawder, jack@teachingforsuccess.com, or Penny Shrawder at penny@teachingforsuccess.com. Your responses are very important and appreciated!

A Tale of Perseverance and Community Building in an Online Science Class

Shree Iyengar Ph. D.
Anne Arundel Community College
ssiyengar@aacc.edu

SI

Second Place, Super Idea, SuperIdeas Contest Winner

*B*uilding a learning community in any class is a great idea. But it's especially challenging to build a learning community in an online science class.

What Didn't Work

I tried this a number of times in my first-semester general chemistry online class and failed to achieve my goal.

My failed strategies to promote a learning community included: asking students to post their responses to review questions before major tests; encouraging them to outline their ideas for studying difficult chemistry topics; and prodding them to share their thoughts on current topics in chemistry. I was even willing to give them a few bonus points for their participation. Finally things changed for the better in the spring of 2005.

Some Preliminaries

Here's some background information you'll need before I describe how I developed a workable approach to building a learning community. Previously, once a week students were asked to post their responses to a set of questions in the Discussion Topic (graded work) for the week.

They posted their answers in an email to me, and I assessed them. This provided immediate feedback to them. I then asked them to send me revised answers for grades.

These messages remained confidential due to the fact that late responders could (and did in a previous format) copy answers from early responders. This confidentiality of student responses and my feedback precluded building a functioning learning community.

A Simple Change That Works

I changed my strategy a little and succeeded in getting my students to talk chemistry online, and a successful learning community was born! What I did was not extraordinary, but it seems to work well. It doesn't involve much work for me either. In order to form a learning community, I use the idea of Open Discussion Topics that are periodic and relevant to the content.

In each Open Discussion Topic I ask the students to do two things: write two relevant chemistry questions with the caveat that the questions should not be from the textbook or weekly Discussion Topic or posted by someone else earlier, and answer two questions posted by another student.

Each Open Discussion Topic carries a specific score, which counts toward their grade. I have five Open Discussion Topics and all are well received by students. They participate! Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I count the Open Discussion Topics as part of their grade. But, it works!

Their questions and responses reflect their learning and thinking, offering me an opportunity to provide feedback. The questions and responses generated by students have another benefit: if the timing of this assignment is right, it serves as a preparation and review for a major test.

Anyone who teaches online classes can try this simple technique. Also, why not try using a few of the questions developed by students in a test or a quiz? Finally, we are a learning community! ✦

An Opportunity For Full Expression

*T*FS is looking for a small group of educators who are passionate about improving teaching and learning in higher education and would like to help *TFS* continue to improve, expand, and more effectively serve the needs of part- and full-time faculty. Advisory members interface directly with Jack Shrawder, the publisher and editor of TFS, via phone and/or e-mail. Phone is 800-757-1183.

René C. Izquierdo, Ph.D.
Miami-Dade Community College
Experience: 17 years at MDC
Teaches: Spanish
rizquier@mdc.edu

• *What are the toughest teaching and learning challenges you face?*

Increasingly, students come to my classes lacking the most rudimentary principles of grammar.

Furthermore, my evening students, most of whom work and raise families while they study, lack the necessary time to study and do their homework.

• *What are some of the solutions you have found that help you successfully meet these challenges?*

I have remedied this situation by incorporating the use of WebCT, a computer-based classroom program, in all my classes.

Since learning languages requires time and practice, WebCT has contributed greatly to the success of my teaching and to the learning of my students.

With WebCT, my students are able to practice and study at their own pace, in their own time, from their homes or places of work.

Help Your Students Cross the River to Greater Learning

Jack H. Shrawder
Editor, Teaching For Success
jack@teachingforsuccess.com

*H*ow excited but overwhelmed I was taking my first higher education teaching position. I came from the aviation industry right into the classroom, with lots of enthusiasm but a minimum of knowledge about good teaching and learning practices. There is so much to know in the first few weeks and so little time to understand the basics.

Sometimes some of the best ideas about teaching and learning come from sources and experiences other than formal pedagogical research or graduate level coursework in instructional design. What follows is one such idea that changed the way I prepare for a class.

The "Stones Across the Brook" idea came to me in a public speaking seminar for businesspeople created by Decker and Associates of Needham, MA.

Toby Decker taught the idea of looking at any presentation as building a series of stepping stones across a stream. These stepping stones will be the major points in a presentation that listeners need to understand to make it safely from the left bank to the right bank of the

stream. If you have ever forded a stream by using dry rocks protruding from the water's surface you know how tricky this operation can be. A slippery, unstable, or poorly chosen stone can result in a wet foot or a even a cold swim, so choosing the right stepping stones is crucial.

I use this excellent planning metaphor as an easy and effective way to structure a class session or any public presentation. At the beginning of the class session, visualize your students standing on the left bank. The learning outcomes form the right bank and the learning activities you choose provide a step-by-step route from ignorance to understanding. Some of the major stones may require smaller pebbles (subtopics, questions, etc.) to be added around the central rock for better stability. My pebbles usually represent key discussion questions.

Also, in this metaphor, the stepping stones can represent the mix of learning activities you plan to offer. One stone might represent a mini-lecture, another might be a small-group discussion, role play, peer teaching module, etc. Thus, this idea works as an instructional design tool too.

I recommend that if you are new to teaching that you use a piece of paper or computer drawing program and sketch a right and left shore with a wide space between to place your learning stepping stones and associated pebbles. Identify your outcomes and place the learning stones and pebbles as needed. You'll find your class time is now much more organized with much less effort. ✺

TFS Book of the Month Recommendation

Success is reading in your field one hour every day.

The Art of Changing the Brain
James E. Zull

This book is an easy and rewarding read into the mysteries of the brain and how it is set up for learning. You will learn how to adapt your teaching to conform to the natural way people learn. With this book and a small amount of effort you can reap large learning rewards for your students in terms of ease and depth of learning. If your goal is to maximize learning, then this book is for you. ✺

Explain Your Success Philosophy

*W*hat is your teaching and learning success philosophy? Can you explain it in 250 words or less? Submit your response to this fundamental question and help promote success dialogue in teaching and learning. Send your response via email to jack@teachingforsuccess.com, preferably attached as an MS Word document (.doc) or a rich text file (.rtf), but it's OK to send in the body of a message also. We will select the most informative responses for publication. ✺

Five-Star Teacher Interview

• What is your teaching and learning success philosophy? Or, what attitudes and skills are crucial for success as an instructor in higher education today?

The ideal teaching and learning setting is one in which an experienced instructor imparts knowledge to a group of students who are eager to learn and are at nearly the same educational level.

Instructors, however, seldom come across this utopian classroom setting. Foreign languages in Florida colleges are a basic degree requirement and, therefore, many of the students who register in my Spanish courses do it merely to fulfill this obligation. Another group of students, however, is motivated to master the language in order to communicate with in-laws or to advance to higher job positions. Furthermore, the innate ability of each student to learn the arts of a foreign language runs the gamut of talent.

Assessing the situation from the beginning is crucial. But, how can one assess this heterogeneous group of students that rushes into your classroom? Well, my students come in several distinctive groups: bright students who may or may not be eager to learn; disadvantaged students who may intend to strive, but who have difficulty grasping the most basic of concepts; and others who lack the necessary background skills to succeed in the class. Obviously, it is difficult even for an extraordinary teacher to impart knowledge successfully to such a blended array of students sharing the same classroom. This is the dilemma that many teachers face today; this is the quandary of modern pedagogy. [His solution appears in the September issue.] ✯✯✯✯✯

Classroom Management: a Crucial Success Factor to Master

How to Quickly Warm Up the Atmosphere in a Large Class

SI

Genell Hooper Harris
Associate Professor Elementary Education
Southern Utah University
harrisg@suu.edu

*1*f you are like me, you may struggle to find ways to make your large lecture classes more personal and inviting for you and your students.

Looking into the faces of 55 unknown individuals is rather and intimidating and cold experience even after twelve years of teaching.

Therefore, I eagerly search for ways that I can make personal contact with students. One of the easiest methods that I've found is through the use of first names.

Trying to memorize names is not practical when I have a large section, but I can have them make name cards with small personalized pictures on them.

These name tags typically have only a first name or first name and last initial, are of sufficient size (usually 8.5 x 11 inches) that I can read from a distance, and are constructed from paper that is rigid enough to stand up when folded like a pup tent.

First Name Responses

This provides me with a personal tool I can use any time or any day. Even when students raise their hands and offer a response, I reply using their names. Sometimes students even think I have their names memorized, because they forget they have a name card in front of them during the class.

Get Personal

This strategy personalizes my delivery method and students say it makes them feel more important. The pictures they draw next to their names help me build an even tighter connection to them as unique individuals.

A bonus to this approach is that you can also use the name cards as a means of taking attendance. I hate to take precious class time to call role, so I place the name cards on a table and as students enter the room, they collect their name cards and place them on their table or desk.

If desk space is limited, construct the name cards with a loop of string where they can hang on the front of the desk. In my syllabus, I note that unclaimed name cards will be collected ten minutes after class begins; students with unclaimed name tags will be counted as absent.

Students Manage Cards

It's solely the students' responsibility to retrieve the cards as they arrive and return them to the table at the end of the class. Sometimes I have a designated student (one I know and can trust) be the one who gets up and collects the unclaimed name cards.

Now you can kill two birds with one stone: you personalize your class by being able to call on students by name, and the same name card becomes an efficient means of collecting and keeping attendance data. Thus, you also gain more time for instruction.

Full Expression—Sharing What Works

Jack H. Shrawder
Editor, TFS

*S*uccess means being open to learning from each other, and *TFS* can assist in the idea-sharing process by publishing your ideas, techniques, philosophy, experiments, innovations, etc.

Who has good ideas to share? You do! If you're an instructor who values improvement and strives to continuously find ways to energize, simplify, organize, and streamline the teaching and learning process, *TFS* applauds you and would like to publish your ideas.

We're looking for answers particularly to the following questions: When you are conducting a class, what do you think about most of the time? What are the toughest challenges you face? How do you know that your students are learning? What are the indications you see from a successful learning activity? What happens when a learning activity is unsuccessful? What do you do then? How do you teach students with wide range of skills and experience levels?

Your answers will help your colleagues reach full expression in their teaching and learning. To be published, send your responses to jack@teachingforsuccess.com.