



Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES

WEEKLY UPDATE

A WEEKLY COMMUNICATION FROM THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

April 23, 2007

SoCTL *The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning at CTL*

How Does Teaching Behavior Influence Student Learning?

It's pretty clear from the literature that different teacher behaviors have definite effect on students' gains in subject matter knowledge. Except for research that attempts to predict college student grades and research that tries to identify what factors affect student retention, "... perhaps no other topic in postsecondary education has elicited so much empirical inquiry" (Pascarella & Ternezini, 2005, p. 114).

Of course, studies about which behaviors contribute to student learning generally involve, in one form or another, feedback from the students. It may seem logical, therefore, to believe that the "nice" teachers or the more lenient graders get better ratings. Although this is a factor, the strength of that factor actually appears to be rather small. Instead it appears that the "tough" teachers, who hold their students accountable and expect their students to learn are, ultimately, appreciated by their students. This is certainly heartening news!

So what behaviors can teachers adopt that should increase student learning? The list is, of course, quite long, but, according to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), who synthesized thousands of studies for their seminal book, *How College Affects Students*, research has tended to focus on attributes such as instructional clarity, enthusiasm, organization, rapport, giving feedback to students. Among these, clarity, enthusiasm, and organization all stand out because research confirms their link to students' content knowledge. This piece is a synopsis of their work on this topic.

Clarity. Instructional clarity means avoiding vague terms, explaining things in clear language, and using good examples. Clarity is among the teacher behaviors that have been researched the most, and for the longest time, and is most strongly associated with positive outcomes.

Enthusiasm. This category includes such behaviors as using humor, talking with emphasis, and using eye contact. Physical movement in the room often is also included. Most researchers found that enthusiasm allows teachers to maintain students' attention, which results in better subject-matter knowledge.

Organization. This concept involves how the subject matter is organized and planned. Examples include giving student advance organizers, such as writing class goals on the board, or signaling shifts or transitions in topic. As with enthusiasm, the link to student learning seems to be through gaining and keeping students' attention.

So what does this mean for faculty members? It appears that these three attributes—which combine to increase student learning—can all be learned, or added to a current repertoire of teaching skills. Consequently, this underscores the importance of faculty engaging in professional development activities, including reading about teaching and learning, attending workshops or seminars, and talking with their colleagues about effective teaching. Asking students what works best for them, and acting on their responses, is also a great first step in improving effectiveness.

REFERENCE

Pascarella, E. T., and Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Thomas Wortman

Teaching Tip of the Week

Classroom Discussion Strategies for Later in the Semester (Part 2)

In the [April 9, 2007 issue](#), I started a list of discussion strategies for later in the semester. This week I will add some additional tips:

- Provide feedback on the positive components of responses, especially from those who had previously been reluctant to participate.
- Avoid calling a response incorrect; instead, ask whether anyone sees another way to answer. Clarify the correct answer, however, before moving on with the discussion.
- Be careful not to foreshadow or give away the correct answer to a factual question. Doing so will condition students to wait for you to provide the answers in future discussions.
- When a discussion bogs down or you are ready to change topics, have the students summarize the key points covered in the discussion.

Using these strategies can help to improve the quality of the student engagement in your classroom and online discussions.

-Zala Fashant

Source: Lyons, R. (2003). *Success Strategies for Adjunct Faculty*. Pearson A & B.

CTL Report

"The best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book." We saw some of the best of the best at the *Celebrating Excellence* ceremony on April 17 at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. The inspirational and moving part of the ceremony for all of us at CTL was the inaugural [Board of Trustees Award for Excellence in Teaching](#). Nominations for the 2007 award had been made by students, faculty peers, or staff members, and they were evaluated by campus review committees before being submitted by presidents to Senior Vice Chancellor Baer. From among a wonderful list of [29 dedicated teacher nominees](#), three received the award. They are:

Donald E. Graves, Rainy River Community College

Michele M. Neaton, Century College

Julie A. Rodakowski, Rochester Community and Technical College.

CONGRATULATIONS to all honorees!

- Yvonne L. Shafer

Committed to Improving Student Learning

Dates to Remember!

Spring Discipline Workshops

APR 21: WHAT NEW SIGN LANGUAGES CAN TEACH US ABOUT ASL
North Star Academy, St. Paul. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

APR 27-28: MATHEMATICS: SHARPEN THE FOCUS
Duluth Entertainment Convention Center. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

MAY 1: LIBRARY REFERENCE AND INFORMATION LITERACY SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL AGE. North Hennepin Community College. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

Regional Conferences

MAY 22: CLASSROOMS OF THE FUTURE CONFERENCE - Teaching, Learning, & Technology: In that Order. Keynote speaker: Steve Gilbert, The TLT Group. Hamline University. [Conference Information](#)

MAY 31 – June 1: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PRACTITIONERS RETREAT - A Minnesota Campus Compact retreat for all civic engagement practitioners and those who coordinate or lead service-learning and community service on member campuses. St John's University, Collegeville, MN.
[More information](#)

JULY 8-12: INTERNATIONAL DESIRE2LEARN USE CONFERENCE: Fusion – Realize the Potential. Keynote speakers: Ruth Clack, Will Richardson, Nancy White. Duluth Entertainment Conference Center (DECC) / Lake Superior College
[Conference Information](#)

CTL Resources for Faculty

It's easy to find CTL Events!

At the end of next week, more than 200 mathematics faculty and high-school teachers will converge on Duluth for the annual mathematics discipline workshop. There are always teaching-and-learning events happening throughout the state, but it can be hard to find out about and keep track of the dates, locations, and topics. Lucky for you, CTL created a series of Web pages that you can use for easy reference and to find events. (Of course, this *CTL Weekly Update* publication also always list events that are upcoming!)

By visiting the [CTL Events calendar page](http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/events/) (<http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/events/>) users can find an interactive calendar of opportunities for professional development, including workshops, seminars, and other events from around the region. Additionally, all upcoming events are listed, with summary information, on [this page](http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/facdev/user_event-list.php):
http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/facdev/user_event-list.php.

There is also an [archive](http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/facdev/user_event-list.php?eventtype=past_event) of previous events that can be fun to browse, at (http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/facdev/user_event-list.php?eventtype=past_event). The archive is particularly useful to peruse if you want to see what expertise is out there in our system or if you're trying to gather ideas for your own events. For each major CTL conference (Realizing Student Potential or ITeach: Best Practices in Teaching with Technology), a link to presenter's materials can be found—if the presenters have made them available—by just going to the program for a given year, and clicking on the session title link.

- Thomas Wortman

Featured Events

MATHEMATICS DISCIPLINE WORKSHOP

Duluth Entertainment Convention Center

April 27 - April 28, 2007

Speakers: Francis (Skip) Fennell and Joseph A. Gallian

This conference will provide an opportunity for system mathematics faculty to gain knowledge about their discipline, share ideas about teaching and learning, and network among colleagues from all educational levels (K-12, college, and university). Some of the topics to be discussed during the conference include examining strategies for success in developmental math courses, tips from students on the Mentoring Program panel, activities for the classroom to keep students interested, a student note-taking process that has been shown to improve success in developmental courses, the pitfalls and pleasures of teaching online, and the use of movie clips in mathematics lessons.

Francis (Skip) Fennell is professor of education at McDaniel College (formerly Western Maryland College). He has more than 35 years experience as a classroom teacher, principal, supervisor, teacher educator, and author. Dr. Fennell was president of the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators from 2001–2003. Joseph Gallian, professor of Teaching and professor of Mathematics at the University of Minnesota Duluth, is president of the MAA. He has a host of honors and awards, including the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Minnesota Professor of the Year Award. He is the author of many books and numerous papers.

Participants are encouraged to register on-site. For more information on this event, **contact conference planner Nicole Lang** at 763-424-0847 or via email at nicole.lang@nhcc.edu.

-Martin Springborg

Mark your calendars!

**RSP • ITEACH Online Conference
June 11-15**

**On the deck or on the dock,
plan to attend!
Registration opens May 1!**

**Chance of Cancellation Due to Snow
0%**