



Center for Teaching Excellence Hampton University Teaching Matters

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In This Issue

◆ College Students' Perceptions of the Characteristics of Effective Teachers in Higher Education: Implications for Educational Practice

Other Useful Links

◆ Interactive Software

◆ Putting Educational Innovation into Practice

In the Next Issue

◆ Pedagogical Issues and Classroom Teaching

Old Issues of "Teaching Matters"

◆ CTE webpage – Center Resources

College Students' Perceptions of the Characteristics of Effective Teachers in Higher Education: Implications for Educational Practice

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This article explores the implications for educational practice based upon students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective teaching in face-to-face classroom instruction based upon the results of the Johnson et al. (2012) study. Following is a summary of students' perceptions of what effective teaching looks like in the classroom.

A Summary: What Does Effective Teaching Look Like in the Classroom?

Examples of what effective teaching characteristics look like in the classroom from the students' voice and how these characteristics can be fostered in the classroom include:

1. **A consideration of students' learning styles in the classroom**, e. g., some students perceived that a visual teaching style was most effective. It was recommended that teachers try to find some way to incorporate movement and visual modalities into the daily lesson plan.
2. **The use of modern technology in the classroom was perceived to be extremely important**, e.g., the use of multimedia presentations and videos. Other suggestions included skits and in-class experiments.
3. **The use of visual illustrations and physical demonstrations** (to make complex concepts easier to understand and improve class performance).
4. **The use of "field trips"** as incentives.
5. **The creation of experiences divorced from the strict classroom setting.**
6. **The integration of games into the lecture** (as a way of keeping students attentive and increasing their retention of coursework).
7. **The use of student-led textbook reading sessions** (as a vehicle to maintain students' attention).
8. **The use of active learning techniques was emphasized** (so that students might ask questions and engage in discussion on the

subject matter).

Some of the common threads from the Johnson et al. (2012) study, based upon students' perceptions, were that varied teaching techniques were needed in the classroom to maintain students' attention and to help them to retain the information; active learning versus passive learning was preferred; teaching in multiple modalities was emphasized; and the use of technology in the classroom was perceived as crucial.

Implications for Educational Practice

Instructors not only face the challenge of designing ways to motivate students to learn while accommodating their learning preferences, but also determining how to make the subject matter more exciting so that it actively engages students and improves educational outcomes in the classroom (Johnson, 2006). It is important to be aware that students learn differently and may prefer to learn in different modalities or in a combination of modalities. Nevid (2006) recommends that a combination of learning aids, including written materials, visual aids such as Power Point, and interactive exercises be used to broaden the learning environment. These learning aids along with other strategies suggest a way of learning that allows the learner to become more proactive in the learning process (Goodman, 2010).

Learning styles cover a wide spectrum and influence student learning. While we would like to address all of the learning styles of our students, we realize that this is not possible all of the time. Relative to learning styles, Felder (1993) recommends that teachers should talk to students about their learning styles, either in class or through advising. An awareness of the impact of learning styles from the students' perspective is important as instructors design their classes.

Based on the findings of the Johnson et al. study, teachers may need to periodically refocus their students' attention in the classroom. Active learning rather than passive learning was emphasized as a preference. To be actively involved, students and instructors must be actively engaged in the process and change may be needed at both levels. Students will also need to take responsibility for their own development and may need to increase their level of participation in the process (Seeler, Turnwald, & Bull, 1994).

As instructors gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' preferences in the classroom, they may need to redesign learning strategies and use alternative/creative strategies. Results from the Johnson et al. (2012) study confirm that one of the characteristics of effective teaching is the teacher's ability to employ creativity in the classroom. It will also be important for instructors to look at ways to provide active engagement in the classroom as well as active engagement between students (Johnson, 2006).

For today's learners, and as evidenced in the Johnson et al. (2012) study, the use of technology in the classroom is crucial. Students perceived that various types of technology might be employed, including multi-media presentations, videos, skits, and in-class experiments. Additional collaborative learning strategies that might be used include the use of debates, drama, role-playing and stimulation, peer teaching, and the use of "clickers." Instructors should continue to seek out information on technological innovations and take advantage of resources offered wherever possible. The use of our Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), research on technological innovation, and continued professional development, are all alternatives for accomplishing this

objective.

Teacher-student relationships are also important. Results from the Johnson et al. (2012) study confirm that students perceive that effective teachers are caring and empathetic. Additional research confirms that teachers who convey genuine interest in students' success cultivate more productive learners (Eliason, n.d.).

Summary

The students' voice can be a powerful contributor toward advancing educational outcomes. Employing the students' voice has significant implications for the way that instructors deliver information and for the academic achievement of students. What we learn from students' feedback can enhance educational outcomes and provide a more inclusive approach to learning.

The students' voice must also be considered when working toward the enhancement of curriculum instruction, pedagogy, and student retention. If instructors are aware of student perceptions of learning, they may be better able to promote academic excellence. To this end, a questionnaire based upon students' perceptions of effective teacher characteristics is attached.

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The Characteristics of Effective Teaching Questionnaire

1. Are you passionate about your subject matter?
2. Do you know the subject matter?
3. Do you have high self-efficacy relative to your teaching ability?
4. Are you organized?
5. Are you enthusiastic in the classroom?
6. Do you encourage your students to help them succeed?
7. Do you employ creativity in the classroom?
8. Do you have respect for your students?
9. Do you provide routine feedback and provide positive reinforcement to your students?
10. Do you demonstrate discipline in your classroom?
11. Do you show respect for your students?
12. Are you flexible and can you adapt to setbacks?
13. Are you an understanding teacher?
14. Do you relate to your students?
15. Are you caring?
16. Are you patient with your students?
17. Do you have an open mind?
18. Do you show empathy for your students?
19. Do you have a good sense of humor?
20. Are you humble in your profession?

Announcements

AAC&U's Institute on General Education and Assessment: Applications Due February 15

Institute on General Education and Assessment

June 1-5, 2013

The University of Vermont

Burlington, Vermont

[Apply through February 15, 2013](#)

AAC&U's **[Institute on General Education and Assessment](#)** provides campus teams with opportunities to refine and advance general education programs and their assessment. The Institute focuses on building a campus learning culture for intentional, well-defined, and meaningfully assessed general education curricula. During the Institute, teams explore general education models, processes of redesign and implementation of highly effective practices, clarification and integration of learning outcomes, and strategies for assessment. All accredited two-year and four-year institutions are encouraged to apply.

Drawing from what is learned over the course of the Institute, each team will develop an action plan for continuing the team's work upon return to the campus. Action plans address strategies for next steps, relevant stakeholders to engage, and a timeline for achieving goals.

Learn more about the Institute on General Education and Assessment **[online](#)**. For additional information, contact Alexis Krivian at 202.387.3760, ext. 404 or e-mail **Krivian@aacu.org**.

The 2013 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities—"[The Quality of U.S. Degrees: Innovations, Efficiencies, and Disruptions—To What Ends?](#)"—will be held January 23-26 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia.

Three of AAC&U's [Summer Institutes](#)—the Institute on General Education and Assessment, the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success, and the Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments—offer campus teams a time and place for sustained collaboration. The teams each work on a project of importance to their individual campuses. Complete information about these three Institutes, including application materials, will be available online in November.

The PKAL Summer Leadership Institute is designed for early and mid-career STEM faculty members; application materials will be available online in January 2013.

[Institute on General Education and Assessment](#)

June 1-5, 2013: University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont

The [Institute on General Education and Assessment](#) (IGEA) provides campus teams with opportunities to refine and advance general education programs and their assessment. The Institute focuses on building a campus learning culture that supports the design and implementation of intentional, well-defined, and meaningfully assessed general education curricula. During the Institute, teams explore general education models, processes of redesign and implementation of highly effective practices, clarification and integration of learning outcomes, and strategies for assessment. Admission to the Institute is competitive and limited; all accredited two-year and four-year institutions are encouraged and eligible to apply.

[Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success](#)

June 11-15, 2013: University of Wisconsin–Madison

The [Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success](#) is designed to help campuses and systems develop institution-wide change strategies for the benefit of all students, enabling institutions to identify areas for improvement and target interventions. It seeks to help institutions meet ambitious goals for improving both completion rates and the quality of student learning. Participant teams address barriers to student success and devise integrative plans to strengthen student learning—making intentional use of Essential Learning Outcomes and high-impact practices across the institution. Aiming high for all students, the Institute curriculum helps campuses to define approaches that are highly engaging to students and effective at improving the equitable achievement of outcomes. Highlighting the success of students who have historically been underserved, the program supports work to make excellence inclusive and to improve completion of degrees. It builds on research indicating that all students benefit from a set of high-impact practices and that less-advantaged students benefit even more when they participate in these practices.

Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments

July 10-14, 2013: ortland State University, Portland, Oregon

The [Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments](#) is intended for colleges and universities interested in building faculty and departmental leadership for advancement of Essential Learning Outcomes—knowledge of multiple disciplines, inquiry and critical thinking, personal and social responsibility, civic learning, global knowledge and skills, and particularly, integrative and applied learning. Today, college graduates must be able to integrate and apply disciplinary and cross-disciplinary learning in new contexts as they seek better and more responsible solutions to problems encountered in work and in society.

PKAL Summer Leadership Institute for STEM Faculty

Dates to be Announced: Baca Campus of Colorado College

The [PKAL Summer Leadership Institute](#) is designed for early and mid-career STEM faculty engaged in leading projects aimed at transforming undergraduate STEM education in their classrooms, departments, and institutions. These two five-day intensive institutes, identical in programming and activities, provide faculty participants with the theory and practice required to act as agents of change in their home institutions or professional societies. The Institutes are held in the heart of the Rocky Mountains at the Baca Campus of Colorado College in Crestone, Colorado. PKAL is in its 15th year of offering the Summer Leadership Institutes. *Applications will be available in January 2013.*

To register for the any of the conferences or sessions, please access the website at www.aacu.org.