

Faculty Academy---Notes from Meetings October 4 and October 11

Faculty Academy Data

Kammie started us off, handing out some data showing increases in student success rates for faculty that had done the Faculty Academy. These were pre and post studies and were broken up by ethnicity and gender. The data showed an overall increase in student success rates across the board for the second semester of cohort and increases for most categories for the cohort 2 in our first semester.

Group Post-It (Open Space) Exercise

We had a discussion about the group post-it exercise. For this activity, students write down some topics on post-its and then stick them to the board. The idea is to pick a theme, pick a group, and the rule of 2 feet (ie—you can leave anytime you want). This could be used, for example, for students choosing research paper topics in a class. Students would post their interest on the board, some other students would be asked to ‘cluster’ the ideas into groups on the board, and then different students could meet in groups and discuss their themes. For the “open space” version of this, you could give two different colored post-its and have students write (1) something you know and (2) a question or curiosity they have.

Avoiding Praise and Blame

We talked about the issue of not praising students and this theme has been with us for a couple weeks now. Cynthia has suggested to us the importance of getting out of a blame/reward or praise/criticism mindset when communicating with students. Instead of evaluative language, which seems inherently coercive, the suggestion was to use observational language. Instead of writing “great job” on a student paper, the suggestion is to write something like “I really enjoyed reading this paper” and then perhaps asking a question that might spur the student to think about the issue from another perspective. Other suggestions were statements like “this made me think of something I never thought of before.” On this topic, Cynthia brought us a handout called “Roadblocks to Communication” and she recommended the work of Tom Gordon on teacher effectiveness training. Cynthia passed out a handout from the *Psychological Bulletin* titled “The Effects of Praise on Children’s Intrinsic Motivation: A Review and Synthesis”.

Expert Groups

A group project might include creating groups where students become ‘experts’ on a certain topic with the understanding that they have to teach this to other groups. (For example, I could have expert teams for topics that keep coming up with Walt Whitman—democracy, sexuality, race, working class, nature, etc.)

Lone Wolfs

We talked a bit about the importance of allowing lone wolfs to work alone. Often, with the stress on group work and cooperative learning, we forget that some students just don’t feel that comfortable in groups. Lauri had some interesting comments about this and the importance of students figuring this out in groups as part of sociology.

Problem-Based vs Project-Based Learning

We discussed the distinction between these two approaches and John Dewey and the pragmatism tradition were mentioned. Cynthia mentioned the importance of articulating the problems in your field

as part of problem-based education. In this context, Kelly mentioned the idea of asking students to name their favorite songs in the first week of class and then playing them occasionally during the semester. Cool idea!

We also talked about “Stop & Jot”, the Sponge Activity, Robert’s idea of a “Cosmic Date” where two students go have a 10 minute conversation about a topic outside of class and then return. Another idea that Cynthia brought up is leaving the room for 10 minutes to allow students to discuss possible adjustments they’d like to make in the course. Then returning and seeing what they came up with.

I asked for feedback on coming up with a game for the three branches of federal government. Some ideas were using mega-blocks or large-sized leggos to symbolize the branches of gov't, And the idea of having students get into chronological lines as a way for them to arrange historical events. For example, I could pass out key political events of the 19th century to put Whitman in context. I would write these on index cards. Examples might be 1. The civil war, 2. The Dred Scott decision, 3. Andrew Jackson’s presidency, 4. The publication of Leaves of Grass, 5. Bleeding Kansas, 6. Reconstruction, 7. The Mexican American war, 8. The rise of Lincoln and the Republican party, etc. If I had about 30 of these then students would have to get in historical order in a line. They could use their books? Or other sources (cell phones?) to help them figure this out if they are stuck.