

TECHNIQUES
FOR
TEACHING
LAW

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Techniques for Teaching Law

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Chapter 1

Teaching and Learning — Theory, Research, and Applications

This chapter reviews research, theories, and models that provide a foundation for much of what is known about teaching and learning in higher education. It attempts to provide legal educators with a basic understanding of teaching and learning so that they can make informed decisions about their instruction. In addition, this chapter articulates, in general terms, how the research, theories, and models apply in legal education.

Presented below are four theories of learning and three models of effective teaching. These theories and models are based on decades of research and thousands of studies, reported in hundreds of journal articles and dozens of books. Consequently, this chapter just scratches the surface of these theories and models. Many other theories and models of teaching and learning exist. (We hope that legal educators will want to pursue more directly the teaching and learning literature; the list of references at the end of this chapter provides a starting point for that worthwhile quest.)

A. Learning

A central focus of education is student learning. In law school, the core of student learning includes the substantive content, skills, and professional values critical to the education of an effective, ethical attorney. If student learning is central to the mission of legal education, then an understanding of how humans learn should help law teachers become more effective. Four types of learning theories are described below: (1) cognitive psychology, (2) intellectual development, (3) learning styles, and (4) characteristics of adult learners.

1. Cognitive Psychology

Cognitive psychology attempts to explain mental processes such as memory, thinking, problem solving, and decision-making. The goals of cognitive psychology are to illuminate meaningful, not rote, learning and

4 Techniques for Teaching Law

to develop theories that explain comprehension and knowledge utilization. In describing meaningful learning, cognitive psychology has emphasized four areas: (a) information processing, (b) knowledge structure, (c) thinking about thinking, and (d) social processes.

a. Information Processing

Cognitive research has described the basic operation of the human memory. Most humans can pay attention to only one thing at a time. Memory of new knowledge is fragile and can accommodate only a few new concepts in a short time span. Memory becomes much more stable once the new knowledge is recorded in long-term memory stores. Consequently, to acquire new knowledge, humans need to attend to the new information and maintain it until it can be encoded in long-term memory.

Isolated bits of information that students try to memorize by rote are not likely to reach long-term memory. Instead, knowledge is much more likely to be encoded and recalled later if it is meaningful—if the new concepts can be linked together in a framework. Many students are able to make sense of new concepts and encode them only after they can see the “big picture.”

Another key aspect of human information processing is that it is specialized for both verbal and visual information. Thus, when students encounter information both verbally and visually, they are more likely to encode and recall it later.

b. Knowledge Structure

Cognitive theory views learning as a constructive, rather than a receptive, process. One theory structures knowledge in three stages: declarative encoding, proceduralization, and composition. Knowledge is first encoded as a set of facts. For example, “a complaint must contain a short plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief” or “an environmental impact statement must be prepared on proposals for major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.” Student performance with the new knowledge (drafting a complaint, for example) is slow at best.

In the next step, proceduralization, students gain familiarity with the basic concepts and the relationships between concepts. Students integrate the new knowledge with existing knowledge. Knowledge becomes available for problem solving and students can more easily translate knowledge into action. For example, students can draft a complaint that states a claim and can analyze whether an action is likely to require an environmental impact statement.

Composition is the final step in transforming and using knowledge. Students continue to improve their ability to carry out complex cognitive skills. Composition may occur over many months or years. For example, students' ability to make sophisticated and persuasive arguments may develop throughout law school and the students' subsequent professional careers.

c. *Thinking About Thinking*

Cognitive psychologists name the process of thinking about thinking "metacognition," which includes two closely related learning concepts. The first concept is student awareness of how the student learns. This entails whether the student knows what strategies (reading, discussion, performance, writing) are most effective for that student to learn particular content or skills. The second concept concerns student control over learning strategies. Student control involves whether the student can plan, monitor, and alter learning strategies appropriate for the applicable subject matter and teaching style.

Student performance is enhanced when students are conscious of their learning strategies and they can modify those strategies to accommodate the subject and teaching style. Teachers can facilitate students' metacognition by drawing attention to the process of learning, modeling different ways to approach a problem, and providing feedback to students on the effectiveness of their learning strategies. For example, when beginning law students brief a case, the teacher can collect the briefs, give oral feedback to the class on the briefs, provide several samples of effective briefs, and ask students to evaluate whether their briefing is effective.

d. *Social Processes*

Many cognitive processes, such as strategic thinking, articulating reasons, clearly expressing ideas, writing, and speaking, are developed best through social interaction. Students learn higher-level thinking, problem solving, and sophisticated argument by observing and working with others. Group activities can provide immediate feedback on the quality of students' thinking, ideas, and expression. More highly skilled thinkers, such as teachers and advanced peers, model high-level skills. Students working in groups can collectively reach levels none of them could have reached alone. Finally, tasks that connect to the real world, such as clinical work and externships, create a potent environment for the development of thinking, speaking, and writing skills in context rather than in isolation.

2. Intellectual Development

Researchers and theorists have constructed several major models of adult mental development, including Piaget's theory of cognitive devel-

6 Techniques for Teaching Law

opment, Erickson's model of psychosocial development, and Kolberg's stages of moral development. Perhaps the most applicable developmental theory for legal educators is Perry's schema of intellectual and ethical development.

a. Stages of Intellectual Development

Perry based his schema of intellectual and ethical development on interviews with Harvard undergraduates in the 1960s. The schema emerged from exhaustive analysis of the ways students described their experiences and transformations in college. Extensive subsequent research has confirmed the schema in adult students of various ages, in a range of colleges and universities, both in the United States and abroad.

Perry's schema creates four major categories of intellectual and ethical development: (1) dualism, (2) multiplicity, (3) contextual relativism, and (4) commitment in relativism.

(1) Dualism

Students at this stage see the world as a set of absolutes: right/wrong, true/false, good/bad. Knowledge and truth come from Authorities, such as teachers, who have Answers. The true Authorities do not disagree—facts are facts. Different perspectives and disagreements among authorities can exist because there are both Good Authorities and Bad Authorities. Students see their role as learning the truth as set forth by Good Authorities. In the law school setting, Dualists want to identify and commit to memory the Good Law.

(2) Multiplicity

The transition from Dualism to Multiplicity begins as students confront disagreements among Good Authorities. Students acknowledge that there is legitimate uncertainty in the world. Knowledge now falls into three categories: Right, Wrong, and Unknown. During the early phase of Multiplicity, students believe that the "Unknown" category is small and might better be called "Not Yet Known" because through proper procedures Answers will be discovered over time. In later phases of Multiplicity, students believe that the "Unknown" category is large and might better be called "We'll Never Know For Sure." Thus, in the later stages of Multiplicity, students conclude that it is more important to know how to think rather than what to think. On many issues students believe no opinion is any better or worse than any other opinion and there is no objective basis on which to decide what is right. In the law school setting, students in the late Multiplicity stage become adept at making arguments supported by Authorities, but have difficulty evaluating arguments, positions, and opinions.

(3) Contextual Relativism

In Contextual Relativism, students see for the first time the self as a legitimate source of knowledge. Authorities such as teachers and books are viewed as fellow seekers of understanding that have more experience than students in dealing with the knowledge and uncertainties in their field. Students recognize that there are many good arguments on most issues, that there are principles on which one can evaluate arguments in any given setting, and that they must be able to make tough choices based on those principles. In law school, Contextual Realists are able to use facts, precedent, and policy to evaluate issues, make persuasive arguments, and approach complex problems.

(4) Commitment in Relativism

Students at this stage are skilled in analytical thinking and have experience in evaluating ideas, values, and interests. Students use that skill and experience as they face personal and professional choices. As students make professional and personal commitments, they may experience self-doubt and sadness as they recognize that choices they make foreclose other choices. Students come to terms with complexity, and take responsibility for their choices. Many law students will not reach this stage of development until after law school; some will never reach it.

b. Implications for Legal Educators

When adults enter new learning situations, such as law school, they proceed through the Perry schema. Consequently, the Perry schema has significant implications for legal educators. First, the Perry schema speaks to the basic nature of education—not the transmission of knowledge, but the transformation of the learner. This view of education as transformation is consistent with the dominant conceptualization of legal education, which consistently identifies “thinking like a lawyer” as a major goal of legal education. Second, the Perry schema helps teachers understand why their students struggle with what appears to teachers to be basic concepts and skills. As applied to law school, students may write poor exams not because of their study habits but because of their stage of development as learners. Third, researchers after Perry have demonstrated that teaching/learning methods can affect students’ developmental progress. For example, students can develop analytical skills, critical thinking, and independent learning through:

- An environment of mutual respect among teacher and students and enthusiasm for the course;
- Variety in methods of teaching, learning, and evaluation;

8 Techniques for Teaching Law

- Clear course and class objectives and clear directions for learning activities;
- Course materials with multiple levels of complexity and different perspectives;
- Examples from students' experiences;
- Active learning, such as field work, group projects, and simulations;
- Frequent and timely feedback.

3. Learning Styles

“Learning style” refers to the characteristic way a person acquires and uses knowledge. Four types of models of learning styles exist: personality models (basic characteristics of the learners), information processing models (ways of acquiring and processing information), social interaction models (ways students behave in the classroom), and instructional preferences (preferred teaching and learning methods). One of the most elaborate personality models of learning styles, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), has been applied in legal education.

The MBTI is designed to assess the ways people prefer to take in information and to make decisions. The MBTI is based on extensive research and is used widely in business and education. The MBTI classifies individuals based on four preferences: Extroversion (E) or Introversion (I), Sensing (S) or Intuitive (N), Thinking (T) or Feeling (F), and Judgment (J) or Perception (P). Research indicates that significant percentages of law students have each of the preferences. Thus, law teachers should anticipate that students with each of the preferences will be in their classes and that those students will learn best through a variety of teaching/learning methods.

The tables on pages 9 and 10 set out some of the characteristics of each preference and the teaching/learning methods most appropriate for each. The Myers-Briggs scheme is quite elaborate; the tables provide a brief summary.

Table 1a. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Summary

| EXTROVERTED TYPES | INTROVERTED TYPES |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Direct energy and attention primarily toward the outside world—people and activities * Gregarious and talkative; energized by people and activity * Prefer to act first and think about it later | <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Direct energy and attention primarily toward the inner world of reflection and thought * Exhausted by too many people and activities; energized by quiet and privacy * Prefer to think things through carefully before acting |
| <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Small-group interaction * Active methods such as discussion, simulation, field work * Concrete applications of abstract concepts; problem solving | <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Time to gather thoughts before participating in discussion * Working with their own thoughts—listening, reading, and writing * Opportunity to polish work before presenting it |
| SENSING TYPES | INTUITIVE TYPES |
| <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Perceive the world through the five senses * Interested in facts * Realistic, practical, concrete * Accurate, steady, precise, patient * Like to keep things simple; dislike complications | <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Perceive the world through intuition * Interested in possibilities * Interested in abstract concepts, implications, relationships * Creative and innovative; dislike routine and details * Work in bursts of energy when inspired |
| <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Clearly stated goals and expectations * Step-by-step analysis, one topic at a time * Concrete hands-on experience and many examples before moving to the abstract * Opportunity to practice skills to be learned * Computer-assisted instruction, simulations, videos | <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Focus on the big picture, theory, and concepts * Opportunities to be inventive, solve problems, be creative * Assignments that require individual or small-group initiative * Discussion, small-group projects |

Table 1b. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Summary

| THINKING TYPES | FEELING TYPES |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Make decisions on the basis of thinking * Avoid emotions when making decisions * Logical, rational, analytical, critical * Need and value fairness <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Logical, organized presentations * Debate * Evaluation and criticism of material * Feedback of specific, objective achievements | <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Make decisions on the basis of feeling * Base decisions on personal values * Warm, empathetic * Need and value kindness and harmony <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Emphasis on human values; examples with human interest * Close personal rapport with teachers * Questions concerning personal opinion * Feedback that begins with agreement and appreciation; gentle criticism |
| JUDGING TYPES | PERCEIVING TYPES |
| <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Approach outside world by attempting to order and control it * Make decisions quickly * Well organized; make and follow plans * Work steadily on one thing at a time until finished <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide plans, schedules, organization * Assignments given well in advance * Predictability and consistency * Recognized milestones and completion points | <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Approach outside world by gathering information and adapting to it * Delay decision; keep options open * Flexible, spontaneous; not organized * Work at many things at once; may start more things than they finish <p>Teaching/Learning Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide options, choices, flexibility * Allow second chances and changes in plans * Student choice in assignments * Pursue problems in their own way and draw their own conclusions |

4. Characteristics of Adult Learners

Legal educators can improve their teaching and their students' learning by understanding basic characteristics of adult learners and shaping their teaching methods to reflect those characteristics. Four important characteristics of adult learners are: voluntary, respectful, collaborative, and contextual.

a. Voluntary

Participation in learning is voluntary; adults engage in learning of their own volition. Adults pursue education because they want to develop new skills, sharpen existing skills, acquire new knowledge, and gain insights. Adults are usually highly motivated to learn and are willing to engage in participatory learning methods such as discussion, simulation, and small-group activities. However, adults are quick to withdraw their participation if they feel that the education is not meeting their needs, does not connect with their past experiences, or is conducted at a level they find incomprehensible. Further, most adults will retreat if they are humiliated in the classroom. Intimidation does not facilitate adult learning.

b. Respectful

Mutual respect for the self-worth of teachers and students underlies an effective teaching/learning environment. One of the central features of good teaching is that students feel that instructors value them as individuals. However, for students to grow they must develop powers of critical reflection and accept challenges from teachers and their fellow students to consider alternative ways of thinking and behaving. Therefore, a difficult but essential task for the teacher is establishing a classroom climate and culture in which students feel and show respect and are willing to challenge and be challenged.

c. Collaborative

Students and teachers are engaged in a collaborative effort. At different times during a course, and for varying purposes, the teacher and students can share leadership. Collaboration is appropriate in course and class design in which both learner and instructor have a voice in choosing course objectives, teaching/learning methods, and evaluation criteria. Collaboration is constant—it involves reordering priorities and refocusing teaching/learning activities as the course progresses.

d. Contextual

Education involves exploring ideas, skills, knowledge, and attitudes. But exploration does not take place in a vacuum. Adults learn new concepts,

12 Techniques for Teaching Law

skills, and attitudes by assigning meaning to them in the context of their previous experience. The learning process is cyclical. The learner becomes acquainted with new ideas and skills, applies the ideas and skills in real-life settings or simulations, reflects on the experience with these new skills and concepts, redefines how they might apply in other settings, and then reapplies them in new situations.

B. Teaching

Legal educators who want to enhance their teaching skills can make use of a variety of resources and models of teaching excellence. Each year, dozens of organizations sponsor conferences on teaching in higher education and some focus on legal education. Many colleges and universities have development programs designed to help faculty with their teaching. Further, numerous periodicals address teaching in college and several target law school teaching. Moreover, most university libraries contain helpful monographs that explore teaching in great detail.

The three models of teaching excellence below have been the subject of books, articles, conferences, and faculty development seminars: (1) *Components of Effective Instruction*, (2) *Seven Principles of Good Practice in [Higher] Education*, and (3) *Dimensions of Exemplary Teaching*.

1. Components of Effective Instruction

One of the enduring myths of university teaching is, “Nobody knows what makes teaching effective.” In fact, researchers have been exploring the components of effective instruction since the 1930s. Those researchers include educational psychologists, sociologists, and developers of teaching excellence programs for faculty. They have collected and analyzed data from faculty, from administrators, and from students in different stages of their university careers and in a variety of disciplines. Although individual research studies use different nomenclature and reach some conflicting conclusions, reviews of the overall body of that research identify common components of effective instruction. A leading author on teaching and learning, Maryellen Weimer, explores five components of effective instruction identified in a research review. These components are summarized below.

a. Enthusiasm: The Zest for Teaching

Students want to take courses from faculty who enjoy and care about their teaching. Faculty enthusiasm for teaching must be genuine. Few teachers can fool their students by faking enthusiasm for the entire course. Teach-

ers should think about issues such as why they are pleased to be teaching that content, those skills, that course, those students, at that school, in legal education. If faculty are not enthusiastic about *any* of those issues, another line of work is in order. It is not enough for teachers to be enthused—they must also communicate that excitement to their students. Teachers can begin by telling students in the first class why they are enthused about the course. Then throughout the course, teachers can demonstrate their enthusiasm with tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, movement during class, and humor.

b. Preparation and Organization

Effective teachers plan and prepare entire courses and individual classes. When designing a course, faculty should address the following issues and clearly communicate these matters to students in syllabi or some other way:

- Identify course objectives (what students should be able to know and do at the end of the course);
- Choose materials (books, articles, videos, computer programs);
- Pick a variety of teaching/learning activities (lecture, discussion, small-group work, simulations, computer tutorials, field trips, writing exercises);
- Articulate classroom policies and procedures (attendance, timeliness, academic honesty); and,
- Develop grading and evaluation methods (tests, writing assignments, participation).

Each day's class should reflect the teacher's preparation and organization as well. Like most other public presentations, a class should have an introduction, body, and conclusion. Teachers can communicate organization to students during class by identifying objectives at the beginning of class, using visuals such as handouts and overhead transparencies, and reiterating key issues at the end of class.

c. Stimulating Student Thought and Interest

The ability to stimulate student thought and interest in the course is an important part of engaging students in their own learning. Two concepts, learning styles and active learning, are central to stimulating student thought and interest. Different students learn best in different ways (reading, listening, speaking, observing, performing.) Consequently, teachers can help students learn by using a variety of teaching/learning methods in the classroom. Further, many students' preferred learning style is best served by active learning. Active learning means that the students engage in something

14 Techniques for Teaching Law

more than listening, such as discussion, small-group projects, simulation, interactive computer tutorials, field work, and writing. (Each of those active learning methods is the subject of a chapter to follow.) Research shows that active learning methods facilitate the development of higher-level thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) and skills acquisition, which are critical goals for most legal educators.

d. Explaining Clearly

Clear, effective teachers are adept at ascertaining when their students are confused and at using examples to diffuse students' confusion. One way for teachers to gauge students' understanding is to look for nonverbal cues in the classroom. Indicators of students' lack of understanding include facial expressions of frustration or confusion and students conversing with one another or looking at each other's notes to try to fill in the gaps in their understanding. Another way for teachers to assess their students' confusion is to ask the students expressly, "Do you have any questions?" For this query to be effective, teachers must genuinely want to hear students' questions. Teachers demonstrate their interest in students' questions by maintaining eye contact and giving students at least five seconds to generate questions before moving on. Teachers also can assess students' understanding by asking students at the end of class to hand in (anonymously) a slip of paper with a question or by inviting students to ask questions via e-mail.

Examples are an important tool in helping students understand complex concepts. Good examples are clear, appealing, and transferable. Clear examples are concrete, brief, and include ideas known to students. Appealing examples relate to the students' experiences and aspirations and are novel, credible, and realistic. Transferable examples are those that provide a specific instance that can be generalized to the larger principle. Teachers can build a repertoire of examples by recording examples as they occur to the teacher or as the teacher reads or hears about them. Students are an excellent source of examples. By asking students to provide examples of a concept, teachers not only get the benefit of new examples, but can assess students' understanding as well.

e. Knowledge and Love of Content

Good teachers know and love their subjects. Teachers must understand the theory, structure, and key details of the subject to be effective in helping students learn. But knowing the content is not enough to be an excellent teacher. In addition, effective teachers love their subjects and communicate that love to their students.

2. Seven Principles of Good Practice in [Higher] Education

In 1986, leading teachers and scholars in the movement to improve higher education in the United States met to identify the key principles which characterize the practices at educationally successful colleges. Those teachers and scholars developed seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. The principles were based on findings from decades of research on teaching and learning in college. The “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” became the title of the lead article in the March 1987 issue of the *American Association for Higher Education Bulletin*.

The Seven Principles have greatly influenced theory and practice in higher education. More than 150,000 reprints were requested within six months of its publication. Subsequently, educators developed a Faculty Inventory, Student Inventory, and Institutional Inventory, which are instruments designed to help teachers, students, and administrators to assess how their courses and campuses reflect the Seven Principles. Numerous conferences and journal articles have addressed the Seven Principles and two books review the research behind the principles and describe practical applications of the principles in college: *APPLYING THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION* and *THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES IN ACTION*.

Although the original focus of the educators who developed the Seven Principles was undergraduate education, the principles have much to offer legal educators as well. The authors of the principles summarized them as follows:

Principle 1: Good Practice Encourages Student-Faculty Contact. Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

Principle 2: Good Practice Encourages Cooperation Among Students. Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one’s own ideas and responding to others’ reactions sharpen thinking and deepen understanding.

Principle 3: Good Practice Encourages Active Learning. Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes and listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting

16 Techniques for Teaching Law

out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

Principle 4: Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback. Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. When getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In classes, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.

Principle 5: Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task. Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty. How an institution defines time expectations for students, faculty, administrators, and other professional staff can establish the basis for high performance for all.

Principle 6: Good Practice Communicates High Expectations. Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important for everyone—for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers and institutions hold high expectations of themselves and make extra efforts.

Principle 7: Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning. There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learn in ways that do not come so easily.

3. Dimensions of Exemplary Teaching

A leading author on teaching in higher education, Joseph Lowman, has developed a two-dimensional model of exemplary teaching. The quality of instruction results from a teacher's skill at creating both intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport with students. Intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport motivate students to do their best work. Excellence at either dimension can make a teacher effective with some students in some courses; excellence at both will make the teacher highly effective with most students in nearly any setting.

Lowman based his two-dimensional model of exemplary teaching on three types of research. First, he reviewed the immense body of research

on student evaluation of college teachers. (Nearly 1,000 such studies were conducted from 1974 to 1993.) Second, Lowman observed twenty-five exemplary college teachers in the early 1980s. Third, he analyzed over 500 student and faculty nominations for teaching awards in 1989, 1990, and 1991.

For both dimensions of the model, Lowman characterizes teachers who rate high, medium, and low. For each rating, he describes what an outsider would observe in the classroom and the effects the teacher would have on students. In addition, Lowman reports the most common descriptive terms found in the student and faculty nominations for teaching awards. Summarized below, for the highest rated teachers on each dimension, are the most common descriptors, outsider's observations, and effects on students.

Dimension I—Intellectual Excitement

a. Most common descriptors of exemplary faculty:

- Enthusiastic
- Knowledgeable
- Inspiring
- Humorous
- Interesting
- Clear
- Organized

b. Observer's description of teaching:

All content is extremely well organized and presented in clear language.

Relationships between specific concepts and applications to new situations are stressed.

Content is presented in an engaging way, with high energy and strong sense of dramatic tension.

Teacher appears to love presenting the material.

c. Impact on students:

Students know where the teacher is going and can distinguish important from unimportant material.

Students see connections between concepts and can apply them to new situations.

Students have little confusion about material or about what the teacher has said.

It is easy to pay attention to the teacher (almost impossible to day-dream).

18 Techniques for Teaching Law

Class time seems to pass very quickly, and students may get so caught up in the ideas that they forget to take notes.

Students experience a sense of excitement about the ideas under study and generally hate to miss class.

Dimension II — Interpersonal Rapport

a. Most common descriptors of exemplary faculty:

Concerned
Helpful
Caring
Encouraging
Challenging
Available
Fair

b. Observer's description of teaching:

Teacher appears to have strong interest in the students as individuals and high sensitivity to subtle messages from them about their feelings concerning the material or its presentation.

Teacher acknowledges students' feelings about matters of class assignments or policy and encourages them to express their feelings; may poll their preferences on some matters.

Teacher encourages students to ask questions and seems eager for them to express personal viewpoints.

Teacher communicates both openly and subtly that each student's understanding of the material is important to the teacher.

Teacher encourages students to be creative and independent in dealing with the material and to formulate their own views.

c. Impact on Students:

Students feel that the teacher knows who they are and cares about them and their learning a great deal.

Students have positive, perhaps even affectionate, view of the teacher; some may identify strongly with the teacher.

Students believe teacher has confidence that they can learn and think independently about the subject.

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