

PAES Instructional Enhancement Initiative

College of Education, The Ohio State University

Important Dates for Spring

- March 17**—Proposals due to Darcy for the PAES Collaboration in Instruction Award
- April 21**—Spring Workshop: Faculty Teaching Tips
- May 12**—Deadline for Spring issue of the Newsletter
- June 5** — Eggheads & Eggrolls: *Developing a Philosophy of Teaching.*

Spring Workshop: Faculty Teaching Tips—Set for April 21st

It's time to start thinking about the Spring Faculty Teaching Tips Workshop. It's an opportunity to share ideas and learn from your colleagues. Each presenter will have 10 minutes to give a brief overview of a "teaching tip" and entertain some questions and dialogue. Please think about sharing one of your teaching tips with your colleagues.

Other items already on the agenda: A overview of the project by the winners of the 2006 PAES Collaboration in Instruction Award; tips learned at the Lilly Conference on Teaching & Learning; and changes made to our teaching, by previous participants in the PAES Book Clubs. But, there's still room for more! Hope you'll share your ideas— and put the date on your calendar now!



Spring Workshop

Friday, April 21st
12:00-2:00
Location: TBA

Lunch will be provided

Congratulations to Professor Steve Devor, recipient of the 2006 Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching!

In a surprise visit to his classroom on Feb. 21, President Holbrook announced that Dr. Devor received the Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching!

Dr. Devor joins an impressive list of PAES Distinguished Professors who have received this award.

- 2003:** Dr. Gwen Cartledge
- 2001:** Dr. Tim Heron
- 1999:** Dr. Diane Sainato
- 1994:** Dr. Antoinette Miranda
- 1992:** Dr. Ralph Gardner
- 1985:** Dr. Bill Heward
- 1984:** Dr. John Cooper
- 1983:** Dr. Susan Sears



PAES Bookclub

Thanks to everyone who participated in the largest bookclub to date—13 PAES faculty and Dr. Plank (FTAD) met 4 times to talk about *Jarvis' Theory and Practice of Learning*. Bookclub participants: Front row: Professors Fink, Cannella, Hawley, & Owens. Back row: Professors Granello, Plank, Goodway-Shiebler, Sutherland, & Haag-Granello. Not pictured: Professors Joseph, Miranda, Petosa, & Stein,

Proposals due March 17 for PAES Collaboration in Instruction Award

The Third Annual PAES "Collaboration in Instruction Award" will be given during the spring quarter to members of the PAES faculty who demonstrate a collaborative effort in instruction (e.g., several faculty members, a program, a section). Attention will be given to how this collaborative effort enhances the academic plan and/or the mission of the college and school. The winners will receive \$1200 to purchase items to further enhance their instructional plans and will be asked to highlight their efforts in instruction at the PAES Spring Instructional Enhancement Workshop. Submissions are due March 17 —and should include a 3-5 page summary of the proposed project, including (a) an overview and description; (b) goals; (c) a description of how the project meets one or more components of the academic plan; (d) a plan for project evaluation, (e) a description of how the money will be spent, and (f) appendices as necessary to support the proposal. Resubmissions are encouraged.

Facilitating Online Discussions: Lessons Learned

By David S. Stein, Associate Professor & Constance E. Wanstreet, Doctoral Candidate, Workforce Development & Education

A common practice in online teaching is to use discussion boards in which learners make an initial post and respond to two or three other postings throughout the week. A common attitude toward that practice from online learners is that commenting on others' postings is a chore to write and sometimes a chore to read. "I just can't read all those things on the screen," said Lynne¹, a learner in EDU PAES 672 two years ago. "So I'll print them out and read them over a glass of wine."

If adult learners find discussion boards tedious, why do instructors use discussion postings and commentary as a primary instructional strategy; and how can using discussion boards maximize the learning that takes place?

For the past four years, we have talked to learners about their experiences in a single online course (PAES 672) about the philosophical and historical roots of adult education in America. In this article we will share learner insights as well as our research findings and recommendations about how to make discussions more meaningful and less tedious.

In PAES 672, learners make meaning primarily by formulating ideas and refining them through the responses of others. The class meets face to face at the beginning, middle, and end of the quarter. At other times, learners work in small groups (ranging from three to six members) to discuss questions around the text and formulate a posting for the course discussion board. Small group meetings may occur in chat rooms or in a face to face mode.

Coming together to discuss questions of interest is a hallmark of adult education, and through discussion in this course we attempt to simulate an adult education experience. Letitia made the connection: "This approach to learning has actually put us in the text, the way adults [historically] would talk and learn." In addition to helping them connect with the text, learners have told us that discussion has exposed them to diverse viewpoints, helped them take responsibility for their learning, increased their comfort level with ambiguity, prompted them to question their assumptions, and given them more insight into themselves as learners.

One way we explore how to maximize learning through discussion is by using the community of inquiry framework, which assumes learning occurs through the interaction of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000).

Discussion and Teaching Presence

Teaching presence involves course design, discourse facilitation, and direct instruction. In PAES 672, the design is flexible in that learners can choose their small-group discussion format: face to face at a location of their choice or online in chat rooms.

Focus group interviews suggest that the ability to choose small-group format was a factor in satisfaction with course structure. One learner remarked, "When we were allowed to design our own group and our own way of meeting, that took every weight off my shoulders, and all of a sudden [the class] became a pleasurable experience."

Recommendation: If you use discussion as a primary instructional strategy, offer different small-group discussion formats that foster more naturally occurring conversation.

Different group formats required using different technologies to provide teaching presence. Joining chats is an easy and relatively unobtrusive way to check in with online groups. It's harder to accommodate groups meeting face to face. Calling in by phone, for example, interrupts ongoing discussion and changes the dynamics of the session. Personal visits aren't always practical. This can translate into a weaker perception of teaching presence for members of face-to-face groups. "We get very little in the way of interaction with the educator," said Ellen, whose group met off campus. Her group members missed "his management of the group [and] how he fields questions."

Recommendation: For groups that meet face to face off site, consider compensating for your lack of physical presence by increasing your electronic presence through e-mail or discussion postings that acknowledge the group's input.

Discussion and Social Presence

Social presence involves the ability of learners to project their personal characteristics through emotional

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expression, open communication, and group cohesion. It is believed to be a precursor to cognitive presence. One aspect of group cohesion involves developing norms. In the absence of guidelines from the instructor, groups relied on their work experience or took their lead from the moderator of their first session. "It's a practice you acquire," said Lynne. "We all come from a business environment, and we understand how to work collaboratively." "Our first moderator was very organized, very precise, and kept the meeting moving," said John. "She set the tone for the rest of the moderators."

A member of one group that was not cohesive lamented not setting norms, but reflected that there would be no real consequence for violating them. "I was worried that a couple of the members wouldn't do our posting on time, so in the back of my mind I was prepared to step in," said Jim. "What else could I do?"

Recommendation: Offer examples of norms for each group's consideration, such as these from our learners: respect one another, wait for everyone's input before moving to the next question, take time to clarify meaning, ask members to slow down if you don't understand something, be courteous, and be prepared for the discussion.

Discussion and Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence involves the ability of learners to construct meaning through sustained communication. Learners reported that their small-group discussions—whether online or face to face—helped most in understanding the subject matter. Each week, moderators posted the results of their discussions to the course bulletin board to engage others in the class in a broader discussion. This seemed to be the least helpful educational interaction. Judy remarked, "I tend to wonder, are they responding because they have to, or do they really care?"

Social presence may support cognitive presence within the small group because of the ability of learners to engage in sustained communication through which they can construct meaning. However, a high degree of social presence within the group may restrict the ability to learn from the class discussion board, where learners engaged in sporadic, perfunctory communication.

Discussion needs time to develop momentum, to engage learners at deeper levels, and to result in a resolution. A course design in which members spend most of their time learning through small-group discussions may preclude them from contributing to meaningful discussion in the large group, which tends to be seen as a required chore.

Recommendation: Reassess the number and type of postings you require of every member of the class. Consider making responses to group postings voluntary.

Why Discussion Matters

To facilitate meaningful online discussions, instructors need to be aware of and support interactions among teaching, social, and cognitive presence. In that way, discussions will lead to a worthwhile educational experience. Judy summed up the value of discussion as an instructional strategy this way: "Education is a give and take of information and ideas, and to simply be talked to by a professor or to get the material from a book isn't education. Hearing about others' experiences and the exchange of communication—point and counterpoint—that's education to me."

¹Pseudonyms are used to protect privacy.

For further reading:

Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87-105.

Stein, D. S., & Wanstreet, C. E. "Presence in a Blended Course: Implications for Communities of Inquiry." 21st Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning, Madison, Wisconsin, Aug. 3-5, 2005.



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PAES TEACHING INITIATIVE WEBSITE:
WWW.COE.OHIO-STATE.EDU/PAES
THEN, LOOK UNDER “INFORMATION FOR FACULTY”

Diversity Update: The Male Elementary Teacher: Going, Going...

By Roger Sasnett, M.A., NCSP
and Dr. Wendy Naumann, PAES

I remember vividly my first interview for a kindergarten teaching position, in which the male principal asked, “What’s the highest grade you’d be willing to teach, Mr. Sasnett?” After I explained that my university coursework was aimed at the primary grades, and that I had served my internship during the previous year in a kindergarten classroom, the principal somewhat sheepishly explained his position: “The parents in my school would not understand why a man would want to teach kindergarten.” This interview took place in 1982. I wondered how things have changed

Scanning a list of OSU teacher education students, there are four males among 62 students currently enrolled in the early education program (grades K – 3), and of the 43 students enrolled in the middle school program (grades 4 – 8), 12 are males. Interestingly, the roster for the 2006 summer quarter, teacher education program indicates that only one male (out of 75 enrolled students) is slated to participate in the early elementary program, whereas six out of the 32 students that have signed-up for the middle childhood training program are male.

The gender imbalance among teachers also appears to be reflected in the classroom on a national level. The National Education Association (NEA) figures show that men account for just 9% of early education teachers, compared with a peak of 17.7% in 1981. Men are disappearing from secondary classrooms as well. Men accounted for 50% of secondary teachers nationwide in 1986. As of 2003, this figure had dropped to 35%. Male teachers are at a 40-year low. Contributing to the lack of diversity among teachers is that 42% of public schools are without a minority teacher.

There are complex socio-cultural, political, and economic issues that surround the topic of the role of male teachers in the elementary school grades. For example, some literature on the subject addresses issues such as whether men are by nature as capable as women of nurturing young children, the possible benefit men might provide as role models, and whether male teachers discipline children differently than female teachers. The results of an NEA survey shed light on the question of why men tend to shun the primary grades. This study suggested that some of the detractors for male respondents included low pay, a concern with being seen as doing

“women’s work” (gender stereotypes), and the perception of teaching as an endeavor in which one teaches a subject, rather than nurtures a child. Other sources refer to men’s fear of being accused of sexual abuse or of having pedophilic tendencies.

In my experience, and according to other male elementary teachers I have met, the benefits of working in the early grades well outweighed possible pitfalls. Children of these ages tend to openly adore their teachers and yearn for praise and attention. They abound with enthusiasm and have an unabashed love for life. I had the privilege of sharing in some of the happiest and most memorable times of my students’ lives: story circle at the carpet, poetry writing, making bubbling volcanoes with vinegar and baking soda, discovering the values of sharing and caring, costume parades through the school halls. How can you beat that?

Whether males have an important role to play in teaching younger children is a question for future investigation. One may spread the word with confidence, however, that men who avoid these posts are missing out on a gratifying and thoroughly enjoyable professional experience.