
Confidence in the Classroom:

Ten Maxims for New Teachers

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Henry Adams proclaimed, "A teacher affects eternity: he can never tell where his influence stops." The truthfulness of this observation is known to experienced teachers; its implications can be profoundly intimidating, however, to new or inexperienced faculty. The possibility that eternity might be influenced by one's first days in the classroom is likely to reduce a new instructor's initial feeling of eager anticipation to a vague sense of desperation

ings. For example, William James (1892, 1958) noted in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology; and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, that there is "no impression without expression." Thus, to feel confident in the classroom the neophyte instructor must begin acting confidently. "Easier said than done" or "How does one begin?" the doubtful reader might rightfully reply. Increased confidence about one's teaching will result when the following general rec-

articulate professors who have faced this question should consult the provocative essays written by Peter Beidler (1984) and Maryellen Gleason (1982).

3: Learn the Characteristics Associated with Effective Teaching

Despite several recent reports and books criticizing the quality of American education at all levels, most faculty members can recall the positive impact that at least one teacher had upon their

teacher promotes positive emotions and avoids arousing negative ones. This model is based upon both an analysis of published studies and Lowman's di-

Eison's and Murray's studies provide both a conceptual framework and a list of specific teaching skills that can be used to improve classroom perform-

students. As a result, freshmen in introductory classes may receive detailed remembrances of graduate seminars. But, such presentations are frustrating

the test of a good teacher is, "Do you regard 'learning' as a noun or a verb?"

type of environment can ruin the perfectionist's best-laid plans for organization and control.

most experienced instructors can attest, a few seconds of silent contemplation can make a difference.

and passed along, then you present your truths, neatly packaged, to your students. But if you see 'learning' as a verb!—the process is different" (cited in McCleery 1986).

Active learning "involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (Eison and Bonwell 1988); active learning strategies provide students with the opportunity to do such things as completing short, in-class writing activities, engaging in extended class discussions, taking field

It is also helpful for new teachers to remember that one secret to good teaching, passed on through the ages, is "to appear to have known all your life what you learned earlier in the day." That is to say, necessity often forces the new instructor to stay only a few days ahead of his or her best students. In such instances, the new faculty

to answer students' questions.

New instructors should not be afraid to admit to themselves and to their students that there is something that they do not know. But in the words of my colleague Charles Brewer, Furman University psychologist, "Endeavor always to reduce the frequency with which you must say so."

session. The inventories can be completed by students, trained observers, or faculty colleagues and used by the faculty member either alone or in consultation with the classroom observer.

And last, the self-confident teacher will always remember Mark Twain's sage advice, "When you can't get a compliment any other way, pay yourself one." A few minutes of silent reflection—or private feedback—after each class session can help the new instructor identify his or her instruction-

ing student learning-style differences (Claxton and Murrell 1987, Fuhrmann and Grasha 1983), (4) constructing tests and assigning grades that aid learning (Milton 1982, Milton, Pollio, and Eison 1986), and (5) encouraging undergraduates to conduct research (Palladino 1986)

But as noted by Horace, "Wisdom is not wisdom when it is derived from books alone." That is to say, much can be learned about teaching excellence through one's daily experiences in the

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