

The Authentic Teaching Self and Communication Skills

We will refer to the “authentic teaching self” several times throughout the seminar. At this point, we want to think about the performance of the authentic teaching self in the classroom, or any other learning site in which you will be teaching. This handout points out some useful “nuts & bolts” techniques for developing and facilitating good communication skills between you and among/between the students with whom you will be working. As you think about these techniques, remember to always shape your practice with attention to your teaching philosophy. In other words, your theory should inform your practice and your practice should inform your theory. You must work to discover who you are as a teacher and choose the techniques that work in concert with being authentic in the classroom. There is not one way to teach or communicate in the classroom, so one size does not fit all.

While there are some common techniques that each of us may find useful, it is good to adapt techniques that best conform to our individual style and authentic teaching self. Discovering which teaching strategies and techniques work best for you is done through practice. Remember that you have agency in determining what kind of teacher you are and will become, and that a critically self-reflective awareness of different types of class settings, or learning sites, and curriculum should affect the teaching strategies you employ. You must decide what works for you in your teaching, rather than simply trying to employ a style or set of techniques that work well for someone else.

You will want to take into consideration the specific course, the students, and the institution and setting in which you are teaching. Understanding different teaching settings and sites should include being attentive to actively engaging and furthering the skill sets of the learners in a developmental process. As you continue to develop as a teacher (an ongoing, continual task for all teachers—novice as well as veteran), you should continue to refine your pedagogical approach(es) and work to make sure your pedagogical techniques are in concert with your philosophical approach to learning, including eLearning.

I. The Authentic Teaching Self

- A. What is an authentic teaching self? Who am I in the classroom and why?
- 1) Be genuine
 - 2) Students see posing and posturing very quickly; do not be someone you are not in your classroom
 - 3) Being “real” and “present” in the classroom does not mean you erase all boundaries; Paulo Freire argues that teaching is always directive—as the teacher you are never on a completely equal level with the students, even as you recognize that your students can be both learners/teachers in various moments, and even as you recognize that you can be a teacher/learner.
 - 4) Teaching is not all about the teacher; that is, teaching is not all about you. You must be fully present and aware of who you are in the classroom (your subject position, your cultural location, how you are “read” by, and how you “read,” your students), and simultaneously, you should “step outside of yourself” so that you can be attentive to the students and not make the classroom your stage with the students as a passive audience.
 - 5) Active, student-centered learning is not about “edu-tainment”; it is about the teacher as a guide and facilitator; it about a teacher who gently challenges the

students to be their own best selves; it is not about the teacher as a performer or entertainer, for the sake of having a captive audience.

- 6) Always engage with your students; do not do something “to” them, or “for” them, or “at” them
- 7) Rethink the action so that it *includes* them, so that you are working “with” them
- 8) You can control the classroom without being controlling

B. Questions to answer for yourself:

- 1) How can I be genuine, sincere, and fully present in the classroom?
- 2) How do I avoid posturing?
- 3) How do I convey authority without being a strict authoritarian?
- 4) How do I build rapport among all participants?
 - a) first day ice-breakers
 - b) set the tone by example
 - c) put the guidelines/rules for engagement on syllabus and explain both the rationale for the guidelines as well as the expectations for following them
- 5) How do I structure class sessions for optimum engagement and coverage?
 - a) modify what can often be static “techniques” with a student-centered/active-learning approach; be flexible, rather than rigid
 - b) “frame” curricular content at the beginning of the course and help students build upon that scaffolding throughout the course
 - c) build flexibility into the course via the syllabus

II. The “Performance” of Teaching

(adapted from “Using Acting Techniques in Teaching and Everyday Communication” by Gregory W. Justice, VT Theatre Department)

A. Acting vs. Teaching

- 1) How is teaching similar to acting?
- 2) How is it different?
- 3) Connecting with an audience vs. connecting with students

B. Passion, Preparation, and Energy—three keys to good teaching

- 1) **Passion** for your subject (and passion and compassion for the learning process)
- 2) **Preparation**
 - a) always prepare your subject matter
 - b) have a plan b (and c and d)
 - c) be flexible and adapt your plan as you “read” the dynamic
- 3) **Energy**
 - a) expressing, sharing, making visible and palpable your passion (without being overly dramatic or posturing)
 - b) recognizing how passion and energy are connected

C. Being “On”

- 1) An actor and a teacher must be “On” at a certain time
- 2) Leave your “stuff” outside of the classroom—turn “off” the focus on other things and turn “on” your attention to the task and setting at hand

D. The Physical Aspects of Teaching

- 1) Nerves

- a) what are they and how do actors and teachers get rid of them?
 - b) what happens to you when you get nervous?
 - c) how do you turn the negative aspects of nervousness into positive attributes?
- 2) Defining the teacher's instruments
- a) communicating via the physical body
 - b) communicating via the voice
 - c) communicating via the affective
- 3) Relaxation, warming-up and conditioning the instrument
- a) the ideal preparation for the physical instrument is a physical warm-up.
 - b) methods and ideas for warming up and preparing the physical instrument:
 - i) stretching through all muscles.
 - ii) rolling down the spine
 - iii) jumping jacks
 - iv) isolating and shaking out tensions
 - v) jogging in place and releasing physical tension
- 4) Other ideas for physical warm-up, preparation and conditioning:
- i) walk quickly, without tension, from your car to the building
 - ii) take a brisk walk around the building before you go in
 - iii) take the stairs instead of the elevator
 - iv) warm-up in the rest room
- 5) Unnoticed warm-ups – preparation in public places
- i) contracting and releasing muscle sets
 - ii) diaphragmatic breath

E. Examining the Effectiveness of the Teacher's Instruments

- 1) The average attention span of people age 18-35 is close to 15 minutes.
- a) organize the class in 15- to 20-minute segments
 - b) use this same organizational strategy in large lectures, labs, or smaller classroom settings
- 2) How humans perceive and retain effective communication (source: "The Teaching Agenda," video):
- a) 50% of effective communication happens through what a presenter does with her/his body (includes posture, physical placement, movement in space, gestures and PHYSICAL ENERGY)
 - b) 40% of effective communication happens through what a presenter does with their voice (includes volume, projection, diction, inflection, vocal placement, dialect, tonality and VOCAL ENERGY)
 - c) 10% of effective communication happens through what a presenter does with the words (including the actual words used)

F. The Physical Instruments as the Strongest Communicating Tools

- 1) The physical instrument as the strongest communicator
- a) what part of the physical is the strongest communicator?
 - b) the face as communicator
- 2) Defining physical energy

- a) physical energy as a visible substance that moves and changes
- b) avoid placing obstacles between you and the intended target of your physical energy
 - i) no podiums – “step away from the podium”
 - ii) use chairs and tables with caution
- 3) Working in the positive physical energy zone
 - c) recognize and help define the flow of energy of individuals as they stand and as they sit.
- 4) The string exercise
 - a) leading with the torso
- 5) Losing and using physical obstacles in teaching
 - a) avoid obstacles between you and your intended audience.
 - b) don't cut yourself off from the students in the room

G. Looking at the Vocal Instrument of the Performer

- 1) Defining the voice as a physical instrument
 - a) the voice is a muscular system
 - b) what does it take to create voice?
- 2) Warming up the vocal instrument
 - a) start slow and easy
 - b) begin with yawning
 - c) learning to hum again
 - d) gently increasing vocal energy
 - i) the difference between vocal energy and volume
 - e) opening the vocal channels and vocal cavity
- 3) Improving speech dynamics with vocal energy
 - a) borrowing from music and learning to crescendo as you speak.
 - b) learning to work with vocal energy
 - c) avoid vocal energy falling off at the end of sentences
 - d) learn to modulate your voice as you speak