

Reflection and implementation of skills to
Improve teaching

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INTRODUCTION

The demographics of K-12 education are changing significantly. The issues school leaders face daily range from ethical issues to instructional supervision, and the changing “face of schools.” The enrollment of students of color is evident in all schools. School leaders see minority student enrolling in record numbers. Further, schools are faced with ways to address teaching in an environment where poverty is playing more of a role. This change in minority enrollment and the issue of poverty is seen not only in urban but also in rural schools. Accompanying this enrollment change are challenges many school leaders have to assure students are receiving the appropriate educational instruction. School leaders are asked to respond to ways to enhance student achievement considering the influences of poverty, state and federal mandates, more engaged parents and changing teacher forces. There is a need for teaching strategies to be adjusted to reflect these changing demographics.

School leaders assume a significant role in the way schools address student achievement. As a professor responsible to teach prospective school leaders it is important for me to assure they are prepared to address the challenges they face. Consequently, it is essential that I model effective teaching and learning strategies that can be transferable to leadership positions.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

A. Imbedding strategies to address diversity:

During the months of January and February 2006 I surveyed alumni who had completed a masters or specialists in Educational leadership within the last 5 years. A significant

result of this survey was an indication that the content of the program could be more intentional in addressing diversity. With this information and the fact that diversity is a strong initiative for the College of Education and the University, it was evident that I needed to consider more meaningful ways to imbed strategies to address diversity.

Strategy 1: Revise syllabi.

I have revised my syllabi to have a clause: *We live in a diverse environment. We have an ethical and moral obligation to respect individual differences. Each of us brings a unique and different perspective to our conversation n learning. These differences in perspectives enrich our conversations.* At the beginning of the class we go though the syllabus and will spend time discuss the significance that diversity plays in the role of leadership.

Strategy 2: Guest speakers on diversity.

There is a large number of individuals here on campus and within the community who to are willing to speak on the issue of diversity. At some time during the semester individuals will be invited to visit the my class and talk about how diversity affects teaching and learning. For example, Dr. Loretta DeLong, Professor from the Department of Educational Leadership came to my ethics class and talked about native culture and the ethics of Natives Americans. The rich discussion that follows is significant for prospective leaders.

Strategy 3: Refection papers.

As part of the course assignments student are asked to write a reflection paper of the issue of diversity. They are not graded on this assignment. If is intended to cause students to reflect on the issue of diversity

Strategy 4: Recognize our own biases:

Using the information on diversity as was discussed and presented by Dr. Steward Ross, Diversity in the Classroom, Yankton, ND May 9, 2006, I will be extending discussions in the classrooms to include issues of how we as individuals face diversity. I will attempt to determine if the culture I create in my classroom is safe for all, reflect on the language I use, and create an inclusive for environment.

Strategy 5: Internship

As a follow up the course content addressing diversity, internships will attempt to be structured to include experiences in a diverse community.

B. Active Learning Strategies

Teaching graduate level classes requires an awareness of adult learning. Most of the students in the classes are well into their careers and also maintain a full time job. Consequently, it is essential to engage the students in a meaningful way.

Strategy 1: Reading assignments

I have started a strategy in an attempt to actively engage students in the learning process. I assign reading to all students and they are expected to complete all reading assignments. However, a new strategy I will use is to assign or ask for volunteers to read in depth a reading and then to lead a discussion on that reading. They become the experts for the topic and evening. They can approach the class as they wish. Each student is expected to participate.

Strategy 2: Feedback

During each semester students are given an opportunity to provide feedback to me. However, that usually comes at the end of the semester. In order to have more meaningful feedback, I will start to do this 3 times during the course. Such questions as instructional style, assignments, length of class are asked. Modifications are made as per feedback given

Strategy 3: Beginning of the class

The tempo set at the beginning of the class is critical. People arrive from a long day and are not always eager to start learning. Therefore, a strategy was started to set the tone for the class. For example, at the start of each ethics class I will ask the question what ethical issues did you face this week? Each student will be given an opportunity to respond. The dynamics of the class is very interesting regarding some of the issue that come up and the follow up discussions.

CONCLUSION

Learning new way to approach teaching is critical at any level. At the University level it becomes a matter of engaging adults in the learning process. To do so offers unique opportunities. The intend of this new learning experience is that the instructional strategies I will use in my classes will be realized in more meaningful teaching. The benefactors of new learning this will be students enrolled in graduate classes.