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What Makes an Ideal Learning Environment for New Teachers in Higher Education?

Reid, Leslie

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Round Table Discussion: What Makes an Ideal Learning Environment for New Teachers in Higher Education?

A Model: Team Teaching – Teaching Partnerships with Experienced and Beginning Teachers

Rationale: Enriching the Quality and Depth of Learning for Teachers and Students

The first time teaching in a university classroom can be both an exciting and overwhelming experience. When everything is new -- course content and design, educational technology, classroom management and university calendar regulations -- there is little time to think deeply about student-centered approaches to teaching and learning and to develop a teaching identity (Sadler, 2012).

One of the foundational commitments of *Eyes High*—the vision guiding the University of Calgary—includes “enriching the quality and depth of learning.” In order to achieve this commitment, academic staff and graduate students must be equipped to excel in all teaching and learning environments. Building teaching expertise through intentional practice in supportive collegial relationships can be one of the most effective ways to help beginning teachers thrive in the classroom (Bell, 2001; Boud, 1999; Cox, 2011; Viscovik, 2006).

The Program – Arts and Science Teaching Mentorship Program

Overview: To explore opportunities for beginning teachers to develop their teaching skills and knowledge, a teaching mentorship program was developed and piloted in the faculties of Arts and Science in winter 2015. This mentoring program involves the beginning teacher (mentee) and the experienced teacher (mentor) team teaching a course together.

In this teaching partnership, mentee and mentor design and implement the course together, with a focus on student-centered teaching practices. Through this experience, mentee and mentor work together on innovative teaching strategies, allowing the mentee to develop skills and knowledge in instructional design, assessment practices, and skills in classroom teaching and management.

Pilot: The teaching mentorship program was piloted in the winter semester of 2015 with the course ASHA 421: Invention. Dr. Leslie Reid (Faculty of Science) was assigned to teach this course, and advertised the co-teaching mentorship opportunity in the fall of 2014. Dr. Christine Sharp (Postdoctoral Fellow in the Faculty of Science) was selected to team-teach the course, and the planning and design phase began in December.

Together Christine and Leslie accomplished the following:

- Designed the course learning outcomes, assessments / assignments and rubrics
- Designed and implemented learning activities and assignments during the term
- Planned and facilitated class activities and discussions
- Met with students outside of class when necessary
- Evaluated students’ work on assignments and activities
- Provided written feedback to students on their work

- Problem solved class challenges together
- Provided feedback to each other on classroom teaching strategies

To further develop: Christine developed a teaching philosophy statement at the beginning of the course and will further develop it, with support from Leslie after this teaching experience.

Outcomes

The program had significant benefits for Christine, Leslie and the students of ASHA 421.

Benefits reported by Christine (mentee)	Benefits reported by Leslie (mentor)	Students at end of Course noted (on the team-teaching format):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned how to design course activities, assessments and learning goals • Had a partner to reflect on experiences with • Learning how to manage classroom challenges • Observing and trying different teaching & learning strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a fresh perspective on teaching from designing course and teaching with Christine • Increased creativity: bounce ideas off of Christine • Opportunity to work on mentoring skills: provide supportive feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great to observe an example of a creative and trusting partnership between academics • Modeled how people with different backgrounds can work together • be given two unique perspectives on a the same idea

Questions? Feel free to contact Leslie (lfreid@ucalgary.ca) or Christine (cesharp@ucalgary.ca)

References

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