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SIGNS ALONG THE WAY

We all know that we want to teach something to somebody. We feel we have a mission or a talent to do so, but our *self-evaluations* may fall short. We need to be diligent about meeting our goals and objectives, and erect unambiguous road signs that force us to take stock about where we are, where we are going, and whether we need to change direction. I offer an alternative approach to self-evaluation—my way of examining premises, assumptions, and progress.

It is best to focus on learning, rather than on teaching—three questions to answer (in writing) and use to self-evaluate: What do I want my students to learn? How explicit am I in conveying the information *and* my expectations? How do I know they understand the directions *and* the information?

1. We need to be absolutely clear as to the *required* curriculum. Both the school system and the state have clear content and objectives for each subject and each level of that subject. One needs to know this *better* than one's own address and telephone number. To ignore these parameters is to risk dismissal from one's position. We need to consult with our supervisor and veteran teachers about how they handle the content. Adopt and adapt, especially if you are new to the system.
2. List the learning objectives in developmental order, and craft your lesson plans from this list. Remember that the textbooks and computers are tools for teaching and learning; they are not the content.
3. All along the way, from the first day, make sure that rapport and trust are there so that students feel at ease to ask questions about content and process. On a regular basis, you need to ask questions that will tell you whether they understand. Do not ask if there any questions and assume from their non-response that they understand.
4. Explicitly communicate your objectives and expectations on a regular basis. Students do better with both a road map and a GPS. Remind them regularly how the parts of the map puzzle fit together.
5. Provide situations and settings in which even the most reluctant students will be able to tell you that they are confused, do not understand something, or are lost. Support and empathy are not the same as being a "sap."
6. Provide "institutionalized" ways that the student can do it over; no one gets everything right the first time. Make sure, though, that those who did it right the first time are appropriately "remunerated."
7. Stress cooperative learning; education is not a competitive sport. Most of our growth and development happens in association with others. Success can be shared and failure sometimes avoided when people work together.
8. Pace yourself. No one can learn *it* all, which means no one can teach *it* all. Break "stuff" up into small pieces so that it can be "chewed and digested" more easily. Give yourself time to repeat. Even the Holy Writ has repetition.
9. Admit to yourself and your students when you make mistakes, but do not flagellate yourself. Do not make excuses. Make your amends, and get on with what you do best.
10. Seek external validation; encourage peer evaluation.

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HAMMERING HOME THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Marketing a college to prospective students once meant talking to high school seniors as they prepared to make their selection among the many institutions of higher education. Now, college and career planning reaches into the middle and elementary schools.

The "If I Had a Hammer" program provides colleges with the opportunity to make a good and lasting impression by bringing fifth-graders on campus, making education fun, and sending them away with a t-shirt.

The Hammer program shows fifth graders that what they are studying in class is applicable to what they do in life. Using a kit, students build an 8′ x 11′ house with a door, windows, siding, and a front porch. The program couples classroom curriculum with construction—applying math, geometry, science, economics, communications, and other skills during the planning and construction phases of the house.

As the children split into four teams, each assigned a color matching the coded building materials, they are outfitted with hardhats, hammers, and cordless screwdrivers. Over the course of two to three hours, the house comes together, and the students get the message that subjects, such as math, and skills, such as communication, can prepare them for life as a responsible, productive adult. The presentation may be sprinkled with warnings about drugs and other social ills that can wreck the firm foundation they are trying to build for their lives.

The community outreach aspect of the Hammer program also extends to area businesses that are given the opportunity to serve as sponsors. In return for a monetary contribution, employees may act as construction bosses, helping the children build the house; and the company logo is printed on the t-shirts that children may wear for years.

The college pays a $15,000 annual license fee, designates a specific area for the project, and covers expenses, such as a climate-controlled trailer for housing and transporting the materials, salaries for student workers to disassemble the house after each class session, and a portion of the salaries for faculty and staff to serve as project bosses.

The national Hammer program provides the kit, marketing tools, classroom workbooks, and construction leadership training for college faculty and staff. The program was developed by Perry Wilson, a college dropout, who found he could do complex geometric problems on the job that he had been unable to do in the classroom.

Blinn College, which began offering the Hammer program in 2000, brings more than 2,000 students annually to its campuses. Participation is open to fifth-grade classes at public and private schools in Blinn's 13-county service area in Southeast Texas. The program is so popular that teachers include it in their schedules for each school year.

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NISOD regularly receives requests to reprint previously published issues of *Innovation Abstracts*. Taken together over the last 25+ years, these requests identify some of our most popular articles.

On occasion, NISOD will reprint some of these articles, showcasing popular contributions to professional development and the improvement of teaching and learning. We trust that they will become special additions to current readers' collections.

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Suanne D. Roueche, Editor
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