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Faculty Development in a Labor Studies Credit Program

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The term "faculty development" has been defined by Jerry G. Gaff as "enhancing the talents, expanding the interests, improving the competence and otherwise facilitating the professional and personal growth of faculty, particularly in their role as instructor." Indeed, faculty development programs in the 1970s have shifted from traditional practices of professional renewal, such as faculty exchanges and research and travel grants, to a new focus on the individual faculty member and the issues he or she confronts as teacher.

The attempt to assist faculty members in improving the quality of teaching and learning at Indiana University Northwest, an urban, commuter campus in Gary, Indiana, led to the creation of a center called the Teaching Effectiveness Program. The program offered faculty members an opportunity to work on a confidential, voluntary, and individualized basis with a teaching consultant in an effort to assess and improve their teaching.

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skills and behaviors. The systematic improvement procedure used was the "teaching consultation process."²

Among the campus groups to request consultation services was the Division of Labor Studies, which offers a two-year associate and four-year bachelor degree with a concentration in Labor Studies. The division’s concern with the quality of instruction is reflected throughout the field of labor education. In addition to traditional noncredit short courses and conferences, there has been a rapid growth in the offering of credit courses leading to college degrees in university and college labor studies programs. Labor educators have had to acquire skills in areas such as course design and development, test construction, and grading. Although highly knowledgeable in subject matter, many labor educators have had little specific preparation for college teaching or exposure to learning theories. Labor educators also must fact the needs of adult trade unionists, who are often unfamiliar with formalized study and testing, classroom routines, and expectations of a degree-granting program.

This paper will describe the teaching consultation process from the combined perspective of the teaching consultant who directed the service and a labor educator who participated in it. This unique process allowed us to identify some of the key problems and issues facing the teacher of adult trade unionists. It also increased our awareness of the specific needs of trade unionists entering credit courses leading to a degree.

As background information we will describe the course itself and the students enrolled. We will then describe our personal experience with the teaching consultation process, demonstrating the impact of this process on improving teaching skills, increasing sensitivity to the needs of degree-seeking trade union students, and promoting awareness of oneself as teacher.

The Course

Contemporary Labor Problems, a required upper-level credit course offered in the Division of Labor Studies curriculum, met once a week for three hours throughout a 16-week semester. Course objectives were: to provide students with sufficient information to identify and analyze some

². The teaching consultation process represents an adaptation of the service developed at the Clinic to Improve University Teaching, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The process has been reviewed in detail by William H. Bergquist and Stephen R. Phillips, A Handbook of Faculty Development: Volume 2 (Washington, D.C.: Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges, 1977), pp. 69-123.
of the major problems confronting the union movement; to allow students to evaluate how the abovementioned problems affected their particular job and union; and to help students develop strategies to deal effectively with problems they face as members of trade unions and society.

Teaching activities involved assigned class readings, lecture and small-group discussion, film, case study analysis, and presentations by both invited speakers and students. Evaluation procedures included a midterm exam, class presentation, and research paper. All requirements and activities were outlined on a detailed course syllabus.

The Students

The class consisted of 30 students, including 10 females and 20 males. Half of the students were members of minority groups. All combined school with family and work obligations. Ages ranged from 22 to 54 years, all beyond traditional college age. Half of the students had varying degrees of prior experience with credit programs, while the remaining half had no previous college experience. Eighty-five percent were steelworkers, and the remaining 15 percent included members of the United Auto Workers, Sheet Metal Workers, Communication Workers, and Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. This group was representative of most labor education classes on the Gary campus.

The Teaching Consultation Procedure

The semester-long teaching consultation process included four major phases: an assessment of teaching, analysis of data, improvement efforts, and a final review.

Assessment of Teaching

We began our work together with a personal interview. The interview allowed the instructor to talk in depth about his teaching and allowed the consultant to learn as much as possible about the course and the teaching of it. Our discussion touched on what the instructor hoped students would learn, what particular methods he used, how he assessed student learning, what he perceived to be his teaching strengths and problems, and what his values, attitudes, and assumptions were about teaching and learning.

The instructor then invited the consultant to his class to observe classroom instruction and review it with him. Following the observation we
chose a class to videotape. The videotape allowed both of us to observe and analyze class activities in detail later.

During the fourth week of classes we asked for student opinions through a Teaching Analysis by Students (TABS) questionnaire. The results provided us with information about the extent to which students thought the instructor’s performance in a variety of teaching skills was satisfactory or in need of improvement. In addition, a second section of the questionnaire provided valuable information about students’ learning styles, attitudes toward the subject, and time and effort put into the course.

Finally, while students filled out the TABS questionnaire, the instructor assessed his own teaching by completing the same questionnaire. The form asked him to indicate areas that he felt were teaching strengths as well as areas with which he was concerned. Comparisons of this self-assessment and students’ responses enabled him to determine areas in which he and the students agreed or disagreed in appraising classroom instruction.

After the questionnaire results were processed, we met to review the information collected from the varied sources, to identify teaching strengths and areas for improvement, and to decide where to focus our efforts during the remainder of the semester.

Data Analysis

From the information gathered it was clear that the instructor’s teaching strengths could be grouped into the following skills areas: course organization, stimulation of student interest and involvement, and openness and rapport. The consultant’s observations, evidence derived from videotaping, and the instructor’s self-assessment were reinforced by favorable student responses in these areas. For example, 100 percent of the students responding to TABS felt the instructor needed little or no improvement in skills related to clarifying course objectives and clearly explaining course content.

As well as logically organizing course content, the instructor presented it in a way which aroused interest and encouraged learning. Ninety-four percent of the students pointed to the instructor’s skill in facilitating discussion among students and providing variety in learning activities. An

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3. The Teaching Analysis By Students questionnaire includes statements describing a variety of teaching skills and behaviors considered significant and applicable across disciplines, teaching modes and contexts. Developed from research in college teaching, the skills considered are related to student and faculty perceptions of effective teaching and to student learning. Significantly, the questionnaire is designed to serve as an information course for the instructor, and is not an evaluation instrument.
equal number noted his ability to relate the subject matter to situations and problems they encountered in their work sites.

In addition, the instructor's interpersonal skills fostered a positive classroom atmosphere. All of the students thought he related to people in a way that promoted mutual respect; an equal number felt he was available for personal consultation when they desired it. Students commented very favorably on the instructor's policy of setting up at least one consultation/counseling session with each student during the semester.

Research on adult learners has supported the importance of the above teaching skills. One finding to emerge from surveys of adult learners is that they expect the instructor to be well prepared, to have a clear set of objectives and defined content for the course and each class session. Often unfamiliar with formalized study, these students expect the instructor to provide guidance in terms of the course content. They like to have a text or specific readings and assume that the content of the assignments will be elaborated on by the instructor in some definite way—in or outside of class.

Studies show a second characteristic of adult learners is their reservoir of life experiences. They bring these considerable life and work experiences to the classroom and profit from having their talent and information used in a teaching situation. Thus, techniques that use the resources of the group (small- and large-group discussion, student presentations, hands-on problem-solving and case-study exercises) are appreciated. They tend to engage students as active learners rather than just passive receptacles of the instructor's knowledge.

A third characteristic of adult learners, documented in the research, is their pragmatic approach to learning. As Cross notes:

Adult learning is motivated primarily by the desire to solve practical problems. They are interested not so much in storing knowledge for use at some future time as in applying knowledge to life goals that seem important to them. 4

Adult students want to acquire enough knowledge to be able to analyze their work or life problems and arrive at acceptable solutions. The instructor able to relate the course content to real life situations will increase both the interest in the subject matter and its usefulness to the adult learner.

Two final and somewhat paradoxical characteristics emerge from profiles of adult learners: their desire to be treated as mature persons by the instructor, yet their need for his/her reassurance, particularly as they start

their venture back to a college classroom. As a result of our experiences, we would encourage instructors to treat these students as peers in the learning process by soliciting their opinions and ideas on both the course content and the design of the course (e.g., requirements, activities, deadlines, testing, evaluation). At the same time, instructors need to provide adult learners with moral support. Coming from years of work and life experiences, many of these students arrive at a university lacking confidence in their ability to compete intellectually with traditional undergraduates. They also arrive hoping the instructor will find in them an intellectual strength and maturity. They need an intellectual challenge, tempered by patience and encouragement.

Although the instructor’s teaching strengths were most encouraging, we did identify specific areas for improvement. In his initial interview and self-assessment, the instructor indicated that evaluation of student performance was an area with which he was particularly concerned. Student achievement was measured by a midterm essay exam, a class presentation, and a term paper. Despite the fact that course requirements and methods for assessing students’ work were outlined in the syllabus, he felt students were still intensely anxious about their grades and his grading policies. Responses on the student questionnaire confirmed this concern. One-fifth of the students suggested improvement in the instructor’s explanation of work expected from each student and his explanation of precisely how their performance was to be evaluated. Half of the students indicated need for improvement in the instructor’s performance in periodically informing students of their progress.

In addition, the instructor was conscious of uneven levels of student participation in discussion sessions. Although students commented favorably on the instructor’s skills as a discussion leader, both the videotape and the consultant’s observation notes confirmed his perceptions. Several male trade unionists tended to dominate the discussions, making it difficult for other students to offer opinions or ideas. When the consultant and instructor reviewed the videotape and analyzed teacher-student talk during discussion, the women trade unionists in the class showed the most limited levels of participation.

Improvement Efforts

At the review session, we determined our major improvement goals would be: (1) to evaluate the instructor’s methods for measuring student performance and find effective ways to lessen student anxiety over grading
procedures, and (2) to develop strategies to encourage more equal levels of involvement during classroom discussions. We were interested, in particular, in increasing the level of participation of the women trade unionists in the class.

We worked collaboratively to devise, try out, and evaluate a variety of improvement activities. These strategies, although designed to fit this instructor’s particular teaching situation and individual teaching style, are transferable among labor education courses and from one teaching mode to another.

Our activities in the area of clarifying evaluation procedures included:

*Midterm essay exam*: (a) The instructor handed out a list of six key essay questions one week prior to the midterm exam. He allowed students to prepare two pages of written answers to each question. The exam consisted of three of the questions, chosen randomly. Students were given the option of bringing to the exam either copious notes or a prepared answer to turn in. This take-home method reduced student concern and allowed students to show their best work. (b) At the same time, the instructor gave each student a two-page guide to writing essay exams, covering areas such as budgeting time, reading the question carefully, outlining, rereading, and correcting. This proved particularly helpful to students who were out of practice in writing. (c) As an option in another credit course, the instructor allowed students to bring the exam one sheet of paper filled with all they could put on it. Making up the sheet served as a good exercise in studying for the exam and in diminishing the level of test anxiety.

*Class presentations*: (a) The instructor constructed a “Class Presentation Guide” which outlined exactly what he expected from students in terms of topic, format, and length. He also provided a tighter time structure for topic deadlines, outlines, and preliminary reports. We felt this would give students a better sense of their progress and lessen the possibility of last-minute reports. (b) We constructed an audience reaction sheet for presentations so that the rest of the class could offer structured comments on each presenter’s strengths and suggest an area for improvement. This

6. Sharon Schrock, “Five Easy Ways to Score (On An Essay Exam, That Is),” Written for the Division of Development and Special Projects, Indiana University, Bloomington. A copy may be obtained from the authors.
technique suggested that peers, as well as the instructor, were valuable resources for learning.

*Research papers:* Because research papers were an outgrowth of students' class presentations, the instructor outlined how students might turn their oral report into written form. He also asked each student to purchase a handbook for working adults returning to school, which included a chapter on writing a research or term paper.\(^7\)

*Consultation:* Because the instructor had already requested a consultation session with each student during the semester, he set aside one part of that time for discussion of the students' progress in the course. Issues such as preparing for and taking exams, test anxiety, writing skills, and marking and grading procedures were explored when necessary. This consultation time also allowed the instructor to become aware of events that may have interfered with the students' academic performance, such as the illness of a child or spouse or employment irregularities due to scheduling of work hours. In such cases, the adult trade unionist's situation was resolved within the framework of the instructor-student relationship by making adjustments with, but not ignoring, course deadlines or requirements.

Among adult trade unionists, we found one of the most intimidating aspects of the degree program was evaluation and grades. Students were often unsure of their capabilities, yet strongly desirous of proving their ability to accomplish the academic goals they had set for themselves when deciding to return to school. Letting students know exactly what is expected of them; providing a tight structure and specific guidelines for assignments, tests, and papers; setting up a conference session with each student; and remaining flexible concerning a missed quiz or assignment deadline all serve to challenge and yet reassure the adult student that his or her best efforts are being recognized. The instructor's efforts and understanding in the area of student performance seems to be one important factor in the adult trade unionist's decision to continue with school.

Our activities for improving group discussion included:

*The Nonparticipative student:* (a) The instructor made a more conscious effort to reward students who contributed infrequently to discussions. Calling students by name, direct eye contact, a nonverbal nod or smile or a

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verbal comment (e.g., "that's an interesting point") helped encourage participation from the more reticent women and men trade unionists. (b) Another technique that encouraged quiet students to speak was to pose one or two questions or problems per class period before the discussion and ask students to write out answers involving examples from their own experiences. Students discussed their answers either in small "buzz groups" made up of four to six students or in a large group discussion. Within either format, nonparticipative students were far more willing to offer a prepared, thoughtful response rather than risk an off-the-cuff reaction to a question. (c) As a third activity, we experimented with a classroom structure that encouraged the involvement of every student. Students were divided into "learning pairs" and given a common assignment to read on their own. Each student prepared 10 questions relating to the assignment before the next class. Questions dealt with the comprehension and application of the content or new ideas suggested by the material. In class, pairs took turns answering each other's questions, correcting and elaborating on responses as necessary. The instructor then reviewed the questions, commenting on their relevance to major points in the assignment. We found that adult trade unionists worked well in pairs, assisting each other in understanding and critiquing assignments. Additionally, reticent students found it easy to share ideas and personal opinions with just one other individual.

The dominant student: (a) Dominant students often tend unconsciously to control an instructor's attention. For example, a videotape of a class discussion will often exhibit more teacher eye contact with these students, and more questions directed towards them. The instructor tried the simple but effective practice of consciously scanning the rest of the class frequently and not directing questions and comments only to students most likely to respond. (b) A second technique was to redirect the dominant students' comments or questions back to the rest of the class (e.g., "How do you feel about that, John?") or "Do the rest of you agree with that opinion?" or "We've heard from Bill. I'd like to hear what some others' experiences have been.")

When the instructor set up classroom structures that reinforced the concept that participation of all students was valuable, made students more aware of the roles they were taking in discussions, and made students more responsible for productive discussion, the women and men trade unionists became more equally active, verbal participants.

Altogether we spent approximately 15 hours on data collection and
devising improvement efforts. In this comparatively brief time, we were able to gather information on the instructor's teaching through classroom observation, videotape, self-assessment, student opinions, and the view of an outside observer, the consultant. The process was unique in that the instructor was not only provided with a multiplicity of data sources, but was also given assistance on particular ways in which he could improve his teaching.

Final Review
During the final two weeks of the semester, we collected new information about the instructor's teaching in order to assess his progress and determine whether additional improvement efforts were needed. The consultant observed a class session and videotaped another sample of instruction. This afforded us an opportunity to study recent classroom interaction and compare it with what was recorded earlier in the semester. Students completed a more-focused version of the TABS, which contained only those statements that reflected areas on which the instructor had worked. Students indicated both the extent to which they had seen improvement in teaching and the extent to which they felt improvement was still needed. Finally, the instructor reappraised his own teaching by completing the focused version of TABS. The self-assessment allowed him to express his perceptions of change, indicate where he thought he needed further improvement, and compare his perceptions with those of his students. After all the information was collected, the instructor and consultant scheduled a final review to discuss the findings and reassess teaching strengths and concerns.

Results

Final data led to three interrelated conclusions.
First, improvements in teaching skills related to both measuring student performance and increasing student involvement were confirmed by the instructor, students, and consultant.

In his final interview, the instructor commented upon changes in evaluation procedures:

'I've become much more sensitized to the whole area of evaluation and testing and to letting students know how their work will be judged. The adults I work with are very concerned about their progress in the course and need to receive fairly frequent feedback on their performance in class. This process has pro-
vided me with several techniques for clarifying evaluation. Several students have told me they found the written guidelines and the individual conferences particularly helpful.

The instructor's work in the area of measuring students' performance was evident to the class as well. Every student responding to TABS saw much or some improvement in the instructor's explanation of the work expected from each student. In addition, 88 percent saw much or some improvement in his explanation of how students' performance would be evaluated and in his performance in periodically informing students of their progress. The following quotation illustrates the tone of a number of student comments:

I know it's wrong, but older people are hung up on school. It took three years of nagging to get me to come to college. I've been so long out of school that I was nervous the first classes. It seemed I was always asking, "Will this be on the test?" I noticed he took a lot more time to give us information to help us with the exam and paper. Once I knew what was expected, I knew my grades would be good if I put in the work.

In his final interview, the instructor also noted an improvement in his overall effectiveness as a discussion leader:

I tended to let myself and a few students dominate the activities in the classroom. A number of women and men trade unionists were not adding the practical and personal knowledge they had gained to the topic being discussed. With adult learners, who enjoy classroom interaction, this mode of teaching simply does not work. I worked on improving my "question-asking" skills and my techniques for involving a majority of the students in class discussion. My "new" teaching style produced a visible and positive change in student attitude, and I feel more information was shared by all the participants.

In addition, 94 percent of the students saw much or some improvement in the instructor's skill in facilitating discussions among students, as opposed to discussions only between the instructor and students. As one student remarked:

For me, personally, I liked the small groups. I have a slight speech impediment when nervous. Even with two people I had to make myself say something. Finally, I got to believe in my points and was able to present a smooth oral presentation and take questions from the class. The course was beneficial for the knowledge but, more importantly, it helped me socially and increased my self-respect.

Second, the instructor increased his awareness of the needs and learning
styles of the adult trade unionists. In his final interview he noted:

I'm more knowledgeable of adult learners and the strengths and problems they bring to the classroom. I am more aware that a number of my adult trade unionists don't have high self-concepts. They are afraid they won't do well. They may have had failures before. During this semester I think we've learned that some just don't have the skills needed. They may be rusty because they haven't used them or they might need additional academic help. Pinpointing their problems and learning to capitalize on their strengths—their life experiences, maturity, responsiveness and motivation—has proved valuable to me.

Third, the instructor sensed he had achieved an increased awareness of himself as a teacher and was able to move toward further growth in his teaching life. The degree of personal change is reflected in this excerpt from his final interview:

I perceive myself as a better teacher than I thought I was. I didn't realize I was doing a lot of things I should be doing—that was good. I was unaware of the significance of certain teaching skills, and did them because it was my personal style. I think I do them better now because I do them consciously rather than spontaneously. On the other hand, I found things I was not pleased with. But identifying them was a positive thing in the sense that I've become aware of them and have grown as I've worked to change them.

Conclusion

Drawing sweeping generalizations or implications from these findings is not our intent. It certainly must be recognized that not every labor educator has access to such a systematic process for teaching improvement. However, many university and college campuses have developed instructional resource centers.

These centers could provide some teaching effectiveness services to labor educators (e.g., student questionnaires, videotaping of classroom teaching, consultation on course design).

Second, this teaching consultation experience was used with a semester-long credit program. Many labor educators and their ad hoc instructors also teach short-term, noncredit programs and workshops. We are presently modifying the process for use in these more traditional, yet critically important, program areas.

Finally, it must also be recognized that a teaching improvement service such as this is not a panacea for all the problems that beset labor educators.

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in their teaching lives. We believe our experience shows, however, that this process is one way instructors can begin to achieve greater awareness of their attitudes, values, and styles as teachers. It aids them in reflecting on and exploring aspects of their teaching selves that they did not know before, and in making decisions about their teaching that will be helpful to them, and, ultimately, to their adult trade union students.

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9. Recent studies on the teaching consultation process conclude that volunteer faculty who use the process consider it useful and well worth their time and effort, and that it results in significant, positive and lasting changes in their classroom teaching performance. See Glen R. Erickson and Bette L. Erickson, "Improving College Teaching: An Evaluation of a Teaching Consultation Procedure," *Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 50, No. 5 (September/October 1979), pp. 670-683.