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March 04, 2016

Teaching Self-Reflection

Date: Friday, March 04th, 2016

Course: AIS 160 – Many Nations of North America

Room: Cesar Chavez 306

Students in Attendance: 22 students (of 26 regular)

Today, I began class promptly at 10am. I often begin exactly at 10am because I want students to arrive promptly, and have noticed in the past that if I start a few minutes late, then the next session there are students that will come in late each week (I noticed this last semester). My first goal of the day was to pass back exams to students so that they could look over their work. I'm pretty good with students' first names (those that attend regularly) but after today, I think I need to work on last names. With so many students, it is hard to recall the last name, and since I tend to address students with first names that has allowed me to become lazy and forget to memorize last names as well.

After receiving their exams, I asked students to give me feedback on the exam itself. This required more prompting than I thought it would, and it seems that students were indifferent to my questioning them about the exam. Since most of the scores were A-B range in this section, with only a few Cs and one F, I'm wondering if they were not engaged in discussing the exam because they were pleased with their scores. My goal was to see how students felt about the map (a few mutters seemed to say it was "easy" or fine), the definition matching section (again, everyone seemed to agree this was a better construction than adding the definitions to multiple choice questions), and the multiple choice in general. There were no real complaints. But there was also no real feedback that I could use, so I'm now questioning whether or not this exercise was worthwhile. Perhaps I should have relied upon the fact that if students had complaints/concerns, they would have reached out to me.

Today, I asked students to start the session by coming up with main points from Monday and Wednesday's lectures. First, they were to come up with 2-3 main points from Monday's lecture, which was a guest presentation on Kerr Dam by Prof. Trosper. I told students to write the 2-3 main points that they took away from the lecture/readings by themselves on a piece of paper. From the front of the room, this made it apparent that some of the students really hadn't come to class or read things (they did not really start writing for quite some time). Then, I had students form small groups to compare and contrast their lists. I think this was a good discussion because students seemed to spend time actually comparing lists and talking about what they found, as a group, to actually be the 2-3 main points. At that point, I had students from each group tell me what they had found. This allowed me to write up a list on Microsoft Word that they could see, and as a class we then decided what the few main points were from the list.

Commented [MNG1]: Could it be that they were hesitant or mistrusting rather than indifferent? Could an anonymous survey have helped in this regard? Another aspect could have been the context: Would it have helped to ask the students to compare this exam to other exams in Tier 1 courses?

Commented [MNG2]: This was a great peer teaching activity, and it reinforced a notion of accountability.

Once I had this “class list,” we were able to discuss as a group what some of the main points of Monday’s lecture/readings were. This seemed to engage students and helped them to determine what they actually thought was relevant. At that time, I then asked students to help create test questions. I think that this is a good way to get students to think of ways to discuss and engage with the materials. This was beneficial because we did come up with four questions that, with few minor revisions, could be used as exam questions. I’m very big on student agency, and giving them the ability to help create their course exams, so I enjoyed this part of the [course](#).

Commented [MNG3]: Your instructional intentions were implemented very well.

That being said, there were a few kinks that I think would need further work if taught in the same course setting. (1) Students in my larger course often find it hard to start talking, and it requires some convincing that they’re allowed to bring up opinions and chat. In my second session class there are only 6 enrolled students, so this works a lot better, because they realize they cannot rely on another student to talk—there are too few of them to rely upon just one or two students. But in my larger class, it seems like a lot of students wait for awhile to talk because they rely on my handful of chatty students I can always rely upon to have done the readings. I think overall this task worked and reflected some learner centered teaching and student engagement techniques, but I wish there was a way for me to prompt students more [clearly](#). It seems like a few had not done the readings and may not have come to the lecture on Monday, but aside from those few, other students seemed reluctant to speak up. I’m still working on trying to get these students to talk more.

Commented [MNG4]: One possibility might be to form deliberately chosen groups that work together over a period of time, from a couple of weeks to the rest of the semester. There could be the group-based assessment as well as peer assessment within each group to document and enhance individual accountability. The groups could, for instance, be set up as a jigsaw with each group acting as the experts on a partial topic from the lectures and readings and having the job to teach it to the other groups.

(2) It is difficult to help monitor students as they discuss things in the classroom I am in. It is very cramped, which makes it hard for me to actually go from group to group to actually sit down with them and discuss things. This leaves me somewhat awkwardly standing at the front a lot of the time. I would like to find a way to be more engaging and would like to move around a bit more, but I’m still trying to navigate [this](#).

Commented [MNG5]: While the room is small, all chairs are movable. Have you considered asking the students to sit in small groups from the start of the class?

These were my two big problems with this lesson, but I noticed that both were not present in my smaller section because I have more room to move around, and the class was far more talkative. Also, reflecting on my initial lesson plans, I had not put any actual “objectives” in my lesson plan—so that is something that I need to work on for my next set of lesson plans. Admittedly, I am not great at making lesson plans because I have a lot of organic-ness that happens on [Fridays](#) (sometimes I have to switch it up based on what doesn’t get covered in the Mon/Wed lectures). Overall, I was really pleased with what I accomplished today—but I still have some smaller issues to work out.

Commented [MNG6]: It may help to wait until Wed lecture is over to formulate the needed learning objectives for Friday. It is more difficult having to adjust a lesson plan than it is to write it a little later based on the context that is out of your control.