This is the Weekly Reflection podcast from Saint Louis University’s Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning. Each week, we focus on a topic that fits with our theme for the 2012-2013 academic year, Engaging All Learners. Each reflection loosely follows the five-part Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation). The goal of this podcast is to provide an avenue into a space for thoughtful reflection on complex issues, rather than to provide answers to these issues.

Week 2: Learning and the Time Space Continuum
(from “The Hidden Dimension of Learning: Time and Space)

Context:
“Maria is a gifted graduate student studying toward a degree in social work. Her insight and her mastery of complex issues are superior. However, she is unable to complete papers for her coursework on time. Her professors claim that she is lazy, undisciplined, and even manipulative.”

“Donald is late to all of his classes. He has trouble going to bed on time at night and waking up in the morning, even with two alarm clocks. Donald has difficulty pacing himself and keeping track of time. His teachers think he is behaving this way on purpose to flout authority.”

Experience:
We have all had students like Maria and Donald, as well as students who are constantly misplacing materials and homework, or who just cannot seem to ever arrive at the right place at the right time. While many of these students simply have not acquired all of the life skills we expect, according to Sally L. Smith in “The Hidden Dimension of Learning: Time and Space,” these behaviors can also be a sign of learning disabilities. As Smith says, “Most individuals acquire concepts of time and space naturally as they mature. But for those with learning disabilities, these skills don’t always develop automatically and so they have to be learned.” Often students we encounter in our classes have developed coping skills to deal with the effects of their missteps, without necessarily even realizing that there are ways to learn how to adhere to expectations for time and space.

Even though the students we encounter are undergraduate and graduate students, there are ways in which we can engage all the learners in our classes in the organization and sequencing of events such as studying for exams or completing projects. Even the most successful student is engaged by a discussion of how her instructor suggests students could approach these tasks, and the approximate minimum amount of time the instructor expects it might take a student to do these things. Even more interesting to students is to learn the processes by which a particular instructor approaches these tasks in his life. Beyond these ideas, it can be helpful to students to set up multiple deadlines for parts of projects, to assist the student in learning how much time a whole project will take given how much time each part takes.

For those classes that meet in more than one space, it is helpful to send reminders to students about where the next class meeting will be held, including geographical markers such as “across from the fountain” or on the fourth floor.

Reflection:
(Take some time to consider the following prompts. You may find it helpful to write or sketch your thoughts.)
Think about those students you have encountered who seem to just always be out of sync with class time, deadlines, organization and other expectations involving the ability to navigate time and space according to strict rules. How have you reacted to their behaviors during class and in regard to grades? Would you have acted differently had you known whether or not they had learning disabilities? Why or why not?

**Action:**
Choose one of your classes in which organization, sequencing of events, and/or timelines are an integral part of the learning or assessment of learning. Create ways to scaffold the tasks associated to at least one of those areas of learning or assessment of learning (learning experiences). Consider ways to give more detail in your directions, and to include different types of examples, where it makes sense to do so.

**Evaluation:**
(The following questions are meant to be used at a later time after you have completed the Action, but may be used as a way to shape the action as well. It may be helpful to write or sketch your responses.)

With what intentions did you redesign or create the learning experience? How did those intentions present in the learning experience? Did the experience change the ways you see teaching, learning or the course?

How do you know if the change made a difference in student learning? For which students did the change make the most difference? Are there negatives for any students associated with the change you made?

What will you do next?

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Thank you for participating in this week’s reflection.

The next reflection will be posted on Friday, September 14th. All reflections are archived for future use. For more information on this week’s topic, CTTL services, programs, or events please consult the website at http://slu.edu/ctl.