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 4: Intentional Flexibility**

**Context:**
It is the fourth week of classes, the point at which we, students and instructors alike, begin to feel comfortable in a course. Students generally feel like they know what they are expected to do, and instructors begin to “hit their stride” in the natural rhythms of the term. If the course is planned out fully, especially if this is the umpteenth time the instructor has taught the course, this is the week when all of the predictable patterns of the assignments, the discussion, etc. reveal themselves.

**Experience:**
While it is important to plan our courses fully as whole entities that are based on strong, measurable learning outcomes, there can be a point at which everything is too planned. When a course is over-planned, every minute filled with content, and every twist and turn of each lesson and project is set in stone, there is a great risk of missing out on the spontaneous moments of deep authentic learning, that often only happen when students’ excitement or interest takes the content in a new direction. Of course, being open to the question or discussion that veers in a direction that is slightly off topic, in the hopes that it will be profoundly enriching, carries risks of its own. As author bell hooks writes, 

> “to enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, [j]s to transgress. Not only d[oes] it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas ha[ve] to be flexible, ha[ve] to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. (*Teaching to Transgress*, 7)

Thus, finding ways to entice students into animated engagement, forces us to confront the tension between predictable, controlled teaching practices and spontaneous, unexpected learning experiences.

**Reflection:**
(Take some time to consider the following prompts. You may find it helpful to write or sketch your thoughts.)

When are you the most comfortable teaching? Why? What experiences make you uncomfortable when teaching? Why? What are your attitudes toward encouraging excitement for learning in students during class time? Why? Have your attitudes changed over time?

**Action:**
Consider the overall plan for one of your courses. Identify the learning objectives that can be attained through multiple avenues. Choose at least two of these learning objectives and create new ways of approaching the course content around those objectives that could encourage excitement in students by being more open or flexible with what happens during class time.
**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 28th. 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.