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 5: The Many Faces of Participation

Context:
In a class of 35 students, it is easy to predict that there will be 5-10 students who will be frequent contributors to class discussion, or frequent askers and answerers of questions during lectures. Of those students it is likely that at least one or two of them will go beyond contributing and into monopolizing the instructor’s attention. In the same class, there is also likely to be a small number of students who will never speak in class, for a variety of reasons, while the remainder of students in the class may answer or ask one question, or contribute one time every other class meeting.

Experience:
Despite the type and variety of student participation in class, many of us continue to designate a percentage of the student’s overall grade for participation, and then struggle with not only making it a meaningful part of the grade, but also in creating a fair way to assess and evaluate participation. Whether a class is taught online, in-person, or as a hybrid, there are many ways students show they are engaged and participating as learners in the class beyond using their voices or words. For instance, during in-class activities, or small group projects students who tend to be less vocal with the large group are often more inclined to show what they have learned in a hands-on, problem-solving session, where they see the direct correlation between out of class learning and in-class learning, often even taking a leadership role because there also are fewer people with whom to interact. Some students are more inclined to participate in an asynchronous discussion board where they can take more time to choose their words carefully, and may have a bit of anonymity.

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

Do you consider participation as an important aspect of learning in your class? Why or why not?
Do you use participation as a way to assess and/or evaluate student learning? If so, how? What do you consider as participation for your class? How does that connect to knowing if students are engaged in learning during the class? How does that link to the learning objectives of the course?

Action:
Consider the structure of one of your courses. In what ways do students show they are learning during a class meeting? Create at least one additional way in which students can show they are active participants in learning beyond speaking in class. With the existing ways of participating as well as the new additional way you have created, create one additional way you can communicate with the students about the importance of these types of participation, and how they will be used in assessment and evaluation. For instance, build in a self-evaluation system by which students reflect on the types of participation they engage, how often they engage in them, and with what kind of
depth. This self-evaluation could then be used as a beginning to a dialogue between you and the student about his or her participation.

**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, October 5th. 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.