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 8: Relying on Trust to Guide Our Methods**

**Context:**
Keith is a struggling student in Dr. Zum’s mathematics class. He generally does well on homework problems, and does fairly well on small quizzes, but he has failed all of the major exams. When Keith visits Dr. Zum during her office hours, he expresses deep worry about the upcoming midterm exam. As Dr. Zum spends the next hour with Keith, she asks him questions and even begins having him work out problems on the small chalk board in her office. She frequently asks Keith if he understands these concepts and he replies in the affirmative, explaining the processes in which he is following. At the end of their time together, Dr. Zum tells Keith that what he has done in her office is the equivalent of an oral exam, and that while she will have to take some time to consider how to grade it, she feels that he has at least passed the exam. With relief and surprise, Keith asks what he should do about the written exam scheduled for the next day. Dr. Zum casually tells him to just take it for fun, and not worry about it. Keith takes the exam and earns a B+; what he and Dr. Zum realize is that Keith suffers from test anxiety. (Adapted from Bain, “What the Best College Teachers Do, chp 6.”)

**Experience:**
In Ken Bain’s book, “What the Best College Teachers Do,” from where the previous example comes, he notes that the best college teachers treat their students with a great deal of trust, and from this trust comes the willingness to, at appropriate times, move beyond the standard way of proceeding in favor of finding alternative ways to assist students in their learning. In our example, we see a professor willing to see a student as earning a passing grade for an impromptu oral exam, knowing that there was a good chance that the student would be able to earn at least that grade if he was able to relax during the standard written exam. She trusted that the student would not take negative advantage of the situation in any way. She trusted her insights into Keith’s knowledge of the content and her insights into the anxiety that might be plaguing him. She took a risk, and one that also took up a good deal of her time, but one that she was willing to take in the interest of student learning.

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

In which ways do you trust students? How is your trust revealed in the way you treat students? Do you place student learning at the center of your decisions about trust? Are there certain students that you do not trust? How do you treat students?

**Action:**
Consider the exams, assignments, and projects in one of your classes. Choose one of these to redesign to include elements of trust. Perhaps this is a take-home exam or a group project. As you
redesign, pay close attention to how trust plays a role in the ways the exam, assignment, or project is structured, explained, undertaken, and assessed. The ways in which we treat our students with trust should imbue all parts of a lesson.

**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 26th. 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/cttl.