

Changing Perspectives in the Classroom

Sometimes, it is useful to think about what is happening in our classrooms from a different set of perspectives. Here are some questions and question statements that may help you think about your own classroom from “both sides of the desk.” It is helpful for later reflection, to identify the time of year; often the same activity will offer different responses depending upon the time of the day that is reflected upon.

Time frame for the reflection: _____

Optional:

Class: _____

Teaching focus: _____

A. Look at your teaching from the students’ point of view.

The experience

- was so good that I want to bring my friends
- was okay, certainly better than a lecture
- was boring but necessary
- had nothing to do with me
- none of the above, but . . .

When I look at my teacher, I see someone who

- is really interested in the material and in helping me to understand
- is scared of us
- is bored by us
- has lots of energy
- really sees me
- is interesting to look at

When I listen to my teacher, I

- am entertained but nothing stays with me
- hear stories that help me to relate to the material
- hear stories that help me to understand the material
- hear stories that have nothing to do with anything that I can see
- hear background noise

When my teacher walks into the room, I feel

- a sense of anticipation
- confident that I can deal with whatever comes up
- that whatever happens will be important to me
- I will probably be wasting my time, but what can I do about it?
- a sense of impending doom!

When my teacher asks questions, I feel

- she already knows the answer
- there is only one right answer
- she doesn’t expect me to know the answer
- my answer won’t be good enough
- my answer will be treated with respect

Changing Perspectives in the Classroom (continued)

Two other questions to think about as if you were a student:

1. What did I learn and was it relevant? If "yes," what did I learn? If "no," does it really matter?

2. If I did learn something, how will I use my learning and what would I change to make it an even better experience for me?

Now, let's switch hats.

B. As teacher, consider the following questions. They may be useful in helping you to think about the environment of your classroom and to reflect on how that may affect learning.

Beginning the class:

- What kinds of behaviors do I see at the beginning of my class?

- What kinds of behaviors please me and what kinds make me uncomfortable or angry or sad (or all three)?

- How can I capitalize on what pleases me and how can I change what I don't much like?

- How much of this behavior has to do with what I am doing or have done?

- How much has to do with things beyond my control?

- Are these things really beyond my control?

During the class:

- What kinds of behaviors do I see?

- What kinds of behaviors please me because I can see that my students are engaged with both the material and me?

- What kinds of behaviors suggest to me that my students are either not with me or with the material?

Changing Perspectives in the Classroom (continued)

- Students' behavior
 - Has this to do with me?
 - Has this to do with the material?
 - Has this to do with the way I am transmitting the material?
 - Has this to do with them and with their experiences over which I have no control?
 - Am I kidding myself?
- What sorts of questions am I asking?
 - Questions that always follow from easy to hard
 - Questions that offer multiple ways of thinking
 - Questions that help my students relate to what they are learning
 - Questions that can be answered with a "yes" or a "no"
 - Questions that invite students to express their feelings as well as their knowledge?
 - Questions that get in the way of the learning
 - Questions that allow students to reflect (and am I finding the time to allow it?)

Ending the class:

- What kinds of behaviors do I see?

- What signs are there that this has been a good experience for my students?

- What signs are there that this has been a good experience for me?

- What signs tell me that I will need to make more effort as a presenter? Clarify my notes (again!), relax and enjoy myself more?

For next time:

One thing to try: _____

Two things to think about: _____

Thanks to Mem Fox whose suggestions for a language arts evaluation in *Radical Reflections* (1993, pp. 82, 83) served as the inspiration for this reflective exercise.