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Learning While Doing

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LEARNING WHILE DOING

Zachary W. Oberfield and Sally Wu

The following reflections were composed by Zachary W. Oberfield, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Haverford College, who participated in the TLI New Faculty Pedagogy Seminar during the Fall-2010 semester, and Sally Wu, Haverford College 2011, who worked as Professor Oberfield's student consultant during that same semester. Oberfield's reflections are on the left, written directly after the semester in which he participated in the TLI. Wu's reflections are on the right, written in the final semester of her senior year and just after graduation in May, 2011.

Introductions	
<p>Last semester, for the first time, I had the opportunity to think deeply about teaching while teaching. In the past I have studied teaching – I took education classes and completed a teaching certificate during college – and have taught – as a student teacher, in Japan, in graduate school, as an adjunct, and as a post-doctoral research fellow. But last semester I did both: I taught two classes in Political Science at Haverford College, and I participated in a pedagogy seminar offered through The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr College. The seminar included three other new faculty members and was facilitated by an experienced, tenured faculty member. As part of the seminar, I worked with a Student Consultant – an experienced, upper-level student who visited my class weekly, provided me with detailed notes about each class session, and served as a collaborator in planning and revising aspects of the course. The combination of teaching while thinking, writing, and talking about teaching enabled me to link the theoretical and the practical; for the first time since becoming a teacher, I was able to bring theory and practice into dialogue with one another (praxis).</p> <p>With the crush of grades and end-of-the-year parties receding, and the crush of planning a new semester approaching, this document distills a few principles from my experiences last semester; it draws from the conversations that we had in our seminar and that I had with my Student Consultant, the pages of scribbled notes that I took during these meetings, and the written reflections that I posted each week to a closed blog. My goal is that, like a constitution, these principles are clear and provide some structure when I return to them in the future. However,</p>	<p>Although I have been a student for 16 years now, I rarely feel like I'm learning anything of importance. Sure, I know all the state capitals and the molecular structure of glucose, but what does that mean for me in the "real world" when all I know is how to take a test and regurgitate information? For the last two years, I have been realizing that learning can evolve very differently, through practice and collaboration. As a student consultant for The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI), I have spent three semesters working with faculty partners on their educational practices. Through this experience, I have come to identify my own location as a student and to map a path for myself that both deepens my own learning and supports others' learning.</p> <p>In my role as student consultant for the TLI, each semester I observe and reflect upon one of my faculty partner's classes, take and share with him or her detailed notes, and meet with him or her to discuss concerns, questions, and thoughts as well as to share experiences. Through this work, we collaborate through each of our perspectives and understandings, leading to more nuanced and in-depth unraveling and re-raveling of our ideas about teaching and learning. In the fall of 2010, I worked with Professor Zachary Oberfield as he undertook his first semester of teaching at Haverford College.</p> <p>In addition to my partnerships with faculty members, each semester I have also had the chance to dialogue with other student consultants from different backgrounds, perspectives, and disciplines as an additional forum to reflect and develop my understandings. Through all of this work, I have experienced and witnessed true collaboration: value in each person's ideas, genuine dialogue that leads to action, and theories successfully implemented. In essence, TLI engages</p>

they should not be too specific or inhibiting. I hope that they will remind me what I learned and serve as touchstones for the future as I continue to explore teaching and learning. Thus, what follows is something of a time capsule from a new professor, with one semester under his belt, to his future self.

Principle 1: Consciousness

Being conscious is a broad idea that initially seems like something out of the pages of a text on Zen Buddhism; however, it became clear to me that this simple idea is an important aspect of successful teaching. Being conscious applies to numerous aspects of teaching including course design, lesson planning, and classroom practice.

Being conscious during the designing of a course requires thinking about the following questions: What do I want students to take from the course? Why should each text be included on the syllabus? What are my goals for this course? What do my forms of assessment that I choose imply about what I value? How do my forms of assessment connect to my goals? How do I expect that students will react to particular texts and sections? In addition, someone in our seminar suggested that as we design a course and its syllabus, we develop a companion “planning syllabus” for our use only – a version of the syllabus with behind-the-scenes details. I think this is a nice idea and am currently developing one as I prepare for the coming semester.

At one point in the semester we were asked to articulate our goals for students. I found it a very useful activity. At the time I wrote: “I have three goals for my students over the course of a semester. At the broadest level I want them to become critical thinkers and readers. I hope that they learn how to interrogate texts and arguments by asking questions about research design (specifically) and epistemology (more generally). However, while being critical I also want them to be constructive and to recognize that they can’t just tear down methods, theories, concepts, and policies without thinking about alternative suggestions. On a more narrow level, I hope that my students develop an understanding of some of the key debates and tensions within the field; often this means understanding that in political life there aren’t easy answers. For my bureaucracy class I want them to understand why we need bureaucracies, why bureaucracies often

its participants in praxis, the intersection of theory and action. As a participant, I have learned much about educational practices, but even more in regards to education as a social act and a never-ending process.

As my experiences with TLI have been a continual journey, I will highlight various landmarks and obstacles that I have faced, using Professor Oberfield’s reflections as a jumping off or counter point. It’s important to note that I find the process to be iterative, as issues must be revisited and reevaluated as a part of the learning process. Therefore, I expect the ideas presented in this discussion will be relevant over and over again in my lifetime, though new perspectives and side streets may appear. I hope that this document provides a concise map from which more paths may grow over time, but still serves as a reliable road to follow as I take steps towards the next chapter of my life.

Step 1: Locating oneself in one’s surroundings

Similar to the first point highlighted by Professor Oberfield, the principle of consciousness, finding one’s location also requires deliberate thought about one’s approach to life, personal and professional goals, capabilities and limitations, and expectations for self and others. Teachers locate themselves in relation to their preferences and responsibilities whether they realize it or not. When they decide what texts to assign and what kinds of evaluations to use, they also consider their own preferences and needs. How much time does it take to grade each assignment? What ideas do they want to spend more time on because it’s their area of expertise? Though they might not be conscious of these questions and considerations, their approach to the course and to student work is reflected through their curriculum and pedagogy.

As a student, I unconsciously consider my preferences and approach to courses, too: I ask why I want to take certain courses, what courses I do best in, whether I am learning anything in each class, and which ideas are worth pursuing for my own interests. Although I may occasionally discuss some of these topics with friends or classmates, many professors rarely think to ask students or provide room in their courses for reflection of this kind. In most of my classes, the professors may be unconscious of the impact and effect of personal preferences and needs and/or they believe that such topics do not belong when there is so much content to cover. In fact, some classes tend to ask

are seen as failing, and some of the difficulties of giving or taking away bureaucratic power. Finally, I want to kindle their interest in what I teach because I think these topics are important for understanding the world.”

As I reflect on these goals now, in between teaching advanced and beginner students, I realize that my goals will vary somewhat depending upon the courses and students that I am teaching. That said, specifying and being conscious of my goals as I design each course seems like a useful endeavor.

In addition to being conscious during the planning of a course, I realize that it is important to be aware and intentional during lesson planning. What is the goal of the lesson? What do I expect them to know and what do I want them to learn? How do the activities that I choose in the classroom – lecture, discussion, group work, etc. – achieve this goal? How does this lesson fit with the previous and subsequent lesson? How should I configure students physically during the lesson? How will I encourage student involvement? What feelings do I expect students to experience during class? What terminology is new or difficult? One of the interesting questions that we considered during the semester that relates to this aspect of consciousness is: Who are our students? How do we know who they are? I think these are important questions for me to ask each semester.

I also aim for consciousness in the classroom. This is a tricky one since it is easy to get caught up in the content or destination of a discussion and to ignore the process by which we get there. The questions that I have wrestled with in this area are: How is my pace? Are any students dominating the discussion? Do students seem engaged in the material? In answering this last question I wrote in a blog post that: “I go by their classroom behavior (eye contact, hand raising, yawning, comments, questions, etc.), their written assignments (response papers and research), and outside encounters (office hours, receptions, seeing them around, etc.)”

Though consciousness is an important aspect of my teaching, it has its limits: we cannot be conscious of everything and sometimes getting lost in the content of a discussion is useful and necessary. As such, I expect that part of being conscious in my teaching is focusing on which aspects are most important and worthy of my attention.

me to adjust to the professor’s style and preferences without much consideration of my own inclinations. Hence, outside of TLI, I merely focus on the class work without taking the time to reflect and question my experiences in each course. Therefore, for much of my undergraduate experience (especially before TLI), locating myself in my own education was a challenge.

When I entered Haverford College, I, like most other freshmen, had no idea what I wanted to study. I slowly began to rule out disciplines after taking them: math, philosophy, Chinese, political science, etc. By the time I had to declare a major as a sophomore, I had basically ruled everything out. When I joined TLI junior year, I still had no clear idea what my strengths and weaknesses were. During my first semester with TLI, I decided that I was going to change my mindset. I was observing an Introductory Chemistry course that semester, and I felt that my background in Chemistry was keeping me from purely observing the class pedagogically and from understanding how a student might struggle in the class. So I went into the class thinking that I would pretend I did not know all the concepts being taught and struggle with the logic of Chemistry. I realize now that this idea is ridiculous in that I cannot simply forget that I learned all that Chemistry nor can I be another person, but the attempt did help me learn much more about myself. I learned not just to be aware that I happen to be a person who learns Chemistry easily, but also that I was not fully aware of who I was and what I was capable of. However, in voicing such a suggestion, I recognized that I was missing a perspective, but willing to go seek it, even if it was my own.

Over my two years of TLI, through slowly attempting to articulate my thoughts and experiences, I became more conscious and clearer on my perspective and my voice. These attempts were supported by my dialogue with my faculty partners and with other student consultants; through our discussions, I came to see where I was located in relation to my education and where I wanted to be. The first step then, is simply awareness, realizing that I had a place already, but it was never clarified or distinct to even myself. Finding oneself on the map means that one has a designated starting point and place of one’s own to rely upon and draw from. By knowing what that place looks like, it’s easier to realize what and who else is around one and what their locations might tell one about one’s own. My location encompasses

Principle 2: Transparency

One of my major realizations this semester is the utility of transparency as a pedagogical tool. Students who know what is expected of them will feel more secure about the course and, I hope, learn more. But transparency can also be useful if it is posed as a question to students: Why did I do that? In this section I discuss two types of transparency: outside and inside of the classroom.

Outside of the classroom, on things like the syllabus, grading, office hours, and email, it is useful to be clear and consistent about my expectations. On the syllabus, in addition to telling students about how their grades will be determined, I think it is important to: present students with a clear rubric that explains the criteria with which I will evaluate their assignments, how class discussions will proceed (civility, etc.); caveats about the course; and how the topic fits with others in the discipline. A couple other thoughts about being transparent on the syllabus: 1) including a class participation rubric (with examples and modeled language) to show students which types of involvement are most valued; and 2) conveying to students how different assignments align with course goals (i.e. “the point of reading critiques is to help you develop your critical thinking and writing skills”).

Though I initially assumed it would be obvious, I have also learned the importance of being clear about my expectations about office hours and emailing. For office hours: no appointments are necessary, it is a good place for informal discussion about the course, careers, texts, research, etc.; however, office hours are not social hours. For emailing I think it is increasingly important to specify how instructors want students to use email; in my courses I indicate that I see email as somewhere between a text message and a business letter: there needs to be a salutation, proper spelling and grammar, and a closing.

Inside the classroom being transparent means telling students: the outline for the day; how I see particular ideas, theories, or sections fitting with past or future ideas, theories, or sections; what I am hoping we get out of particular discussion; and a lecture’s take-home points. Although transparency can be simple – me telling them why I am doing what I am doing – when formed as a question, it can be a useful

not only my experiences and my understandings, but my philosophy and preferences. After locating myself and figuring out where I stood, I was able to take more intentional steps forward.

Step 2: Finding a compass and venturing out with a goal in mind

TLI would not have been as fulfilling an experience had it not had a strong, yet flexible structure as well as explicit and authentic goals. The goals and structure center around the idea that each person has something to teach and something to learn, leading to productive dialogues and effective communication between all members. Whether it be to explore or to proceed to a particular destination, I need a reason to leave my primary location. If I were to venture into an unfamiliar area, I would need directions, a map, or a sense of direction to avoid getting lost. As a student, I appreciate assignments and classes that have a clear purpose to my learning and support structures that facilitate my efforts. Part of my job as a student consultant has been to simply ask professors, “Why do you want to do this?” and “What are the steps and how do students accomplish them?” What I am actually asking them is what direction they are taking their students and how they expect students to get there.

Some professors have not established or declared goals for their students whether those be for one assignment or for a course, which could mean their students cannot find a clear direction to go, leading to many lost and confused students. All of the professors I have worked with through the TLI articulated many specific and inspiring goals for their students, complete with compelling rationales for their goals. However, they might not have provided students with the appropriate tools and structures to get to their desired goals, which also led to many students getting lost along the way and falling short of the professor’s goals. While I understand that students vary in their needs and preferences, most students would rather have more supports in place than fewer.

As Professor Oberfield mentioned, he had given a writing assignment that was too open ended. Although his goal was clear, most of his students were overwhelmed with the number of potential paths and the lack of direction and merely chose to stay put until they had more support. Like them, I needed help in order to venture out of my location. The supportive forums of TLI promoted my personal growth by not only

pedagogical tool. For instance, though it may be obvious to me how different sections of the course or sets of readings fit together, it may be useful for students to puzzle a bit about my choices. One of my favorite in-class moves that I learned about this semester is the “why did I do what I did?” type question. Being transparent may mean asking students to think about why two texts were assigned on a particular week or how two sections of the course fit together. As students search and discover the rationale behind my choices, they may deepen their understanding of course topics.

Of course, as I finish this section, it occurs to me that transparency could be taken too far: indeed, there are some aspects of my teaching I wish not to be transparent about with students. Also, transparency, if too meta, could distract from student learning. Therefore, like other principles, perhaps it is most useful for me to aim for a certain amount of transparency as I interact with students: a balance between overloading students with information about my course choices and denying them information and keeping them in the dark.

Principle 3: Creativity

Creativity is an important aspect of my teaching. Like other principles, creativity is important throughout a course’s “life”: at the design stage creativity influences the choices I make about texts, assessment strategies, and course parts; at the implementation stage creativity shapes lesson planning, how I translate information (metaphor choice), and dialogue with students. Being creative, I hope, keeps topics fresh and permits multiple approaches to a course; since I fear getting stale over time as the world, literatures, and students change, I hope that being creative about the ideas of the course, and the texts that I assign, will keep me interested and help me think of new ways to present various topics to students.

Just as important are the instances and ways in which I ask students to be creative. On major assignments I hope to design options that give students the flexibility to think about topics in new ways and choose areas that are of particular interest to them. On a day-to-day basis, I often adopt a lecture, discussion, and exercise format and ask students to be creative in the latter two aspects of a lesson. In discussion, I try to get them to think creatively by posing questions and bringing up hypothetical situations that encourage

accepting my voice, but expecting it through reflection and dialogue. Through these forums, I received feedback and critical questions that helped me to continue my reflective process. Over time, I grew more confident of my direction and started to explore more of the world around me.

Step 3: Forge reliable routes, but explore sideroads

For me, it is never enough to have one path from point A to point B. I always wonder if there might be another path that I am missing, one that is faster or more scenic. In the case of working with people, I feel like there are always alternative paths, always more ways to interact differently and more effectively. Each route brings a new perspective and new ideas, as long as I remember to become aware of the world around me and reflect upon it. Each new TLI partnership feels like a new journey, which is exciting, but underlying each new partnership, there is also a familiar cycle of events that runs deeper, which keeps the partnership from being too unpredictable and unmanageable.

With each professor, I observe habits and mindsets that have been entrenched over the years, his or her own predictable and reliable paths that always get him or her to the desired destination. However, I have been extremely fortunate and amazed that each of my faculty partners has also been very open and receptive to the creation of new routes, ones that they may have looked over or avoided in the past. For instance, like most teachers, Professor Oberfield is steadfast in his approach and philosophy of teaching, but his courage and aspiration to pursue creativity is evident in his narrative and apparent in his everyday interactions with his students and with me. My other faculty partners have been the same, as I can usually note pedagogical patterns emerging within two class sessions. However, partly through my dialogue with them and partly through careful observation, I can see where they try new approaches or take tiny steps in a different direction than they normally would. Some of these paths fail to bring about productive or more effective results, but some of them lead to better discussions, allow for more participation, or improve learning and the class in some way (this is when I jump for joy on the inside). In either case, my faculty partners, the students, and I learn more about what works and does not work for each class, setting, or individual and get a better

students to interrogate and recombine ideas from our texts. For instance, one week in my bureaucracy course we read Hannah Arendt's book about the Nazi bureaucrat, Adolf Eichmann, and talked about the morality of rule following; in class, I asked students to think about the morality of rule following in a current U.S. government agency and whether there were any instances in which rule following was immoral. In addition, the exercises that follow discussion create opportunities for students to think creatively about course themes. For instance, one week I gave my bureaucracy course students a scenario of organizational failure (at the National Parks Service) and asked them to come up with reform suggestions using two competing approaches to understanding organizations. In this exercise they had to understand the different approaches and apply them creatively to the situation that I created.

Though I am fervent in my belief in the importance of creativity, I think it is important to qualify this principle a bit. Creativity can imply limitlessness, boundary-breaking, and discovery. However, thinking creatively might not be comfortable for some students. As such, it is important to point out that by asking for creativity I am not aiming for anarchy. In fact, it may be better to think of this principle as "guided creativity." When I ask students to be creative I need to give them confines and guidance about what I expect (this relates to the transparency principle). In practice this may mean scaffolding assignments and ensuring that students have some traction as they approach course assignments.

Principle 4: Responsiveness

With the preceding three principles in mind, I would feel pretty good about my teaching in theory. But who knows how things are actually going to go when they are implemented? One of the fundamental lessons of public administration, one of my fields of interest, is that implementation is routinely not routine ("many a slip between cup and lip"). So that leads to the principle of responsiveness, which could also be stated as: "Ask. Listen." This semester it has become increasingly clear that each class is its own unique organism. Some things that were clear for one group will not be for another. So there needs to be a continual dialogue between me and the students about how the course is going, what they think of

understanding of how to navigate the tricky pathways of teaching and learning.

Of course, the pursuit of alternatives must be accompanied by intention and reflection for its full effects, which thankfully, my faculty partners have exemplified. While they are responsive and considerate of alternative ideas and perspectives, they still remain true to their core beliefs and incorporate only the alternative ideas that strengthen their desired goals and direction. If they had simply adopted new ideas without connecting them to the overall goals and structures that they teach and live by, the overall flow and progress of their classes could become scattered and unproductive for all people involved.

In my personal exploration, I have found that discovery and innovation rank high in my priorities, but like all creatures of habit, I like having a reliable path that takes me where I want to go. Throughout my journey as a student consultant, I took a lot more trips off the beaten path than most others, including an attempt to not think like myself for a day in my first semester with TLI (see story in #1 above). I have learned that some paths are not optimal and some impossible. To get from one place to another, I could choose to take the strangest, most creative path I could think of, but I have learned that although creativity can be a big change, sometimes it could also just be a small realization, such as something on my everyday path that I had not noticed before. It's just a matter of perspective.

Step 4: Re-evaluate, reflect, record

As I have mentioned, I see this whole process of life and learning as iterative now, a journey that will take me through the cycles of teaching and learning over and over again. At this point, as my time with TLI is most likely over, it has been especially helpful to revisit the ideas that I have learned over the last two years and retrace my steps. Through this reflection, I have reconsidered what I have experienced and how I have grown, leaving a record, or a map, that will guide me through the next adventures of my life.

At the end of each semester, I would develop a list of themes, ideas, and questions that my faculty partner and I have talked about, thought of, or wrestled with during that semester, and each time I make this list, I am always surprised that a whole semester can be organized and summarized into a few Microsoft Word pages. I suppose many of the ideas and themes were

the relevant ideas and themes, and how I might improve things. This does not mean, of course, that I will do everything that they suggest or respond to their every desire; rather, it implies a sensitivity to the students' experiences and a desire to make those experiences positive.

I had a very good experience with being responsive this semester in my bureaucracy course. The major writing assignment that I initially developed was too open ended for a class of sophomores and juniors. After getting their feedback on the midcourse evaluations I significantly altered the assignment and gave them more direction. I believe that this helped their morale – feeling like they had been heard – and improved the quality of what they produced (I gave them a more detailed, manageable goal).

In one of my blog posts last semester I noted that being responsive pertains to the classroom as well: it seems useful to check in with students if I see them losing attention, glazing over, or seeming distracted. Simply asking questions like: “What’s going on with this topic at this moment?” “Does it seem uninteresting or irrelevant?” can pull students back into the flow of the discussion and show them that I am paying attention to them. Though I do not plan on creating a constant feedback loop, checking in during class at some points seems to be useful.

Like creativity, being responsive is a balancing act: if I am oblivious to the students, I will lose their interest; if I am too responsive, I will lose control of the class. But, after talking with my Student Consultant and seminar colleagues this semester, I have concluded that being open to students' experiences and making some effort to help them feel heard seems to be an important aspect of teaching.

Principle 5: Institutionalization

The final principle that I want to discuss is institutionalization: if I want students to do something, from getting to know me or writing a successful research paper, I need to institutionalize things. On the syllabus this means “scaffolding”: providing structures that enable them to build successful course work. This seems obvious in retrospect, but it is not a good idea to assign a paper and simply expect them to write it. Rather, it is important to build mid-level steps into the assignment (a pre-paper proposal, etc.). Also, I found it useful to devote time for students to discuss their research in small groups: this gives

already obvious, ideas articulated from the conversation on day 1, but would reappear and just be placed on the table throughout various discussions. Certain ideas would cycle around again and again, usually gaining greater depth each time, but rarely grew immensely. Most of the ideas being discussed were being re-evaluated, recycled, and reused throughout the semester, leading to very few ideas and topics of conversation overall, but not reflected in the list would be the knowledge that the learning was deep and the conversation intense.

I realized that most of what I did as a student consultant was reflect, which was literally display what I was seeing and then re-evaluate by rethinking about myself and others. I finally took the time this last month to organize and synthesize my notes from the three semesters of TLI and as one might expect, it doesn't look like much. It looks like one page of random ideas. However, in the notes are ideas that were constantly being revised and reinforced from discussions with many thoughtful and sometimes very critical students and professors. Wherever I go in life (and it looks like it will likely have something to do with Education!), I will have these ideas to build upon and pull from whenever I need a guide or a fresh perspective. More powerfully, even if I lose my notes, I will never lose the skills and experience I have developed from TLI: the ability to question, find perspective, collaborate, and navigate an unfamiliar world.

Retracing My Steps: TLI as Mapmaker

While I mention the role that others have played in my journey, I have not been explicit about how their contribution made all the difference in my TLI experience. None of this learning would be possible without the ability to discuss and collaborate with others, even for the parts about my own development. In order to become conscious of myself, I needed to articulate my voice to someone, someone who can echo it back or ask questions to help me clarify my perspective. In addition to sharing and collaborating our voices, the constant banter of posing one question after another without needing answers also helped us all gain a clearer picture of how we each thought and made sense of the world.

While the discussion engaged and motivated us, it still would not be possible without a strong foundation. I feel the structure and support of the forum reached out to me while

them a chance to present what they are doing and also be good partners who listen to one another and offer feedback. In the future I am debating whether or not I should institutionalize student collaboration by assigning semester-long research partners.

In terms of getting to know students, I required that they visit me during office hours in the first two weeks of the semester. It was not a long visit, but I found it useful for getting to know at least a little about who the students were and why they were in the course. This may be easier for professors at colleges with smaller class sizes, but even colleges with larger classes could arrange group meetings.

Another thought about the importance of institutionalization reflects the value of the seminar that I participated in and the Student Consultant with whom I worked: it is useful to talk about teaching with others. As I wrote in a blog post: "One of the most useful aspects of my collaboration with my Student Consultant was the realization that discussing my lessons, assessments, and paper ideas with another person is important. It sounds obvious but I have never done this in such an intense way before and I think I really benefitted from this. In other words, collaboration and discussion – either with a peer, student, etc. – has helped me sharpen my thinking about various aspects of my teaching. In the future it would be nice to find someone in my department or building to do this with on a regular basis."

This principle, like some of the others, feels familiar because it connects to my academic field: political institutions build pathways in which people operate. As they promote or frustrate action, they affect the behavior of individuals. As a teacher, I think I should use the power of institutionalization to enhance student learning. However, like other principles, this one has its dark side: too much institutionalization could stymie spontaneity and lessen student learning. As such, I hope to find a way to balance institutionalization and effervescence in my courses.

Conclusion

This document has distilled five lessons that I learned from my participation in a weekly seminar on teaching and learning and a partnership with a Student Consultant. As I conclude this document, it is evident that there is a

pushing me out into the world at the same time. TLI kept me feeling safe and grounded, but allowed me to roam in the clouds and explore wide and far. We had a general purpose of fostering the most effective principles of teaching and learning, but we were free to do so in so many different ways. This system helped me become more productive in the ever-changing social world. Although social interactions are flexible and vary greatly, I now know to seek out the underlying goal and consider the loose structures that may be in play, which both explain and direct the conversation. After establishing the framework of the conversation, I can navigate it easier and work more productively by helping others understand the framework and the direction I or the others want to go. As I become more aware of this process, I have realized that a lot of people are unaware of the pattern and direction of any given conversation in which they are engaged, leading to misunderstanding and confusion. I think that in my work next year, connecting students with teachers and experts in the field, this skill and understanding will be extremely helpful in my interactions and relationships.

For my own path, I had to find myself in order to better work with others, but it did not happen sequentially. I found myself and in doing so, I also found others. Although the path I have highlighted focuses on my own discovery and growth, I believe it also aligns with the path one could take to find and connect with others. In fact, my original intent in writing this article was to articulate what I learned about communication and dialogue with others, and so I had composed the following steps:

1. Become aware of the other's perspective and voice as well as one's own
2. Articulate and refine goals and structures that support the partnership/relationship
3. Test the waters/Try various paths/Lob a few shots into the dark
4. Record, react, refine interactions
5. Reflect on old plans and develop new plans for both depth and growth

These steps were meant to show education and growth as a social act, enacted through the complexities of communication and dialogue, which this work has certainly proven to be for me. I now see ideas and relationships flow in and out through individuals, situations, and systems, all striving for a state of equilibrium. Pardon all the

<p>theme that connects each of these principles: balance. Being a good teacher to me means striking a balance in these five areas. I need to be conscious of myself and my actions in the designing and implementation of a course. However, I cannot be conscious of everything, so I need to focus on what is most important to me at each time. I hope to be transparent about what I am doing inside and outside of class, but there are certain elements of my course designing and classroom management that should be held close to the vest. Creativity is essential for me and for students but needs to be structured so that students can get appropriate traction. I hope to be responsive to students' needs and experiences while also recognizing that I am directing, casting, and editing the movie; decisions about the "final cut" are mine. Finally, institutionalization is key for getting things done. However, too much institutionalization could hurt my spontaneity and responsiveness.</p> <p>As the preceding paragraph indicates, these principles are up for interpretation. I expect that my thinking about them, and where to strike particular balances, will change; also, perhaps I will discover other important principles to add to this list. That said, I feel that these principles offer some structure as I move forward with my teaching and learning. In effect, they are the opening lines of dialogue in what I hope will be a lifelong conversation about improving my craft.</p>	<p>Chemistry references, but I want to illustrate the strength of collaboration as the natural state of learning and growth. At some point, insightful ideas and unexpected understandings enter the equation, at which point, the scales will tip and equilibrium will be broken; however, this could mean the activation of a new catalyst or reaction, one that will create better products in new and profound ways using the same old reactants.</p> <p>Author's Note: A million and more thanks to the people who have been a part of my journey: my wonderful faculty partners who openly shared their thoughts with me and taught me so much about life and teaching, Alison Cook-Sather who helped me through writing this article as well as many other aspects of life (both within and beyond TLI) and without whom this inspirational program would not be possible, and the other student consultants I have worked with throughout my time at TLI who constantly challenged, supported, and inspired me to become a better student, teacher, learner, communicator, collaborator, and person.</p>
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