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Module Reflections from ACUE Course in Effective Teaching Practices

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Reflection on ACUE Modules 1E and 3C

I implemented the following technique from module 1E (Planning an Effective Class Session): use an engagement trigger. I implemented this technique by showing a brief (four-minute) video at the beginning of class. This video is about a brain-dead woman whose body is being kept alive in a hospital by various machines. The main reasons I implemented this technique were to pique student interest and to motivate them to learn about how what they were studying in class that day could be directly related to the scenario they observed in the video.

I implemented the following technique from module 3C (Delivering an Effective Lecture): end with an effective closing. I implemented this technique by having my students share the connections they observed between the two theories of personal identity they learned in class and the video shown at the beginning of the class (described in the first paragraph above). More specifically, I had my students explain which of the two theories was illustrated by the views of the various people (relatives of the brain-dead woman, a lawyer, a religious leader, the news reporter, etc.) in the video. The reason I implemented this technique was to help my students see the "real-life" implications of the two philosophical theories of personal identity we discussed in class that day. (This is important since many philosophical theories can seem abstract and without practical application.)

Based what my students shared at the end of the class period, it was clear to me that many of them could clearly see the ways in which the two theories of personal identity were being manifested through the views of the people who were being interviewed in the video. But I could also tell that some of them were having trouble remembering enough of the detail from the video to contribute meaningfully to the discussion. (They could see the connections their classmates were observing but only after their classmates reminded them about the relevant details from the video.)

Accordingly, when I use these two techniques again in the future, I am considering the following modifications. First, I may "prime" them before they watch the video at the beginning of class by giving them some indication of what they should be paying attention to in the video. My hope is that they will be better able to recall those details at the end of class if they are encouraged to look for them before the viewing. Second, I may simply show the video a second time right before I ask them to share the relevant connections they observed. (I may make the first modification to see if it helps to resolve the challenge mentioned above and then resort to the second modification only if the challenge still persists.)

Reflection on ACUE Modules 3D and 3E

I implemented the following technique from module 3D (Planning Effective Class Discussions): sequence questions to progress toward higher-order thinking. I implemented this technique by scaffolding a set of three questions (starting from the lowest level of complexity and abstractness to the highest), and I had my students discuss this set of three questions in connection with four different scenarios throughout the class period. I implemented this technique for one main reason. Since the third question in the sequence was quite challenging, my hope was that getting

students involved by discussing the first two questions would raise the probability of productive participation regarding the third.

I implemented the following technique from module 3E (Facilitating Engaging Class Discussions): manage the dominant talker. I implemented this technique with a two-step process. First, I sequenced questions so as to provide more opportunities for the less dominant talkers to get involved (by discussing questions earlier in the sequence). Second, if a dominant talker tried to answer a question early in the sequence, I said something like: "Thank you for your willingness to participate, Allision. But can someone else try to address this question so that we can get other voices involved in the discussion?" The reason I implemented this technique was to show the less dominant talkers in the classroom that their input is valuable to the learning processes of everyone in the room.

These two techniques were certainly helpful in creating a more balanced and inclusive classroom discussion. More students were involved in the conversation than would have been involved had I not employed the two techniques. However, some students still seemed reluctant to contribute to discussing even the first question in the sequence. So, I think that I need to adjust the scaffolding so that the initial question is more open-ended and accessible.

Accordingly, when I use these two techniques again in the future, I plan to modify the first question in the sequence. Let me be very specific. After explaining a hypothetical moral scenario, I posed the first question: "Based on what you learned last class period, what do you think a Utilitarian would say is the right thing to do in this situation?" The second question was: "How does this scenario pose a problem for Utilitarianism?" And the third question was: "How might a Utilitarian reply to this problem?" (This sequence was repeated for four different scenarios.) In the future, I plan to make the first question something like: "What do YOU think is the right thing to do in this situation?" That way, the less dominant students will not shy away from the discussion out of fear that they are going to misapply what they learned in the previous class period to the proposed scenario.

Reflection on ACUE Module 4B

I implemented the following technique from module 4B (Using Concept Maps and Other Visual Tools): integrate visual tools in a class session. The topic in class was three different fallacies -- each of which takes the form of an argument against the person. I created a visual representation on the board of these three fallacies that depicted both their fundamental similarity as well as their essential differences. The main reason I chose to implement this technique was to help my students see – quite literally – that, despite their differences, each of these three fallacies is a version of the same basic error in reasoning. Also, one aspect of the visual representation on the board was a useful catch phrase that they could associate with each fallacy in order to help them remember its distinguishing feature.

I think that the implementation of the technique was a success. In order to master this material, a student must be able to look at an argument and (i) see that it commits this general type of reasoning error and then (ii) determine which of the three specific variants of the error it

commits. Accordingly, if a student fails to distinguish this general type of fallacy from other general types of fallacy, then he/she will not be able to do (i). And if a student fails to distinguish properly between the three specific fallacies (within this general category), then he/she will not be able to accomplish (ii). In my previous experience teaching this material, many students have trouble mastering this material for one (or both) of these reasons. However, after using the visual representation of the three fallacies (described above) in class, I found that students were making fewer mistakes (than usual) when identifying fallacies in the various arguments I presented to them in class for analysis.

In future classes, I plan to modify this technique by having my students help me construct the visual representation. Instead of drawing the visual representation myself and then showing them examples of each fallacy, I plan to begin by showing them the examples of the fallacies and then have them try to identify their similarities and differences so that we can use that information to construct the visual tool together. My hope is that this modification will help to deepen their learning by having them actively engaged in extracting the general principles from the concrete examples.