



Struggles, Failures, and Fresh Insights

Teachers recount less than perfect classroom experiences

Compiled by Maryellen Weimer, PhD

When an assignment, approach or course didn't work well

Albers, C. "Teaching: From Disappointment to Ecstasy." *Teaching Sociology*, July 2009, 37, 269-282.

"Unintended outcomes can derail the best of intentions in the classroom. Designing a new course for Honors students provided an opportunity to change my traditional teaching style. I envisioned a classroom where students enthusiastically became more self-directed learners. I was perplexed with mixed reactions from students; while some joined me and adopted the model of teaching and learning I proposed, far more than I expected resisted the change." (p. 269)

Damico, A. M. "Stories of Boy Scouts, Barbie Dolls, and Prom Dresses: Challenging College Students to Explore the Popular Culture of Their Childhood." *Teachers College Record*, 2006, 108 (4), 604-620.

"Far enough into our teaching careers that we thought we knew what it meant to 'expect the unexpected,' we were nonetheless taken aback by what our students led us to do, think and learn about ourselves as teachers." (p. 618)

Gonzalez, J. J., (2013). My journey with inquiry-based learning. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 24 (2), 33-50.

"I am a historian by training, an interdisciplinarian by inclination, and an engaged pedagogue by necessity—and curiosity. I am, in short, a practitioner, and my purpose here is to help other practitioners, providing them with the article that I wish I had read before I experimented with my students." (p. 34)

Noel, T. W. "Lessons from the Learning Classroom." *Journal of Management Education*, 2004, 28 (2), 188-206.

“This was a day that I would long remember. I was accustomed to high student ratings ... Overall, I felt I came across as a competent, caring professional. As I opened this package of responses, though, I felt weak. It was virtually unanimous. My organizational design students thought the class was rotten. Almost to a person, they complained. Page after page was an energetic denouncement of me as a professor. Some said they wanted their money back. All were bitterly disappointed.” (p. 201)

Van Auken, P., (2011). Maybe it’s both of us: Engagement and learning. *Teaching Sociology*, 41 (2), 207-215.

“Sometimes, why certain courses or activities produce disappointing outcomes. . .may actually be a case of ‘It’s me, not you,’ Or, more likely, it is some combination of a lack of student engagement or responsibility for learning, and erroneous assumptions or choices regarding pedagogy or assessment format on the part of the instructor.” (p. 213).

When the teaching wasn’t all that it could or should have been

Cohan, M. “Bad Apple: The Social Production and Subsequent Reeducation of a Bad Teacher. *Change*, 2009, (November/December), 32-36.

“I arrived at my first teaching assignment as a full-blown, unrepentant (and unreflective) ‘critic.’ The critic was a harsh instructor because his primary mode was judgment. He had the virtue of high expectations, but he lacked the compassion, patience and power necessary to help students meet those expectations. As his student, the message you received most consistently was, ‘You’re not measuring up.’” (p. 33)

Delgado, T. “Metaphor for Teaching: Good Teaching Is Like Good Sex.” *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 2014 18 (3), 224-232.

“I know it is unconventional to equate teaching and sex, much less good teaching and good sex. However, this teaching metaphor emerged from a real experience in the classroom that became revelatory: about the incongruence of my teaching approach to the subject matter, the assumptions I made regarding my students, and the need to examine my pedagogy regularly as a matter of practice. Here’s the story of that experience.” (p. 224)

When the teacher is struggling

Sandstrom, K. L. “Embracing Modest Hopes: Lessons from the Beginning of a Teaching Journey.” In B. A. Pescosolido and R. Aminzade, eds., *The Social Worlds of Higher Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1999.

“The most vexing issue I faced as a beginning teacher was how to sustain a sense of hope. As I started teaching, I held visions of and goals for teaching, defining it as a true vocation that, at its best ‘calls’ practitioners to be involved and dedicated, inquisitive and creative, critically reflective of themselves and their world, and willing to promote understandings that contribute to the construction of a more humane world. ... After

teaching a few courses, I became painfully aware of how difficult it was to realize these teaching ideals.” (pp. 526-527)

Walck, C. L., (1997). A teaching life. *Journal of Management Education*, 21 (4), 473-482.
“What I found myself trying to discover was this: Is there more to teaching than content and delivery, technique—didactic or experiential—and evaluation? Is there a space to bring myself into the teaching, to release the artist in me, and can I risk it? It seemed to me that a teaching life should be, as the blurb on the book jacket of *The Writing Life* (Dillard, 1989) suggests, a ‘life of dedication, absurdity and daring—[a] life at the edge.’” (p.473)

Husted, B. L., (2001). Hope, for the dry side. *College English*, 64 (2), 243-249.
“The truth is, I’m trying to change things. Transfiguration: that’s what I’m aiming at, nothing less. I’m not sure it’s the right thing to do. I’m not God. And it’s a freshman writing class, that’s all it is. Even the nurses have to take it, and the agri-business students. The electrical engineers. ‘I’m not going to be a writer,’ some of them say when I push them too far. ‘You already are,’ I tell them. ‘That’s what you’re doing here, writing.’ I know what they mean, of course. They mean: *who do you think you are?*” (p. 243)

When the teacher wasn’t learning

Mulnix, A. B. (2016). What my cadaver dog taught me about teaching and learning. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 27 (1), 5-21.
“Misconceptions are tenacious; sometimes learning something new means being forced to see that the old way of thinking doesn’t work, despite the fact it looks like it does. Even when you find yourself embracing the new model, there are still instances when the old model creeps back into your thinking and, once again, has to be denied.” (p. 9)