

Promoting a European dimension to teaching enhancement

A feasibility study from the European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching (EFFECT) project

APPENDIX 2

The EFFECT pedagogical staff development workshops:
a repository of stimulus material

The stimulus material (see below) was used in the physical and online EFFECT pedagogical staff development workshops. The stimulus material (also called mirror data or vignettes) represents practice problems and systemic contradictions that are presented to the workshop participants in order to launch the debate. Stimulus material can take various forms, from statements or transcripts to video footage. It is an important part of the Change Laboratory Methodology on which the EFFECT pedagogical staff development workshops rely.

Statements and practice problems from teachers

- 1 At the beginning of the class, the teacher suggested that Juliana, a student with severe vision difficulty, changed her place in the classroom, but Juliana resisted. At the end of the session, the teacher took the time, and had a conversation with Juliana to understand her reasons for sitting in a place from where she could not see very well. The teacher found out that Juliana was not comfortable moving to a front seat because she felt too “observed” by her colleagues.
- 2 A professor considers that the student’s visual problem is an impediment for the learning process in a specific course. For that lab class, the professor admits that it’s impossible to continue with more work and looks for alternative ways of exploring the content. The student has visual problems and is not able to see through the microscope.
- 3 International students, all with different mother tongues, need to be integrated in a regular class. What is the best method to use?
 - Professors should prepare all materials (documents, presentations, etc.) in the native language as well as in English.
 - Professors should assume that if the student chose that university then he/she must make the effort to understand the native language and adapt to the teaching method.
- 4 Students from the school of medicine are in general very competitive; this attitude is sometimes the reason for facing difficulties with integration, especially because they do not show solidarity. Teachers have a key role in these situations, to promote collaborative work and reward solidary attitudes.
- 5 I am a teacher for many years, yet lately I have some difficulties during the first two or three classes of the semester, because students find it hard to attend classes without technology and they tend not to concentrate.
- 6 Last year I had three undergraduate Chinese direct entry students join my BA Events Management final year module. I wasn’t expecting them, and they did not really engage in the tutorial activities. They seemed uncomfortable in the class and spent much of their time on their mobile phones. It was clear to me that the activities I planned weren’t inclusive as the students didn’t join in. However, I lacked the experience to know what to do in the situation. I didn’t know whether/how I should adapt the activities to suit the students since they were at the right level for the rest of the class. I’ve since gone on a training course to try and understand how Chinese students feel in this environment.

7 I went to university with top grades. I think I studied hard but in truth I never found things very difficult at school. When I got to university, I was delighted that my lecturer was a world expert in his field. His research was interesting, although his teaching was actually quite dull. I understood the subject easily and enjoyed finding out more in the library by myself. It was an easy transition for me to go on to a PhD, teaching undergraduates as I went along.

I've been an academic researcher and teacher for many years now and still enjoy my subject, especially having the opportunity to share ideas with fellow researchers. The teaching seems harder these days; the students don't seem to have any interest in the subject. The university lets anyone in now regardless of their school grades or where they've come from. Somehow it's become my problem that they have a disability, or can't speak the language, or don't know how to study. And anyway, how can I be expected to concentrate on a few students with difficulties when I have hundreds of students to teach? They've all just been told that going to university will lead to a good job and financial security. Nobody seems to study for the love of learning anymore. We're just not getting the right kind of students.

I suppose I shouldn't say these things, but I actually don't know how to work with this type of student. Some of them make me feel uncomfortable. I don't know how to talk to someone in a wheelchair, and I'm constantly worried about offending someone from a culture or religion I don't understand (and don't want to understand, if I'm honest). I shouldn't have to. The university shouldn't admit students who aren't capable of adapting to an academic environment. Some of them don't make any effort; they just hang out together and complain that we don't accept or understand them.

I love my subject and my research and I am very happy to share my knowledge and experience with students who are capable of understanding and make an effort. It's not my job to spoon-feed and babysit people who shouldn't be here. Let someone else do that.

8 I have always got on well with my students, I just thought I understood them, where they were coming from. I remembered being like them. I took my studies reasonably seriously but also enjoyed myself. But now, they all seem so different I just do not understand them. I want to, which is why I have been on the diversity training programme, and now I just feel overwhelmed by what I do not know about or cannot see. I am terrified of getting it wrong. The only thing to do is to retreat to what I know: my subject. It's not ideal and I have this uncomfortable feeling that I am letting them down, letting myself down. I care about getting it right but now I just do not know how to, so I just let them get on with it and make the best of the situation. At the end of the day, they have to be responsible for their own learning, but that does not feel comfortable, and it is a cop-out.

9 I was appointed as project manager of a newly established post-doctoral school which merged three different doctoral programmes. I was supposed to manage the three single programmes and set up the common legal ground and administrative procedures and products for the school (statute, website, etc.). I received no recognition either for my career or economically. In summer, in particular, I was single-handedly managing three international selection procedures including about 600 candidates, besides all the rest of the responsibilities. I worked from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm.

I was expecting some help or words of wisdom from my director to progress with the project or give me some useful feedback.

Instead, he brought me a box of chocolates.

I kindly told him that I would not accept the chocolate. He got furious. At his reaction I told him that I would not accept anything from anybody, not just him. It was not true, but I wanted to calm him down by providing a somehow acceptable justification which was not personal. I was shocked by his reaction.

Once alone, I found the real subconscious reason of my refusal. He would have never given a box of sweets to a male colleague. With a male colleague he would have discussed the workload, how to better manage the situation and eventually also advise him about future career progression. A box of chocolates was a kind gift – enough for a woman.

Statements from students

1 There is no diversity in my programme. I am a final-year PhD candidate in XXXX and I have never felt culturally or ethnically included. The fact that I am one of two black persons in my programme and that I do not have friends is not my fault. Everything is white and Euro-centric.

2 I'm an Erasmus student. I face the situation that sometimes the class has been held in the local language without any translation into English. I could not understand anything or give any comment in class and that made me feel sad as it was like I was not there at all.

3 There is a sense of false superiority among Europeans and lack of understanding towards other ethnicities.

4 When I entered the university, no one would explain anything to me. I had to search for all the information myself and it was very difficult.

5 My first semester at the university was very difficult, and I almost dropped out. I came from a different city and I did not know anyone. I found out that most of my colleagues were very biased, as I came from a small rural area and they stereotyped me from the first day. Fighting the stereotype was difficult.

6 I've heard discriminatory comments of teachers with regard to the *modus vivendi* of my continent.

7 I come from a family where I am the first to go to university. My parents stopped studying after primary school, and my grandparents were not literate. I made my way to this university, I have good grades and I work hard. But I realize that I am always *almost* there. I *almost* have new friends, most of them coming from well-educated families acquainted with university culture. I have *almost* become a student well appreciated by professors. ... I have the feeling that behind this *almost*, is where things are really happening. I feel scared by those who could be cultivated without this *almost*.

But at university, this was the case of many students – not only of good students who could pass their exams with brilliant grades, but also of young people (mostly men, like prestigious professors or famous people who studied here). ... They would know how newspapers are made, how an editorial committee works, how a movie is produced, and what there is beyond the city, the country, and even the sea. They know the names of those who matter, the names of those you should esteem, or those you had better show contempt for. I, on the contrary, know nothing. To me, whoever has their name printed on a book is a god, and I go through these books in a scholarly way, studying them but not envisaging that I would live in the same world as them. ... I am constantly concerned about saying or doing something wrong, and showing my difference.

(This is an adapted extract from Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels 2: The Story of a New Name* (2012). The narrator is a young female student, who went from her poor neighbourhood in Naples to study in the prestigious Scuola Normale in Pisa, in the 1960s.)


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- 8 My university has a stated mission to produce graduates who will be the problem-solvers of the future, addressing the grand challenges facing society, nationally and globally.

Peter Wells (chief of higher education, UNESCO), referencing the Sustainable Development Goals, has said: “Professors no longer need to scabble around creating artificial problems for their curricula as the SDGs pose real-life problems for students to address, so we have very real and urgent problem-solving curricula.”¹ And yet, in my experience my lecturers focus so closely on their own research that they are detached from the real world, and certainly don’t think it’s their job to apply their research more widely. How can I hope to make a meaningful social contribution if my curriculum and those who teach me aren’t interested in applying learning in this way? Even the university focuses more on my grades and whether I am employable in the modern workforce than how I might become a socially responsible citizen.

Videos

- University of Wollongong. “Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education: Abdul’s Story” [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1sIUDfWEvo>
- @GovMattBevin, “Enjoyed meeting the members of the West Louisville Chess Club at Nativity Academy at St Boniface,” Twitter, 10 Jul 2018, 9:02 am. <https://twitter.com/GovMattBevin/status/1016714234095374337>

1 Rebecca Warden, SDGs—Universities are moving from what to do to how. University World News, 21 September 2017. <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170921171919144>



The European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching (EFFECT, 2015-2019) project aims at facilitating European collaboration on teaching enhancement, identifying and developing innovative practices, supporting higher education institutions in developing strategic approaches, and assessing the feasibility of a sustainable structure for the enhancement of learning and teaching at the European level.

The project consortium is led by the European University Association, and brings together experts, dedicated networks, organisations, national rectors' conferences and institutions from different parts of Europe.

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More information: <http://bit.ly/EFFECTproject>

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