



MEMO

TO: -----
FROM: -----
SUBJECT: YOUR CLASS
DATE: 4/27/2011

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Thank you for inviting me to your HED 410 *Stress Management* class on 10/6/2010. I am sorry I could not stay for the entire class, but the first hour that I observed was enjoyable and helped me with my stress level ☺. Since I am not the content specialist, please take my comments and observations with a degree of caution.

You come across as a competent, experienced instructor who has a solid understanding of instruction at the college level, as well as quite a few specific tricks up your sleeve. I noticed the pre-class chatter was done very expertly, with putting students at ease, and maintaining the personal connections with them. It is an important although often neglected part of any teaching. Students seem to like and respect you, and this is already half the job. I really appreciated the “What is due next week?” question. It activates students’ attention, and serves an important house-keeping function as well.

The first segment of the class included reading one passage from Carlson’s text. It looked like a meaningful activity allowing students to connect their own experiences with the course’s content. I would also use this exercise to help build their professional vocabulary. For example, the reader stumbled on the word “equanimity;” - use such opportunities to define the new words; it can be done by engaging other students, or just give a definition, and perhaps write it on the board. Don’t let errors slip by, within reason, of course. The discussion about the passage was great; my only advice would be to use it more explicitly for connecting the main learning objectives of the course. Students need to learn to *use* the concepts and practices you teach them in a discussion. Use is the only reliable test of comprehension.

Next, you had the game with object manipulation, the plastic egg thrown around the class in search of new definitions. From the timing point of view it was perfect; it broke the flow, and provided much needed kinetic and comic relief. The main link was to the idea that any object may or may not be a stressor, depending on a perspective of those who interpret it. This was a very effective way of demonstrating the concept. I would take it one step further, and ask several students demonstrate the skill of re-writing the perspective on some other objects or situations. That would reinforce the mastery of the concept. Just have a set of escalating questions ready; you can also provide prompts to scaffold the skill. For example: “Imagine you receive a bill you cannot pay in the mail. Describe how you could change perspective to avoid stress.”

The segment with rebuses and riddles was clearly enjoyed by students, and provided them (and me) with mental stimulation. You have some very smart kids in this class, and I found myself lacking ☹. You articulated several important concepts and practices to the students (for example, that the first obvious solution may not be the best one, that one way to change perspectives is to borrow from other people's perspectives, etc.). The unpacking conceptual content of a complex activity is a wonderful teaching tool. What I would add is a link with the reading the passage segment, because this was the extension of the same set of skills/concepts. I know that the segment of the class that I missed includes specific practical applications of the skills students learned, as well as real-life examples of situations.

Your overview of the Chapter 8 of your main text books is one of those practices that are actually very hard to do. You did it well, because you came well prepared, and took your time to digest the content. I would recommend going even further, and just focus on 2-3 main concepts you want them to get absolutely. The book seems to include many overlapping concepts anyway. Then spend more time on providing real life examples, and checking students' grasp of each concept. The best way to check is to have them use it in a different context. "Give me another example of widening one's perspective" – is usually a very good test of comprehension. Try it next time, and do not let them go till you are sure most got it, and can recognize and fluently use the concept in multiple contexts.

Calvin and Hobbs are always useful – Watterson should get an honorary degree from someone for providing great illustrations to almost any college class. Thanks for finding the cartoons, keeping them, and using in class. I know it takes time and patience, but also sets a message to our students: Teaching is a craft, it needs work, and you build your expertise over your life time.

In conclusion, I found the class to be very well designed and run. Thanks for putting so much time and effort into your teaching, and being systematic and compassionate about it. As I said, you are already very competent; keep pushing yourself, and you will become an outstanding teacher.

Sincerely,