

Center for Teaching Excellence, Suffolk University

Excellence in Teaching Matters

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A Class Act: Using Acting Technique in the Classroom

by Allan Tow

Think of classroom teaching as a performance activity. At its most basic, classroom teaching involves appearing before a group assembled for the specific purpose of looking at you and listening what you have to say. To be sure, what we have to say – the content we deliver in the classroom – comes from our hard-earned expertise and careful planning. Still, an inspired delivery and creative use of class time can add immeasurably to the gratification we all experience from teaching and being taught. Recall your own student days when your attention and affection for the subject were sparked by a particular professor's lectures. Think back to how that professor used his or her voice, body movement and emotions to capture your interest. That's exactly what actors do. Both teaching and acting are public performances that emphasize delivery, engagement and feedback. Think of teaching as acting.

Every actor understands that the audience must be able to hear the words he or she is saying. The audience must be able to see the actor's gestures and body

language. The actor's movements across and around the stage are purposeful – they add meaning. The actor stirs the audience's emotions by showing what he or she is feeling. Teachers do the same. Standing before the class, we speak with our voices, we gesticulate and point to the board, using body movement, and we project a persona, usually professorial.

Nevertheless, as we profess, we engage in storytelling, explaining, elucidating, exhorting, and emphasizing. Sometimes we even plead or admonish. Hardly anyone would attend a performance in which a script is merely read aloud. Effective teachers, like good actors, employ techniques that bring life to the materials or the script.

Resist the belief that mere performers cannot share our lofty perches in the classroom. Trained and rewarded for their expertise, many academics bristle at the idea that their classroom performance could use improvement.

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Message from the Director

"If you don't pay attention to something you can't learn it." Daniel Willingham

Cognitive science teaches a simple lesson as illustrated in the above quote. Daniel Willingham is a respected cognitive scientist at the University of Virginia and his book *Why Don't Students Like School* is making an impact on higher education in understanding how learning occurs in the brain with language that can be understood by non scientists. In this edition of Excellence in Teaching Matters we explore ways to help students pay attention to what really matters in your classroom.

You'll hear from Allan Tow from CAS on how "acting techniques" can be used to capture and sustain student attention and from Laurie Levesque in SBS sharing some quick and effective ways to get student

feedback on their learning. From the Law School we profile Rosa Kim who shares how the idea of an engaged student body drew her to legal education

We're also thrilled to introduce our newest CTE member, Katie Linder. Katie comes to us from The Ohio State where she was a member of the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT). Katie will serve as the assistant director of the CTE overseeing our current programming and developing new ideas to assist faculty in their teaching. Katie brings a great deal of knowledge and experience to the CTE and we hope you take the opportunity to meet her.



**Donna Qualters, Director
Center for
Teaching Excellence
Excellence**



Allan Tow is Associate Professor of Applied Legal Studies at EHS, and a member of the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. He has appeared in dozens of television commercials, training films and independent films. Still, he considers teaching one of the best acting gigs around.

A Class Act: Using Acting Technique in the Classroom

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Confusing content with communication, detractors fail to see that content however brilliant or insightful can be greatly enhanced by tweaking delivery. The former Education Minister of Alberta Province advocated the use of video lectures scripted by academics but delivered by professional actors. He and folks at Penn State – two experts in education and communications – are convinced that teachers should use actors’ training. They cite numerous studies which show that the use of acting techniques actually increases student achievement. If you’ve been teaching for a while, get a new lease on your teaching life by developing some acting techniques – skills for the classroom. Elementary techniques such as speaking clearly, varying your pace and intonation, moving about the classroom and injecting enthusiasm, animation and humor, are just starters. How to acquire these skills is easy. It just takes a small commitment of your time and a slightly bigger commitment to the art of teaching as well as acting.

Try taking acting lessons. At Suffolk, there are the acting courses in the Theater Department. There are also many acting classes all over Boston and the suburbs taught by casting directors and in adult education venues. Train yourself by reading some of the vast literature, including self-help manuals, on acting. Read aloud regularly to your children or anyone who’ll listen. When you do, put some feeling into it. Watch for pace, breathing, energy and mood. Act with your voice as you read a character’s dialogue. Try to feel what the character is feeling. You’ll soon find yourself moving your hands, maybe even getting up to act out the body movements, impulsively. When you go out to buy coffee or groceries, try speaking to the cashier with a different personality, a foreign accent perhaps. Once you get up the gumption to do so, you’ll be well on your way. Soon you’ll find that instead of being full of yourself, you can be full of someone else. Teaching will suddenly become really fun again, for the first time. After all, it’s only a movie.

- Allan Tow



CTE’s latest team member, assistant director Katie Linder, comes to Suffolk University from Ohio State’s University Center for the Advancement of Teaching.

Introducing CTE’s New Assistant Director!

The Center for Teaching Excellence is pleased to introduce our new assistant director, Katie Linder! Katie comes to CTE from The Ohio State University where she worked at the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching and earned a PhD.

The CTE is thrilled to have Katie on board to help continue the growth of the center. She will be facilitating an afternoon tea event, a workshop, and a book group this semester, so there are plenty of opportunities to come by the CTE and meet her!

Katie is also available to meet individually with faculty and lecturers regarding teaching needs and concerns. “One of my favorite parts of working with faculty is getting to know them one-on-one,” she says, “I love hearing about the courses they are teaching, their research interests, and their specific concerns about teaching and learning.”

Katie’s graduate work is in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, a field that she found helpful to her training to work in a teaching center.

“The interdisciplinarity of Women’s Studies is one of the primary reasons I was drawn to the field. In fact, that’s what drew me to working with faculty as well,” she says.

At Ohio State, Katie partnered with faculty from a range of disciplines, helping them with course and curriculum design, gathering midterm feedback from students, and working to improve end-of-term evaluation scores.

If you want to set up a meeting with Katie to talk about teaching, she can be reached by email at klinder@suffolk.edu.



Technology and Teaching at the Law School's Sargent Hall

Although most Law Faculty use Campus Cruiser or Blackboard as their online course management system for posting documents and communicating via email, other technology requests range from PowerPoint templates to training faculty and students in CourseCast. The Law School's Office of Academic Technology in conjunction with the University Media Services department assists Faculty in all their technology needs.

Brian McDermott, the Director of University Media Services (UMS) is responsible for the installation and maintenance of the fully integrated classroom multi-media systems in each room of the Law School. They include an integrated control system, DVD players, document cameras, projection systems, video switching, and audio mixing, processing and distribution. Available services are video-conferencing, video streaming and audio/video editing and encoding/transcoding.

Chris Caswell, the Law School's Instructional Technology and Design Specialists, works closely with the Faculty in specific technology requests. Whether it is a slide with embedded sound or a CourseCast video capture uploaded to a Blackboard course, he is ready to assist. Technology support extends beyond the classroom. Chris recently set up a Skype session for Prof. Jessica Silbey where she skyped to a graduate class in comparative literature at Penn State.

Last semester Chris worked with Prof. Kate Day's students in a video project for her Women's International Human Rights and Film and the Law course. Prof Day was thrilled with the results and felt "the editing station Chris created was the core of student work. Chris not only engaged with the students in the editing process, he also came into the seminars early on to

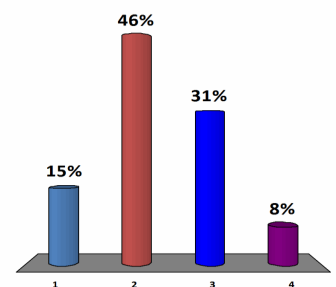
teach students about the available technologies and support."

Other technologies used by faculty within Sargent Hall are tablet notebooks and clickers. Tablet notebooks allow the user to mark up their presentation ("inking") and to essentially use the tablet as a smartboard. Another successful technology is the use of response cards or 'clickers'. Faculty create a presentation similar to a bulleted PowerPoint slide. During class, students receive a clicker and 'click' the answer they believe is correct. Once the polling is closed, a chart reflecting the answers is displayed. Prof. Andy Beckerman-Rodau has been using clickers in his classroom and feels they "...are excellent tools that provide real time feedback on the level of student understanding."

Academic Technology will continue to work with UMS in new video capture options and with the Law School's Technology and Legal Education Committee to promote innovative and effective technologies for the faculty in their teaching.

How many Faculty use Clickers?

1. None
2. Some
3. Many
4. All



Teaching Tip: How to Gather Feedback While Taking Attendance

Our first Spring event at CTE was a great success! Eight faculty members came together to share teaching techniques with hot drinks and cookies.

During the event, Laurie Levesque, Associate Dean of the Sawyer Business School, shared how she uses name cards in her class to create a dialogue with her students. Laurie gives each of her students a card that is blank on one side (for students to write their names) and that has a table on the other side where students can offer feedback about each class and where Laurie can keep track of attendance.

She explains, "cards are either given to each

person as my opportunity to greet them individually before class starts, or they are at the front for them to grab on the way in. Those not picked up at the start of class are marked L for late. Later I convert that to an A in both columns for Absent (in pen, before I leave the room)."

The cards are also used for Laurie to gather student impressions of their participation level for each class and are a place where students can communicate one-on-one with their instructor. Laurie further describes the purpose of the cards when she says, "the goal isn't to get the deepest/truest feedback on the course, but rather allow for additional back and forth with each person outside of the regular and post-class conversation."



Laurie Levesque

An example of Laurie's name cards can be downloaded at the CTE website: www.suffolk.edu/cte Just look under "CTE News and Announcements" for the link.

Upcoming Events:

(All events held at CTE on the 12th floor of 73 Tremont unless otherwise noted)

What is Panopto Coursecast and How Can You Use It?
Tuesday, March 1
1:00pm-2:30pm

Teaching with Simulations
Thursday, March 3
11:00am-12:30pm

Writing Across Borders: International Students as Writers
Tuesday, March 8th
1:00pm-2:30pm

Faculty Lunch Series
March 10th
12:00pm-2:00pm

Dealing with Difficult Students
Tuesday, March 22
2:00pm-3:30pm

Safe Zone Training for Faculty
Thursday, April 7th
10:00am-12:00pm

Faculty Lunch Series
April 21st
12:00pm-2:00pm



Work with a CTE Staff Consultant

Individual faculty consultations are designed to provide confidential support for faculty and lecturers who would like to improve their teaching or learn more about teaching strategies and learning theory. Instructors work one-on-one with a CTE staff member based on their own goals and needs.

During an initial meeting, the instructor will outline the issues that they want to explore and the CTE staff member consultant will provide resources, support, and a plan for action that may include a classroom observation, gathering additional feedback from students, reviewing previous evaluations, or meeting regularly for conversations about teaching.

Individual consultations can address a number of teaching issues and concerns including, but not limited to, assessment, active learning, the course design process, and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

To set up an individual consultation, email cdirico@suffolk.edu.

Improve Your Courses with Student Feedback

A Midterm Feedback Session is a confidential method that uses small group discussion among students to provide feedback to the instructor. The process takes about 20-30 minutes with the faculty member out of the classroom on a scheduled day.

Once a Midterm Feedback Session is requested, you will receive a form that allows you to provide us with additional details about your class. A CTE colleague will then visit your class and ask your students to respond to three questions:

1. What aspects of this course ENHANCE your learning?
2. What aspects of this course HINDER your learning?
3. What could YOU (as a student) do to make the course better for your classmates and the teacher?

The information gathered will then be correlated into a confidential report for the instructor. Once the report is ready, a debriefing session is scheduled with a CTE staff member to discuss the results and brainstorm ideas for the class.

Research has shown that faculty who conduct mid-course feedback and have a consultation raise their teaching evaluations and improve learning. To sign up for a midterm feedback session for this semester, call the CTE office at 617-573-8222 or email Christina DiRico at cdirico@suffolk.edu by February 18th.

Save the Dates!

- We invite you to join us at CTE's Annual Spring Speaker Event, held this year on **Tuesday, April 12th**. Come to hear guest speaker Howard Gardner and to celebrate another great year of teaching excellence at Suffolk University!
- The 2011 Technology Symposium, held on **Tuesday, May 17th** will showcase a range of faculty expertise in teaching and technology and celebrate our academic diversity. Guest speaker Christopher Dede will open the day and participants can enter for a chance to win an iPad or Kindle!



Suffolk University
Center for Teaching Excellence
73 Tremont Street 12th Floor
Boston, MA, 02108

Phone: 617.573.8222
Fax: 617.570.4836
E-mail: cdirico@suffolk.edu

Please let us know if you would like to write an article or share an idea or if you have suggestions to make this newsletter more valuable to your teaching.

Professor Profile: Rosa Kim

What drew you into teaching from practicing the law?

I think I was drawn to both for similar reasons. Practicing law and teaching actually have some common characteristics. I chose civil litigation as my field in law primarily because I enjoyed the aspects that were related to advocacy, such as presenting persuasive arguments to the court on behalf of a client. Teaching offers a similar opportunity to present ideas and impart knowledge to an engaged audience. I also love the idea that I can have a positive impact on students and play a role in shaping their learning. I like to think that I have a hand in ultimately making them more effective lawyers.

How do you balance your life? Do you have any tips to help other faculty to balance?

I would love some tips myself! Like all working parents, it's sometimes hard to feel like you're doing justice to both work life and family life, and still reserve a "space" for yourself. I just try to plan and prioritize what I have going on in each sphere, so that I am devoting my time and energy to the things that matter the most. Working in academia provides more ability to achieve this balance; I fully appreciate that.

What do you feel are the challenges in legal education today?

The primary challenge in legal education right now is preparing students for a hyper-competitive market in a slow economy, with the added burden for most students of having to pay back a large amount of loans. A law school can do a wonderful job of providing a great academic experience, but if graduates are unable to secure good jobs upon graduation, there can be a sense that the institution hasn't completely fulfilled its role. I think the challenge is to keep the focus on learning, while addressing and supporting students' concerns about jobs.



Rosa Kim, associate professor of Legal Writing in the Suffolk Law School, earned a BA from Tufts University, an MA from Johns Hopkins University, and a JD from Boston College.

"I chose civil litigation as my field in law primarily because I enjoyed the aspects that were related to advocacy, such as presenting persuasive arguments to the court on behalf of a client. Teaching offers a similar opportunity to present ideas and impart knowledge to an engaged audience."

- Rosa Kim

How do you show students how to apply what they learn in the classroom?

The course I teach, Legal Practice Skills, is precisely geared to giving the students the critical tools to practice law as soon as they are out in the working world. The course is designed to teach the basic lawyering skills of analysis, research, writing and oral advocacy through hands-on assignments that simulate real-world issues and situations. For example, the students must draft a persuasive trial brief, and present oral argument in a mock courtroom setting. It's great to get feedback from former students that these exercises prepared them well for their first jobs. I also try to share my own experiences as a litigator, both positive and negative, to give them a practical view.