

Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

Issue 4 Fall 2011

From The Advisory Board

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High Tech High

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Recommended Citation

Daley, Ben "From The Advisory Board," *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*: Iss. 4 (2011), <http://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss4/1>

FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD

“Hey, did you notice this?”

Ben Daley is the Chief Academic Officer at High Tech High, a group of eleven K12 public charter schools in San Diego, California. He is also a faculty member at the High Tech High Graduate School of Education, the nation’s first graduate school of education fully embedded in a K12 school system.

The noted school reformer Debbie Meier has described her process of creating excellent schools as one of “inviting the students into an adult conversation.” In reading this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, I was most struck by the comments from students about what it feels like to be invited into a conversation with faculty members about teaching and learning. One student noted: “I am honored that the things I say have any value” (Embracing Productive Disruptions). In her reflections her partnership with one faculty member, Ivana Evans stated: “I began with an urge to push my faculty partner towards my thinking about education... I realized how much I learned because my faculty partner pushed back” (From the Student Perspective). Greg Selover found that, “For the first time ... I could imagine that our relationship could be reciprocal, rather than a one-way transmission of research data from student to professor” (Fostering a pedagogy of mutual engagement). Another student realized that “I am a student and there are things my prof might not see; that I have the right to say, “Hey did you notice this?” (Embracing Productive Disruptions).

As Ted Sizer has written, “the students are watching,” and they are noticing what we do and say. One pathway to improving the quality of teaching in our schools and universities is to talk to our students and find out what they are noticing. The examples published in this journal are excellent models for the rest of us for ways to systemically listen to students and to learn from their ideas.

The dialogue between students and faculty articulated in *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* as well as other work done by Alison Cook-Sather has been an inspiration to me over the years to think about how to invite students into the conversation about what makes for effective teaching. At my current institution, the practices emanating from the Teaching and Learning Institute and published in this journal have inspired in our schools several concrete examples of listening to and learning from students.

Student faculty

In our teacher-credentialing program, embedded in our K12 schools, we have high school and middle school students who act as “student faculty” within the program. These students attend class alongside new teachers, consult with teachers in small groups, offer advice, and even lead class sessions. Invariably, at the end of my course, all of the teachers gush about how the best part of the class was hearing the student perspective on what makes for effective teaching. I try not to be offended that the best part of the class was not my considerable pedagogical talents but rather the contributions of grade 6-12 students.

One of the particularly effective ways that student-faculty work with teachers is through “video consultancy protocols.” New teachers who are students in the credentialing program capture video footage from their classroom. They select a three-minute clip of their teaching to share with a small group in class. They show the video to their video group, which includes student faculty, and share a dilemma. Using a structured protocol, colleagues and student faculty watch the video, ask clarifying and probing questions to better understand the dilemma, and then have a conversation about possible solutions. Invariably, after the class is over, the presenting teacher ends up deeply engaged in a conversation with the student faculty about suggested possible courses of action.

This year, some of our schools are experimenting with bringing these video groups into their faculty meetings so that all teachers can benefit from this experience, not just students in the credentialing program.

Student voice in faculty meetings

Last year, Anna Chiles, a Bryn Mawr College graduate, Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) alum and former guest student editor of these pages, completed a summer internship at our schools. Anna met with all of our school leaders and described her experiences working with faculty members through TLI. As a result, a number of our schools have begun including K12 students in much more meaningful ways within faculty meetings.

For example, Robert Kuhl, the school director of High Tech High Media Arts, included high school students in a professional development session on how to teach reading. He began by asking high school students questions such as, “Are you a good reader?” and “What strategies do good readers use?” He videotaped their answers to these questions and compiled their edited responses into a video that faculty watched at a meeting. He also asked high school students to attend the faculty meeting and conducted a “fishbowl” conversation where students talked to one another about effective teaching strategies that have helped them to become better readers. After, faculty discussed what the students said both in the video and in the fishbowl conversation. Many teachers discussed the power of hearing directly from students about what worked best for them.

Last spring, at another faculty meeting, students helped teachers map out their curriculum for the year. Teachers created a shell for the year, showing what projects they planned to work on with students, the essential questions students would explore, the timeline, and what products the students would create. These plans were posted on walls across several classrooms. Students and faculty alike participated in a “gallery walk” of these plans and posted warm and cool feedback, questions, and comments on the plans using sticky notes. Students and faculty then discussed what they had seen. As a result of these conversations, teachers ended up crafting better essential questions and better projects. Students commented that it was cool that teachers “trusted our opinions.”

School Leadership Master's program

Also as a result of Anna's time with us, as well as because of our graduate school faculty's interest in this journal, our graduate school's master's program in school leadership created a new course in the program called "student voice" focused on incorporating student voice into school reform. The final assignment in this course is for graduate students to "put it to practice" and take action in their school around the issue of student voice. One graduate student, for example, created a student action group with a focus on proactively working to avoid student bullying at her school. One of the end products for this action group was the students planning and leading a staff meeting on this topic.

Listening to what students think is not always easy. It takes work and time. Sometimes we don't like what they have to say. Still, we know that our schools will serve our students better if we make the time to listen to what they have to say. We are grateful when they will tell us what they are noticing.