

Using Student Stories in Theoretical Frameworks: A Pedagogical Strategy for Distance Education

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Presentation Notes (p. 1-4) and Handout (p. 5)

Sections: INTRO-EXAMPLES-BENEFITS-VARIATIONS-CONCLUSION

I. INTRO

In every course, there is a set of **basic concepts, frameworks, or theories** that underlie the material. In my distance ed classes, I've had great success with not only making these **concepts explicit** at the beginning, but with **eliciting stories of student's own experiences that relate to and illustrate these basic concepts**.

- Pedagogical strategy to create meaningful interactions in an online environment
- "Start any topic from the lives of the learners." (Curran 1998 p. 185)
- Not only LEEP: Synchronous lectures or asynchronous on bulletin boards or web pages

To elicit student stories that are relevant to the theoretical framework you're teaching...

- Identify concepts that students need to understand
- Design questions to elicit stories that serve as examples or instances of these concepts

II. EXAMPLES

--HANDOUT: DEVELOPMENT EXAMPLE

3 Other Examples:

- Reference: "What do you refer to?" (brilliant example from paper by Charles Curran, survey of 61 superior LIS teachers) then talk about categories of reference materials and resources
- Public Library Youth Services: "Do you remember visiting the public library as a child? Please recount one of your experiences." Fannette Thomas's 5 categories in the historical development of youth services... tell them years these experiences were first available to youth
- Collections: "What have you collected? Did you organize your collection, and if so how?" Information organization, access... In this case, it's particularly fun

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because the instructor will organize this collection of student stories about collection organization 😊

In other words, you can translate this strategy to realms of LIS beyond youth services, as well as to realms of teaching beyond LIS.

III. BENEFITS

4 Major Benefits to Students:

- 1) **Players, not spectators**
 - 2) **Respect**
 - 3) **Analytic skills**
 - 4) **Community**
- 1) Students Are **Players, not Spectators**, from very early on
 - a. Their life experiences are demonstrably relevant.
 - b. Makes their participation real, not “virtual.” Feeling the conceptual value of their participation
 - c. breaking down the “screen watching” mode
 - 2) Shows them your **respect, attention, and responsiveness** immediately
 - a. You use their names, acknowledge them as individuals
 - b. You model respectful behavior—because text-based interactions can have conflict, you demonstrate expectations of respect
 - c. Because many distance ed students are or have been library or information practitioners, can encourage analysis of tacit practitioner knowledge
 - d. You can post along with the students, which shows you share their participation and are willing to reveal something about yourself as well
 - 3) **Analysis** of and/or how to analyze in terms of major course concepts
 - a. You demonstrate the kind of analytic skills that you want them to gain through the course
 - b. Connect theory and practice, conceptual and everyday. Connects the theory you’re introducing to something they’ve experienced in practice. Can emphasize their “user” perspective, and the importance of the user perspective.
 - c. You’re assured that you’ve analyzed at least one thing that is relevant to them
 - 4) Creates community in the online environment through stories
 - a. Ensures that this community is centered on course topics, agenda
 - b. Students talk/post to one another readily: “I had that experience too”

Best Used Early

- Establishes the tone, these benefits...

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- Shows you're completely tuned in by going beyond reading and on to responding, at a time in the course when students aren't yet sure of how much attention you're paying to the web boards...

Benefits to Professors

Instructor response time is used to give information to the whole group, not just one person at a time as via email.

IV. VARIATIONS

What if not all stories fit the framework?

- Talk about *why* these stories don't fit, how these concepts don't cover the entire universe of experience. Opportunity for critical reflection about theoretical frameworks
- Same principle applies if there's one element of your theoretical framework for which no one offered a story. Take time to speculate why this might be, and invite the class to do the same.

Variations:

- 1) Have them categorize their own stories. Drawback: they aren't exposed to an experience of having the professor read their postings carefully. But could be useful later in a course, after you've demonstrated your engagement.
- 2) After you've posted a categorization, offer to let them "talk back" about whether they might place their experiences in a different category, but require them to explain why that story fits in a different category.

Note: not face-to-face

I've tried this in face-to-face classes, and it put students too much on the spot

- Maybe because it was bridging the distance too effectively, seemed too personal
- or maybe because it had the effect of taking away their voices by speaking their stories for them.

V. CONCLUSION

Conclusion: DISTANCE

--especially a problem without physical cues,

--but it's a problem in any pedagogical situation:

how to bridge the distance b/w professor and student, student and material

Using Student Stories in Theoretical Frameworks:

Community This brings the class together like nothing else I've tried, because

- you know something about each of them,
- they know something about each other,
- you've shown that their experiences have theoretical relevance to the material.

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Players, not spectators—Respect—Analytic skills

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Theoretical Framework (for youth services):
Piaget’s Developmental stages

AGE	STAGE	TASK
0-2 yrs	Sensorimotor	Explore relation between sensation and physical
2-7 yrs	Pre-operational	Uses symbols to represent objects (language)
7-11 yrs	Concrete operations	Rational thought, logic
11+ yrs	Formal operations	Abstract, hypothetical reasoning

Question for Child Development: “Can you remember a learning experience or moment from your own childhood? Please describe this experience and what you learned.”

Example of What Students See:

THEORETICAL CATEGORIES (from Piaget)	STUDENT STORIES
Sensorimotor	--learning to tie shoes (Kathy) --haircuts, self-given and otherwise (Katie H.)
Pre-operational	--reading, writing, drawing symbolically (Lisa) --playing with “codes” (Drew)
Concrete operations	--making guesses, “what happens if I drop this down the stairs” (Tanya)
Formal Operations	--making arguments, justifying actions (Kelly) --self-observation, values and morality (Jackie)

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