Teaching For Success

The Curriculum of Success: Part 2

17th Year

ALL NEW

Building a Curriculum of Success: Strategies and Applications

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*A*ll success begins with right thinking and the desire for positive change, combined with the commitment to acquire an optimistic and disciplined thinking mode—a strategy necessary to effect the desired change.

*T*he TFS "Curriculum of Success," composed of three courses, was introduced in the previous issue. This curriculum is designed to help you realize greater success in your teaching and personal life and provide ideas for you to pass on to your students to aid them in their studies. It consists of three courses:

❏ Success 101: Principles and Foundations
❏ Success 102: Strategies and Applications
❏ Success 103: Tools and Rules

This curriculum is an outgrowth of my 16 years of higher education teaching coupled with another 17 years of writing, studying, and publishing success materials for faculty. I've used these principles, strategies, and tools to produce desired outcomes in the classroom and to enrich my business and personal life.

This month the focus is on the strategies and applications of the TFS Success Principles. The discussion will be restricted to the professional sphere of life. While there will be some overlap with three other major success areas—relationships, financial well-being, and growth of wisdom—my intent is to discuss ideas that are most applicable to achieving professional goals in the fields of teaching and learning.

Success 102: Strategies and Applications

The major learning outcome of this course is to discover how to apply each of the foundational laws of success discussed in Success 101. The first learning task of this course is to clarify exactly what specific changes you want to implement, for success strategies are most effective when there is definiteness of purpose and clarity of goals. Strategies are a set of action steps designed to close the gap between where you are and where you want to go.

But you can't choose the best strategy if you don't have a thorough knowledge of the strategies available to you and how they are best applied.

Right Thinking

All success begins with right thinking and the desire for positive change combined with the commitment to acquire an optimistic and disciplined thinking mode—a strategy necessary to effect the desired change. Right thinking could be characterized as being honestly and clearly in touch with your innermost sense of yourself and possessing the ability to clearly express your needs and desires to yourself and others.

Right thinking equals inner optimism. Nurturing optimism is like having a reserve of nuclear fuel that powers your internal furnaces and radiates positive energy.

A sound success strategy founded on optimism rather than pessimism will more likely result in the completion of a set of action steps. For example, I learned soon after starting Pentronics Publishing that if "talking isn't teaching," then certainly, talking isn't selling either. To be successful, I had to study selling as seriously as I had studied any academic subject needed for a degree or teaching a course—an inside change was necessary.

However, it is often the case that when one learning step is mastered, the need for another is revealed. I acquired sales knowledge, but implementing this new knowledge to create sales success required an enhanced self-image coupled with increased patience and persistence.

The transformation from instructor (one who is often in the spotlight) to sales professional (one who encourages others to take center stage and communicate their wants and needs) required both interior and exterior changes. I didn't succeed in this new role until I achieved a new kind of right thinking.

Fundamentally, right thinking means accepting that thoughts are things, and a basic tenet of right thinking is to think always about what you want, not about what you don't want. Practically, this is extremely difficult to achieve, but there are tools that will make it easier; these will be mentioned in part three of this series, coming in the May 2005 issue.

Take a moment right now to get started on building a strategy of right thinking. Start with a personal assessment designed to encourage your ultimate career and personal goals to bubble to the surface of your consciousness. Then, look at the gap between where you are and where you want to go, and list the interior and exterior changes you will need to make.

How does right thinking apply to students? It suggests that students should be able to explain why they are in each of their classes and what they expect

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to accomplish. In addition, students should also determine how much effort and commitment they are willing to devote to reaching their academic goals. Student success strategy questions can serve as the basis for fruitful discussions at the beginning of and periodically throughout the term.

Accepting Sfumato and Reality

Sfumato, as defined by Michael J. Gelb in his *How to Think like Leonardo da Vinci* (1998), refers to "a willingness to embrace ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty." *Sfumato* and the acceptance of responsibility and willingness to see the truth or reality of a complex situation is another strategic component of right thinking.

Leonardo da Vinci recognized the extreme importance of being able to appreciate and become friends with uncertainty and paradox in order to see the truth of a situation and act accordingly.

Even today, much of life is still a mystery, and things that are accepted as ultimate truth may be overturned completely by new information tomorrow. If you have to maniacally defend your views and believe you have the right answers all of the time, you may find the right thinking success strategy for opening up life's possibilities quite a challenge.

Just as we learn to stretch and exercise to retain anatomical flexibility, we need to learn how to nurture flexibility and adroitness of thought to take in the dynamics of life without being overwhelmed.

Right thinking skills are absolutely necessary for success in teaching and learning. Without instructor-

led discussions of *Sfumato*, students may become stuck in perceiving small-group and whole-class learning activities as merely a convenient opportunity to persuade everyone to hold a single point of view.

Clarity of Purpose

Can you describe exactly why you teach? Is it clear to you just what you can provide your students? Do you have specific outcomes in mind for each class and learning activity? Have you made a list of unique experiences, achievements, understandings, etc. that you can bring to your class?

This list should suggest a teaching strategy that will make use of your unique gifts. Using these personal gifts will help make the learning environment meaningful and beneficial to your students.

These are called points of intensity, because these points define the line of your passion and special interests. When your teaching is consistent with your special skills and interests, it will be especially effective.

Clarity of purpose is not an area of success to be taken lightly. There are only so many hours in a day and only so many minutes in each class. Time is the currency of success. Clarity of purpose helps us make wiser time and energy decisions. The goal is to maximize return on energy (ROE). You have only so much time and energy to devote a class, and so do your students.

Rigid instructional time limits affect most instructors. Therefore, within these limits the highest and best use of each learning minute must be determined. The instructor with the highest degree of clarity of instructional goals can make best choices.

*C*larity of purpose is not an area of success to be taken lightly. There are only so many hours in a day and only so many minutes in each class. Time is the currency of success. Understanding exactly what students need is crucial.

International business consultant Brian Tracy tells a wonderful story about an engineer called in to diagnose the ill health of a nuclear power plant. After a day of taking readings, he marked a big black "X" on one of the control gauges and left. He then submitted a invoice for $10,000. The plant manager contacted the engineer-consultant and questioned him as to how in the world it could possibly cost $10,000 to mark an "X" on a gauge. The engineer replied it cost $1 to mark the gauge and $9,999 to know which gauge to mark.

The job of college instructor also includes responsibility for knowing which learning activities to mark with an "X" and which ones to circle "OK." This is clarity of purpose in a nutshell. Students with clarity of purpose will know why they are choosing to attend class and complete assignments rather than play video games, spend time on the Internet, or do a thousand other things that won't produce the desired results.

Finally, clarity of purpose is not a one-time, all-done-and-on-to-the-next-task decision. Successful people get up in the morning and go to bed at night with clarity of purpose on their mind. Such thought patterns should be as ingrained as a brushing your teeth. In addition, clarity-of-purpose decisions should be reviewed for relevancy and accuracy as often as practical.

How to Better Evaluate Student Drawings

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I was fortunate to take an education course on instructional design and evaluation procedures. This course taught me how to prepare instructional activities and evaluate and grade students' drawings.

Many of my students and colleagues ask why I studied education after finishing an undergraduate degree in construction management. They are curious to know the correlation between construction, architecture, designs, and education.

I tell them that all of my professors were experts in the field they taught, but they were lacking in their ability to teach and understand the nature of learning and students needs.

I have been teaching architecture, interior design, and construction-related courses for many years, and I have found that evaluating drawings to assign a grade is not an easy task. When I attended college I noticed that none of my professors had a formal evaluation procedure for grading drawings; they would assign a grade without having any concrete basis for the evaluation—a very poor teaching practice.

When I started to teach, I wanted to create a better evaluation system for my classes.

I was fortunate to take an education course on instructional design and evaluation procedures. This course taught me how to prepare instructional activities and evaluate and grade students' drawings.

My evaluation approach reduces and, in some cases, completely eliminates misunderstandings and arguments between students and the instructor. I designed an evaluation sheet to evaluate and grade my students' drawings. The information on the evaluation sheet was the result of my past teaching experience,

record keeping, and problems that occurred during the evaluations of architectural drawings.

There are many advantages to having an evaluation sheet to grade student drawings. Some of these advantages are listed below:

❏ All students know the expectations of the instructor.

❏ Students are able to use the evaluation sheet to check off each task as it is completed.

❏ The number of points earned is clearly related to each task.

❏ Students can calculate an approximate grade before they turn in their drawings.

❏ An evaluation sheet based on task mastery reduces or eliminates arguments.

❏ Student performance and grades improve with the use of a properly designed projected evaluation sheet.

❏ Less time spent answering grading questions means I have more time for direct instruction.

❏ Drawing evaluation time is reduced substantially once the evaluation sheet is constructed and tested.

❏ The evaluation sheet also functions as a learning tool as students use the sheet to become familiar with project requirements.

What to Include on an Evaluation Sheet

Begin by composing a list of performance expectations or standards for each assignment, then generate a task checklist from these standards.

Assign a maximum number of points that can be earned from each task.

Note: The sample evaluation sheet available on the TFS Web site is designed to evaluate a foundation plan of a residential one-story dwelling (also called a ranch) with a basement and two-car garage that is drawn on a board (also called manual drafting). This evaluation sheet could be modified for a CAD drawing system too.

Correction notes

Correction notes are also shown on this evaluation sheet to save time when correcting drawings. Instead of writing lengthy comments about missing information, you only have to write a letter that refers to a specific error or omission. For example, if a student forgets to draw a beam pocket, I simply write the reference code "N" for this error and then circle the area where he/she is supposed to draw a beam pocket.

You can see a sample evaluation sheet with error codes in Adobe Acrobat format at: http://teachingforsuccess.com/IssueSupport2/IssueSuptIndex.html

Respect and the Toledo Experience

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Something was wrong, so I decided to get another perspective. Luckily a friend was taking a graduate course and had some time to talk with me.

1 find that whenever there's some trait I can't stand in another person it's usually because I can't stand that trait in myself. Consider an incident that happened a few months ago in Toledo, Spain:

"*Disculpe la molesta*" (Pardon me for the inconvenience), I asked in Spanish, "but where is the Alcazar?"

"*Que*? *Que*?" (What? What?), the person responded. "Oh, you mean the Alcazar! Just walk down this street until you find the building with two lions in front," he said, pointing down the steep hill. After walking down more than two blocks I remembered reading that the Alcazar is on the top of the highest hill in Toledo. I stopped and asked somebody else.

Unpleasant Truth

The truth came out. I marched back up the hill, getting angrier with every step. How could this person be so disrespectful and purposely give me the wrong directions? How could he? I would never do anything like that....

Or would I?

Every new school term my classes fill with new faces, and sometime during the first week, like clockwork, a student will raise his or her hand and ask a question demonstrating complete ignorance of this and every previous math course.

"How can anyone who doesn't understand such a basic concept be in this class?" I think.

"This person must have been placed in the wrong course."

Believing that honesty is the best (and most helpful) policy, I say, "We covered this material last semester and the semester before. I can't spend time explaining it again in class."

Then I'd get right to the point. "Are you sure you're in the right class?" In either case, I usually never see this student again. "Probably in the wrong class after all," I think.

Since my classes seemed to be getting smaller and more staid, I eventually decided to change from direct confrontation to direct avoidance. My answer became, "I don't want to take class time to answer that question, so let me explain it after class or during my office hours." After class the response I usually got was, "Oh that's OK, I figured it out by myself."

"Great," I would think; yet I still found my classes staid, unresponsive, and progressively decreasing in size.

Was there something wrong here?

Something was wrong, but I wasn't sure what. When I talked to some colleagues I got little insight, so I decided to get another perspective. Luckily a friend was taking a graduate course and had some time to talk with me.

"Have you ever been in a class at the beginning of a semester, been asked a question that you should have known the answer to, and then been told by the teacher, 'See me after class or during my office hours'?"

"Oh sure, it used to happen to me all the time. All I needed was a few words to clear the cobwebs, but instead, the 'See me after class' routine made me feel like the instructor didn't have time for my question. I used to get angry, because I felt put down and disrespected."

Déjà vu. It hit me. Here I was, committing acts of disrespect similar to the one I so detested when it was committed against me in Toledo. I finished catching up with my friend, thanked him, and went home a much humbler person.

Nowadays, when, just like clockwork, the question occurs, I stifle my previous responses, saying, "That's a good question," and proceed to answer it. Invariably, after a few sentences of explanation, the light goes on and I hear, "Oh yeah, now I remember." I usually complete the explanation anyway. The longer I teach the more I think this is the way to proceed when this situation comes up. It seems to minimize students' fear while maximizing teachers' respect for the student.

When I set this precedent early in the term, I notice two things. First, the class is alive, eager to ask questions and eager to participate. Second, taking time to truthfully answer students' questions shows my respect for them. It feels good knowing that I no longer treat students the way I was treated in Toledo.

Are Your Students Creeping or Bounding?

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Being a successful instructor or student today includes being a good "infotective" on the Internet. A quick evaluation of your Web consciousness should answer the question of which search engines you use and why.

Getting to know the differences between the three different types of search engines is the best way to approach the search for answers.

Think of any search engine as a simple tool for sorting and organizing information on the World Wide Web. We all are used to hearing the names Yahoo! and Excite when we think of gathering data over the Internet. They are actually fantastic examples of Internet directories, the first type of search engine. Yahoo! started out as a directory, but now it augments its listings with search results from Google, a real search engine.

Directories are best used when you are hunting for information in a general category, since they rate and sequence information from the most related and popular websites first. They are good for when you need just a few good hits quickly. Directories use real people who review and index the links on their databases. They require websites to adhere to rigid guidelines in order to be included in their indexes, concentrating on the information content and style of a Web page. As a result, directories contain a comparatively small number of high-quality information links per search.

Think before you search; the search engine you use can make a difference.

Real Engines of Knowledge

Real search engines are the second type of online information-gathering tool. They are best used when the data you are looking for is very specific. Software programs called spiders are used by real search engines to minutely crawl over huge amounts of Web information while locating the significant data. InfoSeek and AltaVista are examples of real search engines.

Metacrawlers are the third type of search engine, most useful when you want to compare results quickly. They discover documents in a unique and powerful way, by using metasearch software technology to encompass all of the Net's major search engines at once. A good example is Metacrawler http://metacrawler.com, which

has added full Boolean search term competence, including AND, OR, AND, NOT, ADJ, and NEAR.

Result frequency is calculated by taking the total number of times your keywords appear in the Web document and dividing it by the total number of words in the document. WebCrawler http://www.webcrawler.com is another site for metasearching, and yields pertinent results in the form of lists of hyperlinks or summaries, as preferenced by the user.

As you investigate information on the Internet, remember to think before you search, and use the following link to see how your favorite search engine rates, as well as to decide which search engine you need to use. Go to: http://searchenginewatch.internet.com/reports/mediametrix.html.

The newest TFS QuickCourse, "Harassment in the Academic Setting" has been just released. Ask your college to purchase a copy for you and your colleagues.

Super Idea Contest: Win a $300 Cash Prize

Win a cash award; enjoy the recognition of being published; grow your career, and contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education. Contest entries must reach TFS by May 31, 2005, to be considered.

Oh! This is way too easy!

Your teaching improvement idea could win you a cash award in the 2005 *TFS* Super Ideas Contest. In the SuperIdea category, First Place wins $300, Second Place $200, and Third Place $100. In the QuickTip category, First Place nets $100, Second Place $50 and Third Place $25. There are two contest idea categories: SuperIdeas and QuickTips.

Be sure to go to: http://teachingforsuccess.com/Contests2/ContestInfo.html for the contest rules and more information.

How to Prepare Your Students for Essay Exams

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Ask a group of college freshmen which they would prefer to take: an "objective" test (multiple-choice, matching, or even short answer) or an essay exam, and the response is overwhelming—anything but an essay exam! When asked why, they quickly answer:

"In essay exams, I actually have to think."

"With objective tests, I can just guess."

"I don't mind writing papers, but I panic when it's a timed essay test."

My mission includes preparing students for a variety of academic writing tasks. As student responses indicate, they don't feel confident or prepared to write timed, in-class exam essays—even if they can write excellent out-of-class essays. That's why I teach practical strategies for approaching the dreaded essay exam. At the end of the unit, not only do the students take a graded essay test, but the exam tests them on—you guessed it—how to take an in-class essay exam.

Students know that the exam for this unit will test them on the material presented in the textbook chapter, lecture, and class discussion. Learning aids include a study guide with potential exam questions.

Many students wonder why teachers put themselves and their students through the torture of an essay exam. To answer this question, I facilitate a discussion that helps the students to understand the importance of critical thinking skills at the college level. I emphasize that teachers want to see their students thinking out problems, articulating ideas in their own words, organizing information, making connections between ideas, offering examples and supporting details from the course, and applying concepts to new situations.

When students understand teachers' expectations it changes the way students approach the essay exam. Instead of writing an impressively worded but vacuous essay, they focus on demonstrating their knowledge and presenting their own insights.

The strategies also reduce test anxiety. Most students are so concerned about the time constraints that they neglect to plan. This causes them produce a weak essay that lacks focus, organization, and specifics.

Three Planning Tasks

I teach students to complete three tasks in the essay planning phase:

First, **understand the question**: I give examples of directive words, and I demonstrate how annotating the question makes important words and phrases pop off the page to provide them with focus.

Next, **make a list of the main points** to cover, or a scratch outline: Jotting down terms and examples ahead of time means the student doesn't have to try to remember them while trying to compose the essay.

Students need to be reminded that the research for this paper came from studying the course materials, so they should be prepared to include as much of it as possible and appropriate. However, using only the margin of the paper for their quick outline keeps them from going into great detail on the outline and consequently taking too much time away from the actual essay.

Lastly, **write the thesis first**: This keeps the essay focused. They should include as much of the wording as possible from the exam's question or prompt. It can take several class periods to teach these skills, but I believe it is time well spent. Spending a good portion of class time on the planning phase reinforces its importance in producing a quality exam essay; if you rush through it in class, students will rush through it during the exam. They need practice in small groups with realistic, multi-discipline exam questions.

Exam Writing Strategies

In addition to planning, I teach strategies for writing the actual essay—what I call the **essential components of a successful exam essay**:

- ❏ **Thesis**: I emphasize how easy it is to borrow wording from the exam prompt and how important it is to answer the question directly.

- ❏ **Organization and structure**: Use clear topic sentences to start paragraphs, use strong transitions from point to point, and sum up with a brief conclusion.

- ❏ **Supporting details**: Remind students that an essay exam is, after all, an exam. Incorporating information from class (textbooks, lectures, discussions, and projects) as much as possible will demonstrate their learning.

- ❏ **Evidence of original and critical thinking**: The students must demonstrate how well they can analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and otherwise critically examine the ideas presented to them. Students should apply course concepts to new situations, come up with original examples, and make connections between ideas.

How to Prepare Your Students for Essay Exams

Time Considerations

Since time is always on their mind, I have to emphasize the importance of allowing some time at the end of the exam session to proofread. It doesn't even occur to many students that they can (much less should!) review their essay and make minor corrections before turning it in for a grade. To illustrate my point, I have the class free-write on a selected topic. I then ask how many students would be willing to turn it in to be formally graded—including on grammar and mechanics—without an opportunity to proofread. I don't usually get many takers.

Reinforcement

To wrap up the unit, I have the students work in groups to answer the questions on the study guide I provided at the beginning of the unit (simple questions like, "Why do teachers assign essay exams?" "Identify the three steps you should take to plan an in-class essay," and, "Describe the components of a successful in-class essay"). I encourage them to paraphrase their lecture notes into a more condensed version—a useful study strategy for any type of test.

Between the textbook, lecture notes, group work, class discussions, and the review sheet, my students feel more confident about entering an essay exam situation. The questions I give them on the essay exam are similar to the ones they've studied in class, so that they can practice demonstrating the concepts they are also describing.

Finally, the strategies for taking an in-class essay exam are reinforced when I hand back the graded exams. After the students review my comments and ask individual questions, I remind them of the main strategies and describe the problems that occurred most often (for example, not reading the instructions carefully can cause students to lose easy points). The students then write a brief self-evaluation identifying which specific strategies they found to be most helpful for the exam and why, and what they hope to do differently or better next time they take an essay exam.

Teaching strategies for approaching, planning, and writing an in-class, timed essay empowers students on many levels. It's time well spent! ✴

Building a Curriculum of Success: Strategies

Is Success Serendipitous?

Success seen from a distance sometimes looks like an instantaneous event that befalls some lucky folks as easily as they might expect to receive a birthday gift each year. For others, success seemingly cannot be coaxed to come anywhere near them. The tendency is to think of success solely in terms of having luck, being in the right place at the right time, or enjoying fortunate serendipity. The truth is the more things you do, the luckier you tend to be. (This is the Law of Large Numbers at work.)

Success is many things to many people. However, each person chooses his or her own way of defining it. For me, success is the ability to set and reach a desired goal.

The most effective general strategy seems to include the following elements: adherence to right thinking, definiteness of purpose, workable plans and strategies, confidence in one's ability to carry out these plans, cultivation of the ability to bounce back from setbacks, and fostering the courage to learn—especially difficult, complex, and time-consuming subjects. Furthermore, the characteristics of patience and perserverance cannot be overlooked for their contributions to an overall success strategy.

Zero-Based Thinking

Another powerful strategy is zero-based thinking. According to zero-based thinking, it's not enough to repeat an action just because it worked yesterday. Zero-based thinking requires one to justify anew the need to continue a course of action at the start of every new planning period—which for teachers could be annually or even every school term. The difficulty of this strategy stems from the need for continuous outcome or performance evaluation in order to know exactly what should be kept and what should be discarded. When zero-based thinking is applied to teaching, all components of the course are examined for sufficiency. Only when an item passes the latest muster is it used again.

In the April 2005 issue of *TFS*, you will find a set of very specific and useful success rules and tools designed to help you determine the best method of solving problems and achieving the outcomes you desire in your teaching and personal life. These tools can be taught to your students as needed, too. ✴