

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP · FALL 2005
ASSIGNMENT 8

JOHN KERL

It has been suggested that we do more work with the content of the courses you are teaching. Describe one (or more) such assignment/activity that would improve the effectiveness of your teaching next semester.

Perhaps the most effective part of 597T was observations. I would suggest that we do these just as this semester, *and* earlier in the semester as well — perhaps in the first week or two. Personally I found that (poor handwriting notwithstanding) I like myself as an instructor. But, it took me a while to reach that level of self-confidence: the first few weeks I was terrified. Maybe everyone must go through this baptism by fire, but doing more observations early on would alleviate some of the terror.

Which of the math 597 assignments for fall semester were most effective? Elaborate.

Personally, I found the rule-of-four assignment (#6) most interesting. This got to the heart of pedagogy: *how* we do what we do. There are some obviously bad things to do in front of a classroom, most of which don't warrant much discussion: smart teachers won't do dumb things, and ineffective teachers will stubbornly persist in their maladaptive techniques no matter what we say in 597T. Once one excludes the outright-bad teaching methods, there are many not-so-bad ways to teach. Assignment #6 addressed the important question of how to replace *good* teaching with *great* teaching.

Which assignments were least effective? Elaborate.

All the assignments were effective. To pick a least effective assignment, though, I would nominate #7, on policies. I felt that I simply didn't have much to say here. Keep in mind, though, that I felt that our in-class discussion for #7 (along with Tina's presentation) was outstanding.

What general suggestions do you have for math 597 for spring semester (or next year)?

For better or worse, despite the scheduled topic and despite the instructors' good intentions, 597T is mostly a B.S. session. This is not all bad, since it is important that we be able to discuss whatever is going on and vent about various frustrations. In particular, when we talked about classroom management, it appeared that there were several people who had felt that theirs was the only out-of-control classroom. It is important that new instructors feel they have a safe place to talk about their problems and solicit help from others.

However, since there are several dozen people and only one can speak at once, necessarily most people are listening while one is talking. Human nature being what it is, a few people do most of the talking and most of the people contribute little or nothing. (At the same time, I do value the fact that most of the time is spent with class members talking, instead of having the instructor(s) lecture us.) I would suggest three things:

- (1) Refuse to answer off-topic questions. Do this even if the off-topic question appears to be the only question being offered. Wait a few seconds. Someone will come around.
- (2) Don't accept further input from the most active participants. Do this in the constructive context of giving others a change to contribute, rather than in a punitive context. Do this even when no one else seems to want to talk. Wait a few seconds; someone will talk, if given a chance. Call on quiet-but-interesting people by name.

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(3) Break up into groups much more often, if not every class period. This will give more people a chance to participate.