

# Teaching at USMA

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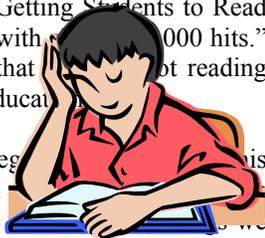
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<http://www-internal.dean.usma.edu/centers/cte>

## Getting Students to Read the Textbook

Recently a USMA faculty member contacted me to ask for advice about getting students to read the textbook. He commented, "Just for kicks, I typed 'Getting Students to Read Textbooks' into Google and came up with 1,000 hits." That number of hits should confirm that not reading textbooks is a significant problem in education.

Before presenting various strategies to solve this problem, perhaps it would be useful to explore one reason why cadets may tend to ignore textbooks and inadvertently do to create the problem.



- **Is your classes dominated by PowerPoint slides that present all necessary information in a digested form for your students?**

If students believe that they are "getting" all they need from the class session and the instructor's presentation of the material (and this is confirmed for them by the grades they are receiving in the course), they will not read the textbook regardless how much they are exhorted to do so.

Undergraduates tend to measure learning by the grades they receive. Hence, if they are getting acceptable grades (from their perspective) without having to read the textbook, they readily assume that they are learning satisfactorily.

### New Approaches Needed

Assuming that you want your students to read the textbook, research indicates that the traditional practice of simply listing the assignments on the course syllabus is no longer effective. Many of today's college students don't believe the course text is necessary at all, as is illustrated in many of those "Google" sources that begin by providing strategies for getting students to buy the textbook! Clearly, a student who doesn't buy the book  
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### Carnegie Perspectives

## Building a Better Conversation about Learning

By Pat Hutchings

One of my colleagues here at the Carnegie Foundation has been exploring the different "forums" for work on teaching and learning in higher education. What Mary Taylor Huber has uncovered in her research is an impressive array of such occasions, bringing faculty together by department or discipline, across the campus, and in national networks and scholarly communities. "What has been surprising," she writes, "is not only how many forums there are, but how surprised people seem to be to find this out." Huber's findings are notable because much of the rhetoric over the last decade (and I confess I've contributed to it) has portrayed teaching as largely private work that faculty don't talk much about. Clearly that situation is changing.

Consider, for example, the energetic conversations and communities that have grown up around various teaching approaches. Faculty interested in collaborative learning--where students learn from one another in structured small groups--can now find colleagues on just about every campus in the country, as well as a growing body of literature. For those interested in learning communities--arrangements that link courses in ways that help students connect what they learn in different contexts--a national resource center located at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, brings together the most exciting people and practices in the country. For other faculty, it's problem-based learning that has captured their interest, and thanks to important initiatives on several campuses there are now national conferences  
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### Also in this issue:

- **Next Brown Bag sessions - see page 2**
- **Are you interested in getting published? - see page 4**
- **Next TALENT Conference - see page 4**

**Reminder:** Nominations for the Apgar Award are due to the CTE by COB, Monday, 10 May

## Building a Better Conversation about Learning

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And publications on that approach. Service learning, too, has its champions: Campus Compact brings together institutions committed to service learning, and the American Association for Higher Education has recently issued nineteen discipline-based publications exploring how and what students learn through our engagement with the community.

These developments represent real progress. Teaching, like any craft or art, advances when people find like-minded colleagues to work with, review their efforts, and push them to the next stages of thinking. The communities that have grown up around different teaching approaches are doing wonderful and important work.

Like many good things, however, these evolving communities present what (as I learned from an essay by Lisa Ruddick in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* a couple of years ago) the Tibetan Buddhists refer to as the "near enemy," the idea that "any virtue has a bad cousin." The bad cousin in this case--the downside of these encouraging developments--is the potential for a kind of insularity and balkanization, with the various teaching camps each going their own direction, in isolation from others.

The problem is dramatized by a comment I heard from an administrator at a large research university. "The problem on my campus," she said, "is not that there's nothing going on around teaching agendas. It's that there are so many different things it's impossible to connect them all--or even to be aware of them." That's too bad because faculty can learn a lot from colleagues who teach and think about teaching differently.

It's not, mind you, that faculty aren't interested in drawing from the widest possible range of classroom approaches. But higher education's efforts to improve teaching often are organized around discrete pedagogies (the campus decides, say, to adopt problem-based learning or to put a special focus on service learning). The various efforts attract different people, meet at different times, and depend on different funding sources. What's missing are structures and habits for exchange across the emergent communities of conversation about teaching and learning. Such exchange would lead to a healthy cross-fertilization of practices and to a greater awareness of common underlying principles that can and should shape the use of a wide range of approaches.

And here is where the movement for a scholarship of teaching and learning comes into play. Instead of beginning with a commitment to this or that approach, the scholarship of teaching and learning begins with questions about how and under what circumstances students learn, and with a commitment to inquiry and evidence about those questions. It invites faculty to bring their habits, skills, and values as scholars to their work as teachers. Thus, faculty using different classroom approaches (and coming from different disciplines and institutional settings) can work together to build a greater collective intelligence about the best ways to promote student learning in the varied and unpredictable circumstances of teaching today. Seen in this way, the scholarship of teaching and learning is not a separate, self-standing initiative but a set of principles that can undergird and connect diverse approaches to

Here's an opportunity for the kind of conversation Pat Hutchings is talking about. Come to think of it, the ability to pull things together (teaching camps, curricular developments, reform efforts of various kinds) into a more integrated whole is a pretty good test of any new educational initiative.

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*Carnegie Perspectives, published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, is a series of commentaries that explore different ways to think about educational issues. These pieces are presented with the hope that they contribute to the conversation and are reprinted here with permission. The foundation invites responses at [CarnegiePresident@carnegiefoundation.org](mailto:CarnegiePresident@carnegiefoundation.org).*



### This month's Brown Bag sessions



Thursday, April 22 and Friday, 23 April

At noon in Thayer 120

#### **CLASSROOM INTERACTION PATTERNS** Presented by COL Barney Forsythe

Have you ever wondered why the great discussion you wanted to have in class ended up with you doing all the talking? One possible explanation is that the cadets weren't prepared. But another explanation has to do with the way in which you structured the interaction. During this session, we will learn to use a framework for facilitating classroom interactions that, when applied properly, can help teachers make their active learning strategies more effective. Participants will learn how to analyze and organize verbal interactions among classroom participants (students and the teacher) in order to achieve desired learning outcomes. Specific topics will include recitation, Socratic dialogue, discussion, and questioning techniques.

# Getting Students to Read the Textbook

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doesn't believe that reading it is necessary. In addition, even those students who *do* buy and read the text often have such limited experience learning from textbooks that they will skim assigned readings too superficially and fail to glean facts or concepts that are important for learning.\*

Thus, undergraduates today need assistance to accomplish the cognitive tasks involved in reading the text. While instructional techniques may vary by discipline, two things appear to be constant—the need for preparation for the reading assignment and for processing the material from the reading effectively for learning.\*

## Scaffolding the Reading Process

The support instructors offer to students to help them read effectively is called “scaffolding.”

One of the most common means for providing scaffolding is to turn the lesson “upside down.” That is, rather than have students come to the reading “cold” before a lesson, the instructor provides some information prior to the assigned reading. Since reading comprehension is linked to the background knowledge of the reader, the idea is to help students link the assigned reading to something they already know through a brief presentation or discussion. For example, an EV203 instructor (physical geography) might say near the end of a lesson on weather:

“We’ve been looking at weather and its importance in a host of situations, and in our next lesson, we’re going to focus on climate. How would you describe the distinction between weather and climate?”

There might be a brief discussion, followed by the advice, “In the reading for next class, you should focus on [one or two things].” Or, “From your reading, a critical question you should be able to answer about climate is. . . .”

The nature of the scaffolding should be determined by the nature of the reading, especially its level of difficulty. For example, MAJ LaBranche of D/G&EnE learned from cadets in his surveying class that they found the reading dense and difficult. So this semester, MAJ LaBranche began using a more structured form of scaffolding. He provides incomplete outlines for each lesson for the cadets to complete during their reading. The purpose is to help them identify the key points so that they will begin to understand how to read more effectively. He has asked cadets about these outlines (which are not graded and earn no points), and their response has been generally positive. One cadet’s response summarizes the value most of the cadets find in the outlines (and what any form of scaffolding should accomplish):

*I think the outlines are good for several reasons:*

*-they can be done in a reasonable amount of time*

*- it gets me reading the material*

*- it allows me to focus my reading on what is most important.*

Another scaffolding technique is to provide students with a “quiz” on the reading material that they have to answer by citing the text. For example, if the quiz is true/false, the student would have to justify a “true” statement by a quotation and page number from the text; a “false” statement must cite a quotation from the text that would render the statement true, along with the page number.

The idea is not that these scaffolding activities are graded but that they are used to provide support for the students’ reading, helping them identify the important points of the lesson. Scaffolding ideally should connect the reading to the class lesson, so instructors who create scaffolding activities should consider how they might use them in class. For example, in the past when I have taught a literature class and might want to focus on character development, I would ask the students to bring to class their “cast” for a movie from this book or short story, and in class, I have three or four students put their cast on the board, and the class discusses which actor/actress they think is most appropriate for the part and why.

Another scaffolding technique that can be linked to a class activity is known as the Cognitive Map. This is a technique that can be used with any reading assignment. The students complete the “map” [see sample below] with their reading. In class, the students are divided into groups of 3-4, and the group (under an assigned leader) compares and discusses their responses to the questions as the instructor circulates to observe, answer questions, monitor the groups, etc. ANY questions can be used for this activity (depending on the course, reading assignment, and amount of time the instructor wants to spend on the activity). The group must come up with ONE response for #5—i.e., the activity culminates in each group posing ONE question for the instructor (thus the individuals in the group must decide which of their questions is the most important to be posed in class). The balance of the class session would be spent on instructor/cadet dialogue about the group questions.

### Sample Cognitive Map

*[Remember that the number and nature of the questions is entirely up to the individual instructor.]*

1. Briefly state the author's main point in this essay. That is, specify and explain the author's message.
2. Name the most interesting idea that you acquired from this reading and explain why that idea interests you.
3. Name ONE thing that you already knew that was reinforced by this essay.
4. Write down ONE thing from this reading that can apply to your own experience--past, present, or future.
5. Write a specific question about this reading that you think would be important to discuss as a class

Obviously, some techniques are better for certain types of courses and reading assignments, but the point is that an activity that provides support and direction for students’ reading and that links to the classroom experience is most likely to get students engaged in reading the textbook. As MAJ LaBranche observed with his cadets in surveying, their frustration with the text was the primary reason they weren’t reading, and that is true for many students♦

*In next month’s newsletter, we’ll present some ways that the*

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\* One example of such processing was the Teaching Tip by MAJ Cowher of D/History in last month’s newsletter.

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GETTING PUBLISHED?**

**DO YOU WANT TO IMPROVE THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH YOUR CADETS AND YOURSELF?**

If so, you will want to make sure to attend our academic luncheon

***Celebrating Teaching***

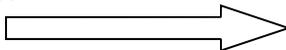
on **Monday, 17 May at noon** in the West Point Club Ballroom where our guest speaker, Dr. Kay Gillespie, will present a talk titled

***Classroom Research and You – Why? How? And Then What?***

*During this presentation, we will look at the benefits of engaging in classroom research and ways of conducting it, inclusive of practical strategies and examples. Finally, we will take these efforts a step further and consider the possibilities of disseminating our results to the higher education community at large.*

For the importance of this topic in higher education today, see the Carnegie Foundation essay that begins on page 1.

Tickets for the luncheon are \$10 and are available from the CTE or your department liaison on the CTE Advisory Committee



**“Learning in the Information Age”  
of our next TALENT\* Conference**

a one-day regional event for colleges and universities.

It is scheduled for Saturday, 9 April 2005.

There will be a call for presentations in September, but keep this date open now!

**\*Teaching And Learning Effectively using New Technologies**

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