



DEVELOPING TEACHING STYLE

By Robert Morgan

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I..."

If you think back to all the teachers you had, you'll probably be able to identify different "styles" or approaches. Probably you could categorize them with one word. Words like "grumpy," "boring," "permissive," and even "mean" probably come to mind. Hopefully, there were some you might describe as "influential" or "inspiring."

Most teachers don't even think about how they appear to students. Whatever the word is that might describe them, it wasn't something that came about with conscious thought. In all likelihood, it just happened. I'm suggesting that teachers need to consciously consider their teaching style and work toward developing a positive and effective style. Developing a teaching style means more than just one word. To develop a well balanced teaching style means you must give plenty of thought to what works well for you and what will be best for the students you work with.

Don't think that you can't change your teaching style. It's easy to dismiss the possibility of change by saying "Ahhh, I'm me and that's that. Nothing I can do about it." Of course, it is possible to change your approach to teaching. Here are some steps to consider as you start defining your teaching style.

1. What word or words would students use to describe you now. Are you comfortable with what they would say?
2. Is the demeanor you present to a class helpful to your teaching or might it actually get in the way of good teaching?
3. What styles of teachers you've observed or known would you like to emulate?
4. What change in teaching style might make you enjoy your job a bit more?
5. What changes in your teaching style are critical now?
6. If you need help, what are possible sources of help? For example, if you're having trouble with discipline, who might help you correct that problem?
7. Do you have a confidence problem? Stage fright?
8. Ask students what makes a good teacher. You may find the answers at once shallow ("they're not mean") and yet perceptive.
9. You can make any change gradually. The Superman approach (into the phone booth, change into the super hero uniform in seconds) isn't required. A little bit at a time is fine.

Once you start the process of developing or enhancing a teaching style which will help you make your job more effective and enjoyable, you might consider some of

these goals:

1. Be in command, in charge, and supremely confident in the classroom. You are a PROFESSIONAL, after all.
2. Never lose your temper. Be firm, perhaps, but don't ever lose control. Deal with explosive situations at another time or another place.
3. Talk to students as if they're human beings, not predatory devils. A little respect for students goes a long way and doesn't stop you from providing advice and guidance.
4. Have a sense of humor. Be ready to laugh even at yourself at appropriate moments.
5. Be fair. "Fair" is probably the most commonly mentioned trait students use about teachers. It may be the hardest thing to do. Work at it. Ask for help from fellow teachers, administrators, and students.
6. Be a mentor or get a mentor. Find someone on the faculty you can trust to bounce ideas off of.
7. Be organized. Read any book on how to be organized that looks like it might help.
8. Try not to take problems home. Work, yes, but problems, no. Resolve them before you leave for the day or at least develop a plan for resolving them tomorrow.
9. Be prepared. Not necessarily in the Boy Scout sense, but have ready all you need for teaching before school starts. Have your lessons planned, make sure all materials are in place, and check the VCR before you show that video.
10. Be the professional with parents and administrators. Consider the concerns and requirements of others, but remember...you're a trained professional.
11. Give a little of yourself. Arrive a little early, stay a little late. Everyone on the faculty knows who comes in at the last minute and leaves just as the final bell tolls.

Here are some exercises that might help you develop any changes you see necessary in your teaching style. Pick ones which might really work for you. If they seem senseless or meaningless, fine. Sometimes the best path is the one you find for yourself.

1. List the words you think students may be using to describe you.
2. Rank the teachers you know in order by quality of teaching, respect accorded by students, knowledge of subject matter, approval by parents, etc. You should keep these lists very private, of course, but you may find them useful. Incidentally, most teachers who make these lists find that the same teachers rank near the top on almost all lists.
3. Make sure you put yourself on the lists in number 2.
4. Create a character for a short story who is the best teacher you can imagine.
5. Sit in on the class of a widely respected teacher. See what that teacher does.
6. Sit in on the class of a teacher you think is having trouble. Find out why.