

Sabbatical Leave Proposal

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Project: Those Who Can: Secrets of Highly Successful Teachers

Proposal Date: Nov. 1, 2024

Proposed Leave: Fall 2024

Previous Sabbaticals: 0

Full Time Hire Date: 1998

Background

We know that the most important ingredient to student success is the teacher, as documented by John Hattie's meta-analysis: "based on 800 meta-analyses (a statistical analysis that combines the results of multiple studies) of 50,000 smaller studies. It found that, among six groups of factors influencing successful learning in schools – the student, home, school, teacher, curricula and teaching – teachers seemed to have the strongest in-school effect" (<https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2023/03/john-hattie-on-the-factors-that-influence-learning-in-schools/>).

As facilitator of the MC Reads pedagogy group (formerly known as Faculty Inquiry Group or FIG) and as the current English 1A Innovation Coordinator, I have been reading books, articles, attending and presenting at conferences, and facilitating conversations about successful teaching strategies and pedagogy for the past 25 years. One thing that has always fascinated me are those certain teachers who are just inherently talented at teaching. They have the ability to motivate and challenge students without ever reading a book about how to be a great teacher--although some of these excellent teachers also study and think deeply about the craft of teaching. They are the professors who over and over students remember or call out as being their favorites or as life changing. They are the teachers with high success rates. And they are the instructors that contribute to a school's positive reputation in the community. So identifying and even quantifying what makes them so effective seems like a good idea!

Overview

For this project I will interview and capture these great teachers' "secrets." I plan to conduct and collect 12-18 faculty interviews and post them to an Instagram account I will call "Those

Who Can: Secrets of Highly Successful Teachers.” Using Reels on Instagram, I will create short interviews of faculty, as well as reveal data points that will hopefully back up what they say in the interviews. Instagram is an easily accessible format with a long life span, and it is a format that I can continue to add to after the sabbatical, so this can be a continuing project. It will hopefully become a fun, inviting, accessible—but also academically focused and data-informed repository of wisdom for current and future teachers. I can envision many spinoffs of this project; for example it might develop into a podcast or documentary film in the future, but for this sabbatical, I want to use a format I can easily create in one semester in order to get the project underway. Plus, social media is how many people (including educators) get information, so it is a good medium for this project.

Timeline

Prior to the sabbatical leave, I will create a curated list of faculty to interview, based on personal experience in their classrooms, student referrals, and faculty suggestions. I plan to choose from my personal 3-6 favorites, 3-6 favorites of students (I will survey MC tutors and/or Honors students), and 3-6 suggestions by department chairs (I will survey dept. chairs). The interview will be focused on one main question: *What is Your Secret?*

August: set up the interviews and plan out the Instagram page; learn how to make high quality reels

Sept: conduct, edit, and post the first three interviews to the Instagram page

Oct.: conduct, edit, and post at least three interviews to the Instagram page

Nov.: conduct, edit, and post at least three interviews to the Instagram page

Dec.: conduct, edit, and post at least three interviews to the Instagram page

Connection to College Mission

Part of the college mission states: “Through the integration of innovative instruction and holistic student support, our programs are designed to foster equitable student outcomes,” so high quality teaching, specifically innovation and seeing the whole student, is vital to our mission. Identifying teachers who excel at this fits our mission.

Benefit to Students

Most research shows that the most important influence on a student’s success is the teacher. By collecting and featuring the habits, advice and “secrets” of successful teachers, this project can influence other teachers to use those tips and also to develop their own strengths and “secrets” to facilitate student success. ***The goal is to make highly successful instructors the***

expected norm, not the exception. This obviously benefits our students and our student-centered mission.

Benefit to College and District

Featuring the voices of some of our best faculty reveals the high quality instruction the college provides and spotlights the talent and passion our faculty have for students and the institution.

Benefit to Faculty

Capturing our collective teacher knowledge celebrates our faculty and our college, and it can help fellow faculty! Having a repository of wisdom from colleagues could help new and old teachers by providing advice, inspiration, and motivation. It's like a group of wise elders (although the faculty interviewed will be all ages of course!) helping out their fellow educators.

Supporting Materials

There are several books and studies about the secrets of successful teachers, as seen in these resources that I plan to read (But there are no social media sites with this title or approach, so this will be innovative!)

Innovative College Teaching: Tips and Insights from 14 Master Teachers by Perry Binder

Those Who Can, Teach by Kevin Ryan and James Cooper

What Great Teachers do Differently by Todd Whitaker

I scanned social media education sites by and for educators and will continue to study and model my Instagram page on the best ones I find. I noticed that these all tend to be k-12, and they are sites where teachers offer teaching tips in their discipline or grade level. So far I can't find any that feature other college teachers' words or teacher wisdom in general, so my site might be something new in this landscape by focusing on college educators and their teaching tips. These are lists of popular educator social media sites.

<https://blog.mindresearch.org/blog/educator-social-media-accounts-that-inspire>

<https://www.teach.org/articles/top-teachers-follow-social-media>

<https://www.weareteachers.com/best-teacher-instagram/>

Here is a list of books I have read and facilitated discussions for MCRoads over the years:

Creating Significant Learning Experiences by L. Dee Fink
Teaching with your Mouth Shut by Donald Finkel
Visible Learning for Teachers by John Hattie
The Skillful Teacher by Stephen Brookfield
What the Best College Teachers do by Ken Bain
Most Likely to Succeed by Tony Wagner
On Course textbook by Skip Downing
Small Teaching by James Lang
Small Teaching Online by Flower Darby
Teach Students How to Learn by Sandra Yancy McGuire
Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Friere
To My Professor by Michigan State University
The Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer
Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain by Zaretta Hammond
Fostering The Habits of Mind in Today's Students by Jennifer Fletcher et al.
Equity By Design by Mirko Chardin and Katie Novak
Learning that Matters by Zender, Metzger, Kleine, Alby

10 Key Takeaways from materials that will serve as the foundational assumptions for the interviews:

Based on the above readings, great teachers tend to do the following: they...

- know themselves, their material, understand what is important to them as instructors, and plan their courses around these core principles
- have great passion for their subjects, keep current in their field, and demonstrate curiosity and enthusiasm
- individualize instruction for students and pay attention to the individual student by making efforts to know them and to create sense of belonging
- maintain high standards with strong scaffolding built in for students to meet high standards

- continually evaluate their own performance and adapt as needed, trying new things to improve instruction
- create community in their courses and uplift all students to meet the goals of the course, maintaining a strong sense of fairness and equity
- see the learning through the eyes of the student so that the learning and teaching is transparent
- focus on what matters in their discipline and communicate this relevance to students
- use student-focused and student led learning methods, involving discussions, choice, relevance, projects, group work, etc. so that the learning is most often not top down or lecture-based.
- have an “it” factor—that indescribable piece, the personality of great teachers which helps them communicate well and make students feel comfortable and challenged at the same time.

Conclusion

By blending data-driven best practices from research with some of Moorpark College’s best teacher “secrets,” the instagram site will be a compendium of wisdom that celebrates great teaching, inspires current and future teachers, and compiles teaching tips for anyone who follows the page. Care will be taken to promote positive images of our students and faculty; no students or student names will be used; faculty will sign an agreement to have their interview published with their approval. All data will be cited. The goal is to collect all these great teaching secrets and then share them widely so they are no longer secret!