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FEATURE

Teachers' Perceptions of Preferred Teaching Strategies in a Faith-Based College

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Abstract: *College teachers frequently have training in their subject area but not in the field of education, yet they spend much of their lives making educational decisions that affect learners. With schools beginning to pay more attention to teaching, this mixed method study looks at what teachers in one college in the Philippines know about teaching strategies, which strategies they prefer, and why. Lecture still tops the favored methods, but it is chosen from among other options with which the teachers were familiar. The one significant difference relating to selection of teaching methods was the possession of a teaching credential. Those with educational training used a significantly greater variety of teaching strategies.*

With the ever increasing demand of a fast-changing economy and complex society, stringent government licensure examinations, changing technology, demographics, and the growing diversity of learners in our schools, there is a need to provide students with every opportunity to learn and acquire skills in diverse ways. After all, it is also "diversity that makes the world an interesting place, and curricula that are interesting acknowledge, respond to, and celebrate human diversity" (Pratt, 1994, p. 254). It may be that

> the positive effects of subject matter knowledge are augmented or offset by knowledge of how to teach the subject to various kinds of students. That is, the degree of pedagogical skill may interact with subject matter knowledge to bolster or reduce teacher performance. (Darling-Hammond, as cited in Marzano, 2003, p. 64)

Do teachers really make a difference in the academic achievement of students? Brophy and Good (as cited in Eggen & Kauchak, 2001) posit that the

teacher is considered to be "the single most important factor outside the home environment in affecting student development" (p. 4). Because of this, teachers needed in schools are those who are "skilled, ready and prepared in teaching and with effective styles and respond to student's needs and interest" (Hoban, as cited in Abordo, 2007, p. 17) because "teachers have powerful, long-lasting influence on their students. They directly affect how students learn, what they learn, how much they learn, and the ways they interact with one another and the world around them" (Stronge, 2007, p. ix). The students' capacity to learn more easily and effectively in the future depends on their acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as their mastery of processes. How teaching is conducted "will have a large impact on students' abilities to educate themselves" (Hopkins, West, & Ainscow, 1996, p. 18).

Simply put, teachers, and teaching, matter. "Teaching is society's most important occupation" (Luckner & Rudolph, p. 1). Beyond being a profession, teaching is "a calling, not just a job" (Stone, 2004, p. 99). Some say that teaching is an art; others say it is a science. But whether teaching is considered an art or a science, it involves "professional judgment and calls for a trained eye to see what is actually happening, and the trained mind to decide what to do next" (Davis, 1997, p. 2).

But how should one teach to maximize student learning? What factors should be considered when choosing approaches and strategies? There is no best way or right way to teach anything or anyone, but choosing strategies is influenced by several factors. Eggen and Kauchak (2006) consider three factors to be at the heart of the decision-making process: the teacher, the type of learners, and the content or the topics being taught. Tomlinson (2003) suggests that educational decisions are made based on particular interests and needs. Added to the list are students' differing academic abilities, background experience, motivation, culture, values, attitudes and traditions (Cushner et al., as cited in Eggen & Kauchak, 2001).

Educational practitioners need to continually experiment with new ways to fit the unique circumstances of a particular classroom (Sagor, 2003), and sometimes intuition can be an excellent complement to educational preparation. The teacher's unique set of personal experiences, background knowledge, teaching skills and personality traits also make him or her more comfortable and effective with certain methodologies than with others (Moore, 2001).

Without formal training in the area of education in my undergraduate degree, in my early teaching experience, I taught students as if they all had the same abilities and learned in the same way. I failed to consider the uniqueness of each individual student. Only later did I realize that my approach was not giving my students the maximum opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills I hoped for them to achieve. Many probably fall into this predicament because "too often

we teach as though all our students possess the same intelligences and learn the same way we do" (Sagor, 2003, p. 74).

If teaching is a decision-making activity based on individual teachers' skills, knowledge, and artistry, then "there ought to be a variety of means for accomplishing any instructional objective" (Orlich et al., 2007, p. 15) because "teaching in the absence of learning is just talking" (Angelo, as cited in Sajjad, 1997, para. 1). Teachers need to reach out to every learner using the child's areas of strength or intelligence (Armstrong, 2000; Gardner, as cited in Batulayan, 2001). As Estrada so aptly stated, "If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way the child learns" (as cited in Ong & Borich, 2006, p. 216).

As teachers, failure in even small details can have serious consequences: "If we teach . . . in a way that causes a student to lose hope, we've sacrificed our usefulness to the profession and the community we serve" (Wormeli, 2007, p. 20). Teachers need to realize that the primary goal of instructional strategies is "to design effective and efficient instruction that produces reliable results each time it is presented to the learner" (Morrison, Ross, & Kemp, 2004, p. 150).

Recently, there has been increasing pressure on college teachers to demonstrate that learning is taking place in their classrooms (Wilson, 2010). This pressure is coming from accrediting organizations and school administration, however, not students themselves. College teaching has been traditionally lecture-based, which has been a source of discontent by students and faculty (see for example Birkel, 1973), yet nothing has changed much in the last 25 years.

With the comparatively recent interest in the scholarship of teaching (see for example Ginns, Kitay, & Prosser, 2008; Hutchings, 2010), more attention is being paid to the way college teaching is conducted, and the measureable results of that teaching. One clear finding is that teaching the same way all the time is not the answer; a variety of approaches is called for. "A repertoire of effective teaching strategies is one of the teacher's best means of reaching the full range of learners in the classroom and of making learning deep and memorable for students" (Silver, Strong, & Perini, 2000, Appendix C, para. 1).

The question is, how do college teachers teach in South Philippines? Most of the research on college teaching has been done in developed countries. The question that prompted this study is whether students in my school are actually receiving that kind of education that produces hope and reaches out to each learner in ways they can relate to. Do teachers teach like that? What methods do they actually use? College teachers worldwide are notorious for being subject specialists who know little about teaching (see for example Anderson, 2010; Kline, 2000). But what do the teachers in one school in South Philippines really know? How much variety do they provide in the college classroom?

This study examines the teaching strategies used at a faith-based college in South Philippines. It seeks to determine the most preferred and least preferred teaching strategies of the teachers, as well as reasons for those choices, and compares these by the demographic variables of age, academic qualification, gender, years of teaching, and whether or not the person has had training as a teacher.

Relevant Literature

Moore (2001) classifies two basic instructional types: teacher-centered and student-centered. In the teacher-centered instructional approaches, students are passive recipients of information whereas in student-centered approaches students actively participate in and help shape their own learning experience. Both approaches can be used effectively to bring about learning.

A variety of teaching strategies are needed in today's classrooms because we are in an "era of standards" (Sagor, 2003, p. 12), and the "demands of the labor market are changing," (Murnane & Levy, 1996, p. vii). More than that, students come with proficiencies and weaknesses and in a variety of intelligences (Silver, Strong, & Perini, as cited in Sagor, 2003). When selecting a particular methodology, the maturity level and experiences of the students must be considered (Hunt, Touzel, & Wiseman, as cited in Moore, 2001).

One study conducted in the Philippines showed that lecture or expository style, question and answer method, project method and demonstration/showing style were ranked from highest to lowest as the dominant teaching styles used by academic and technical instructors (Templado, 2009). In another Philippine study, College of Education teachers preferred to use the following strategies in the order listed: panel discussion, lecture-demonstration, reporting, lecture, and teaching modules (Creer et. al., 2008).

It is interesting that in Delahoyde's (2009) research conducted (among nursing faculty and students) in the U.S., lecture was found to be the most frequently used strategy by faculty and the most preferred strategy by students. Other teaching strategies students preferred included listening to the professor rather than working in groups as well as active participation in group discussion. In Pakistan, students also rated the lecture method as the best teaching method, followed by group discussion (Sajjad, 1997).

The Method of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine and report teachers' perceived preferences in teaching strategies by gathering descriptive data. Data included both quantitative and qualitative information. The respondents in this study were 67 of the teaching faculty of a faith-based college in South Philippines. This sample was taken during a faculty meeting where a majority of faculty were

present, while those absent were also given at their individual offices so the numbers in Table 1 represent the actual population of teachers in the school under study.

A researcher-developed questionnaire was constructed based on strategies known to be used in the region. Reliability indicated an alpha of .82. The questions were based on respondents' presumed knowledge or familiarity with the teaching strategies (but allowed teachers to indicate unfamiliarity) and asked for preferences, and reasons for their preferences. The questionnaire was made up questions relating to teachers' knowledge of teaching strategies and degree of use, preferences and reasons for such preferences, and demographic data.

Data Analysis

Of the 67 respondents, all had completed a bachelor's degree (see Table 1). There were more female teachers with only a master's degree (60%) in the sample, and slightly more male respondents who had completed a doctoral degree (55.5%). Nearly two thirds (62.7%) of the teachers surveyed have master's degrees, with a few having obtained doctorates.

There are quite a few more female teachers (61.2%) compared to male teachers in this sample (see Table 1). While there have always been more females at the elementary level, where male teachers are becoming "an endangered species" (Esplanada, 2009, para. 7), this phenomenon is beginning to creep into high school and college teaching, as well. A similar picture where more female teachers (73.7%) are found in the college level can be seen in another faith-based college in North Philippines (N. S. Batulayan, oral communication, October 1, 2010) and at a state college (63.64%) in southwest Mindanao (Templado, 2009). However, in the U.S., men dominate in number while women represent only one-third of the higher education faculty (Herron, Beedle & King, 2006).

Table 1

Academic Qualifications

Degree	Frequency		Total %	
	Males	Females		
BA/BS	4	12	16	23.9
MA/MS	17	25	42	62.7
PhD/EdD	5	4	9	13.4
Total	26	41	67	100%

More than half (53.7%) of the teachers have been ranked as assistant professors (Table 2), and the age group between 31-40, and those who have been teaching 6-10 years comprise the biggest number. The majority of the teachers (76.11%) have some sort of teaching qualification (see Table 2). This is surprisingly high, given that most references on the topic deplore the lack of teacher training among college professors (Goetsch, 1947).

Table 2

Teacher Demographic Information

Teacher information	Frequency	%
Rank		
No Rank/Not Ranked	5	7.5%
Instructor	8	11.9%
Assistant Professor	36	53.7%
Associate Professor	13	19.4%
Professor	5	7.5%
Age Classification		
20-30	11	16.4%
31-40	26	38.8%
41-50	12	17.9%
51 and above	18	26.9%
Years of teaching		
1-5	9	13.4%
6-10	21	31.3%
11-15	17	25.3%
16 or more	20	30.0%
Teaching Qualification		
With Teaching Strategies	51	76.1%
Without Teaching Strategies	15	22.4%
Not indicated	1	1.5%
Total	67	100%

Knowledge of Strategies

Do teachers in this school have the opportunity to know and utilize the available strategies for the effective learning of all students? Most of the faculty members are familiar with many of the different teaching strategies (see Table 3), but are using mostly lecture and direct instruction regularly. The least heard of teaching strategies include synectics, advance organizers, and KWL (Table 5). Establishing the least well-known strategies is not as simple as it might be, since many of the teachers did not fill in the questionnaire completely, and the pattern suggests they avoided answering the questions relating to terms with which they were unfamiliar.

Table 3

Knowledge/Use of Strategies

Teaching Strategies	Knowledge/ Use	
Lecture	4.85	5
Direct Instruction	4.46	Using regularly
Cooperative Learning	4.00	
Values Clarification	3.95	
Comparison	3.82	4
Role Play	3.75	Using occasionally
Simulation	3.72	
Concept Attainment	3.34	
Mnemonics	3.30	
Scientific Inquiry	3.27	3
Case Study	3.18	Tried but no longer
Jurisprudential Inquiry	2.90	using it
Service Learning	2.81	
Non-directive Instruction	2.66	
KWL	2.42	2
Advance Organizers	2.30	Have considered using it
Synectics	1.71	1 Have not heard about it

Teaching Strategies

Table 4 highlights the teachers' preferred teaching strategies. Based on the data, lecture is by far the most preferred strategy used in college teaching. This result is the same as that found by Templado (2009) in the Philippines, Delahoyde (2009) in the U.S., and Sajjad (1997) in Pakistan. Lecture is followed by cooperative learning, direct instruction and role play. The least preferred include jurisprudential inquiry, case study, synectics, and non-direct instruction.

Among the teaching strategies listed, synectics was the least familiar to many. Advance Organizers ranks among the least familiar strategies, however, follow-up conversations with the faculty[1] suggest that this method may have been used unknowingly by some (see Table 5).

Teachers gave their reasons for the methods they preferred. Many of their reasons, however, seemed to be defaults, rather than chosen actions for specific purposes. The recurring responses centered around themes such as the methods being the most common, easy and convenient. Below are typical responses from the teachers as to why they preferred this method.

Table 4

Most and Least Preferred Strategies

Most preferred	N = 67	%
Lecture	55	82.1%
Cooperative learning	35	52.2%
Direct instruction	25	37.3%
Role play	23	34.3%
Least preferred		
Jurisprudential inquiry	22	32.8%
Case study	19	28.3%
Synectics	17	25.4%
Non-direct instruction	14	20.9%

[1] Feedback given during research presentation to faculty of the campus under study in the Philippines on October 1, 2010.

Table 5

Least Familiar Teaching Strategies

Strategy	N = 67	%
Synectics	43	63.2%
Advance organizers	30	44.1%
KWL	29	42.6%

Lecture

Over 80% of teachers indicated that lecture was their preferred teaching method, and the most common reasons they gave were that the lecture method was

Most common, easy and convenient
Time saving
For emphasis of concepts

The responses of most of the other teachers were similar to these. A few others gave more original reasons, but still placed lecture at the top of their list of teaching preferences:

Can't do away with lecture
Gives teacher the chance to practice speaking in English and students get used to listening to English Language
That has been my style ever since [I started teaching]

These reasons for choosing lecture as a preferred method of teaching suggest a lack of decision, rather than a conscious choice. Only one suggests any educational benefit—the emphasis of concepts—but literature has suggested that lecture may not be the best method for producing even this result (Birkel, 1973). The comment about English is interesting, given that college is supposedly entirely in English in the Philippines, while lower levels of education are taught in a combination of languages. Perhaps the most telling are the two comments referring to convenience and time consumption. Clearly, these teachers feel there is not time for either the preparation or carrying out of more varied strategies.

Cooperative Learning

The reasons for choosing cooperative learning are clearly educational.

Development of teamwork, unity, and cooperation
Learning is easier when done by groups
Individual participation of students

This is not a method teachers use by default just because it is easier. Those who choose it (and many do) are seeking to develop students in specific ways, including, but not limited to, their subject area.

Direct Instruction

It is not clear from the responses that these teachers separated direct instruction from lecturing, however, they did recognize the term by name and marked it as familiar. They said things like that direct instruction was their choice because it was

Time saving and easy to use
Applicability/Appropriateness to courses

Role Play

Teachers who used role play were clearly aware of why they were using it, and what they hoped to accomplish by using it. They said they chose it because of reasons like

Enhancement of students' learning when acted out
Development of students' creativity
Students can relate to real life situations.

Ideas of creativity development, learning, and transfer also indicate an understanding of educational processes beyond a basic level. The fact that over 60% of these teachers have had some educational training is apparent in this type of response.

Some methods were specifically avoided, but this was not always because of lack of familiarity. Common and distinct reasons for avoidance of certain methods included the following:

Jurisprudential Inquiry

Not applicable
Time consuming
Not familiar with the strategy
Students are competing among themselves
Less effective for students' values development

Case Study

Not applicable
Demands so much time and effort to implement only once.
Difficult for the teacher to manage and monitor

Synectics

Unfamiliarity/lack of knowledge about it

Non-directive Instruction

Students need guidance
Chaotic, uncontrollable

The reasons given for avoiding certain types of teaching are almost as informative as the teachers' reasons for choosing others. Far from being mainly an issue of lack of knowledge of these techniques, though knowledge certainly plays a role, teachers make decisions based on other factors. Some of the methods require significant time to prepare, as well as time to implement in class, and this makes them less interesting. A second clear concern has to do with control and management. These sorts of techniques do not lend themselves to grading, or to quiet, orderly learning, and this is apparently a negative factor for at least some of the teachers. Lastly, of course, there is the problem of familiarity. It is quite probable that this problem is bigger than what it appears, because using a new technique requires extensive practice before a teacher is comfortable using it (Joyce, 1985). Doyle and Ponder (1977) also discuss personal 'cost' as a factor in considering the 'practicality' of adopting new educational strategies or initiatives. This cost includes not only time demands, but also the amount of difference between the teacher's personal beliefs about education and the currently held beliefs about the way things should be. The tendency to prefer "teaching the way we were taught" (Machnaik, 2002, para. 36), can add to the difficulty of implementing needed instructional changes.

Another concern woven into the responses above has to do with values. These are Christian teachers, and there are repeated concerns about certain methods not being appropriate for Christian students, as they might lead to ideas that right and wrong depend on the individual, and thus fail to develop Christian values, or they might encourage competition. Whether all these concerns are warranted is not the purpose of this paper, but it is evident that the concerns go beyond preparation time.

Test of Significance

Preference in teaching strategies (see Table 6) was found to depend on teaching qualification, but not necessarily on gender, age, academic qualification, rank, or years of experience. Tests were done using the chi-square test of significance. This means that teachers who have taken teaching strategies courses are significantly more likely to use a greater variety of strategies than those who have not.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the data and literature reviewed above.

1. Teachers at this faith-based college are still traditional, in that they prefer the lecture method. This is not surprising because lecture is prevalent (Lambert, 2004), and continues to dominate college classrooms (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). It is also still considered valid and effective teaching strategy (Bradshaw & Lowenstein, 2011).
2. Preference of teaching strategies depended upon knowledge of teaching strategies. Those who had taken courses in teaching strategies were significantly more likely to use a variety of strategies than those who had not.
3. Faculty members' preferences did not depend on their age, gender, academic rank, academic qualification, or years of teaching.
4. The majority of the faculty (63.2%) indicate unfamiliarity with some strategies.

Table 6

Chi-square Test of Significance of Dependence

Variable	P value
Gender	0.821
Age	0.160
Academic qualification	0.990
Academic rank	0.901
Years of teaching	0.694
Teaching qualification	0.016*

* Significant at the $p < .05$ level

Based on these results, it is strongly recommended that the administration provide teachers with opportunities to become familiar with the various teaching strategies through in-service training or seminar-workshops on teaching. Knowing more strategies does increase their use, as shown in this paper, and a broader repertoire of teaching strategies has been indicated as the way to make learning more meaningful for students (Silver, Strong, & Perini, 2000). If this is so, the teachers in this faith-based college in South Philippines could benefit from further educational training, particularly in teaching methods, in order to increase their knowledge of, and ability to use, a greater variety of approaches.

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