Laurdella Foulkes-Levy sets a high standard for herself when teaching music theory as she constantly strives to bridge the gap between performance and theory. But, as she notes, performance does not just have to be in the arts, it can be in any discipline. “If I weren’t teaching music, I’d be teaching. Period! And whatever subject that might be, I’d thrive on making theories that underpin it as relevant as possible to those who practice that ‘art form.’” Performance might include writing a poem or a newspaper article, solving a major contextual problem in engineering or mathematics, or assaying a compound in a chemistry lab. And as the type of performance depends on a discipline, so will the theory. But in each discipline, there should be a goal of combining performance and theory. How can that be done?

Talking to Dr. Foulkes-Levy, one gets the impression she has determined some of the better ways to bridge the gap in her music classes. And it is apparent that she does it well because she has been recognized for her efforts. She was the Elsie M. Hood Outstanding Teacher awardee in 2006. What does she do, and what brought her to being recognized for her work in teaching?

As a person determined to capture many of the big ideas in her field, one could follow her career across many venues and into many different areas related to music that led her eventually to the University of Mississippi. And in each venue, Laurdella learned and added bits and pieces to her repertoire. From home, she learned much from her musician–teacher parents: from her mother came the positive energy of her spirit; from her father came a love of working with college students and the grace of teaching. From Northwestern University came a master’s degree and an abiding love for music history; and from a two-year campus of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay came the beginning of a teaching career where she was the music department with all the ensuing jobs and classes. In this first trial by fire, she began to understand the importance of relating performance and theory, as she taught all aspects of music there. From the Virgin Islands came training in the Kodály philosophy of music education, which focuses on teaching children to read and write music through singing and folk music. This Hungarian based philosophy is an experiential approach to teaching music and has been with Dr. Foulkes-Levy throughout her career. Note the “experiential” nature of this philosophy whereby theory serves to inform performance and not act as a discrete member of a discipline. It is this experiential nature that can be carried over to other disciplines as a model.
Motivating the Unmotivated
by Susan Mossing, Assistant Director

Teaching motivated students is enjoyable and relatively effortless. They make it easy because they see the significance of our subjects and we can imagine that they care about learning. Life would be grand if we could teach only motivated students who want to learn! Unfortunately, there are students at the other end of the continuum: the unmotivated students. They are difficult and draining. Their very presence in classrooms seems to sap the energy from the room and everyone in it. What can be done about the unmotivated student? This article offers five ideas based on Allen Mendler’s book Motivating students who don’t care: Successful techniques for educators.

Emphasize effort.

A previous Mantle article about fixed mindsets (Mossing, 2009) outlined how students with fixed mindsets believe that “work compensates for a lack of intelligence.” That is, if they have to work hard at something, they assume that they must not be as smart as their fellow students for whom good grades come effortlessly. They use laziness and not caring as a mask for a more evil possibility: intellectual incompetency.

So how does one emphasize effort? Allow students to learn from their mistakes; allow them to redo, retake, and revise (3 Rs). Provide prompt, meaningful feedback on their assignments. Point out the value they gain in doing the work and learning the material.

Create hope.

Some classes are gateway courses; students cannot be successful in a field if they cannot pass the gateway class. Teachers believe they are doing students a favor by helping them face this reality early in their academic careers. As a result, on day one of a course, teachers may present the course as a nearly insurmountable challenge in terms of difficulty. At the same time, however, they may take away hope (and perseverance) from the capable but less-than-confident students.

How does one create hope in an appropriate manner for gateway (or any) courses? Calibrate the challenges by setting smaller challenges that get incrementally more difficult. Focus on the learning process rather than the outcome. Take the time to congratulate students on successes.

Respect power.

One of the missions of the University is to “produce graduates who have the breadth and depth of knowledge to be lifelong learners, to be successful in their discipline, and to be good citizens.” Each of these roles requires a measure of autonomy and a sense of ownership of one’s education. How can autonomy be nurtured while maintaining control of the classroom? Perhaps the answer lies in the degree to which control is maintained or shared.

A small gesture of power sharing is to ask students for their opinions during discussions. When faculty must correct students, do so respectfully. Finally, teachers willing to share significant control of a class might offer students choices in terms of assignments and assessments. Examples include allowing students to choose an area to study in depth and to present to the entire class, or allowing students to choose between submitting a research paper and taking an exam.

Build relationships.

Some students choose to do poorly in a class because they dislike their professors or believe their professors dislike them. When they like professors, they try harder and enjoy the classes more. The relationship professors build with students is in its simplest form, a communication of the respect for the students.

Building a relationship with students is not the same as
befriending them. Most students want to be recognized; they appreciate professors that work to learn their names. Teacher-student relationships can begin to be built by teachers being open to students’ comments, applauding their efforts, making eye contact with them and communicating an interest in them.

**Express enthusiasm.**

Enthusiasm is infectious and it starts with teachers. If teachers are not enthusiastic about a subject, why should students be? Students enjoy subjects taught by professors who enjoy what they are teaching. Sometimes teachers are challenged to maintain their enthusiasm with unmotivated students. How can enthusiasm be generated and maintained in classrooms?

Teachers can think creatively and bring variety to lessons. They can search online to find useful podcasts, Youtube videos, and documentaries because some students find it valuable to see real-life applications. Teachers can find or develop case studies or current problems. Every effort put into maintaining a high level of enthusiasm for a course not only aids the students in the course but keeps teachers refreshed about the content.

As faculty plan instruction in courses, each should consider personal ways that might be used or adapted to follow some of Mendler’s suggestions. One suggestion for a routinely taught course might be to change the text at least after every third year. Consider that teaching with the book the first year will be new and different; teaching with the book the second year will be comfortable; while teaching with the same book the third year will be old hat and of less interest.

**References**


When Is a Cell Phone Helpful in Class?
by Johnny W. Lott, Director

In her Professional Development Workshop on September 17, 2009, Dr. Constance Staley of the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, demonstrated the use of cell phones in a poll of the audience. She mentioned briefly the low cost of their use in the classroom and gave the use as one example of keeping a class involved with course content in an active way. She used polleverywhere.com to conduct the audience poll. So what are the possibilities of using cell phones in classrooms at the University of Mississippi?

A quick look at www.polleverywhere.com reveals that this is truly easy to use at no cost for 30 or fewer students as long as the classroom has wireless internet access. For example, Dr. Staley linked into student union wireless as a guest, posed a simple question for the audience to answer in a multiple choice format, and in a matter of seconds had about 30 responses to her question. A check of the polleverywhere website shows that there is a fee if many more students are using Poll Everywhere, but the fee is nominal and is far less expensive than clickers currently being bought by students on campus. A major question remains as to whether everything that can be done with clickers could also be done with cell phones. [Currently clickers are used in Anthropology 101, Biology 102 and 160, Geology 101, Marketing 351 and 367, Music 104, Physics 211 and 212, Political Science 101, Psychology 320 and Theater 201.]

Even though many saw Staley’s example, there remains a basic question about the use of cell phones as teaching tools. A web search revealed interesting articles, including the following:

From http://teachingtoday.glencoe.com/howtoarticles/cell-phones-in-the-classroom, lower grade teachers use cell phones in classes for calculators; digital cameras; Internet access; and dictionaries, especially the translation dictionaries available on phones for English language learners.

Geary (2008) writes of change in dynamic interaction with students when the language changes from “Please put away your cell phones; we are not ready to use them yet” to “Put away your cell phones; you know they are not allowed during class time!” He recognizes that student use of the device, not the device itself, is the problem.

Use of cell phones at the collegiate level is not new. In 2007, Cyber University in Japan began experimenting with teaching an entire class via cell phones. This experimental class was offered at no cost to students other than the cost of their cell phone packages, but the university was wholly owned by a company selling cell phone technology.

Ball State University has undergraduate and graduate nursing students required to buy an AT&T mobile device to access lab books, medical dictionaries, diagnosis literature, and other resources throughout the school year. These students download free updates of course material, but have to pay for new text editions. Course materials can last a student throughout all nursing studies.

Current Secretary of Education Arne Duncan discussed the use of cell phones as vehicles to convey content to students in an interview with eCampus News on 6 July 2009.

Perhaps it is time that we at the University of Mississippi consider just how to use this ubiquitous tool effectively.

References
Administrators, faculty, and students across the country engage in discussions concerning enhancing the quality of education, community, and environment on university campuses, both physical and virtual. Generally, these discussions generate a commitment to ensure that university and college learning experiences involve critical thinking, civic and personal responsibility, as well as content knowledge, and integrating these into a broader understanding of the world. The Quality Enhancement Plan at the University of Mississippi focuses on “reflection, collaborative learning, and community” as means to support this learning commitment. E-portfolios are means to gather evidence in support of these goals at all levels: student, faculty, and institution.

Though traditional assessment techniques are beneficial in measuring content knowledge, they may be limited in their assessment of some of the larger goals established at the institutional level. Collecting samples of student work from individual courses and then periodically engaging students in guided reflection on not only the work completed, but also experiences associated with the work allows those students to “stop and think,” observe personal and intellectual changes, and make connections with the university outside themselves. In a comprehensive e-portfolio of the type described in the Quality Enhancement Plan, students have the opportunity to demonstrate development over a period of time and make connections not only with content in courses, but across courses, programs, and schools within the institution. Moreover with comprehensive e-portfolios, students have the opportunity to see a degree of personal control over individual learning and could discover that education is not something that is done to them, but done by them.

Using the same samples of work with which students track their personal development, faculty may gather evidence for other purposes. Not only can faculty see students’ development in individual classes or programs, but they can also gain insight into the effectiveness of teaching, content, and curriculum. Moreover, evidence gathered from e-portfolios should demonstrate how well individual courses work together for a cohesive program of study. Such information proves invaluable for instructional, course, and program improvements.

Finally, at the institutional level, some of the same evidence used by students and faculty may help determine the “state of the institution” in relation to its mission. Given the electronic form, administrators and institutional evaluators can readily extract information to verify that students develop as reflective, critical thinkers with a sense of civic and personal responsibility as a result of the experiences provided at the institution.

E-portfolios are means to operationalize the university’s mission at all levels. Though some might consider such assessment impractical, given the amount of information possibly provided and the variety of uses for the same information, e-portfolios are a very practical means for true assessment of current educational goals.

References


Bridging the Gap continued from Front Cover

From further study of the Kodály philosophy in Hungary that included study of musicianship pedagogy, Dr. Foulkes-Levy migrated to the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music where she practiced what she had learned on children and college students. Working with college students is where she gets the nutrition for her energy and drive and it allows her to constantly develop and improve her teaching techniques. Farther along the way, she worked in a Kodály program in Texas. For awhile she was a teacher–administrator in Massachusetts, directed a Kodály institute in Connecticut, served as president of the national Kodály organization, and finally earned a doctorate from SUNY Buffalo in music theory. Only after her doctorate was completed did she begin to develop a curriculum that integrated musicianship and theory at the University of Mississippi. And the University has been fortunate to have her.

Since coming here, she has been able to realize her ultimate goal of bridging performance and theory. She describes co-directing the Mississippi Music Ensemble as “dessert” where she gets to perform and enjoy the fruits of her theoretical studies. Like her Hungarian master teacher models, she has a sense of musicianship that reveals her confidence, her love of the working of music through the music itself. It is not only knowledge of modern theoretical ideas but the development of musicianship skills that allows her to have the freedom to give musically in ways that she could not otherwise do. She states that the same could happen in other disciplines. First know the content, theory and discipline and know it well; then relate this theory directly to the performance or practice of the discipline. In this way, faculty will have the freedom to develop their teaching skills to help their students in the best possible ways.