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Paper manuscripts and material for Dr. Engs can be found in the IUArchives
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SO YOU THINK YOU WANT TO “TURN ON” YOUR STUDENTS TO HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Presented at the 19th Biennial Convention of the Canadian Association for Health Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, June 8, 1971.

by

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Do you really want to “turn on” your students to health or physical education or to any other field? You probably think, “Of course, what a dumb question!” However, beware if you really do, because once a student is “turned on,” you may find that he drops into your office to tell you about the latest fad on the “drug scene” or seeks advice about his broken romance when you have only fifteen minutes to polish off a preparation for a class. Furthermore, a “turned on” student is usually eager for your knowledge and very interested in your teaching methods and your course. “Great!” you think. However, “turning on a student” has further drawbacks because you will find it necessary to be prepared for your class and not “fly by the seat of your pants” with the lesson plan you made seven years ago. “Turning on” a student also means that you will have to keep up with the latest information in your field and what seems to be virtually every other field if you are in health education.

But, if you are willing to risk “turned on” students, you might want to peek at some of the following ideas.

Be honest at all times with your students and with yourself. Being honest is perhaps the most important action for “turning on” a student. During the first few days of a new class, a student will almost invariably ask you a question to which you have not the “foggiest notion” how to answer. Yes, he is probably testing you. When this happens, do you “beat around the bush” with some half true information, immediately cut him off by telling him the question is unimportant to what you were talking about, or in some way imply that the question was dumb? If so, you may well find yourself facing a completely silent class that never asks you anything or you may be confronted with many more questions calculated to put you on the spot. Obviously, when you do not know the answer to a question you should say, “I don’t know.” Simple, isn’t it? However, many teachers think, “If I admit to a student that I don’t know the answer, he will lose respect for me.” Fiddlessticks! He will lose respect for you if you pretend to know the answer. When you admit to a student that you do not know everything, he realizes that you are human too; and in order to “turn on” students, you must be a completely honest human being.

Never “put down a student.” To put a student down you tell him, “That’s a stupid question,” “We aren’t talking about that subject now,” “No, you can’t do a paper on that.” Of course, these ideas can also be relayed to the students by non-verbal communication. If a student feels free to express anything in your class and knows that you will not scold him, cut him off or criticize him, a flood of discussion and information will most probably be generated by the class. Of course, if you do not like having your lecture interrupted, forget this information. You say, “There are times when I really want to finish discussing an important concept and a student poses a question.” Fine, you tell him, “Hang on to that question, write it down, and let me finish what I’m talking about, then I’ll get back to your question.” This keeps everyone happy.

Become “unprofessional.” No, that was not a misprint. By this I mean, forget the serious talks your professor gave with the message, “In order for health and physical education to be academically respected, we must maintain a ‘professional’ image.” This usually implied that one upheld the image of being a “tee-totaller,” never smiled at an “off-

color joke,” or admitted that the “new morality” might have a few valid points. In my experience, most of the people who are trying to maintain a “professional” image are pretty boring and phony. Needless to say, phony teachers do not “turn on” students. The students may have a fearful respect for you, and your “professionalism” but they will probably mumble over their coffee about how dumb your class is. So, become “unprofessional!” “Unprofessional!” means being real, being yourself, and becoming an open, honest person. Yes, you may have to work at this. Most of us are taught consciously and unconsciously from early childhood not to show our real selves or our true feelings. So becoming “real” may be difficult. For further information on becoming “unprofessional” and a “real person” read Abraham Maslow’s works.

Be open to suggestions from your students! If the class continuously gripes and complains that one of your assignments is all “busy work” or moans that a project has not been given enough credit, do you reply, “I am the boss. I set up the assignments. I arrange the credit”? If so, you probably have a group of hostile students. When students complain, stop a moment and really evaluate what they are saying. If upon reflection you feel they might be right, swallow your pride and change that test date or assignment. No, this does not mean they are taking advantage of you. Students usually have an idea about what is fair and will appreciate the fact that you are willing to evaluate and change.

Be respectful of your students’ ideas and moral values. If your students are “turned on” they will probably want to discuss the “counterculture” or the “new morality.” Great! Keep your mouth shut a great percentage of the time and let the students argue about these subjects while you retain the position of moderator. A student will rarely “put you on the spot” by asking you for your opinion about a controversial moral issue if they like you, like your class, and feel free to express any thoughts or opinions without being “put down” by you. It is the alienated hostile student who usually asks if you have ever “smoked up” or if you have engaged in non-marital coitus.

Really listen to your students. Do you have a “trouble maker” in your class? The student who is always making a hostile challenging comment or question, or the one who tries to make you angry? If so, listen to him. What is he saying? Under this hostility, could he be trying to tell you that he feels alienated, rejected, “put down,” and just wants to be treated like a human being? If you ignore him or “put him down” for his hostility, he may only feel more alienated and hostile and will probably cause you more problems. Try, letting him express his feelings about his comment or question. You may learn something.

Try new classroom techniques. Why do you always have to have thirty-odd pairs of half closed eyes staring at you? Break the class into small groups for discussion. They love to talk among themselves. Why do you have to hold classes in the classroom all of the time? You don’t! Send part of the class to the school library for an assignment and take the rest to the cafeteria, or better yet, the local “hang out,” if this is at all possible. Conduct an informal discussion on some topic relevant to your class. Of course, if you want to get home exactly when the class is scheduled to end, do not try this method because it is guaranteed to generate fascinating conversation for many hours. This method, unfortunately, may not be possible with some high schools.

Be friendly and occasionally socialize with your students. At lunch time do you quickly hurry to the safety of the table with fellow faculty members or lock yourself in the staff room? That’s fine if you want to avoid finding out what is really going on with your students. However, if you wish to know your students as people who might need your help, and who might help you to become a more educated person, occasionally seek them out in the cafeteria, sit down with them over coffee and become involved with their conversations. You may become greatly enlightened.
Give students a chance to evaluate you, your class and your teaching. You evaluate them, so why shouldn’t they evaluate you? A good method for accomplishing this is to have the students rate you and the course as a whole by checking off “excellent,” “good,” etc., for specific items such as “teachers knowledge of subject,” or “amount I learned from course,” also leave space for comments under each item. Of course, you instruct them to omit their names from the forms and to disguise their handwriting. This secret form will give the “silent student” a chance to make constructive criticisms which otherwise, would not come to your attention. Of course, if you have done a good job in “turning on” your students to your class, you will get an ego boost from the many favorable comments, written on the forms.

In summary, the ideas presented for “turning on” students to health and physical education or for that matter any other field are:
1. Be honest at all times.
2. Never “put a student down.”
3. Be real, be yourself. Do not be “professional” (i.e., phony).
4. Be open to suggestions for improving class or changing assignments if upon thorough examination they appear unjust.

5. Respect ideas and moral values different from your own.
6. Listen to what a hostile student is really saying and give him a chance to express his feelings.
7. Try new techniques in class such as holding the class in the cafeteria or local “hang out” to help facilitate informal discussion.
8. Occasionally socialize with students at lunch time in the cafeteria.
9. Get a student evaluation on your teaching and your course.

So, if you think you want to “turn on” students to your class, try some of these techniques. However, beware, because “turned on students” take more of your time, require you to be thoroughly prepared for your class, and make it necessary for you to keep up with the latest information in your field.

REFERENCES

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