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## Engage, Challenge, Motivate, Nurture

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# The Weekly Reader

*Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC*

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## Engage, Challenge, Motivate, Nurture

I am recycling a blog post I made in XXITE in 2009, not solely because I have no idea what to write this week (that is certainly true!), but also because I think this idea is one that deserves revisiting. (I added to and revised the blog post, so I don't feel so guilty about this blast from the past.)

While moderating a TLC session a few years ago, "Secrets of the Award Winners," I started playing with some of the questions I had formulated for the panelists. I had written down "How do you engage your students?" and "How do you challenge your students?" Those two questions prompted me to think of a teaching strategy involving the sequence "engage, challenge, motivate, nurture."

The sequence doesn't necessarily have to happen in that order, but I want to begin by thinking that way. Consider the first day of class. Most of us probably deal first with the syllabus, which I

would think would fall under the category of "challenge." What if instead our first move was to engage them? Have some beginning activity that engages the students with the course content before introducing the nuts and bolts of the course. In my literature classes, I sometimes begin with a piece of literature that we read together and discuss, before we ever get to the syllabus or other course matters. My idea is that if students begin by engaging with what we will actually do, they will respond to the challenge of the syllabus more fully.

In my CRTW classes, I always begin with an activity where the students choose their own groups, based solely on who they know or who has a similar major to them. Then I ask them what information, concepts, and assumptions they used, then what are the implications of their choices. (Those words are all key concepts for the course, some of the

elements of reasoning, although I don't tell them that.)

When they realize that they have not formed the best groups they can for thinking from a variety of disciplines, genders, races, and perspectives, I leave the room and let them adjust the groups. Then we have another group activity that introduces key concepts again. At the end of the class, I finally give them the syllabus, which challenges them with what they will have to do for the course. My hope is that, before they ever encounter the challenging nature of the course, they are already engaged with its goals, concepts, and activities--and that they will thus be more willing to embrace the challenges.

As the course continues, it is time to motivate them, especially as the challenges kick in and start to overwhelm them. Then it is time for me to nurture them to face the challenges. The process goes on, over and over,

*"I would suspect that most teachers are best at one of the four elements, but I think we do a better job if we keep all four going, in relative balance. Doing only one element can pose problems. If all I do is engage my students, I run the risk of merely being an entertainer. If all I do is challenge them, I may shut down their learning. Motivation all the time can perhaps run the risk of tiring them (and me!) out. And if all I do is nurture, will they ever be able to learn on their own?"*



## Continued from page 1

throughout the semester.

The same idea applies to writing assignments or big projects. If I merely give them the assignment, the challenge might overwhelm them. If I can begin by engaging them with the goals of the assignment, I think they are better prepared to take the challenge seriously. Then on to motivation, and as problems emerge, nurturing them to help them jump hurdles and handle obstacles.

The challenge reappears when the students receive their grades, and the process begins again if I allow them to rewrite, which I almost always do. I try to engage them in the revision process, to motivate them to try to write better papers (and become better writers), to nurture them as they struggle to improve their writing.

I see the process in a single class meeting, too. In Monday night's ENGL 600 graduate class, we were covering the next two critical approaches, feminism and New Historicism. These pose challenges, for sure.

There was a great deal of material to cover in three hours, and I could have presented the material to them, but I wanted to

make sure I engaged them. I broke them into three groups and we had a competition: the first group to give the answer about a concept or a figure got points, which I tallied on the board. The game was a bit silly, but my students were certainly engaged. In fact, a few exhibited very competitive streaks that I had not yet seen.

The challenge of the material and the game motivated them as well as engaged them. When we got to New Historicism, I had to nurture them as we entered some new territory for this class. I could sense that they were less sure about this approach than they had been for others; they had encountered psychoanalytic and feminist before, but with New Historicism, as with Marxism the week before (and with Lacan the week before that), I had to slow down and give them more help. We moved through the process of engage, challenge, motivate, nurture in our three hours together, the stages changing as we continued class.

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only one element can pose problems. If all I do is engage my students, I run the risk of merely being an entertainer. If all I do is challenge them, I may shut down their learning. Motivation all the time can perhaps run the risk of tiring them (and me!) out. And if all I do is nurture, will they ever be able to learn on their own?

I think I have done some version of this process in the past, as I am sure we all have, but it has been helpful for me to think in terms of these labels. I can see the application recurring throughout the semester, sometimes in a different order, but I am consciously trying to apply all four.

What do other people think? I would be curious to know, to find out if this process makes sense...



## XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)

Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> Or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: [kosterj@winthrop.edu](mailto:kosterj@winthrop.edu) The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

## A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu).

## Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology,

and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

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**BLOG POSTS**

- NEW POSTS ON THE RENOVATIONS**  
Posted by [Mark Y. Herring](#) on June 22, 2012 at 2:09pm
- CORE VALUES**  
Posted by [Mark Y. Herring](#) on June 5, 2012 at 9:41am
- PLAYING TO TYPE**  
Posted by [Blaiz C. Harding](#) on May 25, 2012 at 10:22am
- TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM**  
Posted by [Amanda Hiler](#) on March 15, 2012 at 12:11pm — 1 Comment
- GONE WITH THE WIND...**  
Posted by [Jo Koster](#) on March 6, 2012 at 10:33am — 2 Comments

+ Add a Blog Post

**NOTES**

- DO COLLEGE PROFESSORS WORK HARD ENOUGH?**  
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 25, 2012 at 11:34pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- WHO OWNS YOUR COURSE?**  
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 19, 2012 at 12:07pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF TABLETS INCREASES, PREFERENCE FOR GROWING**  
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 14, 2012 at 11:24am. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)

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Thought  
for  
The Week

"Never put off till tomorrow  
what may be done day  
after tomorrow just as  
well."  
--Mark Twain