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Program One: No Greater Calling

The Importance and the Qualities of Good Teachers

Objective of Unit

Participants will recognize the value of good teaching and identify those qualities that all good teachers share.

Audience

This program was produced for viewing by a general audience to stimulate and enrich dialogue around the issues of teacher professional development, recruitment, and retention. It was also designed to help the public understand why professional development tied to state and national standards, and the use of best practices, are important for all school teachers. This unit is designed for both self-paced viewing and for facilitators.

Program Description

Each of the following video segments described is streamed on the Models of Teaching website:

Introduction

The host of this program, actor Edward James Olmos, begins by saying that “our future depends on the education of our children and that a good education depends on good teachers. That’s why there is no greater calling than teaching. But what does it take to be a good teacher? You’re about to find out.” One by one, he introduces segments on six teachers from all over the country.

Segment One

The first teacher featured in the piece is Susan Armenta, a teacher at Monarch High School, a two-room school in downtown San Diego, California. The school primarily serves homeless students. Susan’s formidable task is to reach and educate children who have lived transient lives, often with little education. She teaches 12-year-olds who can’t read, 19-year-olds who take college level courses, and students at many levels in between, so Susan must tailor her instruction for each individual student. Susan demonstrates the beliefs that all students can

learn and how teachers must adapt their methods to the individual needs of students.

The student profile is of Jennifer Stoneburner, one of Susan Armenta’s students at Monarch High School. There are many reasons why Jennifer should not be successful in school. If she did not have a teacher like Susan Armenta, Jennifer may not have developed the love of learning that she has. And in Jennifer’s case, a mentor in the community has gone a long way in ensuring her success.

Segment Two

The next teacher story is that of Evelyn Jenkins Gunn, an English teacher at Pelham Memorial High School, in Pelham, New York, an affluent, mostly-white suburb of New York City. Evelyn is an African-American who was born into poverty in Alabama but to a family that stressed a love of learning. Evelyn is an award-winning, National Board-Certified teacher and a Carnegie Scholar. She emphasizes an experiential approach to meeting the NY State Standards for English. Evelyn illustrates how she now inspires her own students to write.

Segment Three

The third teacher featured in the program is Steven Vande Griend, a fifth grade teacher at Lynwood Elementary School in Seattle, Washington. This section shows two different lessons he uses to reach his students. The first is an activity in which his students go to a home improvement superstore to work out geometric equations. The second is a social studies activity involving debate. Steven talks about how he realized that when he attempted to have students debate issues relevant to social studies content, they struggled with applying an unfamiliar

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—Edward James Olmos

This Unit Includes:

- No Greater Calling (video)*
- Tied-up in Knots Activity**
- Pre-Viewing Questions (Appendix 1.1)*
- Diagram of How To Tie a Bow Line Knot (Appendix 1.2)*

process to unfamiliar content. As a result, he has his students debate topics like cats vs. dogs to gain greater familiarity with the debate process. Steven discloses how teachers should know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students

Segment Four

Following this section is Donna Hilton, a fifth grade teacher at Arden Road Elementary School in Amarillo, Texas. In addition to emphasizing hands-on learning, this section features Donna’s successful style for classroom management. She is able to create an atmosphere that is respectful of everyone. Students understand that misbehavior is a sign of disrespect to the teacher and to fellow classmates. Donna shows how teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.

Segment Five

Nick Faber, a math and science specialist at Galtier Magnet School in St. Paul, Minnesota, is the subject of the next piece which emphasizes the need to be a reflective teacher. Nick has a 30-minute commute each day that allows him to reflect on the hits and misses of a particular lesson, as well as an opportunity to focus on goals for an upcoming lesson. He also improves his teaching skills by collaborating with others at his school. Through a process called “reflective practice,” Nick demonstrates how teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from their experience.

Segment Six

The final teacher spotlight shows the positive impact that community involvement can have on education. At Southport Elementary School, just outside of Wilmington, North Carolina, Carol Midgett has enlisted Margaret Connaughton and Jean Fairly — two of Southport’s elderly citizens — to help teach Carol Midgett’s students to read. The video illustrates how Carol, her students and the volunteers all benefit from this added classroom dimension. At the same time, this section highlights Carol’s work with the UNC-Wilmington’s School of Education on Professional Development. Carol models how teachers are members of learning communities through activities that extend beyond classroom teaching.

Self-Tutorial Instructions

Timeline

- Pre-viewing exercise (App. 1.1)15 min
- Read lesson background.....5 min
- Viewing of *No Greater Calling*60 min
- Tied-up in Knots activity15 min
- Read activity purpose/background.....5 min
- Address the discussion questions.....15 min
- Note to Self activity20 min

For the Tied-Up in Knots activity, please go to Appendix 1.2 and try to complete the assignments of Group One through Group Four, in order without reading past the group’s assignment you are trying to complete. Each assignment is closely related to the others, so it should take approximately 15 minutes.

Viewing Instructions

Reflect on the following discussion questions while watching *No Greater Calling* or its six video segments.

- How does the program’s portrayal of teaching compare with your experience of the profession?
- What characteristics do the teachers in *No Greater Calling* have in common?
- Are there common elements in the instructional activities portrayed in the video?
- How is school defined in *No Greater Calling*? What are its major goals? Do these goals differ among the institutions portrayed?
- Are the teachers in *No Greater Calling* “super teachers”? Given the conditions in which most teachers work, can most teachers be expected to replicate the practices of the teachers in the video?
- How authentic do the classroom scenes look?
- Stephen Vande Grande, the elementary school teacher, had to work part-time in a lumber store. How does that fact relate to the theme of *No Greater Calling*?
- Donna Hilton, the fifth grade school teacher in Texas, personalizes her instruction. Would her personalization techniques work in middle or high school? How might they be adapted?
- Nick Faber seems to think about teaching all the time. What opportunities, formal and informal, do you have to reflect upon your teaching?
- What has the video omitted? What does the program not say about teaching?

Suggestion:

During the course of the video, participants should be creating a list of ideal teacher traits.

Workshop Instructions

Timeline

- Introduction/Pre-viewing exercise ...10 min
- Viewing of *No Greater Calling*.....60 min
- Break10 min
- Tied-up in Knots activity15 min
- Discussion/Model teacher traits45 min
- Break.....10 min
- Note to Self activity30 min

Note that times may vary slightly based on the size of the group and the extent of the discussion. Instructions for the individual tutorial can be found on page seven.

Pre-viewing Instructions

Prior to starting the video, ask participants to think briefly about the qualities of being a good teacher. Have them write down some of the most important qualities that come to mind; these traits will be used for post-viewing activities and discussion. A list of possible questions include:

- Which teachers were your favorite? Why?
- Which teachers were your least favorite? Why?
- From which teachers did you learn the most?
- Which teachers demanded the most?
- How did the subject being taught affect your attitude toward the teacher?
- How did the subject being taught affect your learning?
- How did higher demands affect learning?

Viewing Instructions

Lesson One can work well without ever stopping *No Greater Calling* while showing it to participants. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on the video after they've watched it.

You may, however, want to pre-view it to find any segments which might be of particular relevance to the participants in your session. If you spot stories that are especially relevant to your participants, it's a good idea to stop the video after these segments for a brief discussion on how the video's content relates to viewers' situations. Some examples from *No Greater Calling* might be:

- engaging hard-to-reach youth by knowing how to teach to them —

following sections on Susan Armenta and/or Jennifer Stoneburner

- incorporating tactile methods of instruction and assessment into the classroom to monitor and manage student learning effectively — following sections on Evelyn Jenkins Gunn, Steven Vande Griend and/or Donna Hilton
- reflecting on classroom experiences to learn from them — following the section on Nick Faber
- collaborating with others in the learning community — following sections on Nick Faber and Carol Midgett

Participants should note places in the video in which any of the people featured show the qualities that were written down before watching the video. At the same time, participants should write down any more qualities of good teachers which come to mind while watching the video.

If showing the video in pieces, have participants briefly discuss those qualities which are exemplified by the person featured in the section(s) viewed.

Post-Viewing Activity: Tied-Up in Knots

Objectives

- to demonstrate the need for good teaching
- to demonstrate the effectiveness of teaching which consists of clear expectations and purpose; guidance, including modeling; and student practice
- to show the disparity of students' prior knowledge
- to lead into a discussion and analysis of teacher traits

Background

The activity is for four groups, or if the number of participants is not enough to support four groups of at least two people, it can be done with individual participants. The facilitator will assign each group the task of tying a bow line knot. The teaching that each of the groups receives from the facilitator will be vastly different, however. Appendix 1.2 provides four different assignments which relate to tying a bow line knot. Each set of instructions provides varying degrees of teaching that each group receives. The degree of thoroughness increases from instruction #1 to #4.

Suggestion:

Participants should realize that teaching is a whole lot more than a "natural gift" that one has or doesn't have. It is based more on hard work, reflection and continual improvement.

Some students come to school better prepared than others. Unfortunately, teachers can't always rely on having students who already know how to do what is being taught to them.

Instructions

To help reinforce the idea of the “luck of the draw” when it comes to students’ getting good teachers and teachers’ getting prepared and eager students, have participants draw numbers for their group assignments. Don’t assign them to groups yourself. As participants walk in from their break, they can draw a group number.

It would help to reinforce some other messages by blatantly playing favorites with Group Four. Make it appear as though they are receiving extra help in learning how to tie a bow line because they are special. That said, try to keep the varying degrees of instruction a secret. The hope is that those with little instruction will become frustrated over the difficulty of the task.

Finally, have all groups display their knots and reveal their instructions. There is the chance that one of the participants already knows how to tie the knot. If so, it provides the opportunity to discuss the fact that some students come to school better prepared than others, and that unfortunately, teachers can’t always rely on having students who already know how to do what is being taught to them.

Discussion Questions and Follow-up

Part One

At this point, it is a good idea to share with participants the purpose of Tied-Up in Knots. Ask questions that encourage participants to figure out the purpose of the activity:

- Why do you think I had you do this?
- How did the instruction differ among the four groups?
- How does the phrase “luck of the draw” apply to this activity? On the part of teachers (if a participant already knew how to tie the knot)? On the part of students?
- Did working in groups help?
- Did working in groups amplify negative feelings for groups with minimal instruction?
- How does the activity illustrate positive and negative teaching qualities?

Part Two

From there, the discussion should return to the positive traits of teaching and to the lists viewers compiled while watching the video. Participants should also have the opportunity to share great teaching moments in their lives, whether as a teacher or a student.

Participants should identify those teacher traits exemplified by the stories of great teaching moments.

This is a good opportunity for participants to refer to the pre-viewing questions. Those questions help emphasize the traits of effective teaching by examining the roles that teacher personality and teacher demands play in affecting student learning.

Part Three

Using the teacher traits identified by the participants group, the list should be categorized. For example, which traits deal more with a teacher’s personality. Which deal more with a teacher’s method of instruction? Which deal more with a teacher’s knowledge of the subject? Encourage the participants to come up with the various categories and with the traits that fall into each category.

This list should show the ideal characteristics of a teacher. At the same time, participants should see that there are many traits that are part of teaching. Participants should realize that teaching is more than a “natural gift” that one has or doesn’t have. It is based more on hard work, reflection and a commitment to continual improvement.

Closing Activity: Note to Self

Objectives

- to use the inspiration of the video and Tied-Up in Knots activity to set personal teaching goals
- to build in a method of encouraging reflection
- to create a built-in reminder of this session for later in the year

Assignment

Participants should write a letter to themselves to be opened in six months. It should focus on personal goals for teaching. What do the participants hope to accomplish in the next month, six months, year? The letter should also build in some guided reflection over the six months that will have passed, by asking questions like, “What has been my best teaching moment in the past half year?” or, “Which of the characteristics of good teaching have I put in practice?” The facilitator should collect the letters, along with self-addressed envelopes, then *remember to mail them in six months!*

Internet Resource Guide

UNC-TV Models of Teaching

www.unctv.org

This site is the home site for the Models of Teaching program. Here, you can find more information about the series, the standards that are covered, and the MOT sponsors.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

www.nbpts.org/nbpts/

This is the official website of The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. On this easy-to-navigate website, you can find information about the National Board, the specific standards endorsed by the NBPTS, and how you can earn a National Board Certification.

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC)

www.ccsso.org/intasc.html

This page of the Council of Chief State School Officers provides more information on the INTASC standards. This page also provides another link (www.ccsso.org/intascst.html) that details the 10 principles of the INTASC. In addition to the Consortium's principles, this second link offers examples of Dispositions and Performances that give clear examples of how to put these principles into action in the classroom.

Directory of Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Members

www.dscc.org/nta/html/isllc.htm

As the title implies, this site offers a directory of ISLLC Members in participating states and territories. This site describes ISLLC as "a collaboration of state education agencies and professional development organizations committed to raising performance standards for school leaders."

American Association of School Administrators

www.aasa.org/Issues/leadership/murphy.htm

This link leads to an article abstract on ISLLC standards. Joseph Murphy of Vanderbilt University and Neil Shipman of University of Memphis wrote the piece entitled, "The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium: A Standards-Based Approach to Strengthening Educational Leadership."

The Center for Creative Leadership

www.ccl.org/programs/lisa/index.html

The Center's Education Sector (ES) group brings a leadership development resource to contemporary educators to assist them with the tough job of reforming and restructuring schools. Strengthening the leadership capability of those responsible for K-12 public and private schools, colleges, and universities so that educational reforms for excellence can occur is its unique and important mission.

The National Humanities Center

www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/introduction/nhcintro.htm

The National Humanities Center is the country's only independent institute for advanced study in the humanities. A private, nonprofit institution, the Center exists to encourage excellent scholarship and to affirm the importance of the humanities in American society.

The Kenan Best Practices Center

bestpractices.ga.unc.edu

The Center serves as a source of research, development, and dissemination of best practices in advancing strong, effective, long-term partners in the preparation and continuing professional development of school-based educators. In cooperation with the University of North Carolina Center for School Leadership Development and the Best Practices Center within the Kenan Alliance for Partnerships in Education, this website has been established as a clearinghouse of information related to exemplary programs, policy, and schools.

About This Guide

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Additional Pre-Viewing Questions

1. Which teachers were your favorite? Why?
2. Which teachers were your least favorite? Why?
3. From which teachers did you learn the most?
4. Which teachers demanded the most?
5. How did the subject being taught affect your attitude toward the teacher?
6. How did the subject being taught affect your learning?
7. How did higher demands affect learning?

Tying a Bow Line Knot

Note: This activity requires four shoestrings or four pieces of rope, each approximately 18 inches long.

Group One

Directions: Tie a bow line knot.

Group Two

Directions: Tie a bow line knot which will be tested for its strength. Your group has five minutes to come up with a knot to be tested by others.

Group Three

Directions: The bow line knot is a popular knot used to tie a loop at the end of a rope. It is a strong knot, and one that does not receive stress on the knot itself. So it is easy to untie. The bow line can be tied by making a small loop toward the end of the rope, bringing up the end of the rope through the loop, wrapping it around the main part of the rope, then threading the end back down through the loop. Wrapping the rope around a group member's arm or a stationary object will help in tying the knot because of its resistance. Your group has five minutes to come up with a knot to be tested by others.

Group Four

(This group is helped by the facilitator, who demonstrates how to tie the knot.)

Directions: The bow line knot is a popular knot used to tie a loop at the end of a rope. It is a strong knot, and one that does not receive stress on the knot itself. So it is easy to untie. The bow line can be tied by making a small loop toward the end of the rope, bringing up the end of the rope through the loop, wrapping it around the main part of the rope, then threading the end back down through the loop. Wrapping the rope around a group member's arm or a stationary object will help in tying the knot because of its resistance. Your group has five minutes to come up with a knot to be tested by others.

Diagram for Group Four Only

