**The Research Process in Action: Teaching Students to Teach Themselves**

Have you ever had that teachable moment that mobilizes and energizes your class as well as yourself? Let me relate my most recent one.

One of the classes I teach is Cultural Diversity in Education. In preparing them for creating culturally competent students as future teachers, the discussion turned towards discrimination (as it often does). I asked the class how many of them had been discriminated against on our campus. I was surprised to see one-third of the class raise their hand. Then I asked them how many of them witnessed discrimination on campus, and fully one-half of them raised their hands. I remarked at what seemed like such a high number to me, and one of the students raised her hand and said “Mr. Turner, our class ought to do a survey on this campus to see how accurate our numbers are. What is the extent of discrimination on this campus?” The class unanimously, and with great enthusiasm, agreed. Thus began our quest.

For the next two weeks we prepared to survey our campus. Of course, the desire to conduct a survey and the reality of doing so are two things separated by a multitude of obligatory tasks. The class was divided into four groups:

1. **Survey.** This group of students did research into creating a survey that was professional and aligned with our intent. They consulted a wide variety of resources and then began putting together survey questions. They continually informally polled the class to make sure they approved of the survey questions, and that they would get results accurately inform our purpose. Their survey creation was thus a continual evolving process. When the survey was finalized, the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (OPIE) transformed it into a form that could easily be processed by their computing staff for analysis of results.
2. **Research.** This group of students conducted research into the topic of discrimination on college campuses. One of our librarians visited our class and showed them various digital search strategies, sources for APA formatting, and other available resources. Curiously enough, while the groups found ample research regarding discrimination on four-year campuses, very little was found about community college campuses. This provided further motivation to explore this avenue.
3. **Institutional Review Board (IRB).** This group worked on going through the IRB application process at our campus. Besides filling out the application, they arrange for our entire class to be trained in ethical procedures in research. This formalized process, known as CITI training, was taken individually by all class members (including the instructor), and all passed. Also, this group created the Informed Consent form that would be used by all surveyors. The survey questions created by Group 1 were added to the IRB application. After minor amendments, we did receive IRB approval to conduct research.
4. **Student Conference.** Coincidentally at this time the Maricopa Student Research Conference was accepting applications for presentation. Our class agreed this venue would act as “publication” of our findings and that we should apply. They strongly endorsed this application, and voted to apply in the poster presentation category. This group filled out the student application, and honed the descriptor responses to align with our intent and purpose of our project as well as rubrics of the student conference.

Upon receiving IRB approval, the class outlined their plans for survey dissemination. The decision had already been made to give it face-to-face, and expectations regarding numbers and due date were shared. The next two classes were dedicated to doing the survey. When all the surveys (543) were collected, they were given to OPIE for processing and analysis. We took their analysis and translated the information into pie charts. While some students were doing that, the rest of the class was engaged in putting together various parts of our presentation using the rubrics as our guide. The final presentation was printed in color slides on card stock. Throughout all of this process, different departments at the college were invaluable with their assistance.

The day of the student conference was the class’ shining moment. The chairs of the four committees were our presenters. The attention given to the study, and the questions asked of our chairs, was such validation for our class and their efforts. The president of the college requested a copy of the study, emphasizing the value of diversity was one of our core values. One of the Governing Board members talked about the need to replicate the study on other campuses. One Vice-President also requested a copy of the study. The chairperson of the college Diversity Committee requested not only a copy of the study, but explained how it would be used to guide actions of the committee. Several faculty members suggested that the study be published. One of the counselors on our campus wanted to disseminate the results to the counseling division. These are but a few examples of the validating feedback the committee received.

I was so proud of my class and their efforts. This project came from them. They had the spark. They did the planning. They disseminated the survey. They analyzed the findings, and they created the report. I was a mentor and facilitated the project, but this was theirs. Lessons I learned:

* Go with the flow. When a class comes up with a suggestion for a change in curriculum or activity, as long as it’s aligned with the course competencies, go with it.
* As an educator of future educators, what better example to set for the class, than a project that motivates and involves students, and is a prime example of scaffolding.
* Projects such as this are great builders of team and community within the class.
* This was a real-life investigation; projects such as these are highly motivational.

The final lesson I learned was this: engaging and immersing students in the research process for a legitimate cause is the highest form of education, for they learn from their research, and from each other. In effect, they were taught how to teach themselves. Isn’t that the ultimate goal of any teacher, at any level?