

# **GATEWAY ACADEMIC PROGRAM (GAP)<sup>©</sup>**

## **Traditional Unsuccessful vs. GAP Successful Teaching Strategies**

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Why are the teachers having so many problems in teaching typically non-affluent students at the high school level in such critical academic areas as math, science, reading, and English?

In our opinion, the primary reasons for these problems in the teaching force are:

- The pedagogy taught to teachers-in-training for almost any level (k-12) is often through the “methods” courses that are taught by the education faculty. Usually, little practical classroom experience is tied to these courses, so the student teachers do not have a chance to observe the talked-about techniques in the hands of an expert teacher who is both pedagogy and content qualified. Also, there is no guarantee that the classroom teacher will actually demonstrate the various techniques that have been described in the discipline the teachers are going to teach. In other words, there is a gap between the “methods” courses and the in- the-classroom experiences of student teaching. At the secondary level, discussions of effective pedagogical techniques between the student teacher and the classroom teacher are none too common.
- Typically, no course is required for secondary teachers-in-training in the teaching of reading in any discipline at the secondary level. There seems to be a tacit assumption, albeit a risky one, that all secondary students are good readers of whatever the subject matter may happen to be. Formal instruction in the reading process is over by the fifth grade. After that, reading becomes the major tool for learning the various subject matters. It is further assumed that the teacher of a particular subject matter is also a proficient reader in whatever the discipline happens to be, typically a safe assumption to make. However, this assumption does not mean that the teacher also knows how to teach the students to read efficiently in the discipline—particularly if the students are having difficulties.
- Pedagogical techniques are presented as a subject matter rather than as elements of an ongoing process for effectively communicating whatever the subject matter may be to students. Treating pedagogical techniques as a subject matter, such as

math or English, tends to isolate them from whatever the particular subject matter is. Thus pedagogy is taught in a kind of vacuum, and it has a tendency to stay that way in the minds of teachers. Moreover, the education professionals, who are pedagogically trained, are not necessarily well versed in math, reading, or English, the cornerstones of education.

- Pedagogical techniques have been derived from research into learning theories and child development, marginally supported fads in education, and traditional educational practice. Much of the experimentation on pedagogy or “methods of teaching” has taken place at the elementary level, and the examples are drawn from there. As a result, many of these newly trained and graduated teachers at the secondary level either have become bored with the examples given or are unable to translate the pedagogy from the elementary level to their classrooms at the high school level.

What has not been communicated is that pedagogical techniques are the universals of teaching; it is the subject matters and their levels of difficulty that vary. Anchoring a new concept to something a student already knows is as applicable at the first grade level as it is at the twelfth or the doctoral levels.

- The pedagogy in the Colleges of Education is applied to some abstract concepts, e.g., inductive vs. deductive approach, practice for mastery, high expectations, etc., during the training of teachers. The delineation of practical examples of these concepts in the various academic fields of the new teachers is practically non-existent. Therefore, many teachers have great difficulties in applying what they have learned in college to their classrooms.
- On the one hand, the Colleges of Education often encourage their students to use the inductive approach to their teaching, i.e., capitalize on information that the students bring to the subject matter. The textbooks, on the other hand, are written in a deductive way, i.e., abstract definitions first, and then an example or two. Their professors usually teach the trainee teachers in a deductive way. So, when teachers teach at the high school level, they use the deductive way because it is the model they have seen. However, the deductive method is generally only effective with advanced students. The result is that the teachers end up demonstrating their own knowledge in front of the students rather than actively guiding and engaging the students in their own learning and mastery of the subject matter, and the students lose interest.

- The importance of classroom management (i.e., control of the learning environment) and how to achieve it is another problem for new teachers—particularly if they are assigned to schools with diverse students from poverty backgrounds. And this is typically the case for new teachers—the most challenging assignments (code phrase for the worst schools or classes)—in their early teaching experiences. It is no wonder that many teachers who started out full of hope and enthusiasm are looking for other employment opportunities by the time they have been in the teaching profession for about two to three years. If they do stay, then they teach to the very few students who may be interested or they just go through the motions.

In what ways are the GAP strategies different?

- The GAP trainers are trained in effective techniques of classroom management, the cluster of skills required for effective inductive learning and the resulting academic performance on the part of students. Also, and most importantly, the GAP trainers are fully content qualified in one or more of the critical academic areas of math, science, reading, and English.

The three critical components of successful teaching: control, pedagogy, and subject matter are all combined in one person—the trainer. As a result of the smooth operation of all three components, the trainer demonstrates confidence in both his/her ability to teach and the trainees' ability to learn. As a result, the teachers soon demonstrate confidence in their own ability to apply the new techniques teach their students more effectively than before. When the trainee returns to the classroom, the confidence will be transmitted to the students who, in turn, will demonstrate improved learning and academic performance.

- In providing pedagogical and management training, the GAP trainer always uses the subject matter content being taught by the high school teachers in their classes. For example, if the training being provided for teachers of basic math and algebra teachers, then all of the content examples are taken from these areas of math. In addition, the various techniques being used by the GAP trainers are fully explained to the teacher trainees, and the trainees are given plentiful opportunities to practice the various techniques on each other and then with high school students.

The classroom management training is designed to fit the students that the trainees will actually be teaching. Without order in the classroom, effective teaching and learning are impossible to achieve. If the students are very hard to manage,

then the trainers focus on those techniques that work with such students, such as eliminating cell phones from the classroom environment; establishing and enforcing rules about calling out, sleeping in class, talking with one another, punching each other, or getting up and just walking out. One key element of classroom management is the teacher knows every student's name as soon as possible.

- The organization of the course material and the instruction provided are formatted in inductive and “parallel” ways. That is, for the inductive aspect, the content basically builds on what the students know, can bring to the table, and can apply to the new learning. For the parallel aspect, the idea is to take similar concepts and combine them into one instructional unit, again building on what they. For example, teaching the five types of factoring in parallel makes the analogy or points of similarity much more understandable to students than teaching them separately or *ad seriatim*.
- “Exit” questions are quick assessments at the end of a training session to see how well the trainees have grasped the content of the session. If there are some shaky areas revealed, the trainer will either review or teach those areas again. Later, the trainees will use the exit questions with their students when they return to their classrooms.
- “Priming” homework consists of tasks or questions that anticipate or signal the next topic to be taken up or application of a given topic, using the subject matter that is relevant to the teacher trainees. Priming homework is more than just practice of what has been taught—it looks ahead to a new application or a new topic. Again, the trainees can take this type of homework back to their classrooms to use with their students.
- Finally, the trainers take the position that if the trainees have trouble learning a particular aspect of the GAP program strategies, then it is the trainers who are responsible—not the trainees. The same position holds true for the students in our courses.