

Some faculty find their working situations and their careers to be energizing and productive. Others are frustrated, unproductive, and will "burn out" quickly, leaving behind a trail of effort without success and ill feelings toward their institutions and the professoriate. What are the differences between these two types and can we capitalize on the skills and working styles of the "quick starters" to help those less fortunate?

Quick Starters: New Faculty Who Succeed

Robert Boice

Most of what we know about how professors teach comes from studies of already experienced teachers. As a result, we understand little about how teaching is learned or about why some of us master it more readily than do others.

This chapter demonstrates a simple strategy for identifying new faculty who make quick starts and it suggests that we can profit in comparing them to other new hires. The result is a new way of looking at instructional improvement, based on communication of the basics of teaching that work so impressively for "quick starters."

Normative Behaviors of New Faculty as Teachers

In a decade of studying new faculty as teachers, I have made a point of interviewing a whole range of colleagues, even those who would ordinarily avoid faculty development programs. The advantage in this patient style, beyond the eventual rapport it builds, is its potential for uncovering aspects of teaching that faculty ordinarily do not verbalize. For example, when new faculty were interviewed and observed over several successive semesters (see Boice, 1991, for details), they revealed some striking commonalities about how most professors start as teachers. As the following list shows, many of the initial habits of new faculty seem less than ideal:

1. Most new faculty, even those who had taught at other campuses, tended to teach in a facts-and-principles style of lecturing (Fink, 1984). As a rule, new faculty equated good teaching with good content. Almost without exception in my sample, new faculty volunteered plans to teach in

more interactive styles, but not until they felt comfortable as teachers. Curiously, new faculty with considerable prior teaching experience admitted that they had rarely strayed from familiar patterns of lecturing.

2. Most new faculty tauged defensively, with the specific aim of avoiding complaints made by students to senior colleagues, especially chairpeople. New faculty at all three study campuses showed an awareness that such complaints, once registered in retention/tenure/promotion reports, could persist and become reasons for termination. Almost invariably, new faculty tried to defend themselves against this potential danger by focusing on content (what they called "getting their facts straight"); the most indefensible criticism imaginable to them was not knowing their lecture material. Incidentally, new faculty almost never worried about the kinds of factors that faculty developers typically assume are critical to excellence in teaching, such as displaying enthusiasm for teaching and assessing student learning.

3. The majority of these few hundred new faculty under study received student evaluations that fell well below their expectations. As a rule, they blamed these mediocre-to-poor ratings on external factors such as the quality of students, teaching loads, invalid rating systems, and class times and sizes.

4. Few new faculty planned improvements as teachers beyond making their lecture notes better organized and error-free.

5. New faculty's most important goal as teachers, a priority revealed only after several semesters of contacts, was to get to the point where teaching no longer took as much time to prepare or as much emotion to conduct. That is, they looked forward to lecture preparation that would not dominate work weeks and to classes where they would feel comfortable. New faculty in their first three years at large campuses expended surprising amounts of time in lecture preparation: Norms for new faculty with two-course-per-semester assignments were thirteen to twenty-two hours per week; with three-course loads, eighteen to twenty-seven hours. One result of this pattern was busyness and stressfulness (Boice, 1989). Another result was a growing aversion to teaching as an activity that took too much time and paid too few rewards.

6. By their own admission, new faculty typically went to class over-prepared; that is, they prepared so much to say that they had to rush to say it all. In so doing, they inadvertently discouraged students from active participation in classes.

7. Most new faculty established comfort, efficiency, and student acceptance slowly, if at all, during my two to four years of regular contact with them. Even by the fourth year the majority of inexperienced new faculty reported feeling tense, worrying about not being in control of classes and doubting that students liked them.

Overall, this is a disheartening pattern, one that probably holds true on a variety of campuses. Its generality is easily enough tested. But even

where practitioners are not inclined to carry out systematic research, they can profit in interviewing enough new faculty to identify some of the quick starters on campus. These exemplary newcomers provide important relief from the discouraging beginnings of most professors. Moreover, quick starters may suggest simple strategies for enhancing the performance of other teachers.

Characteristics of Quick Starters

So far, my colleagues and I have identified inexperienced new faculty as quick starters, usually during their second and third semesters on campus, when they scored in the top quartile on these dimensions: (1) classroom observers' ratings of new faculty's teaching in terms of classroom comfort, rapport with students, and student involvement, (2) students' ratings of teaching in formal, end-of-semester evaluations and in early, informal evaluations (Boice, 1990a), and (3) new faculty's self-ratings of their enjoyment and comfort as teachers. At the three campuses where quick starters are under study, the incidence of new faculty who meet these criteria is 5 to 9 percent. Incidentally, the rate at which experienced new hires (that is, those with considerable prior teaching) meet these criteria is somewhat lower.

Thus far, eight concomitants of quick starts have proven reliable. Overall, the twenty-two quick starters observed for at least a year (usually during their second and third semesters on campus) showed the following, relatively unique tendencies:

1. They lectured in a facts-and-principles style but in a comfortable fashion that allowed time for student involvement. This more relaxed pacing included verbal and nonverbal cues that encouraged students to participate.
2. They verbalized (to me) uncritical, accepting, and optimistic attitudes about the undergraduate students on their campuses.
3. They displayed low levels of complaining and cynicism about their campuses and their colleagues in terms of supportiveness and competence.
4. They showed a marked disposition to seek advice about teaching, from colleagues, via reading and observing, and from faculty development programs. Specifically, they spent an average of four hours per week in social contacts with colleagues that included discussions about teaching.
5. They evidenced quick transitions away from spending the bulk of work weeks on teaching preparation, usually by the end of the first semester on campus. Specifically, they settled into patterns of work allocation that typically included no more than one and one-half hours of preparation per classroom hour by the third semester.
6. They produced a documented balance of time expenditures among aca-

dem activities so that at least three hours per week (of at least half the weeks during semesters) were spent on scholarly writing by the second semester. Accordingly, quick starters were nearly unique in producing scholarly outputs at levels consistent with tenure standards on their campuses (mean = 1.5 published manuscripts per year). (Recall that, by definition, quick starters also excel as teachers during their first year on campus.)

7. They integrated their research and scholarly interests into undergraduate classes, resulting in enthusiasm for teaching and recruitment of students as research assistants.
8. They displayed high energy, broad interests (for example, singing in choirs), concern with self-presentation, and a sense of humor (see Cole, 1986, for a similar finding).

What can we learn from the pattern just outlined? The obvious answers relate to the greater skill of quick starters in establishing moderation in lecture preparation, in meeting other academic needs including collegiality and scholarly productivity, and in finding comfort with their classes, their students, their colleagues, and their campuses. All in all, quick starters seemed to be more positive, more sociable, and more efficient individuals. A problem in stating the differences from other new faculty in this way is that it can discourage emulation; quick starters may seem like gifted people who are necessarily exceptions.

My own thinking about what makes quick starters different keeps drifting back to my interests in understanding success at writing. There are also quick starters among professorial writers and they display illuminating similarities to quick starters as teachers. Briefly, quick starters as writers, unlike their relatively silent colleagues, postpone attention to the *process* and *product* of writing, concentrating first on regular *practice* and *comfort* as writers.

This postponement of addressing product (final outcomes in terms of writing quality) and process (finding ways to write for an audience, with flow and voice) actually increases the likelihood that writers will eventually deal with process and product (Tremmel, 1989). That is, quick starters begin by establishing the mind set and habits of already productive writers, by working at writing regularly, regardless of readiness (Boice, 1990b). Then, once underway, they seek out related solutions to process and product in a timely and enthusiastic fashion.

Quick starters as teachers, similarly, put off the usual concerns of new faculty about product (for example, the completeness of their lecture notes) and process (for example, attempts to abandon lecturing for discussion-based classes). Instead, they begin by attending to issues of practice in comfortable and efficient fashion. Specifically, they talk about wanting to begin with comfort in the classroom, with acceptance and feedback from

students, and with enough time left over to take care of other essential needs such as establishing collegial networks and scholarly productivity. Then, much like quick starters as writers, they build a practical and timely interest in the process and product of teaching once productive practice is underway.

The point in drawing this parallel between quick starters as writers and quick starters as teachers is that, in both cases, the habits, intellectual skills, and attitudes that distinguish these exemplary new hires are basic and teachable. Sternberg and his colleagues call this sort of practical intelligence *tacit knowledge* and conclude that it is rarely taught but nonetheless very teachable (Sternberg, Okagaki, and Jackson, 1990). In fact, much evidence already exists to show that academic writers can profit from emulating the simple basics of quick starters (see, for example, Boice, 1989). In this chapter, the emphasis is on emulating the practices of quick starters as teachers.

Testing the First-Factor Rule with Slower Starters

There is, of course, nothing new about suggesting that new faculty should include the most basic skills in their initial efforts at mastering teaching; the most successful guide for teachers emphasizes basics such as monitoring student note taking as an index of their comprehension (McKeachie, 1986). What may be novel, however, is the notion that new teachers fare best when they address certain basics first.

As a preliminary test of this idea, I have begun studies where slower starters are coached to imitate quick starters. Results of ongoing studies with fifteen new faculty at two campuses indicate that at least some of the practices of quick starters are promising as interventions for other new faculty. In fact, we opted to initiate our program with what quick starters themselves suggested would assist most: helping colleagues find balance in time expenditures. (This is not, I suspect, where I would have embarked on my own, at least in regard to facilitation of teaching.)

Thus, we recruited new faculty who had established clearly distressing beginnings as teachers to participate in a "balance program." These participants represented a wide cross section of faculty who agreed to remain involved for at least an academic year and to (1) keep daily, verifiable records of how they spent their work time (Boice, 1987), (2) decrease classroom preparation to a maximum of two hours per classroom hour, (3) increase social networking aimed at supporting teaching and scholarship, (4) increase time spent on scholarly writing to thirty to sixty minutes per workday, regardless of readiness to write, and (5) integrate their own research and scholarly interests into lectures.

While participants invariably expected these assignments to be difficult and time-consuming, the eventual result was quite different. This un-

ing quick starters as collaborators in coaching the basics of better teaching.) (5) At the least, reconsider Lucas's (1990, p. 113) conclusion about what will most help faculty as teachers: Instead of worrying about *what* to say, they would do better to ask *how* they can present material in ways that create excitement about teaching.

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