

Chapter 50

Students of Color and Anecdotal Pedagogy: A Success Story

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ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates that students of color have greater access to the academy than ever before. Measuring the academic success of these students has become a national priority since social justice and equality scholars have brought attention to disparities experienced by students of color in the academy. Depending on the institution, success is measured by student retention and graduation rates along with climate surveys. Findings clearly illuminate the reality that students of color are not retained and do not graduate at the same rates as white students. Climate surveys highlight how students of color consistently experience various forms of discrimination from administrative staff and faculty alike. Yet, the perception persists that students of color are successfully navigating institutions of higher education at the same levels as their white counterparts. The question begs to be asked: How are students of color successful in the realm of higher education in the twenty first century?

INTRODUCTION

Student Success research indicates that positive experiences in the college classroom consistently leads to high levels of retention and graduation. Through my own personal and professional journeys, I have come to understand that anecdotal pedagogy is an effective tool to inform my academic and teaching practices, which has facilitated richer academic enrichment for myself and other students of color. This case study aims to provide an anecdotal pedagogy framework to illustrate how this approach facilitates student success in the college classroom for students of color. Justin Maxwell's (2017) anecdotal pedagogy, a teaching method that incorporates story-telling by and about the instructor, leads to trust building in the classroom, yielding greater comprehension of concepts and greater learning outcomes. This study proffers that anecdotal pedagogy engages students of color more actively in their learning and in

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the attainment of critical concepts. Instructors who engage in story-telling to relate concepts to his/her personal experiences dispel perceived mysticism or apathy, a dynamic that has been reported to intimidate students, making learning for students of color more difficult. The origins of anecdotal pedagogy are examined for their effectiveness in teaching students of color from the lens of an instructor who has employed the teaching method for over four years.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods inform this study. Quantitatively, the study indicates how international non-white students enrolled in a bridge program at a research I university, and registered in the same course, *American Culture*, using the same syllabus, taught by different individual instructors performed with and without anecdotal pedagogy, using grades as the source of data. The study posits that student engagement in the classroom and grades are reliable indicators of how well students understand and apply conceptual information. Each *American Culture* section is provided a tutor who attends every class and hosts weekly tutoring sessions to ensure students understand course material. Additional qualitative data includes the outcomes of interviews with tutors pertaining to how and why students perform at a higher level in these courses and assimilate material critically when anecdotal pedagogy is utilized in lieu of a lecture style teaching method. The study highlights the importance of utilizing anecdotal pedagogy in the academy with the goal of debunking traditional pedagogies that have not garnered as high levels of academic success for students of color. And more importantly, anecdotal pedagogy allows students of color to better relate to their instructors, minimizing or even eliminating some students of color's perceptions of being discriminated against or judged based on race.

BACKGROUND

The Case of Anecdotal Pedagogy

Over the years, faculty has employed various pedagogical methods to impart academic knowledge in the classroom. Barnes and Blevins (2004), discuss how learning is precipitated by teaching methods that should convey contextualized messages with a myriad of variables including: (1) the type of material to be learned, (2) the magnitude of material to be learned, (3) the degree of mastery desired/required, (4) the level of student interest, (5) level of student ability, (6) the amount of time the student can devote to independent study, (7) the types of benefit received upon mastery of the material, (8) the magnitude of reward received upon mastery of the material, (9) the utility of the gain, from the student's perspective, (10) the type of sacrifices associated with the failure to master the material, (11) the magnitude of penalties associated with failure to master the material, (12) the utility of the sanctions, from the student's perspective, (13) the types of instructional materials available, (14) the magnitude of instructional materials available, (15) access to an instructor, (16) the level of instructor knowledge of the material, (17) the degree of teacher willingness to teach the material, (18) the level of instructor knowledge of teaching techniques, (19) the ability of the instructor to apply teaching techniques, and (20) the time the instructor can devote to formal instruction (p. 42). Barnes and Blevins advance these twenty variables to argue that discussion based lectures are more effective in the college classroom than the formal lecture teaching style. While Barnes and Blevins (2004) acknowledge that a lecture method allows for orderly instruction and manages succinct knowledge transfer, over four years the grades of microeconomics students enrolled in a course that utilized anecdotal pedagogy based approach yielded higher grades than those of students enrolled in a lecture-style course.

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