Coaching for Diversity: A Model of Academic Support for a Liberal Arts College

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As student demographics begin to change and broaden in higher education, resources to serve the growing needs of all students will be stressed just as greater accountability for student outcomes will heighten. With the tight budgets in small liberal arts colleges, supporting students from a broader range of diverse backgrounds and experiences will present challenges to learning in the classroom, campus climate, and retention. Larger universities are generally more able to adapt and put in place academic support staff who are available to work individually with first generation students, students of varying socio-economic backgrounds, racially and ethnically diverse students, and even students who possess a wide range of learning disabilities. Yet, a liberal arts college's strengths lie in its priority of quality teaching in the classroom, and this attribute can be leveraged. Smaller classrooms allow faculty the opportunity to connect and work with students in a deeper and more meaningful way. This advantage can be maximized if we apply an academic support paradigm and specific techniques like academic coaching to current higher education pedagogy to specifically address diversity in the classroom.

Academic Support Paradigm

A variety of larger universities and state colleges (Iowa State University, Clemson University, Minnesota State University, Purdue University, to name a few) are increasingly adopting student success centers and strategic success initiatives for addressing the needs of diverse students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, first generation students, and ethnically diverse students. These success centers, often utilizing grant money, can provide one-on-one support for students in the area of time management, goal setting,

stress management, studying strategies, tutoring, and college transition support. Academic support systems are implemented to meet the financial, social, and academic needs of incoming college students from diverse backgrounds. This support system is based on an academic support paradigm where the goal is to meet the needs of the demographics of each particular college it serves. The purpose of the paradigm is to improve student retention and student success overall. This paradigm has created a shift in focus and resources in many colleges and universities. Some of these demands are met by programs federally funded by the Department of Education, like TRIO, or by increasing services in various departments, like academic advising. Higher educational institutions may choose to leverage their academic advising offices with personnel who offer success strategies in workshops and seminars for students. Workshop themes often include: studying strategies, time management, goal setting, test taking, and writing academic papers. In each of these academic support systems, TRIO and academic advising, there lies a distinct division between the academic support outside of the classroom and inside the classroom. Davis (2010) points out that when we look specifically at first generation students (a label that includes a large demographic of diverse students), faculty play as important a role as academic support services (p. 53 as cited in Terenzini et al., 1995, p. 13). Yet, many of the decisions to support students academically do not require faculty participation or input.

Academic support services have been expanded because there is generally not an expectation for all faculty to teach these skills in their curriculum. However, an academic coaching philosophy could be utilized in all classrooms in accordance with content and become a part of the academic support paradigm; research suggests this approach would both benefit students and faculty by raising student accountability and improving academic performance. It also is a model that would utilize the strengths and specific mission of a liberal arts curriculum that values teaching and mentoring. Small classrooms and the emphasis on personal connections between students and faculty in a liberal arts setting provide a unique opportunity to employ the coaching approach.

Academic Coaching

Robinson, assistant director of academic success initiatives, and Gahagan, student engagement director (both from the University of South Carolina) define the practice of academic coaching as ultimately "self-authorship." Through "self-assessment, reflection, and goal setting" students become independent learners (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010, p. 27). Robinson and Gahagan (2010) elaborate on the purpose and objectives of their coaching program:

> At the University of South Carolina, academic coaching is defined as a one-on-one interaction with a student focusing on strengths, goals, study skills, engagement, academic planning, and performance. The coach encourages students to reflect on strengths related to their academics and works with the student to try new study strategies. Finally, the coach serves as a constant resource for the student to reconnect with throughout college. (p.27)

In this program, a relationship is built by students around one particular support person, the coach. In this coaching session, students meet one-on-one with either a professional academic coach or a peer academic coach to set weekly goals, create accountability plans, and learn how to navigate and access the college's available resources. The purpose of academic coaching is to provide ways for students to access knowledge about learning strategies and their own strengths and weaknesses as a learner. The student's self-awareness along with appropriate guidance from the coach better helps the student identify campus resources that match their needs. The coaching session provides an on-going structure for student engagement.

The staff that provide academic coaching typically vary from professional advising staff to peer mentors who often receive formal "academic coaching" training. Academic coaching has been developed and utilized on college campuses beginning in the early 2000s. Since we now have research that proves the efficacy of academic coaching, these strategies have begun to emerge sparsely in small liberal arts colleges under the umbrella of student academic support services and advising offices. However, again because of limited resources, usually one support staff member and, in some cases, an

additional handful of peer staff are delegated to the specific task of coaching. Research has shown that academic coaching is very effective in addressing the retention of first generation and minority students. In a study funded by Stanford University, a coaching program contracted by *Insidetrack* was found to have "improved retention and graduation rates by 10 to 15 percent and [to be] more cost effective than previously studied interventions. The study was conducted by Eric Bettinger, an associate professor at Stanford's School of Education" (Hayes, 2012, p.15). In these programs academic coaches primarily worked with students one-on-one. In contrast to advising, however, in a coaching session students are guided to a deeper, more accountable self by accessing their stories and then identifying the answers to change those stories.

The coaching method in the classroom employs powerful open-ended questions to help the student explore the many possible answers that he or she may possess, but have not yet identified, until they are explored and verbalized; thus, the coach can advise and guide in a more directed way to the resources each student requires. There is a more reflective and conscious connection to the responsibility that they bring to their academic goals.

Academic Coaching in the Classroom:
Becoming Facilitators

Since the coaching model was initially structured as a one-on-one session, it may be easy to dismiss it as "belonging to" academic support services. However, this model of student engagement also can be replicated in the classroom between the faculty and the students when the faculty become facilitators. Whether the student is encountering a new situation, is unfamiliar to the college environment, or the student is assigned reading or content that seems unlike his or her own life experiences and history, the coaching approach provides a structure to access the material. Coaching operates under the premise that the answers for accessing knowledge cannot be bestowed by another, but are unlocked by the student with proper guidance and facilitation. In the process, an all-knowing presence of professorial authority diminishes, and is replaced by a community of learners where individual

stories emerge. In the beginning of the process, the combination to unlock is not known by either the professor or the student, but it is instead revealed by an emerging questioning and further investigation that is student-led based on progressive knowledge. The faculty member's job is to listen, affirm, assess, and dynamically create questions and opportunities to explore and analyze multiple perspectives. Transformation emerges as the students begin to imitate the structure on their own, applying coaching techniques to challenge assumptions about content, to express their own unique stories after considering the validity of other perspectives, and to properly seek out and receive validation for their own developed ideas.

In Turnbull's 2009 book titled, *Coaching for Learning*, the author compares a traditional teaching approach to a coaching approach while retaining the integrity of the pedagogical objective. She demonstrates the core coaching philosophy that "involves a significant shift of mindset for some teachers comfortable in a traditional didactic style to step back from the role of 'expert' to adopt a coaching role" (41). Although many professors may have already integrated some modification of a Socratic dialectical style in their classroom pedagogy, especially for the purpose of discussion, coaching pedagogy requires continuous and defined procedural application of several strategies such as: dialectical questioning, metacognition, de-emphasis of authority, and, finally, validation and integration of multiple perspectives. These strategies benefit all students as they address not only diversity in race, socio-economic class, ethnicity, or educational background, but also the learning traits of the millennial students who desire active engagement in the classroom.

I initially became familiar with academic coaching when I began teaching First-Year Seminar. Very early on in the course, I noticed one of my students struggling with assignments although he was participating at a high level in class. In conference with this student, I began asking questions about the gap between his performance in class and his written work. The questions I posed ranged from "getting to know you" type questions including how the student came to choose this institution to questions about the expectations for college and after graduation. In that conversation, significant revelations came to light. The student had chosen this college intending to play a particular

sport, but had now incurred a concussion. This concussion happened not to be the first, but instead one in a series of concussions. It seemed obvious that this was playing a role in the student's academic performance. However, after further questioning and hearing details of his academic journey through elementary and high school, I suspected undiagnosed learning disabilities may have been a factor as well. In addition, I noticed that the essence of the student's story was not only about his current struggle but also about a fear of a loss; the student feared not being able to play the sport he loved, which was the initial motivation for coming to this institution. Because I had delved into this student's story, I could now help him identify the resources on campus to help him move forward and I knew how his initial motivation to play sports and that loss may pose a barrier to his learning. The knowledge I now had about the situation helped the student access all of the right accommodations, and aided me in serving him better in the class. Through this process, the student also became very self-aware of his personal strengths and could more readily access those strengths for his academic work.

This student's continued persistence (one of his strengths) and ultimate success through the first year, along with a suggestion from a college support staff member who worked with the student and myself, motivated me to seek out academic coaching training. This training provided me with practiced techniques for one-on-one coaching and also provided a structural framework that I could apply to the classroom. Since then, I have used the training in the classroom with all students, including students from ethnically, racially, socially, and economically diverse backgrounds, to help students identify their stories, experience validation, and apply it to the way they critically think about academic content. Coaching can provide ongoing academic support in the classroom while serving student learning overall.

Facilitation of Stories

The reason the coaching methodology is especially effective in addressing diversity is because some students can feel not only like outsiders to the college setting but also as outsiders compared or relational to their peers and faculty. Their perspectives and stories can sometimes be un-relatable to their classmates. However, even if the majority of the students in the class share

similar backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, their perspectives also differ greatly from their professors. Closing the gap on different perspectives is what the coaching methodology can address. Each faculty member must become the facilitator for their learning community classroom. When shifting to facilitator, every student's perspective and voice becomes the center of learning. Studies show that first generation students are more willing to speak up when they see the classroom as a learning community with the teacher as facilitator. Davis, author of *The First Generation Student Experience*, cites Thayer who suggests that "recent data on college retention point to learning communities as the best way to help first generation college students stay enrolled and achieve a timely graduation" (Davis, 2010, p. 52 as cited in Thayer, 2000, p. 4). There are many reasons why the learning community benefits first generation college students in particular, but creating an accountability for participating and speaking in the classroom as well as creating personal relationships with faculty and peers in the context of class is crucial (Davis). Also, first generation college students' learning style is conducive to the learning environment as a whole because they often quintessentially embrace the ultimate question: "Why is it important to master this information" (Davis, p. 56 as cited in Chafee, p. 85). They, in fact, often present the most challenging questions in the classroom. These challenging questions can emerge only if facilitators encourage students to connect content with personal stories.

When teaching a First-Year Seminar class on social media and mindfulness, I assigned students to choose a "selfie" and explore the story behind the selfie. The learning objective was to examine the difference between the way we represent ourselves online and how the online representation matched our personal stories. This exploration allowed students to both examine their individual selfie philosophy and relationship to technology as well as make a critique about society. One student, a Latina woman, explained how going from not having the resources to buy a phone to attaining the resources to own one "transformed" her "into everything society wanted me to be." This opportunity to make the material relate to her personal relationship with technology also deepened her understanding of the content itself. This reflection exercise was accompanied by readings and analysis on diminishing conversation, solitude, and time for self-reflection

due to social media use. The discussion that followed included students identifying themes that emerged in the readings such as how social media hyper-connection (being continually tethered to social media) could destroy and break down communities as well as personal identities. In that discussion, two students, both women of color, expressed how racial tensions and racial micro-aggressions occurred online for themselves and their communities. They drew connections between the reading and their own personal experiences. Although the material was challenging them to be objective in their cultural critique about the effect of social media on their relationships and communities, students were free to explore how their stories affirmed or negated the readings. They also were more willing to think critically about their own assumptions about the benefits of social media use. This accomplished the learning objectives of the assignment and validated diverse voices and perspectives, which was of benefit to the students of color, but also to the rest of the class who were predominantly white. It also encouraged the other students of color to feel more comfortable in expressing and analyzing the material in the context of their own experiences as well as becoming more aware of how others might view it. This pedagogical approach placed the content in the context of personal experiences; thus, students engaged more actively with the content.

The idea that college faculty must change their pedagogical practices can be controversial. It can also be met with resistance because change is viewed as surrendering to the demands of an increasingly narcissistic and needy student body. Opponents assert that students need to persist through the academic demands of college. Although the issue of decreasing individual persistence may be an issue, it should not be confused with the evidence-based research that shows the ineffectiveness of the college classroom in producing knowledgeable students who can think critically. In a 2003 article in the *Journal of Teaching in Higher Education*, Northedge articulates a way forward that is rooted in neither a traditional "knowledge transmission" approach nor a "student-centered" approach. He lays out a new approach that concludes, "If HE [Higher Education] is to offer genuine opportunities to diverse student audiences, we cannot persist with models of teaching as 'knowledge transmission', nor rely on unfocused student-cent[e]red approaches that leave the students floundering within everyday discourse" (31). In the academic

coaching model, the goal is to not allow students to dictate or modify the content nor the outcomes of the curriculum or classroom objectives, it is rather to guide them and create avenues for accessing the material, so they can achieve the learning outcomes.

Facilitation as pedagogy connotes something both theoretically and practically different than "teaching." In facilitation students take accountability for their learning and thus become more engaged. This begets deeper and more intellectually developed thinkers. Northedge argues, "With a diverse student body, no fixed start or end point can be assumed and, consequently, no selection of items can be appropriate to the needs of all. The challenges of diversity demand a more fluid conception of teaching" (2003, p. 19). Academic coaching lays out not only a structure and strategy, but also pedagogical techniques to create fluidity to help students achieve an expected normative standard of intellectual development in college.

Active Learning

Other support for this facilitation pedagogy includes what some call an "active learning process." In a study titled, "Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics," and published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in 2014, researchers in the biology department discovered that active learning improved test scores by 6% over traditional lecture format. As later cited in *The New York Times,* the study also showed an even greater benefit to "women, minorities, and low income and first generation students" than "affluent" white men from "educated families" (Murphy Paul, 2015). Active learning can connote many varieties of pedagogical strategies, all of which require student engagement versus passive listening and lecture. Academic coaching employs active learning pedagogy as it lays out four key areas that provide the framework for the active learning: de-emphasizing authority, integrating multiple perspectives (story sharing), metacognition, and, finally, challenging questions along with active listening. Each of these areas work in coordination with each other. In fact, the areas are also non-linear steps in the process of coaching. The facilitator works to dynamically select the area needed most in real time, bouncing from one area to another while keeping all of the areas activated

and open simultaneously. If the four keys of coaching are applied in this way in a facilitator-instructor model, active learning can be accomplished.

The Four Keys of the
Academic Coaching Classroom Model

De-emphasizing Authority

The first key area is de-emphasizing authority. The coach or facilitator does not hold the answers but instead helps guide students to explore and evaluate possible answers. For a faculty member, this means to posture oneself not as the expert of the content, but as the expert facilitator. In the first class meeting, faculty can set a tone and structure that directs attention away from their authority. In doing so, they also set up an accountability that is put on the student. Goal settings as well as identifying strengths and weaknesses (self-assessment) is the most common approach in diminishing authority in coaching, but it may need to be modified for the classroom. After laying out the objectives of the course and the course content, the faculty coach can ask for input on the student's familiarity with the content. This step acknowledges that there is not an expectation for every student to be starting at the same point and that as a facilitator one will keep in mind the "starting points" of the class. These starting points are collected through stories of students' past experiences with learning and the particular content. What is the familiarity of the content and in what context? This is not to say that the class will all begin at the lowest "starting point," if one such exists, but that each student has a responsibility to own and recognize that starting point. These starting points should begin as knowledge only known to the faculty member, but they can be strategically used in class discussions and analysis to hand over areas of expertise to different students. In having the opportunity to express the starting point to the faculty member, the students feel their voice has been heard. In order to avoid a feeling of hierarchy in the different levels of perceived starting points, it is imperative to account for other learning strengths that students have to contribute. The instructor also can have students write about how they have excelled in other classes and the stories of their successes. What subjects have they excelled in?

What modes of assessment? What teaching styles? What learning styles? Students will be able to narrate their interaction with previous teachers and peers. By acknowledging their previous successes, students begin to acknowledge that they can succeed if the learning environment matches their learning strengths.

As a facilitator, one can put this information in action by delegating certain students to take the lead on various activities and discussions. For example, if an instructor is teaching history and a student expresses that she has excelled mostly in the sciences and on multiple choice tests, an instructor can have her lead a small group in a fact-finding mission in the text and to create a multiple choice test for her peers. Then as her interest increases, the facilitator returns to challenge her and the group to explain how they decided on the facts they selected for the test. What made those facts more important than others that they decided to dismiss? What do those facts mean in the larger context of the time period? Turning to the students who took the test, what did they find was fairly judged as important and what was not and why? In this exchange, one is handing over authority and accountability for the answers the students found. An added benefit in approaching the classroom in this way is also to increase the amount of accountability on the student's part for all aspects of their success. When the faculty member is seen as less of an authority figure and more of a facilitator in a learning community, all students become responsible for the level and completion of their work. When I employ certain learning exercises in the classroom, I often ask, "Have you done this before? How did you use it and in what context? Was it helpful or not helpful?"

Another benefit of de-emphasizing authority is that all students feel more comfortable approaching the professor. The decentralizing of the expertise encourages students to come to their own conclusions rather than approach the material as detectives trying to discover the answer the professor wants and discourages the idea that there is one particular answer. This accomplishes a goal of critical thinking. The professor also shows interest and curiosity about the student as a person, which makes the students more comfortable in sharing details of their own stories and perspectives.

In coaching and facilitation, considering multiple perspectives and even adopting or "trying on" different perspectives are part and parcel to problem-solving. Validation of different perspectives including the student's own is also integral to moving the student forward in development and accountability. One can also apply the questioning approach used in de-emphasizing authority. The students can ask: What values drove the selection process for the test questions? What are facts that have been dismissed that may be considered by others important and why? When assembling the facts dismissed, the facilitator-coach can also assign small groups with a particular set of facts and have them come up with reasoning for why those facts may be considered important. Who would find them important and why? The multiple perspectives can then be analyzed as a whole, and the instructor can create a chart of the viewpoints and allow students to measure the perspectives' validity. Why is one more valid than another? Working in this exercise of considering many viewpoints, students also are asked to provide reasoning for their positions and are forced to recognize the factors that influence their thinking.

The multiple-perspectives approach can express validity for diverse life stories as well. Students are given a strategy to consider the influences in other students' lives that may lead them to believe or think in a certain way. Also it creates a framework for accepting other points of view; in other words, if I discover that your family has different traditions than mine, I may be able to better understand why you value one idea over another. First generation students, in particular, desire their perspectives and presence to be validated. These students are looking to see how they fit in and how their perspectives matter in relation to their non-first-generation counterparts (Davis, 2010). As Davis explicitly states, "The classroom is obviously one place validation can make a difference" (p. 54). Integrating and validating multiple perspectives as a coaching practice can be prioritized and incorporated easily with any classroom content.

Metacognition

Metacognition is another key practice in the coaching model. The concept and term has been associated most often with both the psychology and the education field, with which coaching also is closely associated. In essence, it refers to thinking about one's own thinking. This is central to the academic coaching model as it strives to create a self-directed learner. The researchers, Rickey and Stacy, from the University of California, Berkeley conducted pedagogical research on metacognition. In their article "The Role of Metacognition in Learning Chemistry" they define metacognition as they applied it to their study: "Metacognitive activities differ from such general cognitive processes in that, for metacognition, the object of reflection is always one's own personal knowledge or thinking" (2000). These authors created a model for learning chemistry that mirrors this process. "The Model-Observe-Reflect-Explain (MORE) Thinking Frame" requires students to first set up a lab module with their initial ideas, observe how the model works, reflect on the "implications" of their initial ideas, and finally revise their initial ideas based on what they took note of in their observations (2000). The results showed that the students practicing MORE "developed significantly enhanced metacognitive abilities, understanding of fundamental chemistry ideas, and abilities to examination problems" better than their peers who did not follow the model (Rickey, et al, p. 915). There was a continuous process when doing their homework of checking in to see "What am I thinking and what are my reasons…" This model helps the student and the faculty member identify places where the thinking process is breaking down. It also allows for multiple paths to the same answer and validates the possibility of unfound paths to those right answers. This again de-emphasizes authority, as the learner is viewed as a person discovering the answer. The students are not merely imitating a proven path, although they may end up doing that; instead, they are given the liberty of seeing the process with new eyes and a unique perspective.

When the coaching or facilitation process is applied to our hypothetical history class model, on the first day of class the instructor would ask students to identify their "starting point" in the class; this sets up the framework for a continuous checking in to see, "Where am I now?"

Also, when the instructor asked the students to explain why they had found some facts to be more important than others, they had to stop and think, "How did I choose the facts?" All during the process of coaching, a student is asked to challenge and question their own thinking. The faculty member can further implement this by regularly asking students to document their thinking process while completing an assignment, writing a paper, doing reading homework, or producing answers of any kind. In this method, the learning goal becomes to investigate reasons for the answers, not merely to receive a report back whether the answer is wrong or right.

A helpful student-development model that reflects and validates the coaching pedagogical model is William Perry's intellectual and ethical student development theory. The objectives of Perry's theory are for students to move from dualistic thinking to multiplicity thinking and ultimately to relativistic thinking that acknowledges not all viewpoints to be equal, but instead moves the student to present evidence and supporting arguments (Evans 86). Coaching implements as a core approach "metacognition" that ignites the movement through these phases.

In Perry's first stage of dualistic thinking, students perceive that problems have right and wrong answers and that authority has the answers. Students are annoyed by ambiguity and base their thinking on beliefs shaped by backgrounds and personal experience. Robert Kloss, a professor of English at William Patterson College, wrote an article that reflects both the objectives of the Perry development scheme as well as, unknowingly to him, a coaching methodology. As in the coaching structure, Kloss adopted a framework challenging the perspective of students while simultaneously reinforcing the legitimacy of their own perspectives (1994). The nature of this approach is to aid in engaging everyone's perspective, affirming the validity of each individual student, while engaging them with the validity of their classmates' views as well.

In the metacognitive approach of academic coaching, faculty implement these techniques to challenge limited thinking:

- Challenge assumptions
- Listen for and observe one-dimensional thinking
- Facilitate self-reflection
- Question the value of ideas and arguments
- Weigh the cost/benefits of thinking and choices
- Explore the relevance and pros/cons of ideas

(LifeBound, Inc., "LifeBound's Academic Coaching to Support Metacognition").

Kloss also offers specific scenarios that reflect this approach such as "requiring students to explain concretely the reasons for any point that they reject: 'Scott, you say the poem is lousy, but you don't give the class any reasons beyond your statement. How about some?'" (1994). This accomplishes diffusing authority in the classroom and redirecting discourse back to students: "Students can then construct the cases in their own minds, compare them with cases from their own experience, pose their own questions and construct their own answer" (30). This is clearly an objective of teaching higher-ordered thinking where students begin to form their own ideas.

Faculty expect students to achieve the higher stages of critical-thinking as applied to their particular discipline. Although all faculty may not practically apply or strategize their critical thinking outcomes, they expect that students will be able to reach a higher level of understanding of material that reflects William Perry's "9 Stages of Thinking" and his cognitive development theory. The academic coaching model mirrors the progression of stages in Perry's cognitive model and, thusly, the goals of the classroom and the coaching session converge. Often faculty members veer away from any activity that may nurture narcissism. However, by not validating a personal perspective, one cannot move beyond it. It is only in acknowledging that there exists a personal perspective or story, that one can begin accepting multiple perspectives. If my perspective is developed through my eyes, experiences, and background, then what is your perspective and why? In this way, we can direct students outward only after validating the inward. Also, in this model, perspectives different than your own begin to receive more validation. If I have a right to my perspective, then you have a right to yours. Then we begin

challenging how there can exist multiple views. This is another technique to help create a diverse classroom with students of diverse backgrounds and learning styles.

Challenging Questions and Active Listening

The primary coaching technique employs questioning, and faculty need to transform into facilitators to successfully implement this technique. What constitutes a powerful question is one that may reveal a false assumption or encourages the student to adopt a different perspective. For example, in a learning moment the facilitator may raise a question that challenges the students by asking: "Why do you think that?"; "How did you come to that conclusion?"; "What evidence do you have that proves your conclusion?"; "How might someone else view it?" This technique of questioning models curiosity for the student along with the metacognition and integration of multiple perspectives. After several class periods of modeling the questioning as noted above in the interaction about the "facts," the faculty member can begin assigning the students the task of creating questions.

This skill of challenging questioning must be accompanied by active listening. In a coaching framework the posture and non-verbal communication of a coach are essential in building a rapport with the student. Students are constantly looking to their instructors to interpret any sign of approval or dissatisfaction. The instructor in their facilitator role must become attentive to these kinds of messages. Turnbull writes that "developing the skill of active listening effectively demands vigilance" (2009, p. 87). Turnbull elaborates with a series of body language questions the facilitator should ask oneself including:

- *Do you have a relaxed posture that is sending out signals that you're receptive and paying attention?*
- *Have you uncrossed your arms and legs so there is no barrier between you? (p. 87)*

In addition, instructors should direct attention to the student speaking with questions like:

- *Are you noticing patterns in the way they use their words?*
- *Are you hearing a lot of detail, or are you picking up that there are things that are not being said? (p. 88)*

Questions like these are ones that the instructor should adopt in order to become more adept at facilitating. These questions are also a guide for the students to become active listeners, especially with their classmates. If students are going to begin imitating the techniques of the facilitator in asking each other challenging questions, becoming aware of these nonverbal messages are key to the learning community's success.

This process again allows each student to assume the role of challenger and authority. When given this license, students are given a voice and validation for their own perspective while opening up their understanding of someone else's perspective. They also become questioning of the content they are reading and discussing. A central academic goal for addressing diversity in the college classroom is to help students transition to higher expectations of critical thinking and engagement with content. If we can help them engage in the classroom, then they will not only be retained but will flourish by contributing their unique and necessary perspectives into the classroom, thus creating more accurate and in-depth knowledge for all students.

Academic coaching theory and student cognitive learning theories are complementary and conducive to the college classroom. When it comes to Perry's developmental model, "Four variables of challenge and support characterize the model: structure, diversity, experiential learning, and personalism" (Evans, 2010, p. 91). In this model faculty need to provide curriculum that reflects student's experiences, provide opportunities to discover and engage in diverse perspectives, utilize exercises that allow for reflection of material, and nurture an environment that is safe, open, and offers continuous feedback (Evans). As our classrooms advance and develop into closer reflections of our nation and world with students of all races, ethnicities, socio-economic classes, and educational backgrounds, our pedagogical practices must simultaneously develop to meet this reality. When faculty embrace the new role as facilitator in the classroom, we can help students discover their own identities, respect other students' identities, and appreciate all perspectives in the classroom and the learning community.

The faculty member's role in and out of the classroom can prove to be an invaluable piece to the future success of any student. Coaching pedagogy respects the impact of diversity on the individual story and consequently individual learning. Students can fit several diverse demographic categories. In academic coaching, students are guided to a deeper more accountable self by accessing their stories and then identifying the answers to embrace, change, and/or accept those stories. One student in my class, a Latina woman, felt comfortable expressing her dissatisfaction to me about her experiences inside and outside the classroom. She felt isolated and missed her home and especially the cultural traditions of home. Using the coaching pedagogy, first, I validated that kind of disconnection she was experiencing. Secondly, in the classroom, I created opportunities for her to connect with other classmates through the content. Thirdly, I continued to ask questions often and have her educate me on perspectives I had not considered. Her story, which was strongly associated with her identity, affected her learning. A story is at the heart of the coaching experience and that story can be the foundation for learning in a diverse classroom. In fact, the power of story can be the underlying answer to propel change:

> Stories have been integral to human communities since the dawn of time. We use them cognitively, discursively, and socially to remember and organise our past, communicate about and negotiate our present, and envision and act into our future. (Drake, 2007, p.285)

It is in understanding the story of students that colleges can help students persist and flourish in classrooms even when many of their peers may not look like or think like they do. Relying only on academic support services for success and diversity initiatives is costly and ineffective, especially for the small liberal arts college. The liberal arts college can, however, leverage the strengths of their educational mission by focusing on pedagogical practices as their initiative for student success, and academic coaching can be a framework. In the coaching framework, the diverse classroom is viewed as an opportunity to advance every student's learning experience and educational achievement.

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