Ep. 012: The Magnificent Seven

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Like the 60s western of the same name, this "Magnificent Seven" is a classic. Claire and Jim discuss the Seven Principles of for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Nearly 30 years later, this short essay continues to be one of the best foundations for any college-level teaching experience. Whether you're a new face to teaching or a grizzled veteran of the classroom, Chickering & Gamson's work is a must-read (or re-read) for any university instructor.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

CLAIRE: And I'm Claire.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Joining me today once again, Dr. Claire Lamonica. Our director, Hi, Claire.

CLAIRE: Hi, Jim.

JIM: Hey, today we're going to be talking about something that has been around for about 30 years. It's almost kind of become ubiquitous. I love that word. By the way, we see these little pamphlets that we're going to talk about all over CTLT. We give them out so much, what is it?

CLAIRE: What is it? Yeah, well, what we're gonna be talking about is Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, okay, and it was originally an article in a journal, and has been reprinted in pamphlet form, it's all over the internet, you can if you start Googling Principles for Good practice, it'll pop up.

JIM: And you don't have to because we will link to the source article or as close as we can get to it on our on our show page for today.

CLAIRE: I think that's best to go back to the sort of unabridged version, but it's not long, but it's it's basically a set of principles that was derived from a sort of meta-analysis of about 40 publications about undergraduate education. And so what the author's did was, do a lot of research on good practice and undergraduate education and then pull it together and distill it down into these seven principles. So, we we do we have them everywhere we have if you've ever been to CTLT, when at a time when lunch was served, then these principles were literally right in front of your nose as you were picking up your salad or your sandwich. Okay, because we have them. We had a wonderful graphics intern one year who created posters out of these Oh, that's right. And they're Yeah, they're beautiful. And, but we also tend to give out these pamphlets, pretty much at the drop of a hat. We use them during workshops, we give them out during consultations. So, they're sort of everywhere. They're kind of allover campus at this point. Yeah,

JIM: Yeah. And we'll put a picture up of our, of our posters do we should do that we can show that off a little bit. And of course, we're giving these out not because we have

them. And we're trying to we're trying to we're trying to push them because we oh, we over ordered them. Right. It's it's because there's there's really something useful in the seven principles. Although we should say that this is not like what we've talked about in a couple of previous episodes, this is not a prescriptive, or using the word properly. Now not proscriptive, prescriptive. It's not a step-by-step sort of thing, or how to think it is, like you said, best practices, it's

CLAIRE: Best practices, it's promising practices, it's a little more, it's a little more descriptive, although it also is it's kind of a combination between descriptive and how to. So it describes these principles, but then it gives some specific suggestions for implementation, and how they can be implemented into any class.

JIM: So, let's talk about what are the seven

CLAIRE: Okay, all right, the big seven.

JIM: The big seven, right? So magnet, the magnet

CLAIRE: Magnificent Seven, The Magnificent Seven of teaching,

JIM: There you go.

CLAIRE: So, um, the seven principles are that good practice first encourages student faculty contact, then encourages cooperation among students. Third, encourages active learning. Fourth, provides prompt feedback, five emphasizes time on task. Six communicates high expectations, and seven respects diverse talents and ways of learning. If you can do those things, if you can kind of weave those principles through your teaching, then the result can be improved student learning, but it's not like, you know, you do one of them on Mondays and another one on Wednesdays and, you know, these are ongoing have to be sort of they are they are principles, they are foundational, they sort of underlie your pedagogy.

JIM: Why don't we Why don't we highlight kind of the important points about each one, and I think we can focus a little bit more in depth on some of them today, and then maybe, you know, down the road, we will single out a few of them because again, these are kind of these are kind of woven into all of Yeah, as teachers,

CLAIRE: I think just sort of an overview. You know, when we I think the interesting thing about thinking about student faculty contact is that we tend to think of our contact with students being primarily in the classroom, but this principle encourages us to extend that contact beyond the classroom. So, meeting students for Office Hours attending, attending, for example, meetings have student RSO's that are tied to our discipline. So, you know, not necessarily being an advisor, but, but engaging in the activities that some of those offers, just getting to know students. And that's the big thing, we know that one of the most important factors in retention, and persistence, is the connection that a student makes with an individual person on campus. And also, that if you talk to people about why they pursued a certain area, why they became a sociologist, it's because they had this professor, you know, maybe in the first sort of Sociology course they ever took

that just, you know, lit, lit them up. So, so that's, you know, there's, that's just really huge is spending time getting to know our students.

JIM: Right. So good practices that encourage cooperation among students, that's more than just having them do a group presentation at the end of the semester, right?

CLAIRE: Well, yes. Although I'm not against group presentations.

JIM: No, no, not at all.

CLAIRE: Or against having them write papers collaboratively. But boy, that's a whole bunch of different podcasts.

JIM: Yes.

CLAIRE: Um, but yeah, I think even encouraging the formation of student study groups is really important as particularly important for certain populations of students who don't so first-generation college students, a lot of times, think that they have to go in on their own. And they, they don't understand that no, studying together, getting together with groups, talking about the ideas from your courses, is one way of understanding the material. And know it's not cheating. It's, you know, it's cooperation. And that's, and so that's kind of a good practice, a good learning practice for students. So, we need to, we need to encourage it, because not everybody will automatically do it.

JIM: And there are existing organizations, or there are programs that are put on by the Dean of Students Office, or the University College or ourselves or whatever, where students have the opportunity to talk to people who are in similar circumstances. So, part of it might also be as faculty members being aware of what all of the, of the buffet of services that are offered on a campus and helping your students connect with those.

CLAIRE: Yeah, sometimes even just being able to say to a student who comes to your office and says, oh, my, you know, I, I, I'm feeling really uncomfortable. I, I'm a vet, you know, I, I was in Iraq. And I feel pretty out of place with all these 18-year-olds who have no world experience, just knowing that we have a veteran Study Center, specifically for veterans. Wow, you know, you don't, you don't need to do much more than that, you can just mention that it's there. And they'll find it. And that'll be huge for them.

JIM: I think that's good. And I think as we go forward with the rest of our episode here today, I think that's actually a good, what we just did there, I think that's helpful, because let's give people just little suggestions on how they can apply these principles. And then again, we can go in more depth and future episodes on, on, on what some of the deep meaning is behind some of these principles. For example, number three talks about encourages, you know, good practice encourages active learning. I think active learning is kind of one of those phrases. It's kind of a buzzword now. Yeah. Yeah. In fact, students ask for it. Students ask for it by name. We talked about that in a previous podcast. And I've had I've had, you know, we need to do more active learning. Okay. Do you really know what that means? So, I guess part of it is really understanding what active learning is, Can you can you give me the ones can you give me the elevator explanation, the elevator speech on active learning.

CLAIRE: So the elevator speech on active learning is that active learning has three components, information and ideas, experiences, and reflection. And if you can offer students a chance to take advantage of all three of those, give them some information, give them something to do with it, and have them reflect on how what they did. connected to what they learned to the information you've given them, then that's, that's active learn,

JIM: that's active learning. So just getting students to talk a little bit in class, which is a laudable goal in and of itself some days. But just getting them to talk in class is not the full idea of active learning. Just having them be conscious is not it's not it's not as, as opposed to inactive learning. Right.

CLAIRE: Right.

JIM: So okay, so what, what, what are some suggestions if you wanted to incorporate this very, you know, if you were looking to incorporate this principle into your teaching, I know that active learning is a huge topic, but what, what would you what would you say? Just what are some things that you will

CLAIRE: you know, it sounds harder than it is. I mean, it's, it's actually it's not that hard. So, if you're teaching math, you know, then you explain a concept, you explain how to do something with math and you have your students do it. I think the piece that gets left out a lot of times is the reflections. So, you know, their chance to sort of engage at a metacognitive level about Okay, so how did you do that? How did you do that problem? You know, what, what? What helped you work through it? Where did you run into trouble? How did you overcome the trouble? And that same principle can be applied in a lot of different disciplines? You know, so I don't think we want to make it sound harder, or more complicated than it really is. Okay.

JIM: Number four.

CLAIRE: Number four is the hardest one.

JIM: Yeah.

CLAIRE: It just this is so hard that number four is give prompt feedback. And, you know, I struggle with this myself, I once I once pretty much incited a riot. By when I was working with the writing programs, one of my responsibilities was each year I reviewed and revised this course guide that we had for English 101, the Freshman Composition course. And one year, I put somewhere in the course guide that students should expect that their instructors would return graded work within I don't know if I said a week or two weeks, whatever I said, yeah, the graduate students who were primarily responsible for teaching that course almost burned be an effigy. I mean, it was, it was not my most popular semester. But you know, so prompt feedback really is important.

JIM: It is.

CLAIRE: Um, it's more important at the formative stages. So formative feedback needs to be quite prompt, like, probably in the moment, yeah, summative feedback, can, you know, that can be a little more delayed, but the problem is that the best learning is going to

happen, the sooner you can get the feedback back to the students, and they can digest the feedback while the learning experiences still fresh in their minds, that's going to help them learn. You have to be realistic. I mean, I actually think that it helps to tell your students I plan to give you your, your work back within X amount of time, and that sort of puts in a layer of accountability for you.

JIM: Well, it's it does now the, the flip side of that is that you have to deliver on that within X amount of time.

CLAIRE: And no, life happens. Yeah. So, you know, as soon as you guarantee that your kid is going to get sick, and you know, our something is going to happen.

JIM: Yeah.

CLAIRE: But you know, that's not a bad reminder, either. No, that's life happens to everybody, it happens to us, it happens to our students. And we end if we have to throw ourselves on the mercy of a class and say, gosh, I meant to get back to you. But you know, this happened. And I couldn't, they're usually pretty understanding.

JIM: So I will just before we leave this point, or this principle, I should say, two observations, one, I have found that I have kind of in the in the teaching, I'm doing now in the course that I've been teaching for the last few semesters, it is a very iterative process, because these are students who are working on critiquing performance, and critiquing their own performance. And so, we have to perform we perform critique, performed critique, and we're looking for a longitudinal sort of view of their of their improvement. So that's forced me to actually give them my feedback, because as soon as they give their feedback, then I release my feedback so that we're not, you know, and

CLAIRE: In what you said, was just really important. And I should have said that up front prompt feedback is not the same as instructor feedback, right doesn't have that not all feedback has to come from the instructor. Peer feedback is quite valuable. And also, feedback doesn't have to be written. So especially in this day and age, you know, there's so many ways you can you know, you can record your voice on your phone, right? And send them, you know, send what you your message to the students so you can record your feedback. I mean, there's lots and lots and lots of options. Yeah. And ways to speed it up.

JIM: Yeah, I think the other thought about prompt feedback is that if you find that you're constantly struggling with prompt feedback, that's a good something that come talk to us here at CTLT about. And in general, you may want to look at how you're structuring the assignments, because occasionally I will talk to faculty members, and I did this myself, where I would have these mega assignments that are very complex and multi part and they could very easily be broken up into easily digestible pieces, you know, easily workable pieces so they can get a little bit of feedback as they begin the second part, right?

CLAIRE: Right.

JIM: So good practice emphasizes time on task. What does time on task mean?

CLAIRE: This is really interesting. This is time actually engaged in learning. Okay, so and, you know, this really is very interesting to me. So I, a number of years ago, there was a study that came out that said, students learn better in online courses. CES, and everybody just went nuts. It was like, oh my gosh, this is it was heresy. You know, it's they can't be true can't be tell me, it's not so. But if you read the research, if you dug down into the research, the reason students were doing better was that they were spending more time engaging with the content in an online class than they were in a face-to-face class. Because in an online class, the content was available 24/7. And they were going, they were going back and re-engaging. So, if there was a, if it included a podcast from the instructor explaining a particular concept, they could go back and listen to that instructors explanation again, and again and again. And they could stop it at points where, you know, if we were explaining how to do something, they could stop it, they could work on it, then they could, you know, rewind it or, you know, I know rewind us, that's not the right term. But anyway, it wasn't that online learning was more effective, it was that spending time with the content was more effective.

JIM: I see. Okay.

CLAIRE: So, it was, it was quite misleading the way that that research was sort of put out there. But so, the key is to get students to help them engage with the content of your face to face course, perhaps in iterative ways, as well. So

JIM: And so, what are some examples on how you could do that? If you're teaching a face-to-face course?

CLAIRE: I don't accept the first draft as students, right, you know, I might collect the first draft the students, right, I very likely do. And then I or we, we workshop it, you know, we talk in class about it, or they share it with a partner or whatever. But the whole idea of the first draft is that it's a first draft. And I expect that there will be further iterations of that draft. And in fact, they're required to produce further iterations. So they're required to go back and do a second draft and a third draft, and some of them do, while some of them get just nuts. And do you know, five and six drafts, right?

JIM: Yeah.

CLAIRE: That's okay. That's not the norm. Those were people who are going to be English teachers when they when they graduate. But just building that into the course, they would spend an extended amount of time working on something.

JIM: So, so it is not just going to the student and saying, spend more time reading this.

CLAIRE: Right. Learn that chapter again,

JIM: Learn harder, you know. It doesn't work that way. So, what you're doing is you're figuring out ways, regardless of your discipline to build in, building that engagement, building that time

CLAIRE: to build in opportunities, sham of extended engagement, yeah.

JIM:	And kind of how are you going to do that? Well, you're going to go write another draft? Well, you're going to review someone else's solutions to these to these equations, and give them feedback on it. That's a way of they're still doing learning their own material as well.
CLAIRE:	Right. Right. Yes.
JIM:	So, good practice communicates high expectations.
CLAIRE:	Yeah, this is a tricky one. I, you know, I think that a lot of times, we think that we're communicating high expectations, if we just, you know, put our learning outcomes in bold,
JIM:	Right.
CLAIRE:	It's like, you will learn this, it's, you know, sort of shouting at the students. That's, it's, it's, yeah, that's not really what we mean, of course, and, and, and high expectations are also tricky, because they need to be reasonably high expectations. So, we need to know what it's reasonable to expect of the students in a given learning situation. Is there a prerequisite for this course have they all taken the prerequisite reasonable expectations that are not easily accomplished?
JIM:	In you know, I went to this conference, a few weekends ago, in Atlanta, the Teaching Professor Technology Conference, and one of the one of the keynote speakers had a presentation with a great title. And he had some very, really good points, it was called the illusion of rigor. And, and the idea that for most faculty members, and, and he was speaking to an extent of the feedback, the heat that comes from the college and the department and the committee down, you're giving too many A's to your students. They're looking at it from a grading standpoint. And of course, we had a great podcast a couple weeks ago, where Julie-Ann and I talked about the difference between assessment and grades. And what we're really talking about is with setting high expectations and setting the expectation for rigor in the learning, yes, you know, and if they achieve that, then they're going to get a high grade. And of course,
CLAIRE:	I have a colleague one time who said, I was talking to her and she said, Well, of course my students all get A's. I am a great teacher. Okay, well, that rocks.
JIM:	You know, and if and if and if they are going through the steps and doing that, I mean, students in some of my courses, there's most students who get unsatisfactory grades are ones who have not done the reiterative nature of the work. They haven't because again, I don't know
CLAIRE:	How to emphasize time on tasks.
JIM:	Well, that's exactly so in. And I think that's a good point too, in it with the seven principles, we are probably all doing some of these things.
CLAIRE:	We're all probably...

JIM: ...doing most of most of them. But we're not, but we haven't labeled it as such. And so, this is a good way of having that sort of that sort of framework. Good Practice respects, diverse talents and ways of learning.

CLAIRE: Yeah, I, you know, I think this is this is probably one of the things that's really important at the undergraduate level, as opposed to the graduate level, because, you know, by the time students become grad students, they've sort of sorted themselves out into disciplines that that are good match with their strengths, right? But undergraduates are taking, you know, they're, they're at a buffet, they're, they're getting a little bit of everything. And so, a student whose main strength is speaking and writing, you know, talking, whatever might struggle in a class, you know, I got to "C" in bowling.

JIM: You got to "C" in bowling

CLAIRE: I did, I got a "C" in bowling.

JIM: You heard it here first.

CLAIRE: I could, there's an explanation for that. But we don't need to go into it right now. It all had to do with the grading. And the fact that on the first day of the class, I bowled the best best game of bowling that I've ever bowled in my whole life before our sins. But anyway, um, not kinesthetically, gifted. You know, I, my muscles don't have any memory on their own. It doesn't feel like that. To me, it feels like I have to think out, you know, motions when I'm doing things like bowling. And I probably overthinking I actually just read some really interesting research on all that which we won't go into right now. But anyway, just remembering that our students have different strengths, they come into our classrooms with different strengths and finding ways to not not letting them off the hook. You know, when I teach writing, I don't tell my artistically gifted students, oh, you can just draw pictures. She'll do pictographs. But I often encourage them to draw as a prewriting activity. And in fact, I have all my students, some days, we get up and we go on walks as a prewriting activity or as a revision activity or a peer response activity. You know, I try to come at writing from a lot of a lot of different directions, so that they can find an entry into my discipline through their own area of strength.

JIM: Well, Claire, that's an awful lot for our 20, probably closer to 25-minute podcast at this point. So, we'll, we'll take some time in future episodes to kind of flush out these ideas a little bit more. And of course, as we said, these are principles that are that are kind of, if not universal to our teaching. They're certainly foundational to our teaching. So, we're probably doing a lot of these, but it's helpful to recognize right, that we are.

CLAIRE: Yeah, and and sometimes to recognize what we are doing

JIM: what we are doing,

CLAIRE: Give it a try.

JIM: Give it a try. So all right. Well, Claire, thank you again.

CLAIRE: Thank you.

JIM: That's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about our podcast by going to our website at CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. Just click on the podcast link which is in the upper right of the page. You can find notes on today's show and you can find out how to subscribe for Claire Lamonica and everyone here at CTLT, Happy Teaching!