

GETTING DEVELOPMENTAL STUDENTS TO TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN LEARNING

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As a Development Studies instructor, I find that getting students to respond in class is extremely challenging. Because they are “Developmental Studies students,” they do not see themselves as college students with something to say about the curriculum, about the classroom environment, about anything. In an effort to ameliorate this situation, I have students write a sentence or a paragraph in which they describe a single (personal) problem with which they are struggling. Students are told to print their responses and not to identify themselves in any way. After “problems” are collected, I randomly choose several for open discussion. Because they are real problems, representing real people, student responses are overwhelming. I am then able to relate subsequent learning assignments in a number of “case specific” ways.

Depending upon the size of the class, I have students divide into groups of five. I give each group a different problem. As a group they must select a spokesperson who will lead them into discussion and provide the summation at the end of the allotted time (usually 15 minutes). While students are in discussion, I walk around and take notes, preparing a lesson strategy for vocabulary development or reading comprehension. I complete my “script” while spokespersons are giving their “summations.” A typical vocabulary lesson to accompany their workbook lesson may look like the following (vocabulary lesson words are underlined in the sample lesson):

Sample Problem—(As the student wrote it; no effort to correct spelling, grammar, or punctuation is made. Students responding to each problem do not get to see the written “entry.” They are told of the situation orally.)

The thing that's really getting to me is that some people look down on me because I have two boys one is four one is six months I know that I had them pretty early but the thing is I did not let that stop me I wouldn't call it grief but I'm a person to and I'm getting something out of life. And I'm a person.

Sample Vocabulary Lesson—Incorporating vocabulary lesson words and students' response to the above:

One of the most natural things in the world is to bear children. Childbirth is certainly not an example of *aberrant* behavior? Stop *admonishing* yourself for having your sons at an early age. That you aspire to get a college education is most *laudable*. Your degree will make you more *marketable*, and, of course, you will need a more *lucrative* job in order to earn enough money to send your two

sons to college. There are a number of programs that perform *benevolent* actions like providing childcare or volunteering a big brother.

We know how difficult it must be for you to stay in school. We realize that you may sometimes *succumb* to the temptation to sleep late. However, we encourage you to find a friend who will help you discover that getting a good, quality education is *indispensable*, without it, you are destined to a *mediocre* life. Finally, we want you to stop feeling extremely vulnerable. Do not be afraid to carry on with your life. Use no *euphemisms* to describe your motherhood. You are a teen mother, and that is okay—not ideal—just okay.

Students “situations” are used imaginatively to enhance writing skills, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, as well as to provide a forum for dealing with insurmountable (in some cases) personal difficulties or just to “feel better.” Of course, one of the most significant advantages is that students maintain their anonymity. *