

New Directions for
Teaching and Learning



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Interpersonal Boundaries in Teaching and Learning

Harriet L. Schwartz
EDITOR

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Catherine M. Wehlburg
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Harriet L. Schwartz (ed.)

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FROM THE SERIES EDITOR

About This Publication

Since 1980, *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* (NDTL) has brought a unique blend of theory, research, and practice to leaders in postsecondary education. NDTL sourcebooks strive not only for solid substance but also for timeliness, compactness, and accessibility.

The series has four goals: to inform readers about current and future directions in teaching and learning in postsecondary education, to illuminate the context that shapes these new directions, to illustrate these new direction through examples from real settings, and to propose ways in which these new directions can be incorporated into still other settings.

This publication reflects the view that teaching deserves respect as a high form of scholarship. We believe that significant scholarship is conducted not only by researchers who report results of empirical investigations but also by practitioners who share disciplinary reflections about teaching. Contributors to NDTL approach questions of teaching and learning as seriously as they approach substantive questions in their own disciplines, and they deal not only with pedagogical issues but also with the intellectual and social context in which these issues arise. Authors deal, on one hand, with theory and research and, on the other, with practice, and they translate from research and theory to practice and back again.

About This Volume

This volume focuses on issues of boundaries that are a sometimes-hidden aspect of higher education. Issues of time, space, self-disclosure, and even appropriate relationship boundaries are sometimes so much a part of learning that it is difficult to tell when a boundary has been inappropriately crossed. This volume explores the intricate questions that exist about power, relationships, and privacy.

Catherine M. Wehlburg
Editor-in-Chief

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Time, space, availability, self-disclosure, and the nature of relationships—college and university educators frequently face dilemmas and decisions regarding interpersonal boundaries with students. Long-standing questions, such as how much to self-disclose in the classroom and whether to set flexible boundaries with adult students, have been part of the teaching experience for decades. More recent influences such as evolving technology and current generational differences have created a new set of dilemmas. How do we set appropriate expectations regarding e-mail response time in a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week Internet-connected culture? How do we maintain our authority with a generation that views the syllabus as negotiable?

Complex questions about power, positionality, connection, distance, and privacy underlie the aforementioned boundary decision points. This sourcebook provides an in-depth look at interpersonal boundaries between educators and students, giving consideration to the deeper contextual factors and power dynamics that inform how we set, adjust, and maintain boundaries with our students.

“Boundaries are the basic ground rules for the professional relationship. They add structure . . . that provides guidance regarding appropriate actions and interactions. . . . The boundary construct is relevant to all professional relationships that involve a power differential” (Barnett, 2008, p. 5). Seeking to deal with the complexity of interpersonal boundaries, some professors choose to maintain substantial interpersonal distance between themselves and their students while others seek to eliminate the boundary completely (Tom, 1997; Barnett, 2008). Extending the distance between teacher and student can diminish the potential richness of the teacher–student relationship (Tom, 1997; Barnett, 2008). At the same time, failing to acknowledge the power differential or seeking to remove it also reduces teacher effectiveness. In one study, a professor realized that by trying to replace her positional role of professor with that of friend or peer colleague, she was less able to support and guide her graduate students, and her students reported frustration and confusion regarding work expectations (Buck, Mast, Latta, and Kaftan, 2009). In another study (Gardner, Dean, and McKaig, 1989), a professor attempting to eliminate her hierarchical role in a women’s studies class realized that when she gave up her position, advanced students assumed power in the room and diminished the

participation of other students. Further confirming the need for roles and differentiation, students indicate that boundaries help create a safe space for intellectual risk taking and also maintain the uniqueness of the teacher–student relationship (Schwartz, 2011).

Although boundary decisions are inherent in the lives of educators, the topic is given little attention in the literature. The most commonly discussed boundary situation is that of intimate relationships between teachers and students, a matter sometimes addressed by organizational policy (Tufts University, Office of Equal Opportunity, n.d.; University of Michigan, Office of the Provost, n.d.; University of Queensland, Australia, n.d.). In the scholarly literature, researchers have studied perceptions of boundary violations (Kolbert, Morgan, and Brendel, 2002; Owen and Zwahr-Castro, 2007; Henshaw, 2008) and have provided general frameworks for assessing boundary questions (Tom, 1997; Sumsion, 2000; Barnett, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Buck, Mast, Latta, and Kaftan, 2009). In this sourcebook, we aim to deepen the dialogue regarding interpersonal boundaries between educators and students. Moving beyond the attention-grabbing topic of teachers dating students, we explore the more common boundary questions that faculty confront daily: matters of availability, positionality, shared space, and self-disclosure.

In Chapter One, Booth explores the complexity of student self-disclosure in assignments and classroom activities. She provides strategies for crafting these experiences and responding to students who may self-disclose more than is appropriate. In Chapter Two, McEwan offers a nuanced look at social media and interpersonal boundaries. She helps us think about how to appropriately connect with students in the Web 2.0 context and how to balance student expectations with our own needs in terms of availability and privacy. Next, in Chapter Three, Espinoza describes the concept of generations and shares his research on Millennial values while exploring implications for setting boundaries with this age cohort. In Chapter Four, Booth and I consider the unique boundary questions that emerge when teaching adult learners and use relational practice and deliberate relationship frameworks to process these dynamics and offer strategies. In Chapter Five, Yamashita and I, drawing on Yamashita's research, seek to illuminate boundaries as a cultural construct and to provide strategies for increasing connection and maintaining boundaries with international students. Next, in Chapter Six, Dunn-Haley and Zanzucchi explore boundary challenges in the lives of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who are typically beginning their teaching careers and also balancing multiple roles with senior faculty. The authors describe a comprehensive GTA development program that includes significant boundary-related content. In Chapter Seven, Holloway and Alexandre reject conventional ideas about interpersonal boundaries in doctoral education and describe a PhD program that is based on connection and collaboration among students and faculty. In Chapter 8, I provide a synthesis of the volume.

I would like to thank a number of colleagues who contributed to this sourcebook. I extend my deep appreciation and respect for the chapter authors who have contributed so thoughtfully to this work. In addition, Series Editor Catherine Wehlburg has been a tremendously helpful and enthusiastic guide for this project. Melanie Booth engaged above and beyond her role as a chapter author and helped me consider and reconsider several aspects of this book. And Sandie Turner, Jennifer Snyder-Duch, and Dee Flaherty helped me refine my own writing throughout this project.

Harriet L. Schwartz
Editor

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