

OCC faculty learning 'Teaching Thinking'

By Tim Richard
staff writer

It was a new kind of retraining for 14 Oakland Community College faculty members.

It had nothing to do with new computer programs, new inventions or discoveries.

It was called "Teaching Thinking." Instructors in math, English, psychology, engineering technology and nursing went through it together, said OCC academic Vice President Richard Thompson.

MUCH TEACHING involves "regurgitation" — memorizing segmented answers and spitting them back on command, said Johanna Kobran, academic dean of OCC's Auburn Hills Campus.

"Society, via television, encourages people to think limitedly and to respond with short, impulsive answers."

"We need to encourage students to think deliberately, to define problems, identify effective strategies for solving problems, develop flexible thinking, do collaborative learning, acknowledge and use feedback, restrain impulsiveness."

"We need to encourage teachers to teach the same. We need to teach students to learn how to learn."

AND SO, OCC, which is heavily involved in teaching older students and industrial retraining, found itself going back to the basics of thinking.

The 14 OCC faculty members were brought together for most of a week at the end of summer. Another training session for a new batch is planned for November, Kobran said.

"We hired a team of instructors from Oakland University," she said. "They have been trained in, and have field-tested, the materials from Reuven Feuerstein on Instrumental Enrichment."

What's "instrumental enrichment?"

"A series of exercises which aid students in developing thinking techniques," she said. Exercises are pre-

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mented to students one at a time over a year.

FEUERSTEIN is a clinical psychologist at Israel's Bar Ilan University.

sity who developed a series of exercises in thinking, Kobran said. His central idea is that intelligence, far from being engraved in granite, is like a soft plastic that can be shaped almost at will.

Take the first Feuerstein exercise. It involves a series of boxes, each with 10 dots.

"Each box has dots which can be connected to make a square and two triangles. You begin to connect the dots and expect to make hypotheses about subsequent boxes," she said.

Some people just "see" the triangle and squares. That's not enough.

The crucial question, she said, is "how do you know that?"

"It's not just reciting certain facts, but to relate those facts into a hypothesis," Kobran said.

"PEOPLE GET revivalistic about it," she said. "It's exciting to see people who have taught for 20 or 30 years come in to do something different."

One OCC faculty member has incorporated Feuerstein exercises into an English course. Another is using a series of them in a math course.

Will it make a difference to students?

"We'll look to see if students in those classes have a better, the same or a worse grasp of their material as those who didn't," Kobran said.

OCC WILL offer faculty members a second "Teaching Thinking" seminar in November. Fifteen have signed up.

After that, "Teaching Thinking" will be offered as long as instructors are interested, she said.

"It's one of many things for instructional growth and enrichment," Kobran said.

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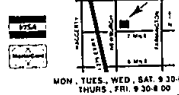
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