

# S.G.I.D. -- A New CELT Program That Taps Student Perceptions of Teaching

~ Cynthia Desrochers, CELT

## Fall 2001 *CELT Letter Article*

CELT is pleased to announce a new program, **Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID)**, a student feedback technique whereby a CELT Classroom Consultant (Elizabeth Berry, Cynthia Desrochers, or Penelope Jennings) will conduct a 30-minute interview with one of your classes without you present. During a mid-semester interview, students meet in small groups and as a total class to reach consensus on answers to three questions:

- **What do you like about the course?**
- **What would you like changed in the course?**
- **What suggestions do you have for improving the course?**

Instructors may suggest additional questions if they want feedback regarding specific teaching methods or assignments.

CELT will organize the students' anonymous comments, meet with you to discuss and interpret them, and discuss your plans for responding to the students regarding changes you are able to make, as well as ones you are not able to make. Your CELT Classroom Consultant will not be a member of your college, and all SGID results are confidential unless you choose to make them public, as in the following testimonies.

### **How SGID Helped Us**

Penelope Jennings, Business Law, writes:

At the midpoint of last semester, I had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of what students liked and didn't like about a particular course by availing myself of SGID interview data. I found the SGID report to be a more accurate representation of student views than the formal, end-of-semester evaluations. For example, every semester, one or two students in a class of 35 complained about having homework every day or about certain active-learning techniques, such as the use of Socratic method to learn about the law. Since these were the only complaints I saw every

semester, I mistakenly assumed that many students felt the same way but just didn't say so on the free-form evaluation responses. Through SGID, I learned that it really was only one or two students. The rest of the class liked the active-learning exercises and having to be prepared every day for class; they simply had not mentioned it before. Furthermore, since students discuss and reach consensus about their views as part of the SGID process, something not permitted in the regular evaluation process, the professor may gain a better understanding of the class group dynamic.

I had a chance to discuss student concerns with the class. Some could not be changed (the price of the course text), but others, such as my hard-to-read handwritten comments on student written work, could be corrected right away. In addition, one of the best parts of the process was that I had a "sounding board" specifically related to teaching and the immediate issues related to teaching during that semester – I could talk to a trusted peer coach.

Elizabeth Berry, Communication Studies, writes:

This past semester, I used the SGID method for getting feedback from my students, and I found it most helpful. Too often, we think we know what our students are thinking and feeling about our course, but our perceptions are inaccurate. Once in a while, one or two outspoken complainers will distract us and make us question our teaching. The SGID method evokes a general consensus from the class and provides the professor with a valuable opportunity to change and/or explain methods and assignments.

I was curious to know what students in my COMS 321 Rhetorical Discourse class liked about the course, what changes they wanted, and if my writing assignments were helpful. After reading the responses from the SGID session, I learned that students found the assignments relevant and liked the structure and pedagogy of the class. Several students questioned my journal requirement so I

spent class time offering them a rationale why I was not willing to change that particular requirement. Students also stated that they wanted a clearer breakdown of the grading system, which I was able to give them. I distributed a specific rubric for future writing assignments.

The SGID method is a valuable tool for improving teaching. It allows teachers to learn how students are responding to a class at a time when changes can be made. It also gives the teacher a chance to explain and justify choice of content, strategies, and grading system.

### **Insights from the SGID Interviewer**

Cynthia Desrochers, CELT, writes:

After having read about the SGID process, I sought faculty who would let me interview their classes. When CELT Advisory Board members Elizabeth Berry and Penny Jennings volunteered, I was impressed with their willingness to let me venture into their classrooms. After all, *peers peering in* can be intimidating! We arranged my classroom visit well in advance and scheduled it at the end of a

class session. This allowed the instructor to retreat to her office, and I dismissed class upon completion of the SGID interview.

Being left alone with students I'd never met before proved to be enlightening. In my teacher dreams, I had worried that they might sit buried in the *Daily Sundial* or, worse yet, walk out on me! Fortunately, my fears were unfounded. Throughout the SGID process, all students in both classes were interested, conscientious, and friendly. In large measure this was because Professors Berry and Jennings had emphasized to the students their critical role in this important process that could improve their class.

I randomly grouped the class into four groups (6 students per group), with one person in each group volunteering to be the note-taker. As I monitored from the outskirts, I saw how diligently students were requiring consensus before anything was noted on paper. Some ideas put forth quickly gained consensus. Other ideas were supported by only one individual, thus dismissed by the group. I was struck by the sophistication of the peer group process I was witnessing, asking myself if this would occur beyond Communication Studies and Business Law classes?

### **How Can You Sign-up for a SGID Classroom Interview?**

Please contact Cynthia Desrochers by Monday, October 1, 2001.

[cynthia.desrochers@csun.edu](mailto:cynthia.desrochers@csun.edu) or (818)-677-6536

### **SGID History**

Dr. Joseph Clark developed SGID as project director of a FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) grant to the Biology Learning Resource Center at the University of Washington, Seattle. The grant allowed him to investigate and disseminate the SGID method, which was used in over one hundred classes with over 10,000 students.

### **Reference**

Clark, D. and Redmond, M. (1982). Small Group Instructional Diagnosis: Final Report. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 217954.