

A forum for discussion and tips for advancing teaching and learning at Mona

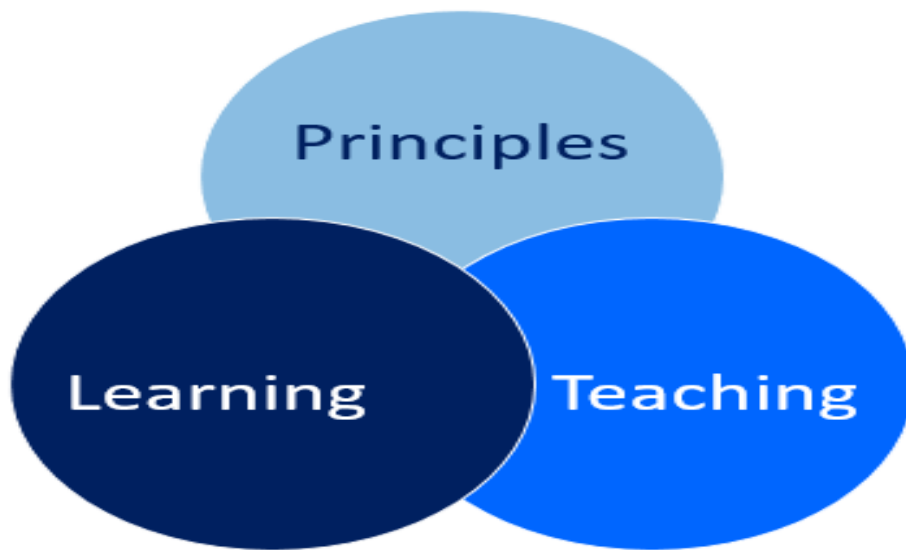
## A note on our 30th Anniversary

This year, the CETL continues the celebration of our 30th anniversary and we will continue to focus on our anniversary theme “Reflecting, Projecting, Advancing.” This semester we will be focusing on celebrating the teaching accomplishments of our lecturers.

### Special points of interest:

- The Teaching Tips Newsletter is a publication of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The newsletter is published three times during each semester and once during the summer. It provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education and is available online on the CETL page at <http://mona.uwi.edu/cetl> as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you need additional teaching tips on specific classroom practices, please contact us at [cetl@uwimona.edu.jm](mailto:cetl@uwimona.edu.jm).

## Principles for Learning and Teaching



Our students come from various schools across our country and the region, and in some cases from foreign institutions too. Nilson (2016) feels that whatever the profile of the student body in a college or university, we are able to make intelligent use of several of the well-researched principles relating to how students learn and inform our teaching so that we can in fact advance learning in our classrooms. In her popular book, “Teaching at its best: A researched-based resource for college instructors” Nilson offers several principles on how people learn. These are useful for us to reflect on, and of course, to make use of and streamline our teaching in ways that honour these

principles and advance learning. Here are ten of these principles related to learning and how they might be utilised in our teaching as we seek to advance learning:

1. Our students are born with an openness and readiness to learn. People are naturally curious. In fact, we all absorb and remember an enormous amount of information and it is clear from the research that people learn what is most relevant to their lives. The implication for teaching is clear, ensure that we make the connections for students. Underscore the meaning and relevance of content being taught to their lives. Further, university teachers should explain the relevance of the content being taught to their future careers and of course, to their growth and development as citizens.

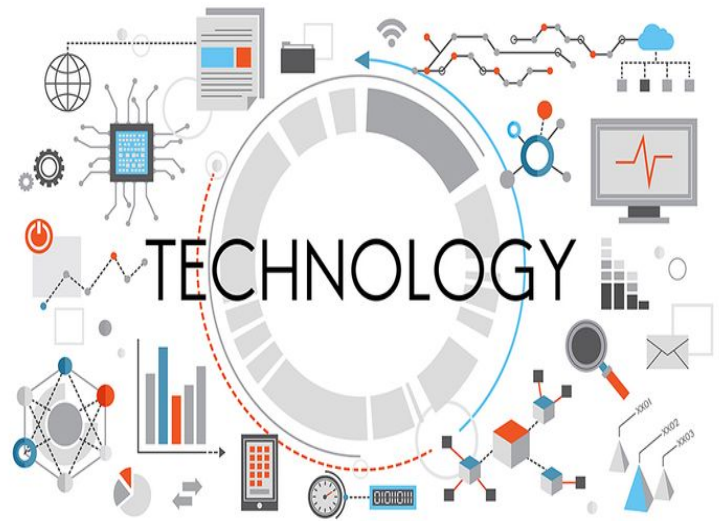


2. Our students learn through elaborative rehearsal and this requires one to think about the content being learned and make connections to what is already known. Here, university teachers must ensure that they create opportunities for students to connect new knowledge to what they know already, whether in the classroom or through out-of-class activities, assignments, etc.



3. Prior knowledge is so important. It makes learning new content easier so university teachers must ensure that new Knowledge fits in with prior knowledge. This means that university

teachers need to start where their students are and this also means that they will need to determine where the students are in their intellectual development, and specifically, where they are in relation to the subject matter content/discipline. In fact, university teachers need to help them to integrate concepts from the discipline in effective and efficient ways by providing mental models from the discipline for them to use in integrating concepts into their schema.



4. Learning is advanced when concentration on the content being learned is done and also by focusing on the process of learning. Clearly, university teachers must encourage students to concentrate on the course material they are learning. The technological innovations of our day and age are big distractors, these distractions in class and out-of-class are problematic. Therefore, university teachers must do all that is within their might and power to help learners minimize distractions.



5. Learning takes place as students interact with each other and as they construct knowledge together.

However, university teachers need to also bear in mind that in most instances, learning is an internal individual activity. Facilitating group learning opportunities and enabling students to learn together, especially the very challenging tasks, is highly recommended. There is a place also for helping students understand the importance of individual learning as an inner activity requiring that they focus their minds on the subject matter content in a steadfast way and determine for themselves, how they are understanding and recalling the various elements of the content.



6. Learning is advanced when persons are internally motivated to learn something.

The inspiration and enthusiasm of one's teacher or others in the learner's life usually assist in motivating a student to learn. Accordingly, as university teachers, we need to express enthusiasm and passion for our discipline and definitely, for the content we are teaching.



7. It is now well known that students learn much better when they are actively engaged in

an activity than when they are passively listening to a lecture. The human brain is unable to focus for long periods of time when it is in a passive state. In order to capitalize on this well-known fact from the learning sciences, university teachers must engage students in active and experiential learning tasks. Where possible, lecturing is to be discouraged. If we must lecture, then interactive lecturing with breaks for activities should be pursued over and above didactic lectures. Of course, in teaching a class, seek always to have learning activities for students to do.



8. College and university students are able to learn much better when

they actively monitor their learning and constantly think about what they are learning, how they are learning, and in fact, if learning is actually taking place at all. They need to utilise the mental operation called metacognition or self-regulated learning. The implication here is that in the classroom students are to be taught how to learn our course materials. Therefore, create opportunities for students to engage in self-regulated learning, this will require that you build in activities that will push them to observe, analyze, and assess how well they are learning.



9. Students are better learners when the steps of a learning operation are learned in the same

order that they are going to perform the operation. The implication here is that university teachers ought to teach procedures and processes in the same order that students are required to perform them.



10. Learning is advanced when efforts are taken to minimize the cognitive load placed on the student. When much demand is

placed on the working memory of the student to store and retrieve information, learning is minimized. Therefore, university teachers must take action to minimize the cognitive load placed on students as they learn. This is accomplished in several ways for example, by removing information that doesn't contribute to students understanding or problem-solving. Another way is by integrating explanatory text into visual materials. University teachers are also able to utilise scaffolding to benefit learning and this might be accomplished for instance, by modeling and providing explicit instructions or partially worked examples.

# Reference

Nilson, L. B. (2016). Teaching at its best: A research –based resource for college instructors (4th edition). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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