

# Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for

Instructional Development  
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## Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Instructional Development Unit (IDU) at the UWI, Mona.
- The Newsletter is published once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/idu/>) as well as in the office of the IDU.
- If you have an area that you would like to explore using this medium, do not hesitate to contact us at the IDU.

## Wrong Moves in Teaching: Eight Terrible Teaching Mistakes



*Richard M. Felder and Rebecca Brent (2008, 2009) shared their insights on some of the worst teaching mistakes. Let's see if we agree. Some of these mistakes are as follows:*

### **WRONG MOVE # 8** Posing a question to the class and immediately calling for volunteers to respond.

Posing a question and immediately calling for volunteers to respond is often a problematic undertaking. Oftentimes the answer is not immediately forthcoming. In fact, there are times in classrooms when it is clear that the students are at their wits end. They might avoid eye contact with you the teacher and in some cases when a response is offered, it might come from one of the few students who usually answer questions in your class. Usually only a few students will actually be thinking about the question. They expect another student to answer for them, perhaps one of the students who always answer questions in your class. Think about asking the question and waiting on the students to volunteer or, better yet, set them an active teaching and learning exercise for instance think, pair & share.

### **WRONG MOVE # 7** Calling on a student suddenly to respond (cold-calling)

Don't stop in the middle of a lecture and immediately pick on a student to respond, worst yet, don't point your finger at the student and ask for a response in the middle of the lecture without giving time for the student to think through the response. Calling on a student to suddenly respond is cold-calling and some students might be intimidated by this approach. Others might stop thinking about the question as soon as someone else is asked. Others might be praying that you do not call their names.

Questioning is a very good way to keep your class active and engaged. However, you should strive to provide wait time after posing a question and it might be better to pose a question to small groups and let them come up with a response by working together to analyze the issue at hand and collectively formulate a response.

### **WRONG MOVE # 6** Using PowerPoint to present your lecture as a classroom show

Some lecturers put their lectures on PowerPoint slides and come to the classroom and read the slides to their students. Oftentimes students complain about these classes indicating that it is a waste of their time. Invariably, the students can't keep up with the reading of the slides. Of course the students can read the slides for themselves and so many do not turn up for these types of classes. It is abundantly clear that reading PowerPoint slides in one's classroom for the entire class session reveals very weak pedagogy. It also leads to much boredom for the students. It is much better to use the slides to initiate discussion of the issues or concepts surrounding the content being taught. It also helps to use the PowerPoint slides to provide learning activities that will keep your students engaged in the classroom.

The best teachers use multiple teaching strategies and get the students engaged in activities. Passive learning is certainly something we should try to stamp out.

### **WRONG MOVE # 5** Didactic lecturing for the entire session

It is well known that lecturing is one of the most ineffective approaches to teaching and learning. However, that is not to say that there is no place for lecturing in the university classroom. Lectures that are purely didactic, with no visuals, diagrams and activities to break the monotony of the spoken word are to be avoided. Effective instruction call for the mixing up of things, in other words use multiple teaching strategies. Break up the lecture into small 15 minutes segments. There might be the use of multimedia, storytelling, cases, discussions, diagrams, team activities, the use of PowerPoint, individual assignments and many other strategies. Make it active, interactive and engaging. Avoid a lecture with a question here and question there, oftentimes by the same students, create activities that will keep the entire class engaged.

### **WRONG MOVE # 4** Failing to establish the relevance of the subject matter content

It is extremely important to establish the relevance of what you are teaching to the lives of the students. This will motivate them to learn far more. You might want to begin your course by describing how the course relates to social and technological problems of the day and of course how these intersect with their lives. Ensure that you relate the contents of your course to whatever you know about your students' lives, particularly their interests and career goals. You should provide these insights multiple times throughout the course and particularly when you begin new topics. If possible, use problem-based or case-based approaches to deal with real world problems to provide additional context for the studying of course materials. Be prepared for resistance to those teaching strategies since they will force students to take responsibility for their learning.

### **WRONG MOVE# 3** Becoming stuck in a rut

Don't get stuck in a rut. You can become stuck in a rut when you teach the same course year after year, using the same notes, giving the same assignments and feeling satisfied that you have discharged your responsibilities in a proper and fitting way to your students. These types of courses oftentimes become extremely boring to students and mechanical to the lecturer. Courses need to be revised or updated from time to time. It is important that you add new information. Update your reference lists and websites each year. Lecturers who are attending conferences and reading journals in their discipline will want to include some of the new information they are exploring in their courses. In fact lecturers who participate in professional development opportunities might learn new teaching strategies and can use them to teach old courses. You might also want to attend the education sessions at your professional conferences and you might learn something that is useful for your teaching.

### **WRONG MOVE # 2** Teaching without clear learning objectives

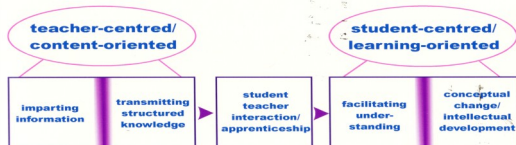
It is important to construct clear learning objectives or learning outcomes for your course and for every class that you teach. You must avoid the temptation to just prepare a particular topic, come to class, give a lecture and write assignments, tests and examination questions on the topic without any reference to learning objectives. Take some time to construct well-written statements of learning objectives. These should be written as learning outcomes or statements of what your students should be able to do after teaching and learning have taken place. You should also use your course objectives to design lessons and test the learning that is achieved. It therefore means that the learning objectives should guide you as you write your assessment activities. It is unethical to test students on knowledge and skills that were never taught. You should also share your objectives with your students and challenge them to use the objective to evaluate themselves, in other words, to measure their own learning.

### **WRONG MOVE # 1** Disrespecting students

The attitude of the lecturer to student is very important, it aids learning. In fact, in the seven principles for undergraduate teaching, the relationship with the teacher is highly regarded as being conducive to meaningful learning. It is important to convey respect for the students and demonstrate in very tangible ways your interest in their learning but also their welfare and wellbeing. In this regard, be careful that you do not (1) belittle your students by making sarcastic remarks about their intelligence, abilities, skills and work ethic; (2) put them down by scoring comments they made or by making disparaging comments about the questions they raised in the class or the responses offered to questions raised ; (3) give them the impression that you are merely doing a job as their teacher and you have no real interest in teaching the subject, them or even being in the classroom; (4) come unprepared for classes, cancel classes frequently and disregard the time the class is scheduled to end ; (5) project an air of superiority and appear unapproachable; (6) disrespect your office hours by not showing up, communicating annoyance when questions are asked of you or by being unresponsive when students make queries. These attitudes will alienate students and communicate negative attitudes that will affect the psycho-social atmosphere of the classroom and the overall learning potential of your students.

#### References

- Felder, R.M., & Brent R. (2008). The 10 worst mistake. I. Mistakes 5-10, *Chemical Engineering Education*, 42 (4), 201-202.  
Felder, R.M., & Brent R. (2009). The 10 worst teaching mistake. II. Mistakes 4-1, *Chemical Engineering Education*, 43(1), 15-16.



**Conceptions of Teaching  
(Kember 1996)**

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