Teaching Tips

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

Instructional Development Unit UWI, Mona

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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.

How Can I Engage Learners in the UWI Classroom?

Break It Up! - Strategies to "break up" the lecture

This month we continue to underscore the need for engagement in the UWI classroom. It is important that the university teacher provides activities for learners that will keep them engaged and actively learning in the classroom. The use of questions and answers to make the lecture interactive is a strategy that is begging for reinvention. Here is a list of strategies that might offer you guidance in making the lecture far more interactive and hence make your classroom an "engaged" learning environment:

1. Use case studies to provide your students with practical applications of the knowledge they gained from the lecture.
2. Use a concept map to link two or three key concepts together. You might want to encourage students to work in pairs to create visual representations of models, ideas, and the relationships between concepts.
3. Use break-out sessions and in this way incorporate the advantages of small group teaching within the lecture format. In using this strategy, your class is broken down into small groups using judicious seating arrangements. In some lecture theatres, you might be forced to use pairs or groups of threes based on the archaic seating arrangements. Ask the groups to discuss the topic for a short period and then make a report of their findings or conclusions to the entire class with appropriate feedback from the lecturer.
4. Use games such as jeopardy and crossword puzzles to present course material and of course for the purposes of review, for assignments, or for exams.
5. Present students with paradoxes involving pertinent concept(s). In this way you push your students to wrestle with ideas and come up with a solution to problems. This will promote the building of critical skills needed to properly evaluate ideas and theories.
6. Explore YouTube offerings for educational videos. There are several other sites that might be helpful too. You might also want to create your own video or have your students create videos to be shared in class. Showing video clips bring training and teaching to life and can be used to help promote and emphasize multiple realities.
7. Encourage active participation through brief written papers for instance, the minute paper or the muddiest point or a written recall. For the written recall, rather than asking individual students questions, all students must provide a written response to a posed, content-based question.
8. Use an audience response system– the clicker or an improvised clicker– the showing of cards.

Using Metacognitive Strategies to Improve Learning

The groundbreaking publication *How People Learn* (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 2000) has propelled metacognition to its lofty heights in the educational landscape far and wide. The topic has increasingly been examined by educators who have an interest in advancing learning at all levels of the education system. Metacognition might be summarized as knowledge of an individual learner's thoughts and the factors influencing one's thinking. There are those who emphasize the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate the learning process as key elements of metacognition.

Metacognition is by no means a silver bullet for improving student learning. However, it might be called into service and used as one of the tools that can advance learning as the emphasis is on helping learners to focus meaningful on the material to be learnt. Teachers have found that by asking metacognitive questions of learners, they become more aware of these learners and increasingly self-reflective about their own teaching practices and of course their effectiveness.

Metacognitive Strategies to Improve Learning Cont'd

Knowledge Surveys: Helping Students Think About Their Thinking

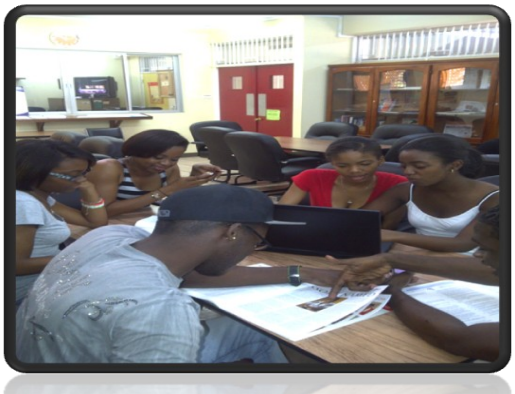
You might want to use knowledge surveys as a central strategy for helping your students think about their thinking. Knowledge surveys involve simple self-reports from students about their knowledge of course concepts, content, and skills. Students are presented with detailed content and learning objectives for each topic and are asked to indicate their perceived mastery of each. Students in fact will identify *"what they know" and "what they don't know."* As students research the topic, they will verify, clarify and expand, or replace with more accurate information, each of their initial statements. The surveys can be administered via paper or the web and they can be done in a short period of time.

These knowledge surveys have several important educational purposes that learners should be made aware of and these can help to advance learning: they help make clear course objectives and expectations, are useful as study guides, can serve as a formative assessment tool, and, perhaps most critically, aid in their development of self-assessment and metacognitive skills.

Reading Reflections

In seeking to advance learning in your classroom, you might want to help students monitor their learning through brief online writing or actual short papers about their reading assignments. This might be called a reading reflection, response or reaction paper. It is now known that expert readers are skilled at using a wide range of strategies during all phases of reading (e.g., setting goals for learning, monitoring comprehension during reading, checking comprehension, and self-reflection). Unfortunately sometimes we assume that undergraduates are competent at these metacognitive skills. You might want to reconsider this aspect of your teaching and make reading reflections a regular part of your course.

For the reading reflection to work, you will need to set the reading and suggest reading strategies that students might use and of course they must reflect on some aspect of their reading. The aim is to get students to read more regularly and meaningfully before coming to class. Hence deep reading is recommended and some focus questions might be assigned to assist the process. In this regard, they will be better prepared to participate in, and learn from, classroom activities resulting in deeper content learning.



Effective Reading and Studying Strategies

Researchers have found that the following four reading and studying strategies are effective:

A. **Generating questions** and responding to these questions. Your students need to be taught how they can construct higher-level questions and what they need to do in order to offer meaningful responses to such questions. Oftentimes, this might be accomplished in groups. This strategy is very helpful in improving students' comprehension skills.

B. **Summarizing content:** Students need help in developing the skill of writing summaries. They need to use their own words in doing these exercises. Further, rules for writing summaries need to be taught in explicit ways. When your students write summaries of the text or the content for the class, this will improve their comprehension skills and they will be able to monitor their understanding of the content they are learning.

C. **Writing elaborations:** You can ask students to create examples, make analogies and explain relationships between concepts and in so doing elaborate about the content they are learning. This is a powerful strategy that demonstrates to the student the depth of personal understanding of the content.

D. **Organizing content** in meaningful ways. In order to do this, you might want to ask your students to draw concept maps, network representations and other graphic organizers. This will help your students to make better sense of the content as they connect ideas and issues more meaningfully.

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