



Teaching Tips

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

Peer Teaching

What is Peer Teaching?

Peer teaching is the designing of learning and teaching opportunities enabling students to teach their peers, learn from each other, and with each other in mutually beneficial ways. The process includes creating opportunities for students to share their knowledge, ideas, and experiences with each other. Much emphasis is placed on the learning process and in particular the emotional support that learners provide for each other as well as the learning opportunities. There are those who believe that the best evidence of mastery of a subject is one's ability to teach it to someone else. Peer teaching provides this opportunity for students to learn something well and teach it to other students.



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.

Peer teaching activities in the classroom

There are various types of peer teaching and learning activities. Some of these are more relevant to a particular course or even a particular discipline. In designing peer teaching opportunities, care must be taken to design in terms of the learning outcomes that should be achieved. The following are some of the major forms of peer teaching and learning activities that you might want to try in your classroom:

Classroom Activities

- **Workshops** - these might be student-led, in this case the students would be responsible for designing and conducting a workshop for their peers, thus learning about working as a member of a team as well as researching the content for the workshop.
- **Seminar Presentations** - usually done in small groups or even pairs. Students will talk about the things they learn in doing research, a project or some other assigned work. Usually, this activity comes after a completed shared project or assignment.
- **Learning Exchanges** or **Group-Group Exchanges** - these are teaching and learning arrangements that enable students to learn about a topic directly from their peers. They involve formal class presentations by a group on an assigned learning task. The experience provides an opportunity for deep learning to occur from investigating about a particular topic, then making a presentation about that topic to the class and receiving feedback from the group.
- **Work-in-Progress** - this is a strategy that calls for students to give reports on the work done together, individually or in a group to the rest of the learners in a class. It is usually followed by question and answers.
- **Debriefing Sessions** - after students have had a field experience, visit to an industrial site, some other site or some work experience, a session is arranged for them to talk about the experience and reflect on their learning together. This might take place in groups (perhaps in pairs) and then in a plenary session.

Classroom Activities cont'd

- **Peer Feedback** - a teaching and learning opportunity might be designed enabling peers to comment on each other's assignment based on a list of criteria that would have been determined prior to the activity. This would be followed with some classroom discussion.
- **Study Group** - these are groups that can be facilitated by a faculty member or can be facilitated by students themselves. They will meet inside or outside the class regularly to discuss specific learning tasks or as a learning support group.
- **Learning Partnerships** - in these arrangements two students or more provide support and encouragement for each other. It creates an opportunity for collaboration with a learning partner and this offers personal support outside the classroom.

It is quite usual and normal for peer teaching activities to change their character when they are formalized. Much effort need to be expended in ensuring that other agendas do not interfere with the arrangement and render it less effective than it can be. Peer teaching activities must be monitored and where group activities are a major part of the engagement, there will be need for group process activities. The need for clear directions at the outset, ongoing support and encouragement cannot be overstated. There is also need for some activity that brings closure to the learning. This might be a session that calls learners to reflect on the learning from the experience and provide feedback to guide the designing of future peer teaching and learning activities.

● **Social Networking**

Social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Tagged, Hi5 etc. are the digital hangout spots of the 21st century digital natives. Social networking tools provide opportunities for group sharing of ideas and addressing issues that are important to members of a particular social group. Social networking tools support the formation of communities of learners who share similar interests and who have similar needs. By sharing information with each other through social networking, students are transmitting their knowledge of and views about a particular topic or issues thereby promoting learning from and with each other.

By designing activities that require students to use various technology tools to collaborate and share information with each other, faculty are facilitating peer teaching in their classes. For students to teach each other something, they must first learn it themselves.

Peer Teaching with Technology

The wide availability of new and emerging technology tools provide faculty in higher education settings with a variety of media that can be used to design instructional environments and events that support students learning from and with each other. In particular, Web 2.0 tools that support online collaboration and the formation of communities of learners can be used in the higher education classroom to facilitate peer teaching activities. Web 2.0 tools provide students with opportunities for interactive content sharing, collaborative creation of content, networking with each other and reflection. A group of tools including blogs, wikis and social networking sites are commonly referred to as Web 2.0.

● **Blogs**

A weblog or blog as it is commonly called is an online diary or journal. It is usually a simple webpage with postings of opinions, comments or information related to a particular issue or topic. In the higher education classroom blogs can be used to provide peer assistance in teaching and learning. As students contribute to each other's blog postings and as they share their views about issues that are important to them, learning from and with each other happens automatically. Blogs may also serve as valuable tools for peer feedback as students become e-moderators and reviewers of work submitted by their peers. Blogs facilitate reflection on the learning process and interactive learning.

● **Wikis**

A wiki is a web page or a collection of web pages that allows persons with access to modify or edit the content within these pages. Wikis facilitate peer moderation of written pieces as well as peer creation of written pieces. Through activities such as *Collaborative writing* and *Building a knowledge repository for a particular topic* within a course, students are provided opportunities to peer review, peer edit and peer assess each other's work thereby facilitating learning from and with each other. Wikis support the use of small group activities as students collaborate on projects. When students build on and extend each other's work, they are inadvertently learning from and with each other.

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