

Teaching Tips

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

DEEP LEARNING

What is deep learning?

Deep and **Surface learning** are two approaches to study, derived from original empirical research by Marton and Säljö (1976) and since elaborated by Ramsden (1992), Biggs (1987, 1993) and Entwistle (1981), among others. It is the kind of transformative experience which represents the very best outcomes of higher education. In essence, deep learning can be described as long term retention and the ability to transfer knowledge, skills and attitudes created in the university setting for use in other contexts at some time in the future (Halpern & Hakel, 2003). John Biggs' famous distinction between surface and deep learning has had a major impact on thinking about the need to make learners **do something** with the information which normally forms the basis of **transactions** between teachers and learners.

- Deep learning is mostly measured by the extent to which qualitative changes – rather than mere content memorization – occur in students at the end of learning.
- It involves more processing, often through discussion, reflection and in response to the stimulus that problems or tasks require.
- Put briefly, surface learning occurs where students are too busy accepting information that they have no time or motivation to process it.

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.



What factors promote deep learning?

FACTORS THAT PROMOTE DEEP LEARNING

- Good teaching: staff are well prepared, confident
- Openness to students: staff friendly, flexible, helpful
- Freedom in learning: students have a choice in what they study
- Clear goals and standards: assessment standards, expectations are clearly defined
- Vocational relevance: courses are seen as relevant to future careers
- Social Climate: good relations between students, staff (social, academic)
- Workload: heavy demands for content coverage, many assessment tasks
- Formal teaching: the perception that formal classes (vs. individual study) provide the main opportunities for learning.

What more can I do to promote deep learning?

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS CONCERNED ABOUT FACILITATING DEEP LEARNING

- Decide what sort of learning is important
- Match teaching methods to learning goals
- Devise learning tasks as well as teaching content
- Think early about assessment tasks and timely feedback on performance
- Consider the relationship between what you teach and what students learn (the “hidden curriculum”)
- Stress learning process as well as content and encourage reflection about learning
- Plan workload for out-of-class learning
- Select appropriate learning level – challenging but not overwhelming
- Offer students learning choices
- Evaluate and reflect upon your teaching, and if possible discuss with colleagues

Helping them to read deeply...

Many of our students do not read and when they read they do not retain much. Some struggle with the vocabulary and are very slow readers. Obviously, in order for them to succeed they will have to read. In fact, we often say that they have come to university to read for a degree. Students must be encouraged to read deeply, read for understanding, and read for greater retention. Roberts and Roberts (2008) offer the following six ideas that if implemented could result in deep reading:

Interesting- Students must find the assigned reading interesting. Find course-related material that will be interesting to the learners in your classes. This will be a greater source of motivation for them to read.

Curiosity- Try to develop ways and means to get them curious about what is in the reading. Pose interesting questions that will make them curious about the answers and want to read the assigned passage/chapter

Continued....

Connections

Try to select readings that students will be able to see that the content is connected to their lives. When the readings relate to their lives, beliefs or their future aspirations and ambitions, there is the greater likelihood that they will read it.

Deep reading and memory

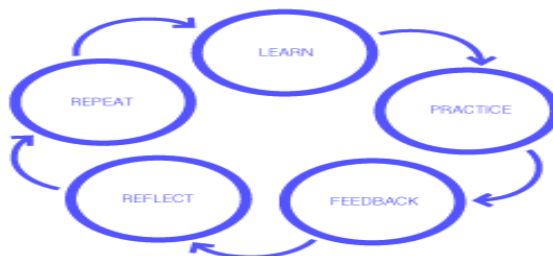
When students read deeply, the material will be easier to remember. Try to remind them of this constantly. In fact, when they understand the concepts in a course with greater levels of clarity, they will remember it more and can write about it meaningfully. Be a crusader for this approach to their reading.

Engaging

Use aspects of the reading to challenge their beliefs. In fact to propose alternative perspectives to some of the things they are reading and challenge them to make a response. Have them take a perspective and defend their point of view.

Higher order thinking

Ensure that you ask questions and set tests in ways that focus on higher order thinking skills. They will have to read deeply in order to deal with higher order cognitive skills.



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