

# Teaching Tips

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

Volume 1 Number 5

## Teaching and learning: What Strategy will you use? How about *DISCUSSION*?

### Discussion in the Classroom

Discussion is a teaching strategy that lends itself to be used in multiple ways in small and large classes. It promotes interactive learning since students are asked to process information they have studied in new ways. At times the student might be called to apply the information, at another time the student might be asked to evaluate or compare their understanding of the information with that of others. Further, class discussions, either between the teacher and the students or the students and their peers greatly improve the retention of subject matter content by the students.

If you are thinking about active and interactive teaching and learning, if you are thinking about increasing participation in your lecture or classroom, you might want to think about engaging classroom discussions. It won't just happen; you have to plan assiduously for meaningful learning to take place through discussion. Discussion might be used in a variety of innovative ways in your classroom. Here are four ways:

#### Discussion Row

In a lecture theatre, a couple of rows can be designated "discussion rows". The students in those rows will be asked to respond to the teacher's and students' questions throughout the lecture.

#### Classroom Talk Show

In this activity, students are asked to volunteer to serve as guests on a talk show. One useful way to approach the talk show is to ensure that various points of view are represented by having a varied panel of guests. In a discussion about the stock market students could take the roles of invest banker, ordinary citizen and investor in stocks and shares, economic/financial analyst, Minister of Finance, Trade Unionist, Priest, worker and Company Director (company listed on the stock exchange).

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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 will be published once per month and will focus on tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. The Newsletter will be available online 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.

#### Discussion Quadrant

The lecture theatre can be divided in four quadrants. Throughout the duration of the class students from particular quadrants are asked to respond to questions from the teacher as well as from the students. A whole class might be facilitated in this way throughout the semester with a different quadrant being responsible each week etc.

#### Expert Panel

From the outset of a course or class this activity might be planned and students divided into groups to serve as expert panelists. Students would have to prepare well for this assignment. Each panel of expert established will be asked to respond to the teacher's and students' questions on a particular topic.



## Online Discussions

*“The heart of an online course is the discussions that take place in the discussion boards. Students need to be aware that their presence in the online discussion boards can make a tremendous difference in the learning experience for all of the students in the classroom”.*

Source: Centenary College, NJ. Available at: <http://www.centenarycollege.edu/cms/en/academic-services/are-onlinedistance-courses-for-me/sample-online-discussion-guides/>

A discussion is one of the most frequently used strategies in the online environment and can be an extremely useful strategy if well executed. Discussions are used for a number of reasons:

1. Very interactive
2. Encourage active participatory learning
3. Promote alternative ways of thinking
4. Allow learners to explore their own experiences
5. Enhance critical thinking and problem solving skills among learners
6. Facilitate multiple perspectives on an issue
7. Give audience to the students' voice
8. Facilitate self expression

### Teacher Presence in Online Discussion

There is always the question of the amount of facilitator presence required in the online environment. The facilitator should be present in the online environment to:

#### 1. Set-up expectations for the students engaged in the activity.

As they start to discuss online, drop in to:

- Provide focus to the discussion
- Draw attention to particular concepts
- Encourage them to: draw on previous knowledge and experiences.
- Respond to others' comments directly as they think critically about the discussion questions.

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## Answers

Last month's Technology Word Match answers: Mashup (1), RSS (6), Wiki (5), Blog (2), Web2.0 (7), MySpace (3), TechTerms.com (4).

#### 2. Use your presence to motivate and encourage students.

- Provide directions to the groups
- Provide feedback on how the discussion is going
- Teachers' presence helps to keep students focused on the task at hand and can help refine discussions so that the conversations progress past basic information sharing to active, collaborative construction of knowledge.

#### 3. Provide direct instruction to the students.

- Direct instruction and feedback: keeps them on track with the discussion
- Help diagnose misconceptions, which may impair a group's ability to learn effectively from the discussion. serve as a model for how the discussion should unfold

#### 4. Increasing Participation Online

- Make clear from the beginning the quality & level of participation required
- Assign students some of the responsibility for ensuring participation
- Assign different roles to students
- Assign a grade for participation

## Are you Web 2.0 savvy?

Do you know these words: **Folksonomy** and **Webisode**?

Choose the correct meaning for **Folksonomy**:

- A) A history of folk tales on the web.
- B) A way to categorize and label web content.

Choose the correct meaning for **Webisode**:

- A) A television show which airs on the Web first.
- B) An episode of an e-movie.

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