

# Teaching Tips

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

Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, The UWI Mona



October, 2018

Volume 11, Number 2

## Special points of interest:

- The Teaching Tips Newsletter is a publication of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The newsletter is published three times during each semester and once during the summer. It provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education and is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cetl>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you need additional teaching tips on specific classroom practices, please contact us.

## Learning in Lectures

Despite the bad press associated with the use of the lecture in teaching and learning in higher education, it continues to hold sway. It is used extensively in multiple sites of teaching and learning in higher education.

### Why the Lecture?

There seems to be an important question that is worthy of being asked: Why continue with the lecture today when there are multiple sources of knowledge? Further, all we know about learning indicate that lecturing is one of the more ineffective approaches to teaching and learning in higher education. Some argue, for instance, Race and Brown (2001) that the lecture is justifiable on the following grounds:

- It provides a space for the dissemination of large bulky information.
- It creates the opportunities for large groups of learners to get together for a shared learning act/event.
- It enables students to get together and make sense of the things that they know already and it also whets their appetite for further learning.
- It introduces and clarifies important or contested areas of knowledge and it provides a common briefing on assignments.
- It provides a space for a skilful lecturer to use voice, facial expression, illustrations and body language to communicate the significance and relative value of the content to be presented.
- It also provides for the dissemination of subject matter content for further discussion, exploration and elaboration.

### Challenges and Recommendations

There is absolutely no doubt that lectures, especially in this era of short attention span create a number of problems for teachers and learners in higher education. Here are some of the challenges and some strategies that you might employ to mitigate some of the problems that might arise:

1. Lectures do not readily create space for students to receive the individual help that they might need to make learning impactful.
  - a. You might want to consider how peers can be used to enrich the teaching and learning act.

- i) Encourage interactions among students as much as possible (Biggs & Tang, 2007). In pursuit of this, use individual, pairs and small group activities. The use of Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATS) will be helpful, for instance, think, pair and share. This activity is now widely used in higher education. In implementing this strategy you will pose a short question or problem and get students to think individually about it for about a minute or so. Afterwards, ask them to turn to their neighbour and share their thoughts on the question or the solution to the problem (for another minute or so) with this learning partner and then with the entire group. In the larger group, you will take a sample of the outcomes of the discussion from as many groups as time will allow to ensure that the learners voices are heard and of course, to get feedback on the discussion. There might be need for additional explanations. The variation to this activity, think, write and pair may also be used.

- ii) Other such CATS include the minute paper, writing of the muddiest point paper and many more. Several of these are available from the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) upon request.

- iii) Of course you can pose a more substantial problem and get students to work in small groups in the lecture. All of these learning activities create opportunities for students to process ideas together and make your lecture interactive.

- b. If you teach large groups and have tutorials, then this should help to address some of the concerns of students who might need additional clarifications on the subject matter content after a lecture. If you do not have tutorials, you might want to provide follow-up seminar groups and this could easily be facilitated face-to-face or online using OurVLE with the requisite planning.

- c. In many teaching and learning situations, there is a problem, students do not know how to study and you might be able to help here in providing tips on how

they can get the most out of their study times. You might need to pay attention to opportunities for faculty development focusing on metacognition and self-regulated learning and these can in turn, empower you to help your students to study in smarter ways.

2. Students oftentimes find it very hard to concentrate and pay attention in a lecture. They have short attention spans.
  - a. Race and Brown (2001) suggest that we speak clearly and intelligibly. Ensure that students are hearing well and understanding the content that you are disseminating particularly if English is not your (and/or their) first language (Miller, 2007). This is very important. Further unfamiliar content or vocabulary, even unfamiliar accents can turn off students and cause them to tune out. Ensure that if you use Jamaican, all students are understanding what you are saying. Sometimes students from overseas or other Caribbean territories do not readily understand Jamaican.
  - b. Mortiboys (2010) suggest that we vary methods and strategies during lectures. We can easily become monotonous, especially when presenting dense information. The importance of illustrations cannot be overemphasized and nowadays we have various presentation software to help us, for instance, PowerPoint and Prezi.
  - c. You will want to ensure that students do some work in your lecture. Passive learning shouldn't be the only thing that is happening in your classroom. Let them do something. In this regard, assign engaging teaching and learning activities to encourage active learning (Brown & Race, 2002). The learning will occur in the doing. It is definitely harder to encourage interaction in very large classes, for instance, in classes with 200 students but it is not impossible and it is essential.
    - i) The student response system (clicker) is available or other 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies (please check with Mona Information Technology Services, MITS).
    - ii) You can also introduce short writing exercises for them to write down key learning points covered or provide a template for them to fill in key information that would have been gleaned from the lecture.
    - iii) Use brainstorming by asking students to write down, for example, a list of important terms, concepts and ideas that have been dealt with in the lecture so far.
    - iv) There is also important research to indicate that frequent quizzes and tests are helpful.
    - v) You might also ask students to do calculations or complete diagrams.

- vi) There are times when you will want them to contribute to the whiteboard by writing key points, drawing a diagram or doing a calculation and explaining it to other students. This usually creates enormous interest.

- d. Introduce these learning activities (just mentioned) gradually and gently. Explain to students the reason why you are introducing interactive activities if this was not traditionally your way of teaching. Sometimes we fall for the question and answer session and oftentimes, with very few persons participating, especially in large lectures. It's better to use other interactive strategies that can get more persons involved. This is not to suggest that we shouldn't create opportunities for students to ask questions, however it should not be the single focus in making classes interactive. Please remember that using interactive activities will take more thought and preparation than straightforward lecturing. So prepare well to implement these activities.
            - e. It is important that we become aware of the students we teach. Get to know your students as best as you can. If possible, try to familiarise yourself with their daily work and rest regimes and other factors that impact their physical and emotional well-being. It is well known that it is very hard to concentrate without sufficient sleep or on an empty stomach. At times, you might have to point out opportunities or make references for your students to help them navigate successfully the higher education terrain and deal with some of their social, economic, and psychological challenges.
            - f. In using questions, remember to plan them and ensure they are at various intellectual levels. Ask both planned and extemporaneous questions to stretch your students. Remember give them time to think about the question, provide clues at times but avoid answering them if they aren't answered quickly.

## References

- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for quality learning in university*. Maidenhead: SRHE/Open University Press.
- Brown, S., & Race, P. (2002). *Lecturing: A practical guide*. London: Routledge
- Miller, L. (2007). Issues in lecturing in a second language: Lecturer's behavior and students' perceptions. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32, 747-60.
- Mortiboys, A. (2010). *How to be an effective teacher in higher education*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education/Open University Press.
- Race, P., & Brown, S. (2001). *The lecturer's toolkit* London: Routledge.

Check us out at :

Our website: [myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cet1](http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cet1)

Twitter: [/twitter.com/cet1mona](https://twitter.com/cet1mona)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/cet1mona](https://www.facebook.com/cet1mona)

Contact: 935-8341 extn 2341, 2730