

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



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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 once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/CETL/>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you have an area that you would like us to explore in this newsletter, do not hesitate to contact us at the CETL.

Getting Students to Ask More and Better Questions in the Classroom

Last month we had a short feature on questioning and we are continuing this month. It is an important classroom activity for all of us as teachers. Yet, some of us continue to be terribly disappointed with the number of questions our students ask in our classes and sometimes the quality of the questions is also cause for concern.

Steve Snyder, Professor of Humanities at Grand View University in the USA was concerned about these issues as well and he presented some tips on how we might deal with these issues at the Teaching Professor conference in 2016. He developed a list of questions for an introductory Humanities course but it has applicability with some tweaking to several courses offered in any undergraduate programme. This list of questions provided students with models for designing their own questions and it is informed by the Bloom's taxonomy. These models can be used to help students create their own questions based on the readings and they might also be required to take questions they have designed to class.

Level One Questions

Looking at the Context (contextuals)

- ◆ How was X (event, text, work, etc.) shaped by its time?
- ◆ Where did X originate and why?
- ◆ Who was the originator of X and what was he or she like?

Seeking Clarifications (definitions and deepening understanding)

- ◆ How do you define X (word, term, idea, etc.)?
- ◆ What does this passage, concept, etc., mean?
- ◆ What would be a specific, concrete example of X?

Analysers

- ◆ What parts or features make up the whole and what does each part do?
- ◆ How do the parts contribute to the whole?

- ◆ How is X organized and why is it organized this way?

Level Two Questions

Comparing and Contrasting

- ◆ How is X the same as that?
- ◆ How is X different than that?
- ◆ How are these more or less similar?
- ◆ What is the opposite of X?

Causals

- ◆ What factors caused X to happen?
- ◆ Which of these factors is sufficient? Which contributing or probable?
- ◆ On what grounds can we eliminate possible causes or explanations?

Evaluatives

- ◆ What are the most important features of X?
- ◆ Why do you like or dislike X (or agree or disagree with this)?
- ◆ How strong is the case that X is correct?
- ◆ What criteria are best for judging X?
- ◆ What is the best order or priority for these things and why?
- ◆ What is the strongest argument against X?

Level Three Questions

Counterfactuals

- ◆ How would X change if this happened?
- ◆ How would things be different if X had not happened?
- ◆ How would things be different if X happened to a greater (or lesser) degree?

Extenders (Synthesizers)

- ◆ How can we apply X to this set of circumstances?
- ◆ What can we predict if X is correct?
- ◆ What ideas should be added to X?
- ◆ What might happen if you added this to X?

Developed by Steve Snyder, Professor of Humanities at Grand View University, Des Moines, IA, USA.

Using the Index Card Strategy for In-Class Questions

For decades we have used index cards in our classes from primary school to university level. For some faculty in institutions of higher education, this strategy works well.

In a class, after a lecture or some discussion, the lecturer hands out index cards and asks students to write questions on the card. These are done anonymously. The students are oftentimes guided about the level of the questions they are required to write. Time is given for them to think about questions and write them on the cards. The cards are collected and some lecturers will shuffle the cards in the presence of the students to underscore the fact that anonymity is being maintained, then the questions are read to the class and a response offered by the lecturer.

There is also an opportunity to continue the conversation sparked by a question posed on the index card. In responding to the question, the faculty member might indicate that s/he would like to speak to the questioner individually and ask the questioner to see her/him after class, during office hours' time or make contact via email or by one of the other mechanisms available for students and teacher to meet.

In this technological age, there are opportunities for the use of the index card "type" classroom activity to be done electronically by the submission of a response online. Of course, this would require reliable internet. There are multiple open educational resources (OER) available that would make this possible.

Appreciative Emails: Evidence of Impactful Teaching for your Teaching Portfolio/ Dossier

From time to time, you are required to prepare a teaching portfolio or a teaching dossier. But what is a teaching portfolio or a teaching dossier?

A teaching portfolio is a factual description of a professor's teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes documents and materials that collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance. The portfolio is to teaching what lists of publications, grants, and honors are to research and scholarship. As such, it allows faculty members to display their teaching accomplishments for examination by others."

(Seldin, Miller & Seldin, 2010, p. 4)

The basic purpose of a teaching portfolio is to make significant chunks of a university teacher's work public and available for peer review. By creating a teaching portfolio we are indicating that our work is valuable and it can be evaluated, shared, exchanged and examined. In some institutions, a teaching portfolio is required for the tenure and promotion process and it is a good instrument to look at your professional development as a university teacher. Of course, if you want to enter for a teaching award, it is likely that you will be asked to prepare a teaching portfolio.

It is advisable to collect evidence as you go along for your teaching portfolio. Sometimes we do not realise that some of the everyday and seeming unimportant stuff that comes our way are possible artifacts for our teaching portfolios. Let us think for one moment of that appreciative email from a student or a former student. It is always a wonderful feeling to receive an email from a student or former student indicating the role you have played in his/her educational development. This student might have said wonderful things about your course and the personal attention given to him/her, your interest in using innovative teaching strategies or your penchant for giving feedback that really mattered. Don't let this unsolicited email just remain there in your inbox or delete it after some days, print it out and save it. This is good qualitative evidence of your impact as a university teacher.

Reference

Seldin, P., Miller, J. E., & Seldin, C. A. (2010). *The teaching portfolio* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass

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