

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 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.

Welcome to the new academic year 2019 - 2020

It is a new semester here at the UWI, Mona Campus and we welcome all new and returning faculty members to the task of educating our students. We wish for you a very productive semester. At the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, we stand ready to assist you in improving your pedagogical skills.

At this the beginning of the first semester, we would do well to remember the tips in this newsletter as we strive for pedagogical excellence.

Focusing on learning this semester

A question that many members of faculty will ask this semester: "Can we get them to learn this semester?" The following tips should be helpful in promoting learning in your classroom:

1. Essential Question

What is the intended goal of the lesson? Remember, there is at least one essential question per lesson, and students must be able to answer this question by the end of the lesson. Ideally you will convey this in terms of the objective/learning outcome.

2. Active Engagement

Active teaching and learning calls for a teaching strategy that gets students actively thinking about the lesson or making a connection with the content being taught. Explore the possibilities of using 21st century technologies for engagement.

3. Relevant Vocabulary

Introduce relevant vocabulary and limit it to what your students are able to cope with. Ensure that it is used in context throughout the lesson.

4. Mini Lecture

If you must lecture, use this strategy sparingly. A mini lecture or "lecturette" is recommended. Please remember that after 12-15 minutes of lecturing, you should engage your students in some type of activity, even if it's for only a few minutes.

5. Graphic Organizer

The use of a graphic organizer provides an opportunity for students to visually categorize new information or review old information. Here, the use of 21st century technology tools might be helpful.

6. Student Movement and Attitudes

Have some focus on the psychomotor domain of learning by creating opportunities for movement. Students need to be mobile at some point during instruction to ensure they're actively engaged. You should also craft an objective that focuses on the development of some attitude or values

7. Higher Order Thinking Questions

Create opportunities in your class for students to focus on at least three higher-order-thinking skills ("HOT") questions during the lesson. This is important in demonstrating to all that the content is challenging.

8. Summarize

Utilise various approaches (including the use of 21st century technologies) to summarise the lesson as you end each session. You should also use an assessment task to find out if the learning objectives have been realised.

9. Rigorous

Ensure the learning activities are rigorous and engaging by carefully reviewing them and pitching some at higher thinking skills level of the Bloom's taxonomy.

10. Learner-Centered

The lesson should be learner-centred. There should be clear indications that the session is catering to the needs of the student/learner and the use of 21st century technologies might be employed here.

Focusing on the Development of a Growth Mindset

Have you ever thought that your students possessed fixed mindsets? Do your students limit themselves by defining their intelligence and talents as fixed traits? How often have you heard students emphatically declare: “I am no good at math,” or “I am not a good writer.” Many lecturers and professors hold similar beliefs about students. In fact, some of us label them as “smart,” “bright,” and sometimes “not bright,” etc.

Let us be mindful of the fact that research is indicating that teachers have great influence on the mindsets of our students. We might confirm them in their belief that they have a fixed mindset by how we operate in the classroom, especially with the comments we make about intelligence and brilliance. Further, our operations in relation to our beliefs about achievement might also convey ideas about a fixed mindset.

According to Dweck (2006), students have a fixed or a growth mindset. Students with fixed mindsets believe that they have certain talents and only those talents. These cannot be expanded or improved. Further, those having this fixed mindset and who consider themselves bright usually embrace an approach to their work in which they generally try to look smart at all times. For these students, mistakes are statements about their deficiencies. Oftentimes, they do not try to correct mistakes. In fact, they attend university to do what comes easily and avoid the harder tasks. They believe hard work might be seen as evidence of low ability. Such students see failure as an indication that they are not suited for the task and hence, they ought to quit. It is not uncommon to find that students with fixed mindsets suffer from anxiety and depression.

On the other hand, students with a growth mindset are more flexible. They accept and confront their deficiencies. They work hard and demonstrate ongoing perseverance when beset with challenges. Generally, they embrace the perspective that they can learn and become better at what they do, even those things that come easily to them. Further, they are of the view that they can develop new talents over time. In this regard, failure is usually seen as a temporary setback and certainly not a permanent barrier to achievement. From such experiences emerge greater impetus to work harder, smarter and seek success. Persons with this growth mindset have less anxiety, less depression and a greater sense of their own self-efficacy.

Mindset is extremely important as students move into the university community. Tertiary level work is harder than high school or secondary level work. Further, in the university learning environment despite our best efforts, the same levels of personalised attention and nurturance are not readily available. In this context, it is much easier for the student with the fixed mindset to get derailed and give up as failure oftentimes comes and in searching for a response, the student might embrace a perspective that suggests that s/he is not cut out for a particular field of study. They might also hear comments of their inability to master particular bodies of knowledge. Those with a growth mindset will persevere, since mistakes and failures are interpreted as opportunities to work harder and strive to do better. They oftentimes will seek help, make progress and prevail.

Dweck (2006) noted that one is able to cultivate and develop a growth mindset. She recommends that we praise students for the processes they employed in obtaining good grades rather than for the grades themselves. In this regard, as university teachers, we must identify the strategy, the concentrated effort, and the persistence that were embraced by students who have achieved outstanding academic outcomes. When we elevate effort and persistence, this approach is able to work wonders and provide the encouragement needed for students to continue to do well. Is it possible to plan teaching and learning activities that students will come to realise that their efforts play a role in their overall learning outcomes? Let us remember that effective feedback and opportunities for revision are able to create a risk-tolerant, pro-growth learning environment.

A growth mindset will work through the well-known phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy. It is focused on a state that does not yet exist and works hard to bring that state into being. It also works through the realisation that as one learns, one becomes smarter. In fact, brain research and cognitive science is indicating that as we continue to learn, the brain makes connections facilitating more and better learning. In this regard, intelligence is not fixed, hard work pays off, as our efforts are rewarded. Let's seek to cultivate growth mindsets by the comments we make in our classrooms and the learning environment we create.

Reference

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, Random House.

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