

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.

Advancing Learning with Researched-Based Principles

Teaching and learning in the UWI classroom is definitely challenging. The diversity of students with different learning preferences and various levels of motivation contribute to making our task as university teachers pretty difficult. Luckily, years of research on teaching and learning have yielded approaches that might be used to advance the process. As university teachers we need to remember the following:

1. Learning is a process, not a product. However, because this process takes place in the mind, we can only infer that it has occurred from students' products or performances. This means that our students need activities in the classroom and we must create those opportunities for them to demonstrate that they are learning. Questioning is also important in getting students to articulate their ideas. In-class teaching and learning activities should be used to do something with the material that students are learning. This might be a debate with classmates, application of concepts to real or hypothetical cases or contrasting it with other content. There is the possibility that the teaching and learning activities will cause your students to combine material they are learning in the class at that point, with other aspects of the course content. In this way, they might come up with some new principle or some new perspectives, preferably ones that all the minds in the class are able to be involved with in one way or another.
2. Learning involves a change in knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, or attitudes. This change unfolds over time; it is not fleeting but rather has a lasting impact on how students think and act. In this regard, we need to create opportunities for students to express themselves and we need to challenge them to integrate aspects of the content we are teaching them with their experiences. In fact, there is a difference between received knowledge and constructed knowledge. When students construct knowledge, they combine what they read and hear in class with their own knowledge from other sources.

This process can be advanced when it is done with classmates. Of course, the process is enhanced by rigorous questioning to sharpen thinking and challenge persons to think even harder about concepts and refine them further.

3. Learning is not something done to students, but rather something students do for themselves. It is the direct result of how students interpret and respond to their experiences.

Developmental and holistic perspective

4. Learning is a developmental process that intersects with other developmental processes in a student's life.
5. Students enter our classrooms not only with skills, knowledge, and abilities, but also with social and emotional experiences that influence what they value, how they perceive themselves and others, and how they will engage in the learning process.

Researched-Based Principles

In the book, *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*, the authors Susan Ambrose, Michael Bridges, Michele DiPietro, Marsha Lovett, and Marie Norman (2010) offer some important researched-based principles that will help us to teach smarter. This text is the joint work of former Carnegie Mellon colleagues. It synthesizes 50 years of research on learning:

These principles are as follows:

1. Students' *prior knowledge* can help or hinder learning.
2. How students *organize knowledge* influences how they learn and apply what they know.
3. Students' *motivation* determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn.
4. To develop *mastery*, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned.
5. Goal-directed *practice* coupled with targeted *feedback* enhances the quality of students' learning.
6. Students' current level of *development* interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual *climate* of the course to impact learning.
7. To become *self-directed* learners, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning.

Reference

Ambrose, S.A., Bridges, M.W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M.C., & Norman, M.K. (2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Encouraging Students to Become Better Learners

Deliberate use of practice and dedicated strategies

As university teachers, we have to encourage our students to learn and become better learners. There are those persons who believe that people are born learners, however, research is showing that we can learn to learn. Help your students understand that learners are made, not born. In some of our everyday comments, we express views that, on the surface, might be suggesting that we believe people can learn to learn, for instance, "practice makes perfect" or even the biblical statement "study to show thyself approved..." In many instances though, there is an ingrained belief that learners are born. This is not true based on the research on learning done over the last 50 years or so.

Since learners are made, your students need to understand that they can develop expertise through the deliberate use of practice and dedicated strategies. Practice and feedback is therefore an indispensable strategy that should be a part of our teaching and learning approach.

Good learners organize their goals.

Effective learning might be realised through the organization of learning goals. Students must set achievable goals about what they want to learn and develop strategies about how they will attack and realise those goals.

Think about thinking

Psychologists have defined metacognition as "thinking about thinking." It is really thinking about how you know what you know. It involves asking oneself questions about our learning and our students need to constantly check themselves and how they are learning. The following questions are important and you should challenge your students to think about them:

- ◆ Do I really get his idea?
- ◆ Can I explain this concept to a friend?
- ◆ What are my learning goals for this topic?
- ◆ Do I need more background knowledge to fully understand this concept?
- ◆ Do I need additional practice to learn this concept?

Reflecting on One's Learning

When we learn something, we can often deepen our understanding as we reflect on it. Learning benefits from reflection. Students need to understand that they need to think deeply about issues after class or after reading an assigned chapter or article and this might occur in a space away from the fray. Reflection requires calmness, it might be that they need to retreat to a quiet corner to think about the points for an essay or think about it while they are in the shower. This is a recommendation for our students to engage in focused deliberation and this will require a moment of silent introspection or a time of cognitive quietness where one can bring to the fore (internally) issues that we are seeking to understand and think deeply about them to gain greater clarification and solidification.

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