

Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for

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 a summer edition. 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.

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Teaching in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: High Impact Practices

Many colleges and universities worldwide have been forced to engage in remote teaching since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, there has been a massive “migration” from traditional in-class face-to-face classes to online teaching and learning or remote teaching and learning. The observation has been made that in this era of remote teaching and learning, online teaching is not the preferred moniker for what we are engaging in. Online courses require an elaborate design, teaching materials such as audio and video contents, as well as technology support teams.

Moving classes online has been a massive and disruptive occurrence. For remote teaching, colleges and universities have rapidly trained faculty to use various 21st century technology tools to engage students. Of course, at the UWI Mona Campus, some training was provided but this was hardly enough. Some of the remote teaching approaches used during this period are likely to become pervasive in higher education of the future. There are university teachers who, having been exposed to Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate are more likely to, for instance, invite a guest speaker to join his or her class by Zoom.

Faced with the need to complete teaching and learning to meet end-of-semester requirements, in some cases faculty engaged in traditional modes of teaching. It is an open question as to whether the shift to remote teaching, and in particular, the various online platforms being utilised will not see a return to traditional ways of teaching. If this becomes reality, it certainly will impact student engagement in negative ways. In 2019, Gert Biesta noted that:

some of the most popular technology-mediated forms of education – such as TED talks, MOOCs and the numerous professional and amateur instructional videos on YouTube – are all staged in traditional ways, with someone talking and explaining so that others can watch, listen and learn (Biesta, 2019, p. 55).

It is easy to allow the crisis that we are enveloped in to cause us to use (at least those of us who were not involved in teacher-centred approaches) passive approaches to teaching and learning in higher education. However, we need to be more concerned with student engagement and passive approaches to teaching and learning must be avoided.

Challenges student faced with remote teaching

During the emergency transfer to remote teaching, the UWI had some major challenges. Internet connectivity obstacles were aplenty in Jamaica during this time. Students, in some rural communities had very little access to the internet (internet connectivity continues to be a major challenge). Some students had no devices. This lack of tablets, laptops or other devices was grave. However, the UWI was able to procure several hundred devices for distribution and this, no doubt, allowed those students without devices to borrow one from the institution. There was also lack of focused attention in the remote classroom. When students are involved in remote teaching, self-discipline to advance learning is required. They must pay attention to the learning activities and seek to make sense of it for themselves. There is also need for a good learning environment and this was not always available to our students.

High-impact practices for remote teaching

With online teaching, lecturers are challenged to maintain the same depth of engagement with students they previously enjoyed in the classroom. For this to happen, you might want to think about the overall structure of your course. On the UWI’s Learning Management System (LMS)(OurVLE), there is the section for course information. Upload in this section your course outline, course regulations, contact information for the lecturer, teaching assistants contact information, office hours, a grading rubric, assignments, deadlines and other important information.

It might have been impossible to engage all the functionalities of online learning during the latter part of the second semester. However, going forward, we might be called to use the various online tools at our disposal to make teaching and learning more engaging and exceptionally meaningful.

At UWI Mona, Moodle (OurVLE) is the major tool available to us. You can make this platform your student's one-stop-shop for all that is needed for your class.

In using OurVLE, high impact practices are necessary. As you upload your courses, ensure you have various links to references and sources in your readings. With the acquisition of Curriculum Builder, the library is able to assist you to make linkages to readings. It is available as an external tool in OurVLE. You will also want to create discussion boards/ fora and utilize the quiz tool, interactive websites etc. to push your students to think harder about course content. Further, you will want to explore live meeting tools, such as Blackboard Collaborate Ultra (similar to Zoom), and the breakout rooms. These rooms allow you to split your class into smaller groups for pair or group work. Consider also allowing your students to share their screens so they can give presentations to the class. Please also incorporate polling or post quiz questions during your live sessions.

A modular approach to online learning is one of the approaches recommended. You are encouraged to break down major topics into manageable segments. In fact, it is best to break them into smaller modules for 30 – 40 minutes sessions. This will cause students to concentrate more on the lesson at hand.

Body Language/ Non Verbal Expression

In the face-to-face classroom, the use of body language has always been important. The facial expression of the teacher and the student, the voice of the teacher and movements have also been significant in advancing learning. It is important that these are utilised in some way, form or shape in the online classroom. In synchronous classes, faculty can slow down to allow students to make sense of the information being transmitted. In non-synchronous classes, the use of emoticons is helpful.

Provision of on-line Teaching- Assistants and Technical Support Agents

Online teaching (for large classes) requires teaching

assistants who understand this domain. The need for this kind of support is greater than what is generally required for the traditional face-to-face teaching. These teaching assistants must understand the learning outcomes, content and pedagogical approaches and learning activities used in teaching the classes. Teaching assistants must provide students with ongoing support. Hence, feedback on a timely basis is necessary. In cases where there is no teaching assistant support, the lecturer must assume this task. Further, supportive technical assistance is required and this must be taken into consideration as we continue to teach online even after COVID-19 since some faculty are just beginning to develop expertise in online teaching and many do not have any expertise at all.

Activities

It is possible to create online learning with meaningful activities to engage students. Of course, faculty can design and insert learning activities into the LMS. It is another thing to get students to do these activities. Unfortunately, we live in an age when students will not do learning activities unless they earn points that go toward their overall course outcomes/grade. Almost all faculty complain about insufficient pre-class preparation, limited participation and inadequate discussion of the course material. Students more often than not, do not do the assigned readings. Accordingly, you must be on top of your game and find creative ways to get students more involved in these activities. These might include providing incentives. Merely setting a reading and asking some questions on the reading is not enough. The use of short videos, audio recordings, online fieldtrips, various images with activities etc. are all helpful and lead to greater levels of engagement.

Reference

Biesta, G. (2019). Teaching for the possibility of being taught: World-centred education in an age of learning. *English E -Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 4, 55–69. Retrieved from <http://pesj.sakura.ne.jp/english/englishjournal.html>

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