

# 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.

## Teaching with 21st Century Technologies: Using Vocaroo to Give Audio Feedback on Assignments

There is a usually pretty rapid change in the various educational software and hardware available for use in the higher education classroom. In fact, it is quite a daunting task to figure out which 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tool to use at times. This is true for those who are technophobes and also for those who are techno-savvy. However, despite the rapid changes taking place, there are still some simple tools that you can use to make an impact and advance learning in your classroom.

There are times when you provide feedback to your students and they do not even read the comments that you have written on their papers. Sometimes, students misinterpret the comments that were offered on their papers. It is always the desire of the conscientious teacher to find a way to reach the student with constructive feedback and in particular, feedforward or advice as to how they can really move forward and do better next time. Of course, you would like the student to hear what you have to say and use the feedback/feedforward to advance his or her learning. A good tool that you should investigate and use to provide feedback is vocaroo [go to <http://vocaroo.com/>].

This 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tool, vocaroo is an online audio recorder and is free to use. You would need to access the link, use your microphone in your computer to assist you in recording your message and share the link with your students. It is very easy to use and provides great fun. Further, it is an effective way of communicating with your students.

When you have decided to use it to offer your students feedback, it is best to record a short message. Remember, an important tip in giving feedback, that of identifying something positive. Therefore, identify and accentuate the positive. Point out something that was well done and then something that was not so well done. Be sure also to offer comments on how this activity might be improved. The student will be listening to your voice and you will want to ensure that you use an instructive tone that is at the same time, encouraging and supportive of the learning quest of the student. Chances are the student will actually stop and listen attentively and might even be less defensive about the work that was done (if this was his or her usual stance). Those teachers who have used this 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tool have reported good success, since, their students have clicked the link, listened to the comments offered, made adjustments in their next assignment, and increased their level of success in the course.

The link can be pasted into any digital document or you can send it to your students in an email. It can work for you if you are teaching a face-to-face class and wish to use this tool to provide feedback. It can also work for you in the online class and of course, in the online discussion board.

## "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education"

Fill in the chart below by identifying specific activities that you could undertake to improve your course through blending.

Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamson)	I could use technology to accomplish this by...
1. Encourages Contacts Between Students and Faculty	
2. Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students	
3. Uses Active Learning Techniques	
4. Gives Prompt Feedback	
5. Emphasizes Time on Task	
6. Communicates High Expectations	
7. Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning	

# Critical and Creative Thinking: Six Thinking Hats

Critical and creative thinking are important outcomes in many courses in the university. They are very important in developing problem solvers. The “Six Hats” exercise below is one that can be used to develop critical and creative thinking. This approach to thinking is a technique that was developed by Edward De Bono. “Six Thinking Hats” is in fact, a powerful tool facilitating productive critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. It provides opportunities for each person’s unique point of view to be included and considered. Since its development, it has been used with great success in many corporations across the globe. It is simple, yet highly effective parallel thinking process. It has helped people to be more focused, productive and mindfully involved.

In a classroom setting, learning teams can use this strategy to strengthen thinking processes. Team members can learn how to separate thinking into six clear functions and roles. Each thinking role is identified with a coloured symbolic “thinking hat”. The team member is called on to symbolically wear and switch the thinking “hat”. This is accomplished mentally. This activity offers a structure for students to investigate six distinct perspectives of a complex issue or scenario. It can be adapted in many disciplines.

In the team, each member use this simple mental metaphor by putting on a hat and taking it off. Each hat is of a different colour which is an indication of the direction of the thinking. Each member thinks using the same thinking hat at the same time on the same thinking challenge. This is referred to as focused parallel thinking.

Each hat enables the team member to focus on a particular perspective.



- ♦ White Hat: here the focus is on that which is neutral and objective. Therefore, there is an emphasis on data, facts, information known or needed.



- ♦ Black Hat: here the concern is with the difficulties, the potential problem and the reasons that might prevent success from being achieved hence, the risks are reviewed.



- ♦ Red Hat: focuses on emotions, feelings, hunches, gut instinct, and intuition.



- ♦ Yellow Hat: here there is a focus on values and benefits and the reasons that might cause some thing to work. Hence, this hat is associated with that which is optimistic, hopeful, positive thinking and that which is constructive.



- ♦ Green Hat: focuses on creativity: possibilities, search for alternatives, solutions, new ideas and concepts.



- ♦ Blue Hat: here the focus is on process control, timing, next steps, action plans. All this points to organization.

## How do the hats really work in a teaching and learning context?

Using “high school drop-out rates” as a sample topic, the “Six Hats” and perspectives are represented as:

- ♦ White Hat: What is the current high school drop-out rate in this country? How does the rate in Jamaica compare to the available international data? What specific programmes are currently in place to promote persistence and graduation?
- ♦ Black Hat: What issues contribute to the drop-out rate? What are obstacles to improvement? What mistakes do we need to avoid?
- ♦ Red Hat: Do you have any emotions around this issue? Put yourself in the shoes of a high school student considering dropping out and imagine your fears and concerns.
- ♦ Yellow Hat: What are we doing right?
- ♦ Green Hat: What’s a new approach? If we reduce the drop-out rate by 25%, how could that impact our country?
- ♦ Blue Hat: What’s the next logical step? Who needs to be included?

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