

Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for advancing teaching and learning at Mona

November, 2016

Volume 9, Number 3

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.

Small-Group Learning in Higher Education

Teaching and learning in the college classroom has moved from a sole diet of a lecture with an occasional question and answer session to teaching and learning opportunities. These have been created for learners to engage in various active learning strategies that ensure that the students are not passive but totally engaged in the process of learning. Higher education faculty have gone about this task of reinventing teaching and learning in the academy by adopting multiple instructional strategies. One of the prominent pedagogical strategies in these newer teaching and learning arrangements is the small-group teaching and learning approach. From these group-based active learning strategies have developed more defined pedagogies of cooperative and collaborative learning and more recently, variations of the problem-based learning (PBL) and team based learning (TBL) approaches.

Each of these pedagogical approaches has their champions and at least three of these four are considered evidence-based instructional practices (that is, causal research has demonstrated that cooperative, PBL, and TBL have a positive influence on student learning). The collaborative teaching and learning strategy is now considered research-based (there is research to support the method, but the research does not yet indicate a direct causal relationship between the instructional method and a statistically significant increase in learning outcomes). All of these approaches have emerged as some of the preferred approaches to active teaching and learning in the higher education learning environment. In this issue, we provide tips on strategies that employ a cooperative approach to teaching and learning in higher education.

Cooperative Learning Strategies

Think-Pair-Share

(Lyman, 1992)

- (1) The instructor poses a discussion question and gives students time to think through a response individually. This "think-time" may be spent writing (called Write-Pair- Share).
- (2) Students then turn to a peer and discuss their responses.
- (3) Students respond within a larger group or with an entire class during a follow-up discussion. Think-Pair-Share is very rich, with many variations on how to think, how to pair, and how to share.

Timed Pair Share

(Kagan & Kagan, 2009)

- (1) The teacher announces a topic, states how long each student will share, and provides think time.
- (2) In pairs, Partner A shares; Partner B listens.
- (3) Partner B responds with a positive remark.
- (4) Partners switch roles.

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Cooperative Learning Strategies Cont'd

Three-Step Interview

(Kagan & Kagan, 2009)

- (1) Students form pairs, and one student interviews the other for a fixed period of time.
- (2) Students switch roles; the interviewer becomes the interviewee, and vice versa, for the same time.
- (3) The pair links with a second pair, and the four-member team then shares and discusses the information or insights gleaned from the initial paired interviews.

Jigsaw

(Aronson, 2000; Aronson et al., 1978)

- (1) Students are seated in home groups with four members.
- (2) The instructor divides an assignment or topic into four parts, and each group member is responsible for one part.
- (3) The instructor forms four expert teams, with each team becoming expert on the same part of the assignment.
- (4) Expert teams work together to master their fourth of the material and also to develop a plan to help others learn it.
- (5) All experts then reassemble into their home groups with four experts leading in turn, one expert on each part, in each learning group.

Taking Some Time to Reflect on Learning and Teaching

As the semester comes to an end, this might be a good time to reflect on important aspects of your students' learning and your own teaching. Here is a set of questions to consider for an "end of semester snapshot":

- 1) What do you feel was the strongest part of your teaching (and student learning) this semester?

- 2) Why did that happen? Can you link those outcomes to your teaching?
- 3) Did you achieve your learning goals for the courses you taught?
- 4) What were you dissatisfied with in terms of how the course is turning out?
- 5) As with your successes, think about why things didn't work and what you can do the next time to change those aspects that you can change.
- 6) Who are the colleagues and mentors you can talk with for ideas and support, or the resources/information you need to access?

Thinking About Your Teaching Philosophy

As you think about your teaching over this semester so far and before you plan your teaching strategies for next semester, what is your response to the following questions?

"I bring to teaching a belief that ..."

"In the classroom I see myself as ..."

"I believe students are ..."

"I seek to foster in students ..."

"I think learning is ..."

Look again at the questions above and think deeply about them. They can be used as helpful probes as you seek to identify and understand your **philosophy of teaching**. Stephen Brookfield in his book, *The Skillful Teacher* (1990), calls attention to the importance of a philosophy of teaching. He points out that a philosophy of teaching can have many purposes in the life of a university teacher for instance:

"... a distinctive organizing vision — a clear picture of why you are doing what you are doing that you can call up at points of crisis — is crucial to your personal sanity and morale." (p. 16)

Statements of one's philosophy of teaching are commonly used in hiring and review contexts in many universities, especially in the USA and Canada. Their utility are readily recognised at various stages of one's professional development.

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