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EdTalk Session: Teaching Technique Suggestions for Large Classes

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Starting with a non-example

How to be boring: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhiCFdWeQfA>

- Let the students do nothing
- Teach the book
- Be right all of the time
- Assume students know nothing
- Sit still or stay in the front of the class
- Be predictable
- Speak in a monotone
- Make sure students are idle
- Lose students-speak quickly and don't explain
- Keep talking

Some relevant findings from research

Recommendations from Marzano and Brown, 2009, *A Handbook for the Art and Science of Teaching*:

- Use games and low consequence competition (relevant to course content or as a brain warm-up – ex. boggle <http://www.wordplays.com/boggle> (the idea is to get them actively engaged in an intellectual exercise as warm-up to a lecture topic or to reset their concentration partway through a lecture).
- Plan your engaging questions in advance (don't rely on thinking of them on-the-spot).
- Consider pacing (change it up periodically throughout the class).
- Wait for responses, don't jump in and provide the answer to avoid uncomfortable silence. Show students you expect participation.

- Use non-verbal responses to questions (technology such as student response systems, hand signals).
- Incorporate affective domain engagement tools (humour, enthusiasm, energy).

From Marzano and Pickering, 2011, *The Highly Engaged Classroom*:

Four aspects of classroom engagement:

1. Emotional
2. Interest
3. Perceived importance
4. Perceptions of efficacy

This session focused on the first, emotional engagement. Three areas of emotional engagement:

- 1A. Students' energy levels
- 1B. Instructor's positive demeanour
- 1C. Students' perceptions of acceptance

1A. Students' energy levels

Movement:

The idea is to get students physically moving to vary the pace and to benefit from increased intellectual focus that comes from physical movement in the classroom (Emmer and Gerwells, 2006):

Types of movement:

- Grouping and regrouping
- Conference Tables
- Breakout Areas
- Learning and reading strategies that require direct student involvement.

Examples:

Definition matching: As students enter the room, from a box they take a piece of paper on which there is a term or a definition related to course material. Before students sit down, they must find someone who has the same term or definition. This person becomes their partner for think-pair-share or other type of peer interaction during the class. It is a bit chaotic, so you have to be OK with that. Students tend to be good at this, so it is likely to take 5 minutes or less for them to settle into position.

Corners: The idea is to position people around the room according to ranges of opinion (for potentially controversial topics) or interpretation (for science concepts). Start with volunteers to say which opinion or interpretation they have. Move these people to different parts of the room. Have remaining students

move to the part of the room that best represents their opinion or interpretation. Ask students to discuss their perspective with those near them (have specific instructions on a slide). Variations are to have people from the groups converse with those of other groups to try to convince each other (arguing from evidence) and having students move from one “corner” to the other as they change their minds. Or, do this variation as a continuum from one extreme to the other, with a student at each end arguing their position and students changing position along the continuum as their opinions or interpretations change.

Games

The idea is to help students refocus after one activity as you transition into another, or to reinforce concepts taught.

Briefing the Prime Minister (or CEO or your PhD Supervisor): Groups summarize readings in a memo format for a briefing presentation to a superior. They write clear, succinct key points. Have them prepare answers for possible questions the superior may have. Have the group spokesperson present the memo to the class (with the class acting as the superior), and let the class ask clarifying questions.

Envoys: Divide class into groups of 5 or so, each group with a different topic for research or discussion. One person in each group is the envoy who, after a specified time, moves to another group and presents the findings of her or his original group. The envoy also listens to the report from the group being visited. After that, the envoy returns to the original group and reports back on what was learned from the visited group.

Exit slips: In the last few minutes of class, ask students to write on an index card or slip of paper a comment about what they read or studied in class. Or, they can pose a question they haven’t had answered yet, identify what they consider to be the most important idea or point of that day’s class, predict what will happen next, write something they found confusing. Or, pose specific questions, such as, “What did you learn today?” “What are you still unsure about?” “What do you want to learn more about next class?”

Exit slips can be anonymous or not. They are not marked, but reviewed to get an idea of what students are thinking and getting and not getting, so that the subsequent class can be changed if necessary to address issues they indicate. You could use some of the anonymous comments in your next class, to show you are taking them into account.

Jigsaw: This involves two types of groups, Home Groups and Expert Groups, and works for 25 students. You can scale up by having sets of groups of five. Create Home Groups of five. Each group member has a different aspect of the topic to research or discuss. The different aspects are assigned in the Home Group. Then students move to the Expert Groups, which means that all the Home Group #1s gather together in an Expert Group, as do all the 2s in another and so on. Each Expert Group agrees on findings for their aspect of the topic. Finally, students reassemble in the Home Groups and each member takes a turn explaining and demonstrating their Expert Group findings. The Home Group then discusses how all the parts fit together into a comprehensible whole.

Rotating groups or papers: Do this to cover several topics efficiently while promoting student-centred, collaborative problem solving and critical thinking.

Active Reading Strategies

It Says/I Say/And So: Have students individually write these three items as column headers on a page. Have students put a few sentences from a reading in the first column. In the second column they write their interpretation of what it says, in their own words. In the third column, they state the significance of this new information. The purposes of the activity are to promote attention to detail and to practice making inferences.

Placemat: Divide the class into groups of four. Each group gets a large sheet of paper divided diagonally into four work spaces, with a circle in the middle. Students work individually on their part of the sheet, writing points from the reading or research. They then compare notes. Students with the same points take turns highlighting one of theirs and the others cross their duplicates out. In the end, the group writes a summary of the highlighted points in the circle in the middle. Summarize the groups' findings orally or cut out the circles and post them. This promotes consensus development, practice synthesizing ideas, learning from others, and taking responsibility for one's own learning.

Previewing a text: Students read the abstract of an article (the whole class has the same reading) and skim the contents to see the main points and how they are organized. They pair up and share their predictions of what the article will find, and write down one or more questions they expect the article to answer. Some volunteers share their predictions and questions with the class. The idea is to build effective approaches to reading articles so that students can get the most out of them.

Note taking frameworks: Provide notes outlines that indicate or leave space for topic headings. Have indicators with spaces for a structured approach to note taking appropriate for your subject area, such as:

- Statement
- Elaboration
- Examples
- Summary

Model note taking a few times. Encourage students to use point form format to record supporting ideas, key words, and phrases. Have students then compare notes in pairs. This is "scaffolding" for building note taking skills.

1B. Instructor's positive demeanour

Enthusiasm: Instructor enthusiasm generates heightened attending behaviour from students thus improving student achievement.

Humour: Use of humour was associated with a 40 percentile point gain in instructional effectiveness (Jonas, 2009). It changes the classroom culture, enhances productivity, reduces stress, and promotes positive thinking. Use funny TV headlines, signs, ads, or classifieds as warm-up or change-up.

1C. Students' perceptions of acceptance

If students perceive that the instructor likes and respects them, they are more likely to attend to classroom content. Instructors need to:

- Provide fair and equitable treatment of all students
- Show interest in and attention to all students
- Communicate respect and acceptance to all students
- Identify positive information about all students

Extend simple courtesies: engage students independently, give sincere greetings (hellos, goodbyes, handshakes), and circulate around the room as you lecture and during learning activities. Use photos and quotations to personalize teaching. The intent is to engage students, not provide entertainment.

References

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