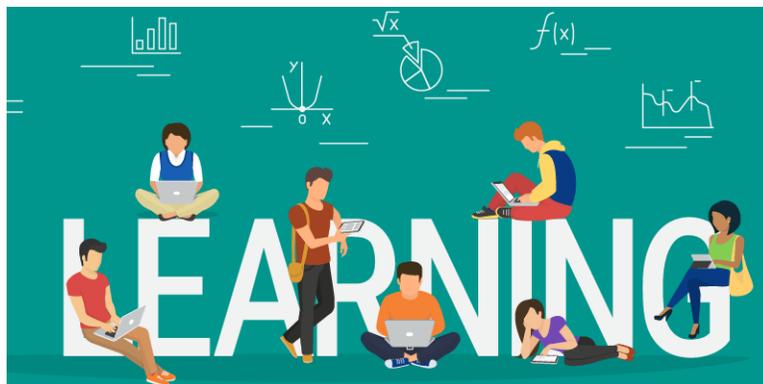


Teaching Tip 8: In Class: Learner-Centered Teaching, Small Group Work

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This tip continues on the learner-centered teaching theme. Learner-centered teaching engages students in activities that help them learn in an active fashion. This is in contrast to teacher-centered instruction which tends to be primarily lecture in which students passively receive information which they then need to work with in order to move it in to long-term memory which is required to learn and develop enduring understandings.

In many (most) courses the primary mode of instruction is lecture in which students passively listen and to a lesser or greater degree take notes on what is presented through lecture PowerPoint and other one-way transmissions of content. Lectures are an important pedagogy and have a central place in most forms of teaching. The lecture format is familiar to both the



instructor and the students and often the preferred pedagogy by both. Lectures are useful and an effective for the dissemination of information, but often they don't engage students in learning that results in enduring understandings. Hundreds of studies have shown that lecture alone is not an effective pedagogy despite what we may believe based on our own experiences. One limitation of the lecture is that human attention span tends to be 10 to 15 minutes after which we disengage from the materials being presented. The tip below provides an easy non-technology means to enhance the lecture and increase active learning in traditional classes. Moreover, it provides a means to break up the lecture format, obtain formative feedback and help reestablish students' attention.

In Class Group Work -The List-

A useful learner-centered activity is student generated lists. In this exercise students are randomly assorted into groups and the group is asked with coming up with a list of items related to the topic or a query. Those of you fortunate enough to be teaching in a room where students are seated around tables rather than in rows the group assignment is easier since the list task becomes one per table. However, it can be easily used in classes of >200 where students are sitting in fixed rows. When using the list technique is important to ask student to generate a list that is slightly longer than one that can be easily constructed, this requires the students to work with each other and think beyond the obvious. It is important to assign an actual number for the list of items otherwise students simply give up and stop they have done the easy ones. You can allow the students to use technology to help assemble list it depends on the nature of what the list is about. For example, when teaching introductory biology, one might ask for list of five key differences or similarities between photosynthesis and

respiration. This requires students to go beyond memorizing facts and to think about commonalities and differences in of a set of complex processes. Ones monitors the class's progress by moving around class and seeing how the different groups are doing, if a group quickly completes the list that asked them to add one or two more items. Generally, the exercise generating part takes 3 to 5 minutes. Once the lists are completed, they are shared with the class. There are several ways in which the information on the lists can be shared. If the class is small each group puts one item from their list on the board, one easy way to do this is to have a student go to the board and write one. It is important that you limit the report out to be one item per group continuing through the groups until all items have been collected. Otherwise the first group will simply give you their whole list and make it difficult for the remaining groups to add to it. This technique of having groups report out a single item is called "round robin". Ones finishes by asking if there are any missing items. If the class is large e.g. >60 I simply have several groups report out a single item each. One ends the activity by presenting the instructor's list as a PPT slide, thus showing that the class that students already has most of the information without the instructor presenting it. In general, the class gets at least 80% of the items on the instructors list and often the class comes up with additional ones.



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