

TCU This Week
(February 28 – March 4, 2005)

"The great skill of a teachers is to get and keep the attention of his [or her] scholar...To attain this, he [or she] should make the child comprehend the usefulness of what he [or she] teaches him; and let him [or her] see, by what [s/he] has learned, that [s/he] can do something which [s/he] could not do before; something which gives him [or her] some power and real advantage above others, who are ignorant of it."

~John Locke

Teaching Tip of the Week "Creating Enthusiasm"

This week's tip is from the University of Indiana and involves possible ways to engage students by creating an atmosphere where they can become more enthusiastic about learning content in your class.

Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer has noted that *mindful* -- intellectually alert -- learners are more enthusiastic as well as more successful than *mindless* -- relying on intellectual auto-pilot -- learners. She explains how social conditions can affect how mindful a student will be. This week's tips offer suggestions to encourage mindfulness in your students.

Make It Meaningful

People become more mindful when they believe something meaningful is happening. Since it is impossible to anticipate what different students will find important, create ways to encourage them to look for connections to the course material.

- **Check Connections.** *Introduce a topic by challenging students to think of how it might connect to past, present, or future experiences. Students can share orally at the end of class or write a short response.*
- **Find Significance.** *Ask your students to identify something in the reading material or lecture that has personal significance for them.*
- **Examples.** *After illustrating a concept with your examples, pause and ask students to provide examples from their experience.*
- **Application.** *Give students an index card at the beginning of class and ask them to write down one or more potential applications of today's lesson by the end.*

Conditional Conditions

When people are not comfortably certain with what will happen next, they become more alert. By contrast, when a teacher simplifies information, students feel they can adopt a mindless attitude, trusting they won't be surprised.

- **Should/Could.** *Langer found that substituting conditional verbs -- should or could -- in a description encouraged students to learn better. Find appropriate ways to tell your students that ideas "might be" right . . . but need some thoughtful inspection.*
- **Imagine Alternatives.** *Ask students to imagine language without grammar. Ask them to invent another language. By upsetting the taken-for-granted, you can make students more alert. Find an example suited to your lesson and give student a few minutes to consider a contrast to the expected.*
- **Teach Mistakes.** *Students stop thinking once they believe they have the right answer. Encourage hypothesis testing as a way to make thoughtful mistakes . . . ones you learn from.*
- **Multiple Viewpoints.** *When reading a text, ask you students to consider the material from multiple points of view, not just the author's. Ask them to consider how the same event or description would change.*

Searching for Patterns

The search for distinctions and patterns is what makes our observations interesting. Boredom comes from a rote acceptance of information and failure to search for underlying patterns. Challenge students to actively look for distinctions in what is happening with the following tips.

- **Logs.** Ask student to keep study logs. Set aside time in one class to analyze their personal patterns for studying. Discuss the patterns that they find.
- **Process Analysis.** Ask students to note the steps they follow in completing an assignment. Have them examine the patterns they follow in analyzing a story or working out a problem. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their approach.
- **Inductive time.** Inductive teaching provides examples and asks students to construct the underlying principles. Through presenting the right examples in a questioning way, students will usually cover the same material as a lecture.

Final Comments

Creating conditions that generate mindfulness is one way to keep the doldrums in the middle of the semester from turning your students into inert learners. There are other factors that affect individual motivation. Students struggling with such problems may not gain much from the ways you make your class more meaningful. But, for many students, teachers who create mindful conditions provide opportunities to slough off lazy mindlessness and engage the course ideas thoughtfully. Reprinted from http://web.indstate.edu/ctl/tips/tip1_16.html

Resources at CTE - Come by and take a look at some of the articles and books in our library. If you would like a copy of any of the articles abstracted below, contact the CTE (cte@tcu.edu). You might be interested in:

- **The Dea(r)th of Student Responsibility** by Holly Hassel (University of Wisconsin - Marathon County) and Jessica Lourey (Alexandria Technical College). *More than eleven hundred university students were surveyed to determine attitudes toward learning and accountability. Apathy, absenteeism, and grade inflation emerged as contributing to the lack of student accountability. This article suggests institutional changes to reanimate college classrooms: explicit expectations; smaller, engaged classes; absenteeism consequences; grading consistency; elimination of the extra credit model; and reorganizing responsibility for retention and enrollment.*
- **Hybrid Design Enables Individualized Learning Experience** by Diana Joseph (University of Chicago). *This brief article discusses methods to increase student learning in a seminar that was project-based. Results indicated that participants were positive about the seminar and that the increased independence fostered by the online environment motivated the students.*
- **The Role of Attributional Retraining and Elaborative Learning in College Students' Academic Development** by Nathan Hall, Steven Hladkyj, Raymond Perry, and Joelle Ruthig (University of Manitoba - Winnipeg, Canada). *In the present longitudinal study, the authors examined the impact of attributional retraining (AR) techniques on academic motivation and achievement for college students who are either frequently or infrequently using elaborative learning strategies. During the 1st semester, 203 students completed an initial questionnaire assessing elaborative learning followed by 1 of 3 treatment conditions (No AR, Writing AR, Aptitude Test AR). Results indicated improvements in students' end-of-year perceptions of control, success, and emotions, as well as course-specific and overall academic performance for those receiving either AR format, with "high elaborators" showing higher levels on these measures than "low elaborators?" The authors discussed the importance of elaborative and attributional processes underlying the effectiveness of the AR treatment and the potential utility of individualized AR techniques in the college classroom*