

Effective Teaching Strategies That Promote Learning From a Student's Perspective

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This essay provides a student perspective on effective teaching strategies so that professors can optimize student learning and success. In my 2-year college and 4-year university courses, mostly in social sciences, I have had the opportunity to see many teaching styles. Below, I identify the best and worst strategies for my learning.

What to Do

Although many factors affect learning, low-stakes classroom assessment techniques (CAT) and issues surrounding PowerPoint slides were two teaching approaches that helped facilitate my learning:

- 1) Low Stakes Classroom Assessment Techniques (CAT) and

2) PowerPoint Slides structured in outline format

Professors performing a low-stakes classroom assessment technique (CAT) activity. One example of an engaging CAT activity from a cultural psychology course demonstrated the invisible cultural norms that exist and how difficult they are to decipher. Half of the class was sent into the hallway. The other half was instructed to only respond to students if they both had glasses or did not have glasses on. When the other half returned from the hallway, they were to figure out the cultural rule by only asking yes or no questions. This first-day activity set the tone for the semester and resulted in more engaged students, along with promoting a friendly classroom environment.

Structuring PowerPoint slides in an outline format. This involves providing students with a set of skeleton-like PowerPoint slides with only key terms which are built upon verbally during class. For example, a slide titled, Define Psychology might contain the words or images for; mental processes and behaviour. This promotes class attendance because the students are not able to only download the PowerPoint slides from online and have all of the information that will be covered. Additionally, professors can add a blank PowerPoint slide at the end of the student version of the presentation with the heading, Summary, so that students can jot down key concepts from that class and refer back to it when studying.

What Not to Do

On the other hand, assigning too much reading, not making PowerPoint slides available before the start of class, not responding appropriately to student questions, and not being accessible to students are factors that were detrimental to my learning and success.

Professors assigning an overwhelming amount of reading. Students are often taking 4 or 5 other courses each semester. When there is too much reading that is not directly relevant to the course, it can be difficult for students to comprehend the content entirely. When this occurs, it can negatively impact other aspects of students' lives, such as their mental, social, or physical health. The sweet spot is to have enough reading to explain the content and make the



course challenging but not so much that it overwhelms. The ideal amount of reading depends on the course content.

Making PowerPoint slides unavailable for the class. When PowerPoint slides are available for students, it allows them to see what is ahead in the lecture and only have to add the details when they listen to the professor. A way to post PowerPoint slides in advance while still promoting attendance is to use the method mentioned above that only provides keywords.

Professors responding inappropriately to student questions when they raise their hand. When students raise their hands to answer a question posed or ask one about the content, they make themselves vulnerable. If the student's answer is incorrect, embarrassing a student in front of their peers can have detrimental consequences for their learning and could also discourage other students from participating. Asking the student to explain their answer or helping to guide the student toward the correct answer helps the student, and the rest of the students, feel safe in the classroom. This is a fundamental principle in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) that helps to eliminate barriers to learning for all students (CAST, 2018).

Professors not being accessible to their students. Another issue is when professors cannot meet outside their office hours or are slow in their responses to emails. Many students are taking a full-time course load in conjunction with having a part-time/full-time job, doing volunteer work, and also have a family to care for. Because of this, it can make it difficult for students to be able to coordinate to meet professors during their limited scheduled office hours. Some professors have held additional office hours in the week, or weeks, leading up to exams and major assignments, which is helpful. Another technique I have seen used is professors being quick in email responses or offering to schedule an online meeting via Skype/Microsoft Teams/Zoom/etc. to increase their availability.

Concluding Statement

A professor's role is to maximize student learning. These are just a few examples, through my experience, of what professors have done to help and hinder my

learning and success. Hopefully, this essay has provided some insight into the student perspective and can help educators maximize other students learning.

Discussion Questions:

1. What other teaching strategies do you think would be beneficial or more important than the strategies listed?
2. Of the suggestions described here which counter what you would have expected?
3. If you were to make a list of what teaching strategies you believe are the most effective in helping students learn and a list of the ones you think are the most detrimental to student learning, what would they include?

Reference:

CAST, Center for Applied Special Technology (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2, Wakefield, MA. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>