

Learner-Centered Teaching: 10 Ideas for Getting Started

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By Maryellen Weimer, PhD

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Looking to incorporate some learner-centered teaching principles into your courses but aren't sure where to begin? Here are 10 activities for building student engagement and getting students more actively involved in their learning.

Strategy One: Creating the Climate for Learning

- Use the same activity but with a different topic. For example, before the first discussion in a class, you might have students talk about the best and worst class discussions they've observed. Have them explain what the teacher did and what the students did.
- The activity can be used as an icebreaker for group work. Say you've put students together in work groups. Have them start to get to know each other by talking about the best and worst group experiences they've had and what they need to do individually and collectively to have this group function well.
- At the end of the best/worst course discussion, ask a student to take a picture of the board (constructive use of cell phone in class) and send it to you. Then you can send a copy to each student. Obviously, you can write down what students said and distribute a paper or electronic copy.
- Use the description of the best class as an early course feedback mechanism. During the second or third week of the course, have students rate the items they listed. For example, if they said, "The teacher respects students"; ask them to rate on a five-point scale how well that's happening in class so far. You might rate them on some of the student characteristics.

Strategy Two: Let the Students Summarize

- Give students a few minutes to review their notes, and then on the board or in a PowerPoint presentation share what you consider the three most important points. Have students check to see how many of these points they had in their notes. This is a good way to start involving students in summarizing activities. Don't use this approach every day, or students will just wait for your list, and chances are that's all that will end up in their notes.
- Use the summary to start the next period. Ask a verbally confident student to read and briefly explain the three summary points to another student who wasn't in class Monday. ("Elyssa, could you summarize for Anthony what we identified as the three most important points from our last class.")
- Give students two or three sample questions based on the day's material and ask them to read (verbatim) what they have in their notes relevant to the question. This is a great strategy for showing students that often they don't write down enough in their notes.

Strategy Three: Lessons Learned from the First Exam

- Ask students to identify a study strategy they used that they think worked well and would recommend to other students. You could also do the opposite: Ask students to identify something they did or didn't do that didn't work well and that they don't plan to use again and wouldn't recommend to a fellow student.
- When returning an exam, have students look at how many times they changed answers and how often the strategy helped or hurt them.
- If students want another multiple-choice option to count, have them make the case by reading to you what they have in their notes or what appears in the text that supports that option. You can listen respectfully to their opinions, but you most want to hear is evidence.

Recommended Resources

DiClementi, J. D. and Handelsman, M. M. "Empowering Students: Class-Generated Rules." *Teaching of Psychology*, 2005, 32 (1), 18-21.

– gives students a set of categories (late arrival, sleeping in class, use of cell phones) and lets them decide the rule and how rule violations will be managed

Litz, R. A. "Red Light, Green Light and Other Ideas for Class Participation-Intensive Courses: Methods and Implications for Business Ethics Education." *Teaching Business Ethics*, 2003, 7 (4), 365-378.

– lets students have some control over how they will participate in class

Ludy, B. T. "Setting Course Goals: Privileges and Responsibilities in a World of Ideas." *Teaching of Psychology*, 2005, 32 (3), 146-149

– sees a possible role for students in setting course goals or in sharing goals with the instructor

Adapted from a Magna Online Seminar by Maryellen Weimer.