



BRIEFLY NOTED

The Case for a Different Approach

The sheer volume of information available in any field is now so vast as to make it impractical to continue to require students merely to memorize fixed bodies of knowledge. Student involvement in a process called cooperative learning may be the key to promoting concept development, analytical thinking, creativity and meaningful involvement with the learning material. Researchers have found that students who actively discuss ideas and participate in problem solving exercises with other students in small groups are less distracted, are better able to synthesize and integrate materials and retain more than students who passively sit and listen to lectures.

Cooper, James *et al.* *Cooperative Learning and College Instruction*. Long Beach: California State University Institute for Teaching and Learning, 1990.

Lively Discussions at What Cost?

Some professors employ the classroom "skirmish" as a means of generating discussions. However, according to J.A. Anderson and M. Adams, the process of attacking theories, authors and even one another is primarily a male Eurocentric means of seeking truth. Most others, who do not belong to that group, either will not participate in the discussion or will not find it instructive.

Anderson, J.A. & M. Adams (1992). "Acknowledging the learning styles of diverse student populations: Implications for instructional design." In A.S. Knoedler and M.A. Shea, *Conducting Discussions in the Diverse Classroom* (pp.123-135). *To Improve the Academy, 11*. Stillwater, Oklahoma: Professional and Organizational Development in Higher Education.

Case Studies Bring Life to Learning

Law professors may have been the original users of case studies in the classroom, but the approach is applicable to a variety of other disciplines, including management, political science, education, nursing, in fact, any discipline where knotty problems, ethical/legal dilemmas or analytical challenges exist. Would students be more likely to retain information from a statistical probability lecture or from a case study of a blackjack player trying to beat the odds in Las Vegas? Case studies can overcome passivity by placing students in the shoes of the persons described in the case. Success depends upon

selecting a good case, making sure the students understand it as thoroughly as you do, involving them in group discussion and refusing to give an opinion until they have grappled with the problem. Students are more likely to reflect on such experiences than information they have merely read or heard in a lecture.

Meyers, Chet & T.B. Jones. *Promoting Active Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993, pp. 103-119.

Teaching Large, Introductory Classes

It is difficult to go beyond surface learning in those large, introductory classes, but Christopher Knapper writes, "Of great importance... is the need to ensure that students learn how to learn so that they may take from the course the knowledge, skills and attitudes that can serve them well the rest of their lives." At the heart of the issue is understanding the variety of learning styles students bring to the classroom. The successful instructor of large classes will usually have researched (formally or informally), or knows intuitively, how students seem to learn and retain best, and the most efficient and effective means of presenting materials and evaluating outcomes.

Christopher Knapper. "Large Classes and Learning," in *Teaching Large Classes Well*, Maryellen G. Weimer, editor. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987, pp. 5-15.

How Do They Learn?

Some extremely successful instructors only know on an intuitive level how students learn. Others gain insight by collecting empirical data over long periods of time. When a group of distinguished professors were asked how students learn best, they answered, "It depends on who they are, what they are studying and who is teaching them." But they agreed that *personal engagement* is the key element. "They learn by doing, observing, discussing, experiencing, by having examples and by connecting with the minds and spirits of professors."

Peter G. Beidler. *Distinguished Teachers on Effective Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986, pp. 51-61.

What's in a name?

If you think knowing students' names is important, but find your memory less than perfect, take snapshots of them the first day or two of class. Line up four at a time against the chalkboard and ask them to write their own names above where they are standing. You can cut the pictures apart and arrange them alphabetically or on a seating chart. Knowing students' names is a civilized thing to do, it shows your interest in them and may be one thing which helps connect them to you, the course and the learning process.

REACHING THROUGH TEACHING

Contributions from KSC faculty are solicited. Please submit articles to CETL on a 5.25" or 3.5" disk in WordPerfect. Preferred length of articles is 1,200± words. Deadline for the Winter, 1994 issue is January 7.

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