Four Teaching Strategies for Creating Student Engagement and Learning

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Author Biography

Breck A. Harris has worked for the past 24 years as a Professor in the School of Business at Fresno Pacific University. A key focus of his previous academic research has been applying in his classroom settings different teaching strategies related to the goal of achieving excellence in college teaching.

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In this essay, the author discusses four evidence-based teaching strategies for creating student engagement and learning. The four evidence-based teaching strategies are (1) become an active learner, (2) become a storyteller and share your life stories with students, (3) create classroom collaboration, and (4) use technology to engage students with Classroom Mobiling.

Introduction

In this essay, I will discuss four evidence-based teaching strategies for creating student engagement and learning. These four evidence-based teaching strategies are (1) become an active listener, (2) become a great storyteller and share your life stories with students, (3) create classroom collaboration, and (4) use technology to engage students with Classroom Mobiling.

Context

My teaching background includes 24 years of full-time college teaching, During this time, I have taught 38 different business-related college courses and worked with undergraduate, graduate, and degree-completion students. A key focus of my previous academic research has been learning of evidence-based techniques, tactics, and procedures that lead to excellence in college teaching.

Overview and Analysis of the Four Teaching Strategies

1. Become an Active Listener

Listening is the process of hearing someone speak, process what you are hearing and demonstrating that you understand the speaker. Listening is a critical element in the sender/receiver communication process (McGraw-Hill Education Inc., 2016). Listening helps both sender and receiver transform previous ways of thinking and acting about any topic (Beatty, 1999). Learning to listen is important because adults spend 30% of our waking hours engaged in this communication activity and is a skill used frequently in daily life (Rankin, 1926; Sinhaneti, 2009).

Different research reports that we receive between 45% to 80% of our total knowledge through listening (Hunsaker, 1990; Ahmed, 2015) . Most Americans believe they are good listeners but this belief is not supported (Harris, 2005). In fact, we remember only ½ of what we immediately hear. Two months later, what we can recall drops again to only ¼ of the information we originally listened too (Nichols & Steven, 1957; Mind Tools Content Team, n.d.).

College students spend large amounts of classroom time listening to teachers as a way to gain knowledge (Harris, 2005). Teachers must also be skilled in listening because in a classroom setting, they are constantly sending and receiving verbal messages from students (Cronin, 1992). In summary, listening is a critical skill for teaching success and helps avoid teacher/ student miscommunication (Kreuger, 1997; Wilmington, 1992).

The most powerful form of listening is active listening. Active listening is a two-way communication process that involves high levels of care, attentiveness, clarification, and message processing. Characteristics of active listening are to display genuine care, respect, and empathy for students, avoid distractions, use direct eye contact, and demonstrate effective nonverbal behavior (Stewart & Logan, 1998). Other suggestions for active listening are not to abruptly interrupt students when they are speaking, but include constructive responsive replies to students when they are speaking such as "Really?", "Sure!", and "Do you mean….?" For the teacher, it is important to realize that our emotional state impacts our ability to actively listen to the student. Other barriers to active listening can include boredom or mentally rehearsing a response to the speaker. A final barrier to active listening is being easily mentally distracted due to the fact that we can speak at 150 words a minute while we can listen up to 1000 words a minute. This difference in the rate between speaking and listening leaves the mind with a lot of extra time and opportunity to wander (Armstrong, 1998; Robbins, 2000).

Learning to paraphrase is an important skill to assist a teacher to become a more active and empathetic listener. A paraphrase is a process where, after listening to a student speak, you focus on the key message spoken and puts the student's key ideas and feelings into your own words (Stewart, 2002). A parapharase is not a verbatim repeat of the student's speaking but should reflect the tone and feeling of the original message (Brownell, 1994; Lasky, 2017). Paraphrasing a student's comment is an important way to demonstrate the teacher has correctly understood a verbal message.

2. Become a Storyteller and Share Your Personal Life Stories

Stories are oral or written narrative accounts of events that can be either true or fictional. Storytelling, also known by the term personal narrative, are common to people of all cultures and help us make meaning of our life, and learn from others'

experiences and mistakes (Simmons, 2002 & Bridge Interactive, 2002 as cited by Harris, 2018b). Additional benefits of storytelling include connecting more vitally with others, developing creativity and confidence, and helping us to internalize and integrate our learning into a conceptual framework of knowledge (Brown, Denning, Groh, 2005 & Maguire, 1998 as cited by Harris, 2018b).

Use of authentic and truthful stories by the teacher improves communication and collaborative learning with students (Harris, 2018b). I often share truthful stories about my prior work experiences that are tied directly to current class topics. For example, in my business ethics class, I often share a truthful story either verbally or in the form of a one-page written summary about an ethical situation I have experienced during my work career where I was required to make an ethical decision. I next form them into small groups of 3-5 students. Each group is given time to discuss my ethical work situation and attempt to come to consensus on how their group would decide to act. Next, each small group shares their decisions with the entire class. I end the class exercise by sharing with the entire class how I actually chose to act in that ethical situation (Harris, 2018b). I have found that student interest in my personal storytelling work experiences is always very high, and encourages very high levels of student engagement.

I believe it is critically important that your personal stories always tell a genuine truth that touches in interesting ways the humanity of your students'. Sharing truthful personal stories that are situationally tied to classroom topics helps you be perceived as being more human by students. This human connection helps the teacher build a more personal connection with students that leads to more powerful forms of classroom collaboration and learning (Brown, 2011 as cited by Harris, 2018a).

3. Create Classroom Collaboration

The Millennial generation is a key student population that college teachers are working with today in classroom settings. Born between 1980 and 2000, there are over 80 million American Millennials. They are the largest cohort size in American history (The Millennial Generation Research Review, n.d.). Research indicates that core traits of The Millennial generation include being very team oriented and working well in groups (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Monaco & Martin 2007; Pinder-Grover & Groscurth, 2009).

Based on this research, creating different methods of classroom collaboration versus the traditional lecture format with the millennial student may be much more effective for the delivery of learning (Harris, Dermon, Bryan, & Vasquez, 2015). For example, I have found that less use of lecture and "sage on the stage" approaches with Powerpoint slides encourages greater levels of classroom participation. One form of classroom collaboration I often use to place my students into small groups

for discussions on important classroom topics. I later facilitate the sharing of learning from the small groups in a large group setting.

One form of small group classroom collaboration I often use is to create "fun" activities where I place students in small groups for extra credit opportunities. Millennials are highly motivated by a strong sense of feeling special and enjoy experiencing a sense of achievement. I have found that use of extra-credit "fun" group activities lead to higher levels of student/teacher and student/student classroom engagement and collaboration.

I also recommend inclusion of end-of-course signature assignments where you allow students to form small groups to complete important end-of-course written and oral assignments. These type of end-of-course assignments create important opportunities to work in teams and collaborate together to learn (Harris, 2018a, Brown, 2011).

I also encourage creating greater personal classroom collaboration with students'. Millennials are relationally oriented (Rickes, 2009). I believe it is important to get to know each of your students by their first name and take a genuine interest in getting to know them. Frequent quality communication during assigned office hours and responding in timely ways to all email messages can significantly enhance learning and improve motivation (Monaco & Martin, 2007). It is also important to motivate, coach and support students in appropriate ways (Pinder-Grover & Groscurth, 2009). Millennial students like college instructors who are "fun," relaxed, "laid back," unconventional, use humor, and entertain them (Bart, 2011; Brown, 2011).

4. Use Technology to Engage Students with Classroom Mobiling

Research indicates that millennial students seek engaging creative classroom experiences where they learn using technology while interacting with others in small group settings (Crone & Mackay, 2007; Kotz, 2016; McGlynn, 2007; Monaco & Martin, 2007). They enjoy being part of learning communities and desire to become more "intentional architects of their own learning that allow them to explore, reflect and integrate acquired knowledge into their existing worldviews" (Crone & Mackay 2007, p. 18; Kotz, 2016).

Building on this research, one classroom exercise named "Classroom Mobiling" that I use with my students' requires them to use their smartphones, IPads, tablet, or laptop technology they independently bring to class to do online research related to a learning topic I am discussing. During lecture, I ask my students' to use their technology to go online and conduct a search process using Google, Chrome, or other search engine service to learn on a classroom topic. After being given five minutes to conduct individual research on the learning topic, the student is asked to share their research results with another student seated near them. I then facilitate a process where the dyad groups share their research findings with the entire class. While each dyad shares their findings, I summarize their research findings by writing them

down on a whiteboard for the entire class to review. This process allows students to review a variety of different research insights based on a learning topic. I end this exercise by a short lecture comparing information shared by the dyads on a learning topic with the textbook definition or my own research sources (Harris, 2019). I am continually surprised how often my own knowledge on a learning topic has been enhanced after reviewing the information by the classroom dyad groups. I have found that Classroom Mobiling is a very effective alternative approach to the traditional lecture that leads to more creative classroom collaboration and development in student skill in creative thinking, and ability to explore and learn on their own.

Conclusion: Discussion and Considerations

In this essay, I have discussed four teaching strategies of (1) become an active listener, (2) become a storyteller and share your life stories with students, (3) create classroom collaboration, and finally (4) use technology to engage students with Classroom Mobiling. Educators must be skilled in actively listening to their students to effectively engage with them. Paraphrasing a student's verbal messages is an important way to determine that a college teacher has correctly understood a student's message. Learning to become an effective storyteller is a powerful way to create authentic two-way communication with students. Millennial students are very team-oriented and teachers who offer learning approaches that encourage collaboration and incorporate use of technology are effective approaches for creating student engagement and learning.

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