Learner-Centered Teaching—Where Should I Start?

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Iterations of the Strategies

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. Again have them talk about 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/worse 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. Say that 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 points 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. (I use the absent student’s name.)
• 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. 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.

  • If returning the actual 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 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 want to hear evidence.

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**Learner-Centered Teaching Resources**

**Other Good Learner-Centered Strategies for First-Time Users**


– 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


– 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
Recommended Readings on Learner-Centered Teaching

– chemistry prof recounts his experiences completely redesigning his chemistry courses; insightful and reflective

– close to a workbook, this resource proposes a practical system for implementing incremental changes that make courses more learner centered

– great list of 10 specific ways teachers can encourage students to step up to the plate

– very good on responding to student resistance
   – excellent book, especially good on “using” content instead of “covering” it

   – recounts first attempts to implement learner-centered approaches and explores why they failed

   – for teachers who aspire to create learner-centered classroom, it explores five aspects of current practice that need to change

   – great advice on implementing learner-centered approaches, starting with how the course is designed