

Tips for Teaching to Increase Student Participation

John Hilton III, BYU Education Week 2008

Philosophical Underpinnings

“Albert Shanker (a renowned American educator) has a sign in his office. The first line reads, ‘I taught the material, but the students didn’t learn it.’ The second line says, ‘Define the meaning of ‘teach’ in that sentence’ (C. Roland Christensen, Ed. *Education for Judgment*, xii).

“The learning sciences have discovered that when learners externalize and articulate their developing knowledge, they learn more effectively (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000, how people learn: brain, mind, experience and school. National academy press). This is more complex than it might sound, because it’s not the case that learners first learn something, and then express it. Instead, the best learning takes place when learners articulate their unformed and still developing understanding, and continue to articulate it throughout the process of learning. Articulating and learning go hand in hand, in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop. In many cases, learners don’t actually learn something until they start to articulate it—in other words, while thinking out loud, they learn more rapidly and deeply than studying quietly,” (*Cambridge Handbook of The Learning Sciences*, R. Keith Sawyer (Ed.), 12).

“When students are bored, they are not ready to learn. Student boredom often occurs when students are not actively participating in the learning process... Changing teaching approaches and methods can help stimulate student readiness and maintain learner participation throughout the lesson... If students seem bored or restless, it may be because they are not involved... The teacher may need to change something in the lesson presentation... When students complain about classes being boring, part of what they often mean is sameness. Even a persuasive teaching technique may become boring if overused” (*Teaching the Gospel*, 15, 23).

Have High Expectations

“You can make it far more likely that [your students] will choose what will let them claim a constant companionship of the Spirit... It begins with expectations, yours and theirs. If you expect little, they will feel your lack of faith in them and in the Lord’s promised outpouring of the Spirit. If you communicate, by word or action or even by your tone of voice, that you doubt their spiritual capacity, they will doubt it. If you see [powerful potential] in them, they will at least have the chance to see it in themselves. Your choices of what you expect will have powerful effect on their choices of what to expect of themselves” (President Henry B. Eyring, “Raising Expectations.” CES Broadcast, 8/4/04, 2).

Helping Students Ask Questions

A student’s hunger for knowledge is a driving force in the educational process. “The more questions we can get from the learners about something, the more they are engaged in the learning” (Sister Julie B. Beck, *Ensign*, June 2007, 101). When students have questions they are almost always in a state of readiness to learn; therefore, by encouraging students to ask meaningful questions, teachers help increase their students’ motivation to learn.

Great article to read: “Asking Questions First” Robert G. Jones, *Ensign*, Jan. 2002, 23.

On Student Discovery and Participation

“Creating an atmosphere of participation enhances the probability that the Spirit will teach more important lessons than you can communicate” (Elder Richard G. Scott, *To Learn and Teach More Effectively*, BYU Education Week, 21 Aug. 2007).

“A suggestion: after a student finishes talking, watch her eyes. Do they indicate that her thought is now complete? If you feel unsure, wait a few seconds and recheck. A five-second pause often produces a contributor’s most insightful thought” (C. Roland Christensen, (Ed.) *Education for Judgment*, 23).

“An answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime. The most important learnings of life are caught—not taught... Consider how missionaries help investigators to learn by faith. Making and keeping spiritual commitments, such as studying and praying about the Book of Mormon, attending Church meetings, and keeping the commandments, require an investigator to exercise faith and to act. One of the fundamental roles of a missionary is to help an investigator make and honor commitments—to act and learn by faith. Teaching, exhorting, and explaining, as important as they are, can never convey to an investigator a witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. Only as an investigator’s faith initiates action and opens the pathway to the heart can the Holy Ghost deliver a confirming witness” (Elder David A. Bednar, *Seek Learning By Faith*,” 2/3/06).

“Never, and I mean never, give a lecture where there is no student participation. A ‘talking head’ is the weakest form of class instruction” (Elder Richard G. Scott, “To Understand and Live Truth.” Church Educational System Broadcast, February 4, 2005, 3).

“The more class members read their scriptural reading assignments...[and] bring their scriptures to class...the more will be their inspiration, growth, and joy as they try to solve their personal concerns and challenges” (Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Ensign*, Jan. 1989, 15).

“Teachers who speak 90 percent of class time are probably talking too much. Of course, teachers need to give explanations, instructions, examples, stories, testimonies, and so forth, but their speaking should be a planned part of promoting participation. In many lessons, students can speak 40 to 60 percent of the time” (Jon D. Claybaugh and Amber Barlow Dahl, “Increasing Participation in Lessons,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2001, 33).

TEACHER AS COACH: “Skills” for students and “Drills” to practice in class

- 1. Use the footnotes, Topical Guide, Bible Dictionary, Joseph Smith Translation.**
 - Give in-class quizzes that require the use of these resources.
 - Have students find five scriptures that relate to a topic you are studying in class.
- 2. Mark scriptures in meaningful ways.**
 - Provide marking materials. Ask students to mark specific key footnotes such as JST references.
 - Give students time to mark verses that stand out to them.
- 3. Find scriptures that are personally meaningful.**
 - Structure devotionals so that students share meaningful things that they have discovered.
 - Give students time in class to slowly read and ponder what they are reading. Encourage them to share significant insights with the class.
- 4. Writing**
 - Have students keep an in-class journal to record their applications.
 - Encourage students to have a personal “scripture study” journal, or other forms of records.