Tricks of the Trade: Teaching in Large Classrooms
By Rod Lucero

Move around the Classroom

It may be cumbersome, but moving around the classroom is a great way to raise the level of attention among your students. When teaching from a power point, use a wireless mouse, or have one of your students advance the slides. It will liberate you from the front of the room, permitting you to roam freely around the classroom.

Use Your Proximal Power

As you move around the classroom, stop next to students who are "off-task." Without losing a beat, continue with your lecture. Your close proximity makes it quite difficult for students to continue a conversation with their neighbor, sleep, text, or talk on a cell phone.

Tonal Quality: Speak Up

Playing a big room? Got a full house? Make yourself BIGGER. This is where tonal quality comes into play. The bigger the room, the bigger your voice needs to be: The more dynamic you can make your voice; the more you are going to be able to focus your students' attention on the topic at hand. Big booming baritones are a natural for this sort of thing. Grab a mike if you're vocal gifts scale in more delicate octaves.

Tell the Story

A compelling story is one of the best ways of transferring an important point. This is especially true when working with difficult concepts. Find relevant stories that illustrate your content and use them to get your learning-point across. This will help your students create meaning and find personal relevance in the lesson at hand.

Is there a Song in There?

Is there a song or musical piece that relates to the concept you are teaching? If so, you might consider playing it for your students. It's a great jumping off point for a discussion. How does it relate, or how is it representative of the concept? Music is a great way of engaging both hemispheres of the brain!
Create Small Group Conversations

Ask students to break into groups of two, three, or four for the purpose of explaining to each other what was just discussed, shared, or introduced within the larger class group. This is a great way to engage students more intimately in the topic at hand.

How About Section Leaders for Larger Classes?

Large lecture hall configurations present more difficult situations for group engagement. Consider breaking the class into sections and assigning 4-6 students as leaders. Section leaders might be selected from among those who demonstrate a command of the concept or content about which you are teaching. Alternatively, leaders might be assigned on a rotating basis, perhaps on a class-by-class or weekly meeting basis.

However you decide, section leaders can be responsible for 10-15 students. You are now able to take intermittent teaching breaks, asking each leader to review a guiding or clarifying question with those in their section. After providing time for a short group discussion you can move on with your instruction.

This is simply another way of breaking the class into smaller groups, providing a change of pace that will allow students to become more personally engaged in the concept or content at hand.

Ask Questions

Students are more likely to remain engaged when they think you might call upon them. This is especially true in large classes. Asking questions throughout the class period is also an effective way to make instant assessments regarding whether your students are grasping new material. In large lecture, make a point of asking them to speak up. This is a great way of using class size to encourage on-task behavior.

Note: For more on asking questions, please review:

Power Formula for Classroom Questioning

A Good Verb is Hard to Ignore

Contributors: Peter Connor - TILT Web Content Writer and Editor

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