Teaching Tip Three:
Best Practices Ideas for Promoting Learning over a Lesson

In Fall 2014, over 45 new faculty were observed teaching. The four observers collected some of the best practices they saw. By skimming through these practices and the suggestions, you may find something new to try!

Active, student-centered teaching is a deliberate practice choice. Berman (2014) highlights that "moving from a teaching model, defined in terms of content transmission, to a student-centered pedagogy represents a major challenge. It means faculty members must rethink their assumptions about teaching and place student-learning needs at the center of their efforts." You can see from the practices below that Conestoga faculty are making instructional plans and delivering lessons that put student learning front and centre.

Attendance Monitoring
- Input the attendance in eConestoga during one of their pair group exercises. Reminded students that attendance was being tracked but not evaluated. Student mentioned he had gotten an automatic alert and made sure he woke up.
- Sign in list left on clipboard on front desk. Students all signed in as they entered.
- Stack of name tents placed on front desk by door. Name tents not picked up by 10 minutes after the class begins are marked absent at break time by faculty.
- Small learner groups created within class to support peer learning. Group file folder distributed at the start of each class and attendance was taken by small group and returned to instructor.

Board Work and Materials
- Excellent collection of student ideas on the board after the pair work.
- Clear and useful slides. Great idea to have the time icon in the corner of the slide.
- Nicely organized board work. Clear printing.
- Nice use of textbook for vignette.
- Nice, neat board work in appropriately sized printing.
- Descriptive, guiding titles on board to guide student note-taking.
- Excellent slides – attractive and accessible.
- Schedule and handouts nicely formatted and available on eConestoga prior to class.
- Each segment had a visual and kinesthetic element as well as the auditory.
- The addition of the realia and the visuals as well as having everything available on eConestoga made things very professional and accessible.
- The textbook PowerPoints were used effectively with the board to supplement. Nice to put key terms down the side of the board.
- All materials including agenda available on eConestoga. Most students had printed out the guided note sheets to follow along.

- Examples created in previous lab were on hand for discussion. Excellent blow-ups on whiteboard that were readable.
- Diagrams in slides were clear and easy to read.

Content
- The subject matter was practical, digestible, and clear. It inspired student interest.
- This was a very hands-on practical class. Information was fed in judiciously and it was all very clear.
- Discussion of field experience integrated throughout the lesson.
- Appropriate level of detail and repetition when explaining concepts.
- Nice vertical and horizontal integration of content across the semester and the program.
- Excellent "connections" to other related workshops and seminars at the College and in the community.
- Referred students to external resources that had simple and clear explanations of class topics.
- Incorporated review of last week's new concepts into questions associated with new concepts.
- Provides authentic examples for each concept covered; welcomed and discussed student ideas.
- Asked students about memorizing vs. understanding … stressed the importance of really knowing what the system is and how it behaves as students move forward in their studies.
- Encouraged students to further investigate interesting things they read in the textbook.

Copyright
- Excellent use of citations and references for all sources even the text.
- Excellent reminder to learners as to where resources related to citations and referencing can be found and referral to the Learning Commons.

Debriefing Activities
- Great debriefing leading smoothly into the new focus
- Debrief focussed on what went well, even though students identified things they did (or thought they did) incorrectly. When necessary brought students back to positive personal reflection.

Discussions
- Skilled facilitation of targeted discussions.
- Students were responsive and contributed willingly.
- Excellent conversations – equitable and inclusive.
- The students were very engaged and striving to contribute and to come up with useful answers.
- Effective question wording.

- Discussions very well done, thanked students for their contribution, welcoming of input and questions.
- Excellent use of cooperative learning strategies for facilitating and encouraging discussions.
- Handled questions that could have been a tangent by indicating that it was a really interesting topic for discussion, but not for this particular class.
- Handled student reluctance professionally ... kept the class moving, continued to ask questions even though students weren't forthcoming with their answer.
- Handled student questions easily and indicated when he didn't know. Stated "will find out and let you know."

Equity and Variety in Student Involvement
- Responses from class were spread throughout the room – very inclusive and equitable.
- It was clear that the students felt supported. Only two were slightly disengaged. The rest were impressively engaged in interacting with the teacher, the materials, and each other.
- Students were respectful of classmates during presentations.

Evaluation Preparation
- Excellent hints about mid-term.
- Great to do a mid-semester review of the outcomes and to check them off "live" on screen as they confirmed learning.
- Nice to see the unit outcomes reviewed and students seeing how they would roll out in the class.
- The evaluation was aligned well with the expectations in the course, the semester, the program and the field.
- Students were offered a choice of projects to demonstrate their knowledge of the topic.

Gestures
- Superb gestures - you gesture right to the key words on the board and screen.
- Excellent focussing gestures – highlighted key words and processes on board and screen.

Group and Pair Work
- All learning styles were taken into account. A variety of active learning activities, Q and A, discussion, and drawing allowed everyone to get involved.
- Nice balance of full-class, pair and individual work.
- Excellent inclusion of active learning strategies
- Great practice and the method promotes engagement and professionalism.
- The techniques used really promoted active learning and students were moving, talking, reading, writing, reviewing etc.
- Gave 5 minute (and then 3 minute) warning for group activity encouraging students to document their discussion points.

- Timely reminders about what the overall process was and where students should be at given point in time.
- Categorized ideas generated by students into sections that would be addressed through rest of class ... did refer to these ideas as appropriate through rest of class.

Personalization
- Your personalization struck the right note affirming future usefulness but not being about you.
- The lesson was engaging for students and provided them with a personal point of view in relation to the context of the lesson.
- Your willingness to provide a story which highlighted a mistake that you had made in the field and the consequences of that mistake enhanced the meaningfulness of the lecture content.
- Brought personal experiences (good and bad) to the classroom to help prepare students for career and interviews.

Proxemics
- Excellent use of the room and attention to both sides. For balance, you may want to pause longer and more deliberately once you get to a new spot.
- Move the students up out of the back row. You can start this in a new semester by tipping those chairs up and putting a handout in the front-most rows. The closer the proximity, the easier it is to feel like a team.
- Maybe get students moving during group or pair work by asking them to work with a new person.
- Nice use of the room. The level of vocal drama and animation kept the class involved.

Re-Broadcasting
- You re-broadcast what students said so all could hear.

Sequencing
- Nice flow from personal to field- general to new learning
- Excellent flow of content. The lesson plan provided a nice ebb and flow of energy.
- The overall flow the session was smooth and all topics were covered.

Start-Up
- Very clear - tied to current class' goals, previous cases, and evaluation.
- Lovely chatting with students at start – made verbal welcomes and chatted about assigned readings
- Gave an excellent rationale for the new learning at start
- The relevance of the lesson was made clear from the start.
- Learning Outcomes discussed and tied to exam and personal and business contexts.
- Nice Q and A at start to get them thinking about new topic – activated prior knowledge and served as a pre-test of their knowledge and experience base

- Excellent framing of content so students could relate it to past experience and future career hopes
- Shared personal, past, work experiences related to the topic
- Was ready prior to class start. Chatted pleasantly while awaiting students. Students were seated, attentive, and ready-to-go.
- The technique of asking a series of questions as to whether they would know how to do certain things in the future workplace was effective. It confirmed the usefulness and application of the lesson to come.
- You made the expected learning crystal clear at the start.
- Classroom was prepared (attendance sheet out and video set to desired starting point) well before students arrived.
- Started with a "good news" activity.

Student Comfort Level
- Students were very comfortable and respectful.
- Students were all engaged and taking notes.
- Class was 100% focussed on the learning opportunity.
- This was a safe, patient, interactive, and productive class.
- Alerted students appropriately to pending discussion of a sensitive topic.
- The strategies that you employed to create community in the classroom were evident in the level of comfort that the students demonstrated.

Technology-Enabled Learning
- Great to use electronic board and save each screen so you have a record of your teaching for your own quality reviews and can send/go over the board work to students who miss class.
- Everything was set up so that students could use their laptops to take notes as they followed along on the screen.
- Used lap-top and pen, computer, eConestoga, students used calculators
- All materials were made available electronically for preview, use, and review.
- Technology-enabled classroom was beneficial. Students used it to reinforce concepts being learned.

Use of the Voice as a Teaching Tool
- Great voice – positive valence and clear enunciation.
- Calm and confident in the delivery of information.
- Great voice with lots of variety in the intonation. Because your pace of speaking is quick, you will need to learn the art of the pause. Let their brains catch up.
- Excitement for topic reflected in voice.
- Voice commands student attention without being imposing or threatening.

Validation of Student Questions and Responses

- Very nice validation of student input.
- Excellent prompting and clarifying.
- Students' names used regularly with pleasant intonation on the name
- Used student names effectively to quickly call on students and keep the discussion moving
- Great affirmations "Exactly" "Absolutely"
- Great repertoire from "Thank you" to "Precisely" to "That's a great contribution to the discussion because ___"
- Good job managing difficult topics.
- Enthusiastic presentation style with many links to students' lived experience.
- Used students' facial expression as feedback on their progress – asked questions to help them get back on track.

Variety in Activities

- Used both pair work and group work
- Blend of teacher directed (slides for talking points, discussion, reflection), and student-centred activities ... individual (clicker review), pairs (think/pair/share) and group activities.

Suggestions

- Text written in green marker hard to read from back of room (reflections from window and low-light for DVP)
- Increase the words on slides to their largest possible size. Students also had access electronically so not as big an issue.
- You could also get them to ask you 3 questions that they still have about _____ in general. "Now that you know a bit about _____, ask me 3 questions." Don't always be the one asking the questions.
- Instructions for tasks: Modify how you give instructions a bit. Give them input first, put your instructions on the screen and also tell them (two modalities and also gives the task more weight). Let them try for a pre-specified # of minutes, then take it up. If it is pair work (be clear on the degree of collaborating), say so but let them work quietly with you circulating but not adding comments. Take-up was great but section the room to get answers from more individuals. After take-up say, "Keep this for studying purposes. Ask me two questions about how I might test this?"
- Limit initial chat to 3-4 minutes of class time.
- Limit the review at the start. "Here are 3 things we have been highlighting."
- You could buy cheap mini whiteboards and hand them out some classes so students have to hold up and "reveal" their answers.
- Be deliberate about stimulating class discussion. Periodically say, "Spend 2 minutes comparing your answers and prepare one question you both have." I will take 3 questions.
- When showing paper on screen, increase size to fill screen.

- You could add at least one out-of-seat kinaesthetic experience each class. Put a problem on the electronic board and have two students come up on either side and solve it. Others can work at their seats and cross-check what their colleagues are thinking.
- Be more directive and concreate in setting up the episodes of classroom work to increase the "flow."
- Be even more deliberate about specifying and alternating when they are working quietly alone, when working with a partner etc.
- Some did not take many notes. You could leave some spaces in the slides for additional points added during the class. You could also leave a blank slide, take photos of each diagram you draw and tell them you will upload those photos later for them to add in if they wish.
- Make use of all possible teaching spaces in the classroom.
- Avoid cursive - switch to printing separate, block letters.
- You could say they must have a new person with them in the next pair/group work so they don't stick with the same people.
- Avoid the laser pointer. Get up and touch the slides and then sit to discuss.
- Add one period of quiet early – maybe a Think-Pair –Share on an early slide. "Take 2 minutes to absorb this info. Prepare a question and decide if it is a question for a layperson or an expert."
- Few were taking notes. I wonder if they would take more notes if you periodically reminded them. "Make note of this suggestion as it could feature on the mid-term." Or show them in the first quiz that not all questions are from the text so the ideas shared in class needed to be added in.
- Make sure you catch everyone's eyes when you ask a question. You tended to gravitate towards the 2 contributors in front.
- If you get a 'wrong' answer still affirm, "Yes, good, you are close but _____." ALWAYS affirm. You can bond through affirming student guesses and suggestions and then elaborating on their offerings.
- Instead of saying, "Any questions?' try, "Let me get two questions about X."
- Try to print the smallest words at 3 inches. I could not read them from the back.
- Try to get large, black markers. When the students wrote in red it was not very readable.
- You could section the room and ask for an answer from the left, right, back, etc. to get more students offering answers
- Familiarize yourself with the AODA requirements.
- It is beneficial to the students to be able to put their course learning in context. This can be done by sharing how the specific course learning relates to other courses being studied that semester and how it relates to past semesters, future semesters and the field.
- Learning the students' names would be beneficial to the question and answer process.

- It is important to project your voice at all times. When your back is turned to the students (i.e. when writing on the white board) it is difficult for the students to hear what you have said.
- Give them a numerical target and recording responsibilities during pair work such as, "Make note of 5-7 commonly _____ and 5-7 that people would --_____. Be ready to share your ideas within 5 minutes."
- Tweak the pair work slightly so they take notes as they work and have a volume target.
- Would the students benefit from "cueing" related to note-taking? (i.e. "You may want to write this down.").
- Re-broadcast what students contribute especially from the front row. The front row actually carries the worst to the back of the room so be sure to re-broadcast anything donated from the front.
- Integrate concepts covered in pre-readings into the learning activities without covering them explicitly; if students know you'll cover the material anyway, many feel that they don't need to come prepared.
- Use peer learning and group discussion to replace some of the teacher-directed review.
- Watch for and encourage quiet/shy/introverted students to contribute to small group and/or class discussions.

References

Berman, R. A. (2014). Engaging Students Requires a Renewed Focus on Teaching. *Chronicle Of Higher Education*, *61*(3), B28-B30

eResources

Conestoga Teaching Tips

LRC Teaching Resources File

University of Honolulu Teaching Tips

Teaching Practices Inventory

Seven Ways of Learning Chart