



Teaching Generation NeXt: Methods and Techniques for Today's Learners

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Faculty struggle to effectively teach traditionally aged students from Generation NeXt. Their academic preparation and expectations, consumer orientation, esteem and importance issues, and use of technology are challenging traditional educational practices (Coates 2007; Hersch and Merrow 2005; Schroeder 2004; Taylor 2005, 2006, 2010; Twenge 2006; Prensky 2001a, 2001b; Tapscott 2009). While old-school methods, especially the all too common lecture on content to passive learners, are proving less and less successful in bringing students to successful learning and developmental outcomes, pedagogies of activity and engagement, especially those that use recently available Web- and technology-based tools and resources, can be more effective but are not attaining significant levels of use in most schools. Many faculty who are interested in meaningful student learning understand why they need to move from the traditional academic delivery model to a best practices model based on increasing student responsibility, engagement, and activity that leverages newly available online and technology-based resources, but they may not know what to do (Barr and Tagg 1995; Bok 2006; Gardiner 1998; Tagg 2004; Taylor 2010; U. S. Department of Education 2006). This paper provides an overview of specific techniques for improving instruction and student learning when operationalizing the model introduced in “Teaching Generation NeXt: A Pedagogy for Today's Learners” (Taylor 2010).

Improve Student Future Orientation

Helping students see themselves in the future to better understand and identify with future vocational, professional, and personal roles can improve both learning and persistence as they connect class goals and current learning to future needs and better see educational success, specifically in this class, as necessary for them to reach future goals.

Techniques to Improve Student Future Orientation

Offer students opportunities to identify future roles (vocational, professional, and personal) and the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to be successful in those roles by involving them in class assignments and in-class activities to help them look more closely at the after-college world. Students can research their prospective careers in resources like the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>), identify the requisite skills for that work, and connect the skills to course outcomes. Upper-level practicum or internship students (or recent graduates who have successfully transitioned from school to work), with whom current students can readily identify, can visit classes to describe and help students better understand workplace and after-school expectations. Students can interview people in their chosen professions or ideal jobs and identify how those professionals use course skills or information.



Identify Class Goals and Link to Student Goals

Students are more likely to learn content and applications when they see what they can do with the information and skills and how these applications can be of benefit to them. While faculty often ask students for their goals for the class on the first day of class, students rarely have a clear understanding of what the possible benefits of successful course completion (beyond course credit) can offer them.

Techniques to Link Class and Student Goals

Faculty should develop a “menu of benefits” for each class. Brainstorm how the learning from the class can help the student in the future around Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs, from basic physical (the need to eat) to self-actualization (having a personal, positive impact on the world.) Faculty can offer students the menu of benefits either before or on the first day of class, with an assignment to select the three benefits most important to them and articulate, either in an in-class activity or in an assignment, why the class is necessary to their future success.

Improve Student Understanding of Class Expectations

Many compliance and learning issues can be understood as failure to make academic expectations clear. Besides helping students understand the benefits of the class, more instrumental motivators like rewards (in the form of points and/or the privilege of participation) and consequences (in the form of penalties, points, or learning opportunities lost) should be spelled out for all academic expectations:

- **Preparation.** Completing specific out-of-class assignments is prerequisite to attending class and participating in in-class activities.
- **Attendance.** Class attendance should be required; out-of-class preparation does not preclude the necessity of attending class, but rather provides raw material for class activities.
- **Attention/engagement.** The expectation that students will be fully present in class and the reason for it should be explicated and enforced. Distracting other students, using mobile devices for nonclass activities, or doing other work during class is counterproductive to students’ own and others’ learning, and so is not allowed.
- **Participation/activity.** Inactivity is not an option, and 100 percent of students are expected to comply with instructor expectations for participation and activity (as well as preparation) 100 percent of the time. Since the evidence is fairly indisputable that increasing student activity increases learning, this should be a basic precondition for success in all classes (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, 2005).
- **Cooperation.** Active learning involves interaction. For the interaction to be effective, all participants must cooperate toward learning goals, including preparing for class. This is especially critical in graded group work.
- **Accountability.** For all students to have the best opportunity to learn, students must be accountable to themselves and to the group for meeting all these expectations. Students are accountable to prepare for and attend class and to participate in the activities most likely to facilitate deep and lasting learning.



Move Content Learning Out of Class

Class time is too valuable to spend delivering content, most of which is readily available and accessible by students out of class. Besides the traditional textbook (and newer, less-traditional textbook), content is often available in media forms like webcasts and voiced-over slide shows. These new media can be much more attractive to students than a traditional lecture and offer a level of credibility to “digital learners” (Coates 2007; Prensky 2001a, 2001b; Tapscott 2009). Beyond content, out-of-class resources can also be used to introduce and demonstrate skills.

For those faculty who believe that their own explanations of content, demonstration of skills, and rationale for the importance of the course are superior or more appropriate for their students than the available online resources, many opportunities to package content are available. It should be stressed that “lecture capture”—making the traditional in-class delivery of content to passive students available out of class—is not advocated. Faculty should identify and develop content delivery available to students in preparation for class.

Techniques and Resources to Move Content Out of Class

Online resources are available from

- **Schools**—like MIT (<http://ocw.mit.edu/about/ocw-consortium/>), Yale (<http://oyc.yale.edu/>), and the Community College Consortium (<http://oerconsortium.org/>)
- **Popular sites**—like iTunes University (<http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/>) and You Tube Edu (<http://www.youtube.com/education?b=400>)
- **Organization sites**—like the Open Learning Initiative (<http://oli.web.cmu.edu/openlearning/>), the Internet Archive (<http://www.archive.org/>), and Open Content (<http://www.opencontent.org>)

Traditional resources also exist. Most instructors still require students to purchase expensive (though often unused) textbooks to use for out-of-class preparation. School libraries remain vital sources of valuable learning resources.

Faculty-created resources include

- **Video capture tools**—like Camtasia (<http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia/>), Mediasite (<http://www.sonicfoundry.com/default.aspx>), and Tegrity (<http://www.tegrity.com/>)
- **Inexpensive, easy-to-use flash video recorders**—like the Flip (<http://www.theflip.com/en-us/>)
- **Voice-over options in popular presentation software**—like Microsoft PowerPoint for PC platforms and iWork Keynote for Macs

Create the Necessity of Preparing for and Attending Class

Many students have been successful in high school (and even other college-level classes) without doing out-of-class preparation, relying instead on faculty to tell them everything they need to know during class. While this in-class lecture delivery is arguably effective in delivering content, it is ineffective in bringing about meaningful, lasting learning for content retention, skills development, or helping students come to value the course. Lecture also fills class time that could be used for more effective learning activities. Many college students are successful without even attending class diligently. The challenge is to make



preparing for and attending class necessary prerequisites for course success. It should be stressed that out-of-class work needs to be preparation for the upcoming class, not simply review of the material from a completed class session.

Techniques in Improving Class Preparation and Attendance

Very clear expectations of what students are expected to do in preparation, what options are available to prepare (such as reading, viewing a video, or reviewing voiced-over presentation slides), how their preparation will be assessed, and the rewards for preparing and consequences of not preparing. Students must prepare to attend class because student homework is used in class activity.

Preparation for class should be worth a significant percentage of the course grade, at least 15 percent. These points can be awarded or claimed in class only, generally only at the beginning of each class. This preparation is necessary to participate in class activity, which is also worth at least 15 percent of the grade.

Assessments of completion of out-of-class work must be timely at or before the beginning of class. Before class, questions are to be answered on course management software, comments made on a blog (<http://www.blogscholar.com>) or wiki (<http://www.wiki.com/>), and answers or other material e-mailed to the instructor.

At the beginning of class, a live quiz is given and is scored in real time with clickers or an audience response system (<http://www.turningtechnologies.com/studentresponsesystems/>) (Bruff 2009; Caldwell 2007; Duncan 2005). A paper and pencil quiz can be scored immediately in a class of manageable size. A quick visual check of homework completion should be done.

Increase Classroom Learning Activity and Engagement

If there is a truism in higher education, it is that student activity increases learning (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, 2005). The primary reason class content is moved out of class is to free class time for active learning. Peer instruction, which is activity, can help move students to content, skills, and affective learning outcomes (Manzur 1997). Activity necessarily improves engagement, since the active student is an engaged student.

Techniques to Increase Learning Activity in the Classroom

To help students understand content, they should actively teach it to another person, as with peer instruction. The “think, pair, square, share” model can help students move from reflection to sharing (<http://teachingtricks.weebly.com/think-pair-square-share.html>).

To help students learn a skill, they need to actively practice it with someone observing for accuracy. The student demonstrates the skill to another student, who evaluates the demonstration for accuracy with a rubric. In Jigsaw and Expert groups (<http://www.jigsaw.org>), students teach skills to other students.

To help students come to care, value, or see worth in a subject or skill, they need to actively identify how this content or skill will benefit them in the future and actively articulate this benefit to another person. The menu of benefits in the “Identify Class Goals” section above is designed to help students connect class goals to their future and increase the likelihood that they will value the class, class goals, and class activities. Provide ongoing opportunities to identify how people in roles they aspire to use the course content and skills. Use structured activities designed to offer students the opportunity to convince another student that course content and skills are valuable.



Activity necessarily improves engagement, since the active student is an engaged student. Several techniques improve student engagement directly.

Techniques to Improve Student Engagement

Ensuring that students are prepared for class can improve in-class engagement, as they have made an investment, possess some knowledge about the subject, and have something to interact about. Audience response systems or clickers are powerful tools for keeping students engaged, especially in large classes (Bruff 2009; Caldwell 2007; Duncan 2005). They also encourage class discussion, which increases engagement. When students are using audience response system apps on their smartphones, they are less likely to be using those mobile devices for other activities, like texting and games, that reduce engagement with the class.

When encouraging class participation and discussion, student participation should not be voluntary. Voluntary participation tends to be less engaging for the majority of students, as the few most verbal and extroverted students tend to monopolize class discussion. When all students know that they may be called on, especially when the selection is randomized, they remain more engaged.

Improve Assessments and Accountability

As instruction moves from the traditional faculty delivery of content process to a student construction of learning model, instructors also need to move from a reliance on summative assessments of learning outcomes to assign grades, usually emphasizing content, to ongoing formative efforts to monitor and measure the efficacy of instruction and students' movement toward meaningful learning outcomes.

Techniques in Formative Assessments

Classroom response systems help instructors monitor ongoing student learning (Bruff 2009; Caldwell 2007; Duncan 2005). Low-tech techniques like ungraded quizzes, private response, and anonymous opportunities allow all students opportunities to let instructors know their ongoing understandings or skills. Summative assessments and graded learning outcomes should move from a reliance on content to broader measures inclusive of skills and attitudes.

Techniques in Summative Assessments

Since students are assessed at the content level based on bringing content to class, there may be less need for and emphasis on content-level testing. Content-level assessment should be reflected in skills assessments. There should be less emphasis on students' ability to regurgitate information and more on their ability to apply that information.

Assessments of learning related to values, the affective level, and how much students have come to care are relatively new to most faculty, but can be explored and addressed through open-ended short-answer and essay questions like "What was the most important thing you learned from this chapter?" and "How can what you learned from this unit help you in the future?"

Accountability

Accountability relates to our efforts to improve instructional practices and educational outcomes in light of our professional obligations and the expectations of accreditors, employers, governments, funders, parents,



and the public at large. Instructors might challenge themselves (before they are challenged by others) to demonstrate that they are incorporating the research and data on best practices into their instruction.

It is hoped that the techniques described here will contribute to meeting this increased accountability through recognizing and appreciating the traits of our learners, leveraging technology, and increasing student activity, all to the end of helping students identify personally relevant uses for academic content, develop meaningful skills, and come to value their learning. As faculty teaching the learners from Generation NeXt, as well as the other students we serve, we must use the best available resources and methods to help develop successful graduates and lifelong learners equipped to contribute to and benefit from their world of the third millennium.

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