Ways to Shake Up Your Teaching

Whether you have taught the same lesson many times before and are looking to try something new, you have a lesson that never quite works the way you want it to, or you’re relatively new to teaching and looking to experiment, taking risks can invigorate your classes. Take risks with your teaching as you plan the next semester. When you take teaching risks, both you and your students learn.

✓ Sit in the back of the room for an entire class. Ask for volunteer students who will write or draw on the board. The board-writers call on raised hands, but the class must decide on and revise information that gets written on the board. Students work as a class to outline the key ideas or concepts from the reading. The same can be done for drawing and labelling graphs, charts, and diagrams and for solving math problems. If the class accomplishes remembering and understanding through discussion and outlining, refocus them on application and analysis tasks (see Top 10 #20).

✓ Teach something in a way you’ve always thought would be fun or interesting but have never tried. We’ve heard many teachers say how interesting it would be to try teaching X using Y, or doing C in class in order to show students D, but they’ve never tried it in an actual class. Unless it’s dangerous or obscene, try it. If a lesson idea excites you, try it, even if you think it’s crazy or it might not work. You’ll learn something, and we’re betting your students will, too.

✓ Completely change the configuration of your classroom. If you normally teach students at short tables, rearrange the room into a circle or a U so that all students are facing each other. Or push all tables to the walls and sit in a circle of chairs. Hold class for a day in a room with round tables or in a computer classroom. How is the configuration of the room appropriate to the content of your course? Better yet, ask your students.
✓ **Play games in class.** Games work. Get a book of games for teaching or training and try a few in class. Tap the experience of your colleagues by asking around and finding colleagues who use games to teach. Work with them to develop ideas for your class.

✓ **Visit the classroom of instructors whom you admire.** We don’t spend anywhere near enough time in other instructors’ classrooms. Ask both colleagues who teach in your discipline and those who teach other subjects if you can visit their classrooms. Good teaching techniques and ideas often translate across the disciplines.

✓ **Invite colleagues to your classroom and ask them for feedback.** Informal, non-evaluative observation from a trusted colleague can give you invaluable feedback from another pair of eyes in the room. A colleague you respect and admire can make you aware of classroom dynamics and teaching behaviors of which you might be completely unaware.

✓ **Switch classes with a colleague.** Teach her class and have her teach yours. Don't give the person your lesson plan, and don't take one of theirs. Use your own approach to the subject. Listen to his students. Get feedback from his students about how they received what you taught (see *Top 10* #9).

✓ **Use music.** Arrived 5 minutes early to every class and have music playing as students enter. Smart classroom technology helps. The first student to name the artist gets to e-mail you a song to be played at the start of the next class, and so on. Offer bonus points to any student who finds and e-mails you a link to song whose lyrics connect in some way to the content of your course. Play for the class the songs that earn bonus points.

✓ **Teach a class without speaking.** This requires a little planning, but it forces you to be deliberate in your lesson and activities and to use sounds and physical motions to teach. You will observe much, much more about your class when force yourself not to speak. It also places the burden of participation squarely on your students and forces them to be more active learners through discussion and activity.

✓ **Go to a teaching workshop or conference.** Almost every college offers local teaching workshops or discussion groups each semester, and the statewide Center for Teaching sponsors Pathways Workshops, the Spirit of Teaching, Instructional Skills Workshops (ISWs) and the Barnes Seminar in teaching each year. Also, the New England Faculty Development Consortium (NEFDC) meets each fall in Worcester, MA. Go!
Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty

The Top 10…

No. 1 – The All-Important First Day of Class
No. 2 – Ways to Make Your Teaching Life Easier
No. 3 – The Crucial Second and Third Classes
No. 4 – Ways to Show Students that You Respect Them
No. 5 – Promote Effective Student Study Skills
No. 6 – Components of a Well-Planned Class
No. 7 – Observe Your Teaching Tendencies
No. 8 – Ways to Keep Your Students Learning
No. 9 – Ways to Get Feedback on Teaching from Students
No. 10 – Using Short Writing to Assess Learning
No. 11 – Getting More (and Better) Student Questions
No. 12 – Mixing Things up Mid-Semester
No. 13 – Engaging Different Input Preferences
No. 14 – Helping Students Stay the Journey
No. 15 – Ways to End Your Course
No. 16 – Resources for Learning and Teaching
No. 17 – Create a Memorable AND Functional Syllabus
No. 18 – Ways to Build Your Students’ Self-Efficacy
No. 19 – Practical Study Tips to Share with Your Students
No. 20 – Laddering Thinking Skills
No. 21 – Learning Based Ways to End Lessons
No. 22 – Ways and Reasons to be Vulnerable While Teaching
No. 23 – Best Practices in Using Student Groups
No. 24 – Components of a Complete Learning Experience
No. 25 – Ways to Use Visuals for Learning
No. 26 – Students’ Locus of Control
No. 27 – Help Students with Rigorous Writing Assignments

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