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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Students Learn What THEY Do, Not What WE Do

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Blog Series: Online Teaching, Online Learning

November 23, 2020

Tags: student learning | online learning | cognitive learning | learner focused

As faculty become more adept at the online learning experience (of necessity for many; reluctantly for some) many lament the loss of the classroom experience. There is a real sense of loss in not being together with students in the classroom, seeing faces, engaging in discussion, flipping through that awesome Powerpoint presentation one spent hours refining, enjoying the energy when the classroom environment is charged with learning.

While we teachers may miss the experience of lecturing, presenting, and explaining, it remains true that students learn what THEY do, not what WE do (lecture, explain, expound, wax eloquent, et cetera). Research demonstrated that 70 to 80 percent of classroom teaching experience is “teacher talk” (Hattie 2020). But as previously noted, and as paradoxical as it may seem, learning is not an outcome of teaching.

There is a challenge in shifting one’s stance from teaching-focused to learning-focused, especially for teachers whose only or primary experience of teaching is the classroom. The shift requires a deep understanding of the cognitive and affective processes of learning that happen within the student.

The good news is that the online environment leans toward *student-focused learning* rather than teaching. To oversimplify, this forces teachers to become designers of a student learning experience rather than instructional performers.

Fortunately, the online learning environment offers almost unlimited opportunities for students

to *do* something in order to achieve learning. It can be helpful to focus on domains of learning and align the student learning experience with the desired learning outcome. Here are things students can do to both achieve learning and demonstrate learning.

Cognitive Learning Domain

Explain
Examine
Evaluate
Critique
Defend a position
Posit a theory or proposition

Affective Learning Domain

Give an opinion
Share an experience
Reflect on a feeling response
Express an attitude
Share a perspective
Demonstrate empathy

Skills or Competencies Domain

Demonstrate
Present a tutorial
Write an essay or paper
Compose an argument
Complete a project

Instructors should strive for higher-order demonstration of learning or activities, and avoid rudimentary activities ("list," "identify"). For more ways to get students to DO, see Student Engagement Methods: A Checklist.

For more:

Billings, L., and T. Roberts, *"From Mindless to Meaningful,"* (2014).
Hattie, J., *"Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning,"* (2012).
Ripp, P., *"Cultivating Passionate Learners in Common Core Classrooms,"* (2014).
Soranno, P., *"Improving Student Discussions in Graduate and Undergraduate Courses: Transform the Discussion Leader,"* (2010).

<https://wabash.center/2020/11/students-learn-what-they-do-not-what-we-do/>

