

Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

“Wah, Wah”

*Remember the scene with Charlie Brown sitting in class listening to his teacher and all you hear is “Wah, Wah” over and over and nobody in the class is paying attention? Hopefully, this is an image of what you **do not** want your learners doing in your class. Instead, as instructors/developers, the goal is to create a learning environment in which students are eagerly hanging on your every word and actively participating. But how do you do that when the ratio of students to instructor can be upward of 100 to one?*

ALM 2015

ALM 2015 was designed and implemented to ensure that learning is an active process in which the learners are taking control of their own learning, using problem-solving skills, and being actively engaged for long-term retention of material. However, it is often thought that ALM can only be applied to small group instruction. Additionally, with the prevalence of many large classes across SWCS, it is often believed that the only way to reach these large groups is to “cover the material” with a lecture. In this month’s Tips, we want to share some ideas and strategies that will help you engage those large audiences so that they are benefitting from ALM even in larger settings.

The Basics...

Of course, no matter what strategies are used, the number one variable of learning is the ability of the instructor to teach. Therefore, when working with large classes, it is imperative for the instructor to capture and maintain the attention of the learners ---work on those presentation skills. Make sure you are well-rehearsed, confident, and by all means, step away from that podium. Use movement, gestures, inflection and avoid those filler words. Take control early by setting expectations, establishing procedures, and modelling effective time management skills. Remember, you are the example for the Force so demonstrate those ARSOF attributes, be enthusiastic, prepared, and professional. When you start your lesson with a large audience, it is imperative to capture their attention early.

Start your lesson with a motivator- personal story, experience, relevant example, or video clip or if you are implementing ELM, plan that concrete experience. By taking time to set the relevancy of your content, you set the stage for engagement. However, you can’t stop at that. In order to keep them actively engaged so that the learning takes place, you will need to include activities in the lesson in which students are interacting with the content/material after segments or chunks of the lecture/PowerPoint/lesson--- why? Because the brain needs time to process new information.

So you will want the learners to Do Something!

It is believed that the one who is doing the most talking is the one doing the most learning and traditionally, the one doing the most talking is the instructor. But think about it, the instructor is the

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SME or the one with all of the expertise and knowledge which means they already know the information. Therefore, instead of the instructor talking so much – “WAH WAH,”--- why not find ways to include the students so that they have the opportunity to **do something**. Notice the words, **do something** are highlighted. Listed below are some of the most popular strategies used to engage students in a large lecture-style class. Take a look and try implementing one or two of them in your next large lecture. In addition to making the lesson more engaging, you will be able to better assess whether or not the learners are retaining what you are teaching which is the bottom line.

Think, Pair, Share: As simplistic as this sounds, it is the most common strategy listed by educators across the country in all fields to keep learners engaged in the large classroom. Ask a question, provide a statement or fact, or a scenario and tell students to think about it for a moment (30 seconds to 1 minute should be sufficient). After students have had time to reflect and process, tell them to turn to the person next to them and discuss their ideas. You can expand the discussion by asking pairs to discuss with other pairs in close proximity. Once again, time is precious so only give students a minute or so to discuss before calling on volunteers to share their ideas with the entire group. By limiting time, you are ensuring that you keep learners on-task and prevent them from straying off topic. **Turn and Talk** is another variation of this process which eliminates the reflection piece and goes straight to partner discussion. Both strategies work beautifully to engage learners in a discussion but in a controlled environment to help keep you within your time constraints.

Quick Writes: This versatile strategy may be used at any time during the lesson in order to promote student reflection and an excellent way for students to capture their thoughts in their green notebook for review. The strategy asks learners to respond in two minutes or longer depending on your time to an open-ended question or prompt posed by the instructor or after a particular part of your presentation.

Most Important Point: Tell the learners to stop, reflect, and write what they think is the most important point learned so far in the presentation. With both of these strategies, you may ask volunteers to share their thoughts and ideas which gives you the opportunity to assess if they are learning what you want and need them to learn in the class.

Demonstrations and Role-Playing: To break up the monotony of lecture, insert some active learning with demonstrations with learners involved or by designing scenarios in which you ask participants to role-play. While these two strategies do not include everyone, it does increase their attention as they observe decision-making and actions of their fellow classmates.

Note-Taking: You can help students organize what they see and hear during a lecture or PowerPoint presentation by preparing skeletal notes or hand-outs in which learners fill in the blanks or add their own personal thoughts to the information you have provided on the hand-outs during the presentation.

For this article, the **Most Important Point** is that by implementing a few strategies that encourage all learners to actively reflect and discuss the content – not just one or two that are brave enough to volunteer or that you call on to answer a question--- you will promote engagement in the large classroom and promote learning and long-term retention!