



CETL TIPS: Teaching and Performance - Ideas for Energizing your Classroom

Most teachers would agree that there are many parallels between the classroom and the stage. The art of teaching often lies not only in what information is presented, but also in how it is presented. Viewing the teaching role as a type of performance provides possibilities for instructors to revitalize their own approaches to familiar material.

Rosenshine and Furst (1973) found that a teachers' enthusiasm positively relates to student achievement gains. With this in mind, one reason for approaching the classroom as a stage is that your students may actually achieve more in teaching environments when you as the instructor take risks in communicating your own enthusiasm for the subject you teach. Remember, excitement can be contagious; developing your own style of presentation can be an asset to student learning.

Adopting a new attitude to teaching and learning experiences generates question asking as a practice. Every time we try something new, we place ourselves in a "beginners mind." In the process of thinking about students as a type of audience, instructors may begin asking questions such as: how well-received was the material of the day? What kinds of responses did my interactions with students elicit? These questions, among others, encourage reflection. By making a link between teaching and performing, instructors can actively sharpen their lecture delivery skills. This in turn, may result in more active engagement by students.

Reflect on the dynamics of previous classes and what you could do differently. For example, if students have appeared preoccupied or disengaged during the last class period you might consider starting class with a song or poem that characterizes the era or subject being studied. This tactic might also be employed at the mid-point in a class when students may need a change of pace. As noted by Tauber and Mester (1994), "if we expect students to absorb the material presented and discussed in class, we must cultivate their attention by offering the material in an interesting and captivating way."

Some tips for approaching teaching as performance are:

- Before class, put your notes aside and get physically ready for class. Try a few humming exercises to loosen up your vocal cords. This will allow for more vocal variety in your speech.
- Know your material well enough to make eye contact with your students. You will enjoy greater freedom of movement and interaction if you feel comfortable with the content you are presenting.
- Use props and costumes to adopt different roles in the classroom. You might try coming in dressed as the famous theorist and scientist about whom students are reading.
- Use storytelling as a method of teaching. This approach will allow you to be more animated in your discussion of course materials.
- Play with space. You might try rearranging the classroom by moving tables and chairs so that students become part of the stage.
- Move in the space—rather than being tethered to the podium, try walking down the center or side aisle, or standing at the back of the room.

Rosenshine, B., & Furst, N. (1973). Research on teacher performance criteria. In B.O. Smith (Ed.), *Research in teacher education: A symposium*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

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