

How to Support Student Learning?

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Abstract. *The article states my learning and teaching experience during the Student Support learning (SSL) module at Westminster University in Tashkent (WIUT). You can dive into insights that completely changed my mind towards teaching. I have been exploring a teaching and learning journey with euphoria and enthusiasm. I believe that you also can feel this journey's discoveries on the way with me by reading this article. In this article you can read about 'A-ha! Moments' during the module, my applications of insights that I have stated below and self-reflection on my own teaching.*

Key words: *rapport, enlivening a concept, experiential learning cycle, student-centeredness, deep learning, deep learning, reflection.*

Introduction

First of all, I am eager to describe the moments that led surprises. Building rapport is vital in the classroom. My first day of studying in the module made me feel this environment. I have realized that proper organization of students in the lesson will be a bridge to pass the student-centered approach. Because some students may be unwilling to stand up in front of the whole class or feel nervous. In other words, they may not want to be in the center of attention. Teachers can find great ways to mitigate these uncomfortable situations. I have discovered a solution for this problem: round-circle! Students can feel confident and free in this area knowing that there is a strong bond that connects each one in a circle. They can openly and freely share their opinions as if they are trying to make the bond stronger. It gives a chance of discarding their phobia about speaking or presenting themselves and feel safe. Falout (2014) states that "Circular seating arrangements can help instill a sense of belonging within classroom communities with overall positive effects on learning, emotions, and wellbeing" (p275). It can be obviously clear that feeling confident in the class exerts an influence on learning process as well as emotional and physical condition which are crucially linked to each other. Glazzard (2016) approves of Canny and Byrne's disagreement on rarely explicitly teaching process of social skills. He underlines the necessity of focusing on these skills in schools and circle time should be implemented to develop students' social engagement (p275). It can be concluded that round-circle arrangement is one of the most pramout elements of enhancing learning and teaching.

One of the significant elements of rapport is being approachable. Hai (2021) stated that responding to emails, substantive feedback, and having times available for individual discussion makes a teacher available, accessible and responsive. He adds a teacher needs to be approachable as some students are not likely to take advantage of class hours (p5). This was what I needed in my learning journey. Whenever I approached to the module leader during my Master's except for the class hours, I was able to get a substantial guidance to develop further.

The next thing that lightened my mind is the skill of enlivening a concept with visual aids that is very confusing for learners and they tend to avoid understanding. By doing so, a strong long-term understanding is given to learners. It is not hard to notice that the way the teacher explained the

learning theories was ‘wow’ not only for me, but for the entire class. Although I read before about these concepts, I had almost no perspectives to comprehend what is beyond them. However, this class helped me to grasp the significance of them in the long run. What the teacher needed was just a box and some threads and some toys. By utilizing these visual aids, she managed to effectively explain us in an intriguing way. Nowawan (2010) also highlights the efficiency of them to explain concepts: “...the use of visual aids in materials helps learners understand particular concepts or words in the materials because visual aids can help learners out visualize the concepts, which are hard to understand in mind” (p39). I could visualize and feel what the researchers wanted us to comprehend and differentiate and why the learning theories came up during that period. I guess I can recall this crucial moment for the rest of my life vividly.

Experiential learning cycle. That session was turning point among my amazements. The approach that the lecturer used was a great wow for me. I did not think that we were having a lesson. At first we were allocated 10 minutes time to write a descriptive text for a lesson individually. It was followed by evaluation and getting feedback from the course leader and she encouraged the students who got feedback to approach for the other students and assist them. We were so engaged in the process: working on our works, interacting and exchanging different feedback that guided us to create an excellent masterpiece. After these procedures, we conceptualized what we had learned from these activities and listed all the ideas about how to make an effective description. In the next stage we updated our work with new gained expertise and applied what we had experienced. We were able to create an excellent piece of writing efficiently. The course leader introduced the topic of the lesson and the founder of the concept. I was so astounded by the power of this theory and her acuity to apply to our learning process as well as our perception of this theory. During the session “... (We all) receive(d) information through concrete experience of the subject matter and transform(ed) it through reflection and conceptualization and then transform(ed) it again by acting to change the world including what information was attended to in the new experience” (Kolb and Kolb, 2017, p16). We were able to do the task, reflect on our work as well as working on weaknesses and conceptualize what we learned and apply it into practice again. They are the crucial aspects of every learning and teaching process that make this process valuable and efficient. Boggu and Sundarsingh (2016) states the importance of experiential learning model (ELM): “ELM encourages the learner to discover their learning styles, reflect upon their areas of weakness, make connections between theory and real life situations, and think critically” (p29).

Materials and Methods

The methodology for supporting student learning in the context of this article is based on experiential learning and student-centered approaches. The approach begins with creating an environment where students feel comfortable and confident. Circular seating arrangements are recommended to foster a sense of belonging, enhancing students’ emotional and social engagement. This setting encourages open communication, collaboration, and active participation, reducing anxiety in learners who may feel nervous in traditional classroom structures. Additionally, rapport-building between teacher and students is emphasized, where the teacher remains approachable and available beyond class hours, offering substantive feedback and guidance. Visual aids play a critical role in helping students grasp complex concepts, providing concrete tools that transform abstract ideas into understandable visual representations. Experiential learning is further applied by encouraging students to engage in active learning processes, where they are guided to reflect on their work, receive feedback, and apply newly acquired knowledge. Teachers act as facilitators, allowing students to be the center of the learning process, which enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This student-centered approach emphasizes learner autonomy, providing opportunities for self-reflection and peer collaboration. Teachers should also foster deep learning rather than surface learning, enabling students to detect patterns, apply knowledge in new contexts, and critically assess information. By promoting an environment of mutual respect, encouragement, and reflection, this methodology supports the development of critical thinking, self-confidence, and the capacity for independent learning, aligning with contemporary educational goals of fostering lifelong learning abilities in students.

Results and Discussion

I have already started to apply what I have experienced in the module. My ideas about teaching were enriched with useful insights that gave motivation to inspire my learners. The task that I have ever contemplated on a lot was creating a teaching metaphor. This delayed production urged me to think critically, recall my teaching experience: the best and the worst moments of my teaching journey, learners' and my expectations, the moments of satisfaction and hardships that I encountered, achievements and failure of my learners. After thinking deeply on these thoughts, I produced a beautiful metaphor that made my invisible imaginations visible. Doing this activity encouraged me to research about utilizing metaphors in the classroom as power tools. "By giving students specific tools to think critically, such as making the invisible visible through explicit comparisons or applying knowledge from one discipline to another, we help students move beyond memorization to deeper learning lasts" (Wormeli, 2009, p4) I have already commenced to apply using metaphors with my learners to bolster their critical thinking skills. I am surprised at how my students approached the task and created fabulous masterpieces that made me think about how intelligent they are!

Student-centeredness. Most of the classes were focused on a student-centered approach that made us actively engage in the process. The teacher as a facilitator that guided and facilitated us how to move forward. Hai (2021) states that the teacher is expected to actively design and facilitate activities that students are involved at the centre of the activity and learning as well as getting meaningful experience. (p4). After experiencing this important moment of teaching and learning process, I have realized that this is what I need for me with my learners to enhance the efficiency of the process. Having experienced as well as researching about it, I started to apply this method to my classes. I am acting as a facilitator in the lessons by guiding and facilitating them to allow my learners to be at the centre of activities. I would say that my learners' enthusiasm towards the classes has significantly increased. Moreover, I feel that their critical thinking acuity is developing as they are approaching the tasks with critical perspective.

Turning to my self-reflection on my own teaching, I want to talk about what teachers should not do as long as we want to encourage learning autonomy. Sometimes we may not believe in our learners' capacities. We try to control them in every way and we tend to create pressure in their learning journey. The thing that we should as a teacher is to create a congenial atmosphere where students should be able to discover their capabilities in the long run. In the session, I realized that we managed to get adequate information about 'a complicated object' by using the available resources and at least we learnt how to use this object and how to move in it. The teacher encouraged us to utilize the sources effectively: a video, pictures, a reading material, and the possibility of touching the object. My realization was directing them, facilitating what they need to and observing how they are doing. Because we can develop self-confidence in them to achieve their maximum potential in their lives. I realized that students are capable of more than what we think. We should give freedom to our learners so as to be able to act autonomously and think critically.

My next realization was to develop a deep learning approach, not a surface. In the session, we were able to analyze efficiently what a preschool kid knows by the help of the authentic product of a little girl. By learning the pictures that she drew and the words written in them we concluded that preschool children can count, write, make self-correction, design, observe, compare, identify and apply what they know. We are surprised that before going to school children might use Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). They should be encouraged further to develop these skills. Teachers should not limit their lessons with just teaching factual or structural information, but their ultimate goal should be extending the knowledge and guidance to apply it. As Goos stated 'Deep learning involves things like extending ideas, detecting patterns, applying knowledge and skills in new contexts or in creative ways, and being critical of arguments and evidence.' (cited in <https://socialsci.libretexts.org>) Moreover, that session gave me how to use mnemonics effectively to recall difficult information and how to apply it to our teaching by encouraging learners' criticality.

Turning to my future goals, applying what I have learnt so far to my teaching is one of my foremost priorities. I want to make my learners feel an authentic learning environment and teach future leaders whose critical thinking skills are high. I am planning to implement all the things which I find beneficial for my learners to boost their confidence in learning and develop their criticality. As a potential future researcher I am contemplating conducting research about how to enhance learner's critical abilities efficiently in Uzbekistan and make them ready to analyze any situations and give their mature consideration about them.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of fostering a supportive, student-centered learning environment to enhance both academic and emotional development. The use of circular seating arrangements, rapport-building, and experiential learning techniques were shown to significantly improve student engagement and confidence, while the integration of visual aids facilitated deeper comprehension of complex concepts. These findings suggest that teachers who adopt a facilitative role and promote learner autonomy can positively influence students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The implications of this approach are far-reaching, suggesting that incorporating these strategies can lead to more effective learning outcomes and a more inclusive classroom environment. However, further research is necessary to explore the long-term impacts of these methods on student success, particularly in diverse educational contexts. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of these strategies across different age groups and cultural settings, as well as their potential for enhancing higher-order thinking skills and lifelong learning competencies.

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