

The ToolBox

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A Teaching and Learning Resource for the Faculty of Indiana Wesleyan University



Lecture-Induced Mind Paralysis: The Quest for a Cure

I would like to invite you to participate in a virtual field trip. Imagine that you have just entered the hallway of an academic building on a college campus of your choosing anywhere in the world. Now imagine you are walking down a hallway during a time of the day when classes are in session. Stop and listen. What do you hear as you walk past these classrooms? There is a high probability that the most prevalent sound you will hear is the voice of a faculty member delivering a lecture or a monologue. Although there may be brief interludes of conversation and dialogue around the topic at hand, the professor's voice is almost universally the foremost sound emanating from these classrooms.

Let's continue on with the second part of this virtual field trip. As you continue walking down the hall, now observe the students seated in these classrooms. What do you see in their eyes? What does their body language tell you? Do their facial expressions give you any indication of their level of involvement and engagement in the learning process. Quite often, there is a look of passivity and resignation that may reflect a variety of feelings including fatigue, boredom, disinterest, and/or capitulation to their required physical presence (but conceivably optional mental engagement).

A retrospective version of the virtual field trip that you have just completed was described by Spence (2001):

For just a moment, assume that time travel is possible. Plop a medieval peasant in a modern dairy farm and he would recognize nothing but the cows. A physician of the 13th century would run screaming from a modern operating room. Galileo could only gape and mutter touring NASA's Johnson Space Center. Columbus would quake with terror in a nuclear sub. But a 15th century teacher from the University of Paris would feel right at home in a Berkeley classroom. (p. 13)

These scenarios invoke thoughts about the current controversies and discussions in higher education: What should we be teaching in college classrooms and what are the best ways to facilitate student learning?

There are many opinions, and a considerable amount of rhetoric, that have been put forth as possible responses and solutions to this question. On a more personal level, consider the worst-cases scenario of teaching at the college level. There you are, standing in front of a classroom looking into the eyes of your students. As you glance at your notes, and then at your watch, you realize that another twenty minutes remain in the class period. Simultaneously, you survey the classroom. There you see what you most dread—blank stares, drooping eyes, heads that appear too heavy to support their own weight, uncontrollable doodling, window/door gazing, and compulsive clock watching. It is a helpless feeling. You continue to talk knowing that your words and wonderfully clever thoughts are drifting off into the atmosphere never to connect with the hearts and minds of your students. What you are observing and experiencing are the classic symptoms of "Lecture-Induced Mind Paralysis." The diagnostic signs (in the box at the right) are familiar to all of us who have spent time in a college classroom. This edition of *The ToolBox* is part of a worldwide campaign to wipe out Lecture-Induced Mind Paralysis in our lifetimes.

Join us today as we fight against this dreaded disease that impacts the lives of countless college students around the world.

Spence, L. (2001, November). The case against teaching. *Change*, 33(6), 10-19.

Diagnostic Signs of Lecture-Induced Mind Paralysis

- ◆ Drooping eyes
- ◆ Profuse drooling
- ◆ Extended periods of staring
- ◆ Head appears too heavy to support its own weight
- ◆ Dazed appearance
- ◆ Uncontrollable doodling
- ◆ Snoring
- ◆ Window/door gazing



Ten Ways to Work With Millennial Students And Defeat Lecture-Induced Mind Paralysis

1 Invest your time in getting to know the life stories of your students Find ways to connect with your students outside of class and begin to learn their individual stories and share yours. This simple commitment turns the classroom into a group of people that you know (and who know you) rather than a sea of faces.

2 Think outside the box of traditional classroom routines and structures Think of each class session as an experiment and adventure in learning. Try new things, take a chance, do something new this week. What is the worst thing that could happen?

3 Intentionally connect content with practice Always ask yourself the "So what?" and "Now What?" questions. These questions help us evaluate the content of what we are teaching and how we are connecting that content to real world scenarios (i.e., Here's how this information is playing itself out in the world-at-large).

4 Use technology—wisely and judiciously Millennials are generally quite technologically savvy. We all need to take the time and effort to enhance our own abilities to effectively use technology in the classroom. Technology, however, is not an end in itself. It is a tool that can enhance learning and is not a substitute for good planning and good classroom conversation.

5 Create narratives Millennials love stories. Great stories are all around us. Use stories (e.g., historical accounts, letters, movies, plays, fictional literature) as a way of breathing life into your teaching. Narratives provide a context for our teaching. Narratives also provide a touch point for students to make connections between course content and their own unique narratives.

6 Incorporate varied strategies for group work Millennials generally love to work in groups. That is a really great thing because working in groups is one of the most effective ways to facilitate the processing and application of newly acquired knowledge, skills, and dispositions. As a means of holding yourself accountable in this area, set a limit on the number of PowerPoint slides that you use during each class session or the maximum number of minutes that you will talk. Given this newly available time, how will you spend it wisely?

7 Show you care, share your passion Students often talk quite openly about what they like and what they don't like about faculty members. Two clear characteristics consistently emerge as they describe the faculty members that they admire the most and are most interested in learning from: They care for their students and they have a passion for their subject matter. Be that teacher!

8 Look at your students with high expectations in mind Is the glass half-full or half-empty? It is easy to get caught up in the dialogue that leads to the conclusion that students don't care, that their skills are declining, that they don't come to college to learn, etc. Resist the temptation to be part of these discussions. Use your influence by setting high expectations and being a coach/facilitator who helps each student move toward noteworthy levels of achievement. That is the essence of the teaching and learning paradigm.

9 Talk less You know a whole bunch of "stuff" about your discipline. That is good news. There is no obligation, however, to verbalize all of it over the course of a single semester. Try thinking of your role as one of helping students find the answers to the most important questions in the discipline you are teaching. As a short-term goal, try to reduce the amount of direct talking and lecture that you do by 20%. You will be amazed at how much your students have to say and the number of questions they have to ask. Their sharing and asking questions can lead to higher levels of learning.

10 Only make rules that you are willing to enforce Millennials have a keen sense of fairness. They generally respect authority and the rules. Your job becomes one of deciding which rules are really important and worthy of diligent enforcement and which rules are just rules for the sake of having a rule.

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