

How Can I Get Students to Take Responsibility for Their Own Learning?

Presented by:

Christy Price, Ed.D.



©2013 Magna Publications Inc.

All rights reserved. It is unlawful to duplicate, transfer, or transmit this program in any manner without written consent from Magna Publications.

The information contained in this online seminar is for professional development purposes but does not substitute for legal advice. Specific legal advice should be discussed with a professional attorney.

To make this program available to all your faculty and staff, contact Magna's Customer Service department at 1-800-433-0499 and ask about our Campus Access License.

Christy Price:

Hello, and welcome to How Can I Get Students to Take Responsibility for their own Learning? sponsored by *The Teaching Professor*. I'm Christy Price from Dalton State College. I'm really excited to be here with you on this particular topic. I've been teaching for 20 years, and this is something I've been aspiring to do over my entire career. I'm going to overview our learning goals very quickly before we get started.

What I try to do is describe that literature related to motivating student responsibility and look at some specific practices that might promote student responsibility and then reflect on how we might alter our core structure to promote that type of responsibility. So I'd like to begin with some students here. When I think of this, this is what I'm looking for. The ideal student shows up, excited. They're prepared. They take responsibility for their own learning. This student does exist.

Of course, we also have students who still, as I said, 22 years in, I still, this semester, had a student approach me and say, did I miss anything important, after missing a class. So I try to just take it all in stride and find that humorous at this point. But the idea is hopefully we not train students but get them to alter their behaviors by creating a different social situation and expectations in the class.

One of the things I do want to address, and this is kind of the moment when your own parent effectiveness really comes back to haunt you. This is my own little man who says, Mom, if you help me clean up my toys, I'll give you a sticker. The idea behind this, of course, is we've raised a whole generation of children on stickers, and when they play soccer, everyone gets a trophy just for showing up. And so there's this expectation that they will get a toy from the treasure chest for just doing what's expected. And I know this is problematic.

There has been some research in educational psychology. I'll list in the reference section Kohn's work and Deci and Ryan where they've argued that extrinsic motivators really demotivate intrinsic desire to learn. However, what I've found in my research kind of counters that at this point in time with this millennial generation of students, because when asked what's the number one characteristic there of ideal assessment, their number one answer is that it's graded.

In other words, in the narrative portions of my surveys, I read over and over again students saying things like, my math professor sends us home to do problems for homework, but they don't collect them or require them for a grade. So the first thing that I've captured in my own research is for this generation of students, if we're going to motivate them to, for example, as I travel and present to professors on faculty development,

their big concerns are how do I get my students to read, how do I get them to show up prepared, how do I get them to discuss?

And my first answer to that is we have to hold students accountable with consistent consequences. So as you see here, I've got a student texting, and the idea behind this is one of the many things that, as I travel, professors are concerned about, is student texting in class and so forth.

And what I will say is as I have collected data from students, one of the things that they have noted is a professor will introduce a course, and in their syllabus and on the first day of class say, I don't want students texting in class, put your cell phones up, and so forth. But then over the course of the semester, when students are bored or don't feel like paying attention, they'll pull out their cell phone and start texting. And they will tell me that the professor doesn't respond at all. And so the message to them is that I guess it's okay if we're texting.

So that's one of the things I want to make sure if we're creating this social environment where everyone is attentive that we do hold students accountable in whatever way. I mean, some of you may feel like you don't mind if students are texting and not paying attention. But if you do have this sort of course policy, the first issue is making sure that you are following up with consistent consequences.

My second tip here is we have to resist the temptation, and I'm so guilty of this, for taking responsibility for them. In other words, I'll have faculty tell me, well, I assigned the reading, and then the students came to class, and none of them read it. Well, if that's the case, we need to start embedding, as we'll see, either online quizzing through our learning management system, use of quicker quizzes, short quizzes, something like that to hold them accountable.

And I'll still have faculty say, well, because they didn't do the reading, then I went ahead and covered it and lectured for them. So what we're doing is taking responsibility for them, so we want to be careful. And once again, part of the reason I'm hitting these highlights on this is that I'm guilty of these things as well in trying to change how I'm handling these situations.

So one of the things that we need to do is to clearly define the roles, and this is just one example from a syllabi, but grades are earned based on your performance. Be careful to note the requirements for earning the grade you desire, and be sure to devote yourself accordingly. So we need to constantly reiterate to students what our expectations are, what we find their role to be, and then, of course, what our role is as well.

So here's an example of clearly defining our role. Someone, and, once again, I'm stealing other syllabi, but this person says, because I have this certain number of students, I'm ethically obligated to be fair to students who attend, so I'm not going to copy course notes and provide individual tutoring for students who are regularly missing class. One of the things I have never, and as I said, I have issues with this myself. I've had students even recently say to me, well, I know you'll let me make things up, and so I skipped your class to finish a paper for somebody else's class.

And, you know, I have to step back and say, all right, well, I need to have consequences for my students as well, so, I mean, they're all scheduling their work and plans just like we are according to what the requirements are. And so we need to set up those requirements such that they're not going to take advantage of the situation. And once again, that's if you think it's an issue for them and if it's problematic for them missing class. I know in my own classes, statistically, if they're not there, they are less likely to do well. So that's one of the points that we need to make as well.

I have a third main point that relates to a great resource that I absolutely love. It's Blumberg's *Learning-Centered Teaching: A Workbook for Faculty*. And she's really following up on Maryellen Weimer's original work on learning-centered teaching, but it's a workbook approach, and there's lots of fantastic rubrics that really hold us accountable. It was a very challenging book for me in the sense that she's trying to suggest that we need to do things like, once again, hold students accountable for interacting with the contents.

So in the traditional, as you see the thick arrow in the middle there, in the traditional instructor-centered environment, the instructor delves into the content. Learning-centered obviously advocates that there's student-to-student interaction, there's instructor-to-student interaction. But the most important arrows there are the student-to-content interaction arrows that we need to change things such that the students are actually delving into the content.

And we've really been doing too much work for them with our traditional lecture format, because it's us delving into the content, not encouraging the student to delve into the content directly. So one of the ways we can do that is to hold students accountable by, and I'm sure most of you have heard of this, using the inverted classroom or the flip. So I just have a brief video clip of a colleague who's providing an excellent example of using the flipped classroom. She's an award-winning business professor.

[Videotape played]

In business, it's hard to train a senior to be chief executive officer, but that's the premise of the strategy class. We teach them to be a top manager, and how we do that is through cases. These are about 20 pages, more or less, about a current company. So, for example, we just finished a case on Blockbuster and Netflix looking at how the bricks and mortar Blockbuster stores are going away and being replaced by technology and that Netflix, sending through the mail, that model is going to go away and is going away with streaming and online video.

So we take companies at a particular point in time and analyze them. We look at their financials. We look at their customer information. And students can really go deep into a business and learn what they did right and what they did wrong. And I even ask them, what would you have done differently if you were CEO?

And their project in this class is to pick a local publicly traded company. I've picked about 12 companies in a 100-mile radius of here on the, us here on the DSC campus, and the students analyze them and look at their competitor. I think the focus that I really push in helping teaching is to get them more real-world experience.

[End of videotape]

So as you can see, this is a method that's used in, wow, in math particularly. One of the things that traditionally had been happening, when I was in college, math was watching the professor do the problems. One of the beauties of the flip is that now the students are actually doing the work. And as they say, whoever does the work does the learning. That's one of the wonderful things about the flip. So that's part of holding students, one way to hold students accountable.

The other is through, and highly advocated for student success, regular low-stakes formative assessment with feedback. And so when I started 20 years ago, I was like most people lecturing and giving midterms and finals and not doing a lot of regular assessment. One of the things that's happened, of course, is the high school environment has changed drastically too where they're using a lot of low-stakes formative assessment, because we find it to be more effective. So I transitioned to giving tests over a group of chapters and then two chapters.

And, finally, now in my introductory courses, and all of this applies, of course, more to 1000- and 2000-level courses, especially gen eds, we need to be doing regular low-stakes formative assessment, which means that we're not focusing on this kind of mid-term/final huge assessment type situations where students are failing horribly. So I advocate, of course,

Bruff's *Teaching with Classroom Response Systems*. It's one quick and easy way to manage particularly large classes to quiz in.

And as we saw previously, you can use the learning management system as well to do online quizzes before students come to class. This is one way we can hold students accountable, but the feedback part is critical. Still, I see students not caring about the feedback after an assessment, so we need to structure things such that they're almost forced to get the feedback.

And that's what I love about the clickers, very immediate. They see they got the right answer or the wrong answer. You can have immediate discussion about why the answer is right and which answer is wrong and why it's wrong. It's a beautiful thing.

So moving on, my fourth tip here is developing students' self-evaluative and metacognitive learning to learn skills. And this is an entire workshop in and of itself. But I will say, once again, Blumberg's book has some great activities, and I'll also advocate in our list of references *How Learning Works* by Ambrose and his colleagues. There are some wonderful things in those, in that literature about how to infuse self-evaluation to help students focus on learning-to-learn skills.

One of the things I'm realizing is that a lot of introductory freshmen don't have these skills, and so we're needing to embed things to make sure that they stop and, metacognition, think about their thinking, why they answered the way that they did, how they're going about studying, and so forth. So some things related to that, and you'll see in the packet, using rubrics, I have a course contribution rubric that you can kind of check out there, but developing self-assessment skills and providing clear expectations with rubrics.

So I'm a huge advocate of rubrics in terms of helping students self-evaluate. So any time you're having an assignment, I advocate a rubric and making sure that as part of the rubric the students are actually self-assessing before they even turn in their assignments. The other part of this then, as we said, reflection is built into the rubrics. What everyone is doing in terms of assessment and requiring students to reflect on assessment is test wrappers or quiz wrappers.

So for any initial assessment, you would ask students what did they do to prepare, what did they expect based on what they did to prepare, but most importantly what they would do differently next time. So hopefully, we're embedding this sort of stop and process after every assessment. And I would also advocate a number four there that I didn't list on the slide, but that is we can also ask for feedback about what we can do differently to

help them so another way to get feedback from students about our own performance.

Moving on, we've got utilizing social pressure, and that doesn't sound very positive, but Michelson's book on a team-based approach is wonderful. I have lots of faculty that I interact with in workshops who say they tried group work, but it just didn't work, because you get social loafing and students not paying attention or not pursuing the task and other students doing all the work.

And so if we do team-based or group work effectively, we can counteract that. And what I've found is that when students are being evaluated by other students, it really ups the ante on their performance and their work. So this is a picture of students who are, and this is such a great way to use clickers, and you can do this in other ways too, but they're doing peer assessment.

So they switch clickers, basically, and so you give your partner your clicker, and they take yours. And you click in and do some private self-evaluation on a regular basis or a peer evaluation on a regular basis, which, once again, you stop all the social loafing and group works and so forth with students who know they're being assessed by their peers. It makes them step up in terms of their role in the group and their role in contributing to class and so forth.

At this point, I know lots of people who are doing performance-based classes whenever a student has a presentation or a work that is a creative work that they're sharing with the class. Everybody in the class clicks in to give them an A, B, C, or D. And what happens here then is we are not the only person assessing them. They have 30, 40, 50 other students clicking in, which makes, once again, makes them step up in terms of the work that they are producing.

My next slide here is hard to see, but it's actually something that a participant from a faculty development workshop wrote on the board when we were at break during a workshop. And basically, his question was, whose responsibility is it to get the nuggets in the bucket, which kind of made me chuckle, because when I step back and think about this, really, we have to embrace the idea that our greatest challenge isn't assisting the students in achieving the outcomes, it's getting them to want to achieve the outcomes.

So you've probably seen this particular quote, but it's a fabulous one. It's not about filling the pail, right? It's about lighting the fire. So my last few tips are kind of related to how do we light the fire so that students will want to take responsibility for their own learning? This one suggests that

we're going to create intrinsic motivation by making outcomes and class activities relevant.

Once again, this can be an entire workshop in and of itself, but what we're trying to advocate here is if we connect our content to student lives, their current lives, their academic lives, their future professional lives, to any kind of current events, students in this generation are constantly asking why, if we propose our content from that perspective, they're much more likely to be engaged, excited, and motivated.

So one of the ways to do this is to structure courses to develop professional competency. So basically what I'm arguing here is whenever we have content that is requiring students to do things, presentations, group work, we embed a professional behavior rubric. So there's a sample of that in the packet, and it depends on what your discipline is, but the idea here is then students link the course content to their future, and they're much more motivated.

So these closing slides are kind of intriguing in that they're from an interesting communication literature source, Nancy Duarte's book, *Resonate*. And for me, Duarte's work was kind of a life-changing, had a life-changing impact on me in the sense that what she did was analyze all the classic examples, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., all of these people who were persuasive and really had influence on other people. And she basically argues that what they're doing is proposing here is a situation and how it is and comparing it to how it could be.

And so I have the turbines here to suggest that, you know, we're using energy in a certain way right now, but it could be different. And that's what we want to do with students, looking at their skills, their life. We basically, as Duarte argues, we want to lead them on the hero's journey, showing them here's how things are, but if you engage in the content and the discipline, here's how they could be. Here's the difference you can make.

So the student is basically the hero, and we are the mentor. And as silly as this sounds, she uses the analogy of we are Yoda on Luke Skywalker's back basically guiding the student through the call of the discipline, whatever that is, addressing the obstacles, encouraging them so that they, the student, are the hero that prevails in the discipline. If we can do that, that's how we inspire and motivate students.

So in closing here, I just have a couple of slides addressing the, one of the most important ways to do that, obviously. And the only way to really mentor students successfully is to develop positive rapport. So there's lots of literature in higher ed and other communication literature you'll see in

the reference lists that suggest positive rapport is a key to kind of developing that mentoring relationship.

And so there's a list, a rapport checklist that I'll embed, but the most important thing about that is not the individual things on the rapport checklist but the idea or question of whether we are perceived by students as on their side. So if there's one thing in closing that you'd want to ask students, it is, do you perceive me as on your side? And if not, why not, and what do I need to do differently such that you can build rapport to then use that rapport positively to inspire and motivate them?

Thank you so much. We would like to know what you think, so please fill out the evaluation form here on SurveyMonkey. And if I, myself, can be of help to you in the future, please do let me know. Thank you again.