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CRANIUM TO CLASSROOM: A SCHOLAR'S PERSPECTIVE

Teaching techniques are acquired over a time period, but my recent experience has shown that there are exceptions. An innovative seminar by renowned experts could rapidly transform one's teaching delivery techniques. It did for me! A recent seminar on teaching practices, "Cranium to Classroom: Brain-based Teaching Practices" by Buddy McKendree and Aaron McKin (both Faculty Members at Michigan State University) enhanced my understanding and thereby my capacity on the subject. Their presentation has increased my appreciation of good teachers; participants were practically taught how to teach effectively. This model could be replicated in our Nigerian instructional practices.
The Seminar presentation introduced innovation with its participatory delivery. First, all participants were asked to visualize themselves in a classroom setting, preferably the last class or seminar participants had attended and then draw what they had visualized on paper. We had some interesting visual representations of students who were in the classrooms to fulfil graduation requirements and not really caring about understanding what they were being taught. We learned that students' concentration span during a classroom session is divided into three parts:

- Prime-time-1: High concentration or attention. The first 25 minutes of a lecture.
- Downtime: Students no longer pay attention or get distracted or lose their concentration. Downtime occurs during the next 30 minutes after prime-time-1.
- Prime-time-2: Students regain their concentration or begin to pay attention again to a lecture. It happens approximately in the last 25 minutes of an 80 minutes' lecture.

By understanding students' concentration span pattern, one can imagine what a three-hour lecture of hearing someone drone on about statistics would look like! A lot of wasted time. As educators, we were taught to recognize that individuals cannot hold their attention on one thing for the duration of a class. We need to take the total time of teaching/learning experiences and "chunk" that time into shorter activities that match the attention span of our learners. We must learn how to innovatively bring up off-task which include activities to help students reset their

brains and refocus their attention during expected down-time periods. Off-task activities, especially humor, increases students' oxygen and reduces blood pressure. Other activity options that can be introduced during a lecture for effective learning include but are not limited to:

- Case studies: small groups of learners analyzing a scenario from opposing viewpoints
- Games: contest in which learners compete for a specified outcome
- Individual worksheets: learners individually answering questions
- Review of Content: summary of the learning experience, reviewing important concepts.
- Hands-on activities: interacting directly with physical objects relevant to content
- 5-minute break times to use the restroom
- Role-Play: acting out a scenario or situation by learners
- Demonstration: instructor illustrating a skill for learners
- Reading: learners individually reading the content etc.

In conclusion, the "primacy-recency" effect should be our teaching approach. The primacy-recency effect describes the phenomenon whereby, during a learning episode we tend to remember best that which comes first (prime-time-1), second best that which comes last(prime-time-2) and least that which comes just past the middle(down-time). The quality of teaching is far more important than the quantity of what is been taught. It is important for teachers/lecturers to have refresher courses on how to teach effectively as the years go by. We must learn to use these attention spans effectively to deliver that which is the important in our scale of preference.

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