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## Reader's Response: Learning about Learning: Moving Beyond a Teacher-Centered Approach

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### **Abstract**

**Excerpt:** Two articles in the January 2013 issue address the need for teachers to focus on student learning rather than on what the teacher does (Scoufis, 2013) and make learning the object of inquiry (Cerbin, 2013). A big part of making this happen is reducing or eschewing lecture that is one-directional and one-dimensional. This often means that teachers must overcome many habits, biases, or misconceptions about lecture. Like many (if not most) professors, I began my teaching career as a strictly-by-the-book lecturer and has gradually over time worked through his own limitations and prejudices to incorporate more and more active learning strategies, such as classroom voting (Lesser, 2011) or liberating structures such as 1-2-4-whole (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2010).

### **Keywords**

Scoufis, Cerbin

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## Learning about Learning: Moving Beyond a Teacher-Centered Approach

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Two articles in the January 2013 issue address the need for teachers to focus on student learning rather than on what the teacher does (Scoufis, 2013) and make learning the object of inquiry (Cerbin, 2013). A big part of making this happen is reducing or eschewing lecture that is one-directional and one-dimensional. This often means that teachers must overcome many habits, biases, or misconceptions about lecture. Like many (if not most) professors, I began my teaching career as a strictly-by-the-book lecturer and has gradually over time worked through his own limitations and prejudices to incorporate more and more active learning strategies, such as classroom voting (Lesser, 2011) or liberating structures such as 1-2-4-whole (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2010).

These techniques have emerged within a context of an educational community of practice at my university, launched by professional development workshops (usually sponsored by our university's teaching center) and sustained by regular gatherings of committed faculty to experience the techniques and debrief. This reinforces the suggestion of Scoufis (2013, p.2) that for the greatest potential for lasting impact, what is needed is not just scholarly reflection as individuals, but also sustained engagement within a network of colleagues (who need not be within the same discipline).

The point is also well taken by Cerbin (2013, p. 2) that learning deserves to be "an object of inquiry in its own right", not just "a criterion for teaching effectiveness." My use of classroom voting, for example, gives me invaluable real-time information about what would be the best use of class time at certain junctures and about what misconceptions students have, but no permanent records are kept of those votes for the formal assessment of my teaching. As Cerbin notes, it is crucial to identify those gateway/threshold concepts and I have found that they are often quite basic, such as the nature of a variable (Lesser, 2013). I have also found it extremely helpful to my teaching to conduct small-scale studies to understand better what students are thinking when they encounter particular concepts (Sorto, White, & Lesser, 2011) or even particular words (Lesser & Winsor, 2009).

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