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Giving Students a Chance to Learn: Hitting Pause and Engaging Students

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Giving Students a Chance to Learn: Hitting Pause and Engaging Students

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Book Review:

Rice, G. T. (2018). *Hitting pause: 65 lecture breaks to refresh and reinforce learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/USU/detail.action?docID=5210875>.

“We know it is not what we teach that counts, it’s what our learners learn. It’s not enough to merely spout information. If our students don’t learn, we haven’t taught, no matter how much information we provide” (Rice, 2018, p. 12).

During the upheaval of higher education in the spring of 2020, it became glaringly apparent that as instructors, we needed to adapt to our new circumstances, or our student’s education would suffer. The confusion and upheaval that occurred due to Covid-19 and, in turn, the many restrictions on “traditional” teaching techniques have forced instructors across the nation to reexamine their methods and become more attentive to student learning. For many of us, fear and doubt crept in when reviewing our teaching abilities in this new environment, but from that, a new era has dawned on higher education. A transition for most of us resting on our laurels, to diving back into the literature and taking our teaching to a whole new level. Dr. Gail Rice’s book, *Hitting Pause, 65 Lecture Breaks to Refresh and Reinforce Learning*, is one of those books that an instructor can use to implement immediate and intentional changes in their “classroom” to renew student learning during these difficult times.

Dr. Rice urges instructors not to completely do away with lectures but instead to revamp their current style of teaching to include *lecture pauses*. “A lecture pause occurs when instructor talk stops, and students are asked to think about their learning and what they will do with it” (Rice, pg. 14). She argues that these lecture pauses not only benefit the students by allowing them a chance to relate and recall, but it also benefits the instructors. When the students have

a chance to pause during a lecture, it gives the instructor an opportunity to assess what the students know, what they are getting out of the class, and how they can be more effective in their instruction. While *Hitting Pause* definitely has a storytelling feel to it, filled with relatable anecdotes, Part 2 of the book is dedicated to addressing the brain science evidence-based pedagogy supporting lecture pauses.

Lecture pauses have been shown to improve not only retention among students but teach important skills necessary to learning. Dr. Rice provides ample scholarly evidence that shows pauses facilitate collaboration among students, create a positive and safe environment for learning, and allow students the opportunity to learn how to learn instead of what to learn. In the classroom, both in a traditional classroom and online, instructors are obligated to build a community of learning and lecture pauses give the instructor that opportunity. When students are given the opportunity to direct their own learning on a topic, make connections, and evaluate ideas in a safe and welcoming environment with their peers, their opportunities to succeed in the classroom and in the life increase. “Learning how to learn may be the most valuable skill we help students develop” (Rice, pg. 29), and Dr. Rice suggests three forms of pauses that can help achieve that skill.

Three categories of lecture pauses are presented in *Hitting Pause* - starting pauses, midpauses, and closing pauses – all of which have their own primary objectives for student learning. Starting pauses “grab attention, focus, and break preoccupation” (Rice, pg. 40). These pauses give the class a chance to come together and prepare for the information coming their way. With all the stresses and calls for our attention during these challenging times, getting a student’s attention in class or online can be difficult. Beginning the class with a pause allows students to become engaged and directed towards class. While a starting pause is meant to get the student’s attention, a midpause is meant to keep it. A well placed midpause allows the students to remember, apply, and understand what they have learned. This also benefits the teacher by allowing them to redirect their own energies for a time and recognize where the students are in understanding the presented material. Midpauses also help prevent students from experience cognitive overload. Finally, closing pauses are designed as a powerful learning tool because “of the tasks they help students accomplish but also because of when they occur” (Rice, pg. 59). These pauses stick in the minds of the students due to the recency effect; they remember what happened last. Therefore, instructors can make the most significant impact on their closing pauses by focusing the attention of students on major takeaways, finalizing the lesson, summoning a call to action, and referencing the students’ own lives.

Lectures allow instructors control over the classroom, what is being said, and how it is conveyed. Pauses put the learning back to the students, while facilitating the learning becomes the goal of the instructor. Pauses can be uncomfortable and frightening for both the instructor

and students because each must reimagine what the classroom experience can be utilized for and what skills they need to develop to succeed in it. What is so exciting about Dr. Rice's book is that it gives 65 pauses an instructor can adapt and use in their classroom. The appendix, which is longer than the main part of the book, gives 65 pauses divided among starting, mid-, and closing, which can be utilized within a wide range of classroom settings and for a variety of reasons. Each pause suggests when it should be used (starting, mid-, closing), what type of setting it would work best in (online, lab, small classes, etc.), the characteristics of the pause (focus, review, bookend, affirming etc.), how to implement them, additional suggestions, AND online adaptations. These pauses might make us think about our instruction differently, but isn't that part of our jobs as educators? When we stop growing in our instruction, we stop thinking "how can I do this better for my students" and start thinking "my way is the right way."

Overall, Dr. Rice's book, *Hitting Pause, 65 Lecture Breaks to Refresh and Reinforce*, is a tool that no instructor should be without. No matter if you are just starting off teaching or have been teaching for decades, this book gives insight, through evidence-based research, on how intentional pauses can improve instruction and student retention. Pauses can be used in the traditional classroom to help students focus, understand what they have been taught, apply it to their own lives, and have an overall more enjoyable learning experience. What is amazing about pauses is that they can accomplish these same things in the online/broadcast learning environment. Instead of just posting a lecture online and having a student do an assignment after, instructors can break the assignment into pauses. This would be a starting pause asking what they know about the topic, a midpause for them to reach out to a fellow student to share something they learned from the lecture, and a closing pause having them apply what they learned to a real-life issue or problem.

How we teach impacts our students, especially in times of chaos and uncertainty. As instructors, we can continue to act as if this is just business as usual, keeping to the same old lectures and the same ways of instruction. Pausing to just take a breath feels like a luxury somedays; how can we find time to restructure lectures and still cover all the information we must teach. However, the book *Hitting Pause* challenges us to be better and adapt to the new age of teaching we all find ourselves in. It not only presents the evidence that pauses help students' focus, retention, metacognition, and the classroom environment, but directions on how to utilize them in already established lectures. As instructors, if all we have to do is stop talking and pause to improve the learning experience for our students, why wouldn't we?