



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## I'LL TAKE EDUCATION FOR \$100

I had always loved discussing movies with many of my associates. But when I began teaching film, I could not generate any student discussion. I tried a diversity of exercises to get students more involved.

One exercise was to have the class research a fact relevant to the period when the movie, that we were scheduled to watch, was made. Some students would bring their facts to class, but I would have to pry the information from them—with no discussion, just a quick sentence about the fact.

In another exercise, I split the class into groups. I gave each group a multi-part question about a movie they had seen. I thought that a multi-part question would need more than a one-sentence response and class discussion might develop as a result. The groups discussed responses and brought them back to class. One student from each group recited what the recording student wrote, but no more. I asked follow-up questions, but the responses were as short as possible and only served to break the silence.

Thoroughly frustrated and out of ideas, I discovered the problem. These students were not budding film majors! These freshmen and sophomores had no knowledge of movies, except maybe those made in the last 10 years. Any movies older than that—i.e., almost all of them—were obscure, foreign concepts. Students had no point of reference and no desire to discuss anything more.

The class wanted to watch a movie, write about it, and get a grade. Students wanted to bide their time until the end of the semester. As the semester continued, they would listen and occasionally comment on the topic. Every question about a movie that generated a minor discussion was considered a small victory.

Students continued to come to class, but how much enhanced critical thinking occurred? At the end of the semester, some students commented that they gained knowledge and benefited from the class, but I wanted more than crumbs of student enhancement. I wanted a motivated class of students, willing to take chances and discuss the movie they just watched. I wanted students to analyze themes, concepts, and reflections.

This behavior continued for two semesters. The students introduced themselves and the movies they liked in the first class. But as the semester rolled through the movies, students' walls of silence were being built higher and higher.

Student motivation finally came when I taught Film Comedy. As suggested by its title, Film Comedy lends a different mood to the class. An adventurous spirit to try one more time overcame me. I was ready to take a chance on being creative and thinking outside of the box as I weighed the potential outcomes. But what would work? Most people, no matter what age, like to compete, especially if there is a prize at the end—even if the prize is only just winning.

Students would have to compete on teams to make the exercise move quickly and not become boring. They did not have the knowledge or experience to compete individually.

With a class of fewer than 20 students, I decided to split them into two teams, making one of the best students the spokesperson for each of the teams. The spokesperson was an important position because she/he would have to decide which response to give as the answer if the team could not agree.

Having decided on the set-up, what type of format would work? The questions had to be pertinent to the course and could not be too advanced. What format could be educational, but not *appear* educational? The answer was a game show—people love playing “Jeopardy” and “Password,” and they are educational games.

Keeping the game show premise in mind, I developed only one category. Instead of dollar amounts, I numbered the questions, so the teams only had to give me a number. The topic for the category became a primary learning area of Film Comedy, the different types of Film Comedy. The title of the category became: “Is it Satire, Farce, Black Comedy, or Drama?” The students did not have to name the movie, only decide on the type of comedy or whether the movie was a drama. I began reading through dozens of short synopses of movies to choose several that fell into one of those categories.



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The educational purpose developed at the same rate as the exercise—to broaden students' knowledge of movies and determine how well a group of students can work together to identify the comedy type, based on a short description of the action in the movie.

I somewhat embellished the introduction to the comedic nature of the category, explained the rules, and hoped for the best reaction and discussion. I gave the first team the movie description. Members talked together, analyzed the descriptive action of the movie, and came up with an answer. The answer was incorrect, but I had more discussion among the students than anytime in the last two years. The other team was just as animated; each team wanted to win. I enjoyed listening to the comments as each team tried to decide on the answers. The room was alive with discussion! The game was a success!

The class played the game one more time that semester, with the same enthusiasm as the first. Class discussion became contagious as the students began talking more in class, whether playing the game or not. They discovered it was fun to express their thoughts.

I have added extra credits as prizes for the team correctly answering the most questions. I found that some students needed prizes in order to be more competitive. The prize—five extra-credit points—would be added to the next assignment.

The format is easy to adapt to any course. Since that semester, I have changed the titles of the categories based on the course I was teaching. I have added another category—directors—with the same format as the type of comedy category. This semester I am teaching “Popular Cinema” and changed the category to “Name That Genre.” Each category takes approximately two hours to develop or adapt, and is well worth the investment.

Let's face it. Everybody secretly wants to be a game show host. This is your chance! Good luck!

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