



Moving in the Right Direction

Anyone who has ever visited a farm where animals are rounded up by dogs knows that one animal, herding alone, has a more daunting task than two dogs working as a team. Likewise, when students combine their talents, their success is not only efficient but often times remarkable. In fact, students who engage in the learning process through group activities and the generation of course content understand the material better.

Yet, despite overwhelming evidence that lecture-based instruction is largely ineffective for undergraduates, the majority of college professors still predominantly use this method to disseminate information. However, active learning strategies, which require students to engage in the learning process, are more relevant for today's college students.

Active learning strategies can be incorporated into virtually any course, but can be most effective in large classes where maintaining student enthusiasm is difficult. By involving learners in course content, greater flexibility and retention of information can be achieved. Two such examples, "Freeze Frame" and "Multimedia Presentations," have been highly successful in our first and second-year literature and composition courses at Daytona State College, but these methods can also be effectively used in history, humanities, or even science classes.

Freeze Frame

"Freeze Frame" is much like the childhood game, "Frozen Statues," where participants freeze in the position of famous characters and classmates try to guess who they are. In this rendition, instructors break students into groups and assign them to chapters of a text. Next, members individually list five key facts or events from that chapter. As a group, members then decide which events or ideas are most important, and they decide on a way to pantomime these concepts silently to their classmates.

The activity works best when an overall summary precedes the series of pantomimes, or a group member narrates each event that is being depicted immediately preceding the action. The instructor should explain that the task is most successful when the expressions and actions of the players are larger-than-life. This assignment can be given in class, or students can have time outside of class to prepare, which will allow them to gather basic props, if they desire. However, students might be tempted to skip class the day of the presentations

unless a grade is associated with the activity. But after the initial fear of “performing” in front of their classmates subsides, students find the activity to be humorous and engaging.

Multimedia Presentations

“Multimedia Presentations” are another effective strategy for engaging students in the learning process. With this method, students present a selection, using PowerPoint and Internet material. In a literature course, for example, students provide biographical information about the author, discuss the elements of the story, and examine the social contexts of the piece. This can be done in a group or individually.

As the students present their material, it becomes evident that they are methodical in their approach, confident, and efficient. For group presentations, class time is allowed for decisions regarding content. The completed presentations always elicit questions from the class, and the students respond with a professional enthusiasm. This part of the course is always the most engaging for the students.

Conclusion

In addition to being enjoyable and interesting, these active learning strategies help maintain momentum and foster leadership. The variety of individuals and presentations keeps the Facebook generation focused and keeps the herd moving in the right direction.

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