

Significant Shifts in Theory and Practice: From Active Student Engagement and Participation to Student-Faculty Partnership

Uppsala University, 14 October 2015

Activities that Involve Movement and/or High Levels of Participation

Carousel: Students form two concentric circles with equal numbers of people in each, with the students on the inside circle facing the students on the outside circle. Read aloud a provocative statement from an assigned text, or give students slips of paper with statements/problems/issues/challenges/formulas/hypotheses on them, and have the students facing one another talk for three minutes about the statement/problem/hypothesis/etc. Then ask one circle to rotate two or three steps to the left, either ask students to discuss the same statement/problem/hypothesis with a new partner or read or pass out another one, and have students talk with the new person they are facing. Rotate three or four times so students have the chance to talk to three or four different people. After students return to their seats, discuss what they gained from engaging with several different people on the same topic or on the series of topics.

Think/Pair/Share: Ask everyone to take 60 seconds and write their responses or approaches to a statement, problem, question, etc. Then ask them either to share what they wrote with person next to them. Then invite discussion as a larger group. Variation: Ask them to share with the larger group an insight they gained from what their partner wrote.

Silent Board Discussion: After you give the instructions, there should be no talking out loud at all during this activity. Write a key term or statement on the blackboard and circle it. Invite students to come up to the board and define/discuss the term by drawing lines out from the circle (like spokes from the center of a wheel), writing a response at the end of the spoke, and circling it. As responses are added to the board, students can draw lines out from those circled responses and “speak” to them. When students have finished writing, give them a few minutes to read what is up on the board. Then talk out loud about it, referring to what people have written.

Barometer: Designate a continuum with one extreme (at one end of the black/whiteboard or room) being “Agree” and the other (at the other end of the black/whiteboard or room) being “Disagree.” Read aloud a statement and students move to and stand at a point on the continuum that reflects their stance on the issue. Then ask several students to say why they are standing there. As students speak, other students or the speakers themselves can change positions, if what they hear or say changes their minds, and then they can talk about that. Afterwards, debrief/discuss what students learn from the activity. (If you plan to read statements that might make students feel vulnerable, be sure you have built enough trust in the class first.)

Human Bar Graph: Like the barometer, but with a graph format (works well with larger groups). Designate values for the bars (Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Read statements and students line up within the bar that best captures their position, then look around and see where others are. Read a series of statements and have students relocate themselves each time, noting each time where others are. Discuss the patterns during and/or after the activity. What do they reveal about people’s perspectives on the issues/ideas/theories raised? (If you plan to read statements that might make students feel vulnerable, be sure you have built enough trust in the class first.)

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Responding to Excerpts from Texts: Select excerpts from texts and print them on pieces of paper and post those around the room on the walls. Have students walk around the room and write comments, critiques, questions, responses on each. As responses accumulate, students can respond to one another's comments. Once people have circulated, ask students to stand by the excerpt they most want to discuss, asking also that they try to distribute themselves so each excerpt has roughly the same number of people. Have them take the posted excerpt with comments into a small group and discuss in preparation for returning to a large group discussion. (A less time-consuming version of this activity is simply to post the statements, have students walk around and read all of them, then choose one they want to talk about, stand by it, and then divide into small groups and talk about it.)

Fish Bowl: Form an inner circle of desks at which 5-10 students sit. Form an outer circle in which remaining students sit. Have inner circle engage in a discussion of some key topic. Outer circle observes and takes notes. After 10-15 minutes, outer circle can either switch into inner circle (individual students in outer circle stand up and tap the shoulder of an inner student and replace him/her) and the discussion continues, or the outer circle can report on their observations of the inner circle discussion. (If you plan to have the inner circle discuss topics or issues that might make students feel vulnerable, be sure you have built enough trust in the class first.)

Embodying Concepts: Have individual students (if they are confident) or small groups attempt to embody or enact a principle/concept/formula/idea/social dynamic/chemical reaction/etc. Once they have tried it, talk about what kinds of insights or different kinds of understanding emerge from trying to embody rather than simply discuss something.

Doubting and Believing: Create a table that has three columns and 1-3 rows. Above the middle and right columns write "Doubting" and "Believing." In the far left column, write one or more provocative statements (e.g., "Multiculturalism is bad for women"). Have participants fill in everything they doubt AND everything they believe about this statement. They **MUST** find things to put in each column, even if they have to push themselves hard. To debrief the activity, talk about (1) what they learned from having to take up these two stances and (2) what they wrote regarding what they doubt and believe about the statements. The table looks like this (but with more space for writing). (based on Peter Elbow's concept in *Writing without Teachers*)

Read Around: Have students choose a word or phrase from a text you have read. Go around the whole group and have each student simply say the word or phrase. Be sure to tell them in preparation that no one is to frame or explain their contributions in any way, just say them, and repetition is fine. It is key that people simply say the words and phrases and not excuse (i.e., "This might be silly, but..." or "I know Sally already said this, but...") or explain their contributions in an any way. After everyone has spoken, talk about what people heard. (If the group is small, you can have them choose two or three words or phrases and go around two or three times, with the same guidelines [i.e., no framing, explaining, or excusing].)

Quick (Self)Assessments: Ask everyone to write on an index card one thing that they feel clear about from the lecture/discussion/activity and one thing that remains unclear or a question that remains for them. Collect these and use them to inform planning and/or start off the next class session.

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