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Creating Good Classroom Activities

Krisztina V. Jakobsen, Laura Madson, Liz Chenevey



Memory

- All teams are asked the following question:
Of the types of memory presented below, which one is the most useful on a daily basis? Why? Which one would make it most difficult to function without? Why?
- Sensory memory
- Working memory
- Long-term memory
- Students vote using cards to indicate which is the most useful on a daily basis
- Teams engage in discussion about their choices and rationale for the decisions they made
- This is repeated for which one would make it most difficult to function without
- Instructor reiterates the take-away message about the functions of different types of memory

Design an Experiment

- All teams are given the same hypothesis e.g. physiological arousal causes happiness
- Teams work together to design an experiment to test the given hypothesis
- Teams draw up their experimental design to present to rest of class
- Conduct a gallery walk so all teams see the variety of experiments that were developed
- **In a gallery walk, teams post their product on the classroom walls & walk around the room reading eachother's work, a bit like a poster session
- **Students can also vote on the best experiment they see
- Full class discussion highlighting the different ways teams operationalized the independent and dependent variables

Psychological Disorders

- All teams are given a list of psychological disorders to choose from e.g. depression, PTSD, dementia, schizophrenia, OCD, bipolar disorder
- Teams decide which disorder most interferes with daily functioning
- All teams share their choice with the rest of class, either on whiteboard or paper
- Instructor facilitates full-class discussion helping students identify important similarities & differences in choices & reasoning
- Team also submits 3-4 paragraph justification for their choice citing how the symptoms of the selected disorder affect specific aspects of daily functioning

A METAPHOR

Group activities, both in the classroom and out, can be rewarding, but at times difficult experiences. For example, imagine you were organizing a group hike. Everyone is planning on walking the same loop, and has agreed to stay together, with you as the guide. Yet some may find the hike more difficult than others. This could be due to physical ability. It could also be due to how the hikers have prepared for the trail.

If someone shows up in flip flops and with no water, they will be at a disadvantage compared to the avid hiker who has boots, poles, snacks, and a hydration pack. Even with an experienced guide, the unprepared hiker can slow the group down, causing tension.

The same is true for any group activity, especially in the classroom. When students are not prepared, the whole group can be at a disadvantage.

When designing group activities, it is crucial to make sure all students are prepared, so they can have as equal of a starting point as possible.



Voting Cards



Photo from the Team-Based Learning Collaborative. <https://teambasedlearning.site-ym.com/>

Gallery Walk



Photo by Laura Madson

Group Sharing

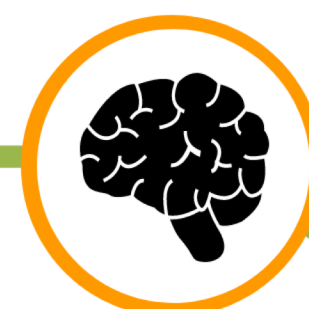


Photo by Edwin Johansson on Unsplash



Same Problem

All teams are given the same question or problem to address. This is necessary for rich discussion because everyone has the same info to work with



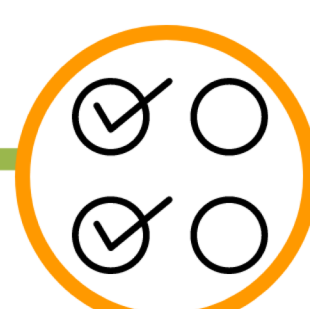
Significant Problem

The questions asks students to demonstrate application or use of course material and is challenging enough to engage students in a meaningful discussion



Simultaneous Reporting

Teams report their decisions. This generates discussion when teams make different decisions and also when they make the same decision but for different reasons



Specific Choice

The problem should offer a specific choice of outcomes. This focuses students' discussion on critical aspects of course content

The 4's

The 4 S's are a framework for designing activities, stemming from Team Based Learning, but that can work in any setting to have students apply content from course materials to answer questions.

The question should map to learning objectives.

To ensure preparation, professors can require the completion of a Pre-Quiz or by conducting a lecture to ensure students have all the necessary information to fully participate in the group activity.

REFLECTIONS

Just like with a hike, the preparedness of the participants can greatly affect a group's experience. The guide has a responsibility to ensure that all participants know what to be prepared for and to offer the same experience to all participants. The 4 S's provide a framework for the students' experience, but as their guides it is the instructors' responsibility to ensure they are prepared and accountable for the content they will be applying. With all these pieces in place, group activities can enhance the learning environment for all.

Some benefits that we have experienced since implementing 5 S activities in our own classrooms:

- Vibrant classroom environment
- Engaged students, especially in larger enrollment classes
- Improved attendance
- Reduced attrition
- Students enjoy class time
- Opportunities for students to develop skills emphasized by the APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major 2.0

NOW WHAT?

Want to try this in your own class, but not sure where to begin? We have provided just a few examples of what we have tried and have worked for us. Find a list of further resources and other examples of class activities using the QR code below!



References:
 Michaelsen, L.K., Knight, A.B., & Fink, L.D. (2004). Team-based learning: A transformative use of small groups in college teaching. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
 Sibley, J., & Ostafichuk, P. (2014). Getting started with team-based learning. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.