



Assessing Class Participation: One Useful Strategy

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One of the changes we have seen in academia in the last 30 years or so is the shift from lecture-based classes to courses that encourage a student-centered approach. Few instructors would quibble with the notion that promoting active participation helps students to think critically and to argue more effectively. However, even the most savvy instructors are still confounded about how to best evaluate participation, particularly when it is graded along with more traditional assessment measures, such as essays, exams, and oral presentations. Type the words “class participation” and “assessment” into www.google.com, and you will get close to 700,000 hits.

Providing students with a clear, fair, and useful assessment of their class participation is challenging for even the most seasoned educator. Even when I provide a rubric that distinguishes every category of participation from outstanding to poor, students are often still confused about precisely what it is that I expect from them. It is not unusual, for example, for students to believe that attendance and participation are synonymous. On the other hand, when we attempt to spell out too precisely what it is we expect in the way of contributions, we run the risk of closing down participation. In one online site that offers assessment guidelines, for example, the course instructor characterizes “unsatisfactory” participation as follows: “Contributions in class reflect inadequate preparation. Ideas offered are seldom substantive, provide few if any insights and never a constructive direction for the class. Integrative comments and effective challenges are absent. If this person were not a member of the

class, valuable airtime would be saved.” The language used in the description—“inadequate,” “seldom,” “few,” “never,” and “absent”—hardly encourages positive results. The final sentence is both dismissive and insensitive. Shy students are unlikely to risk airing an opinion in a classroom climate that is negatively charged. Certainly, the same point can be made by simply informing students, in writing, that infrequent contributions to class discussions will be deemed unsatisfactory and merit a “D” for the participation grade.

While there are a number of constructive guidelines online for generating and assessing participation, the dichotomy between the students’ perception of their contributions and the instructor’s assessment of participation is still often a problem. One tool that I have found particularly effective is to administer a brief questionnaire early in the semester (as soon as I have learned everyone’s name), which asks students to assess their own participation to date. Specifically, I ask that students do the following: “Please check the statement below that best corresponds to your honest assessment of your contribution to class discussion thus far:

- I contribute several times during every class discussion. (A)
- I contribute at least once during virtually every class discussion. (B)
- I often contribute to class discussion. (C)
- I occasionally contribute to class discussion. (D)
- I rarely contribute to class discussion. (E)”

I then provide a space on the form for the student to write a brief rationale for

their grade, along with the option to write additional comments if they so choose. Finally, I include a section on the form for instructor response. I collect the forms, read them, offer a brief response, and return them at the next class meeting.

This informal self-assessment exercise does not take long, and it always provides intriguing results. More often than not, students will award themselves a higher participation grade than I would have. Their rationale often yields insight into why there is a disconnect between my perception and theirs. For example, a student may write, “I feel that I have earned a ‘B’ so far in class participation. I know that I’m quiet, but I haven’t missed a class and I always do my reading.” Using the “Instructor Response” space, I now have an opportunity to disabuse the student’s

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Helping Students Learn

Teachers do indeed aspire to help students learn, and most have lots of opinions as to how to accomplish that goal. In the study referenced below, researchers decided instead to start with students. They asked a cohort of teacher-education students to respond to this query: "What happens in my ... classes that helps me to learn?" It's a great question—one all of us could profitably ask our students.

Researchers asked this question and compiled the myriad of varying answers this way: first, 52 students were asked to provide written responses to the questions, either as a list of bulleted points or in short, but separate sentences. Their responses resulted in 248 different ideas, which researchers then organized into 52 different categories. Next, they selected two individual statements that captured the "meaning" and "tone" of each category. (p. 4) To make the next research task doable for subjects, researchers condensed the results. A second cohort of students was given an envelope that now contained 40 statements. Their task was to sort the statements into categories and then rank those categories in terms of their importance as learning aids.

Researchers used both cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling to analyze the results of this sorting task. The following four clusters (or groupings) of items emerged as factors that help learning, and are briefly described here.

Teacher Qualities—Students reported that "passionate, enthusiastic, and inspiring teachers" help them learn. (p. 9) Additionally, students felt that teachers need to understand course content, and they need to be able to communicate that information to students.

Meaningful Tasks—Students reported that certain tasks, such as "writing assignments that help me synthesize ideas and turn the concepts into my own," also helped them learn. (p. 9) Students also indicated that tasks that got them to discuss content with peers also helped them to learn.

Effective Pedagogy—Items in this cluster referenced content delivery, the reasonableness of a course's workload, and the clarity of expectations and explanations.

Engagement in Learning—Issues reported in this group related to levels of interest in course topics, the value of hands-on learning experiences, and the kinds of connections students saw between subjects and issues.

Researchers noted that both kinds of analyses underscored "students' perceptions of the pivotal role of teacher." (p. 11) Teachers' qualities, like approachability, supportiveness, and responsiveness, "help students engage emotionally and cognitively with the teacher-learning environment." (p. 11)

Another interesting finding involved the way that students disconnect teacher contributions to learning from student contributions to learning. So, when students sorted the various descriptions of what might help them learn in a class, they did not put together statements that referred to teacher and student actions. They did not associate—and, ergo, did not see the connections between—critical reflection (something students do) and readings (something teachers provide). They did not relate an assignment like journaling with owning their own learning.

This research asks an obvious, but terribly relevant question—one that all teachers should ask, and one that all students could profitably answer. Their findings provide a great set of comparative benchmarks.

Reference: Askell-Williams, H., Lawson, M., and Murray-Harvey, R. (2006). "What happens in my university classes that helps me learn?" Teacher education students' instructional metacognitive knowledge. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1 (1).

www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstol/current.htm [electronic journal]

Quizzes Are the Right Answer

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How would you rather spend your class sessions—reviewing the readings for students or having students discussing readings with insight and enthusiasm? Too often, many of us resort to review because we suspect that students have not even looked at the readings. These lectures fill the silence of student noninvolvement. And the more we lecture, the more students are encouraged to stay uninvolved. Uninspired by this drudgery, we decided to try something very different, and we are delighted to report that it works. A weekly content quiz has dramatically increased student preparedness, involvement in class discussions, and collaborative learning—and has significantly reduced the need for us to lecture on assigned readings.

Each content quiz is a brief test based on the readings for the class session. Content quiz questions vary in format: they might be short-answer or multiple-choice. Sometimes video clips, short descriptions, or scenarios form the basis for an application question. Content quiz questions require students to apply text concepts, rather than just report what they have read.

Here is how Joe's syllabus introduces the concept of content quizzes to students in the business school where he teaches. **“Weekly Quizzes—This course will include short (15-20 minutes), weekly group quizzes based on the assigned readings. The quizzes will be graded and returned the following week. These 11 scheduled quizzes will begin on Week 2 of class, end on Week 12 of class, and equal 25 percent of your course grade. These are closed book/open notes quizzes. The quizzes will be completed by each student group, with the same grade being issued to all participating members of the group. Each group has**

the option of using a laptop for quizzes and emailing the quiz to me immediately after the quiz is completed.”

Students are permitted to use open notes, but not the text, for the content quiz. This ensures that students have read the text material and have prepared notes based on the material. Students come to class amazingly prepared and brimming with questions and comments about the assigned reading material.

Each of us opens class with an opportunity for students to ask questions about parts of the readings that were not clear or to make comments about the readings. Along with their questions or comments, students are asked to provide a page reference so everyone can consult the text. This questioning/comment period usually turns into a lively discussion, as we ask students to respond to the questions and ideas of their peers. MaryAnn, who teaches in a graduate college of education, adds an incentive to this open-question time. If someone in the class asks one of the questions that appears on that day's content quiz, all present receive an A for that question. This small incentive encourages students to ask insightful questions.

After this opening discussion, students take the quiz, either in groups (that stay the same for the whole course), individually, or some combination of both. Joe's content quizzes are always completed in a group format. MaryAnn tosses a coin: heads, and the students take the quiz as a group and receive a group grade; or tails, and students take and submit individual quizzes. MaryAnn also reserves the right to “professor's preference.” With some content, and under some circumstances, it makes sense for the professor to determine whether it is an individual or group quiz.

Students who are absent or late are not permitted to take the content quiz at a different time. However, they do have the option of writing a short summary or analysis paper based on the session's readings. The maximum grade for these papers is a “B,” underscoring the importance of class attendance. Students who choose not to

write the paper receive a zero for the missed content quiz. Most students submit the summary/analysis paper.

The content quiz, including student question time before the quiz, usually takes about 40 to 50 minutes. We find it works best to schedule this during the first hour of our three-hour class sessions. The rest of class time is then available for case studies, role-plays, discussion of current issues and problems in the discipline, and other activity-based tasks.

Both of us emphasize the need for equal participation among group members. However, because we cannot see exactly what happens in each group, we ask the students for reports on how the group is functioning. In Joe's class, an elected group leader periodically provides information about member participation to the instructor. If a student is not prepared for the content quiz, he or she may be asked to take the content quiz separately from the rest of the group until the group leader and the instructor are satisfied that this student is ready to collaborate. Students in both MaryAnn's and Joe's classes complete peer evaluations that are reflected in each student's class participation grade—a component that equals 25 percent of the course grade. Students provide written feedback on each group member's readiness for class and his or her contribution to the group effort.

Almost all students, both undergraduates and graduates, have responded positively to the weekly quiz requirement and have encouraged us to continue with it in future classes. We, too, are very satisfied with the results: we are lecturing less, and students read and participate more. Their knowledge is stronger, and they are better prepared for collaborative group work. 🍀

Making Cell Phones in the Class a Community Builder

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The first time a student's cell phone rang in my class, I was angry and frustrated. With their musical ringers, cell phones that go off in class are rude and distracting. But how to respond? I've never been very good at playing the heavy. Was there any way I could take this annoying occurrence and twist so that it would contribute to a more positive classroom environment?

I've devised a "cell phone protocol" that has enabled me to make peace with the problem. As it appears in the syllabus, the protocol reads: **"Please turn off your cell phone ringer while in class. Mind you, violation of this protocol will demand punishment—though one that clearly does not infringe on your eighth amendment rights."** I then ask someone to identify the eighth amendment, and as a history professor, I'm happy to report that someone can always explain the constitutional limits on cruel and unusual punishment. I advise students to turn off their ringers in class, and I note that if someone's phone rings, he or she will have to provide the class with food. It doesn't have to be an extravagant meal (remember the eighth amendment!), but there must be

enough for everyone. In the beginning, I offered the possibility of a subsidy to economically unable students. However, I abandoned it once I realized that if students could afford a cell-phone package, they could provide treats to about 30 classmates.

The community-building process develops in earnest when a phone actually rings in class. During an episode that otherwise involves an unpleasant exchange, there is now occasion for celebration, as students cheer at the prospect of their upcoming snack. The cell phone protocol, much like a kangaroo court in baseball, which exacts minor fines for small indiscretions, helps to build an esprit de corps and I push this outcome even further. When it is difficult to discern whether the cell phone rang or was in vibration mode, I encourage the students to vote as to whether or not a violation has occurred.

So what are the drawbacks of this policy? There are few. The biggest is that even with my policy, cell phones still ring in class and they are just as rude and distracting. I see no way around this problem. In my class, students are distracted, but we grow closer as a result of it. The other potential problem is that an instructor might not want food in the classroom. Fair

enough, just have the punishment be something like telling a joke or sharing a poem.

The policy also has produced some wonderful surprises that make me proud of my students. Once a student decided to skip the standard fare of candy and brought in dried fruit. Although most of her peers (and her teacher) were disappointed with the healthy alternative, this student took the opportunity to encourage people to eat a more healthy diet. And at the end of this past semester, one of my quietest students informed the class that she was disappointed in a classmate who still hadn't brought in food for his transgression. The chastened student, who apparently had extra money on his meal card, brought in a buffet for his dumbfounded classmates.

Ultimately, though, the greatest advantage of the cell phone protocol occurs when someone's phone rings in class and the other students start hooting joyously. It doesn't make the phone ringing less distracting; but on the other hand, how often do you hear students cheering in the classroom? 🍀

Cell Phones Do Distract in Class

In case you ever had any doubts, research (reference below) now exists that verifies that both students and teachers find cell phones ringing in class distracting. The results also document strong support from students and faculty for policies against ringing cell phones. Although there was strong support against cell phones going off in class, the strength of that support was mediated by age. The younger cohort in the study was more tolerant of cell phones than the older cohort.

The problem, of course, is that it is virtually impossible to prevent cell phones from ringing in class. They do ring, despite

strongly worded statements in the syllabus, regular announcements in class, and threats of various sorts. This issue's article by Bloom offers a unique way of dealing with the problem, but even in that case, phones still ring. Well, they don't actually ring, they beep out jingles, tunes, and other electronic sounds without pause until they are turned off or answered.

Ringing phones are distracting, and faculty, probably because we didn't grow up using cell phones, seem particularly annoyed when they do go off in class. If you want to generate discussion in the faculty mailroom, ask several folks standing

there what they do about the problem. For many, there's something of a power issue involved here. Despite policies against cell phones in the syllabus, or announcements by the teacher that they must be turned off, right in the middle of an important point, one goes off. Every one hears the phone and watches as someone (who is usually quite embarrassed) retrieves and silences it.

So what should a faculty member do when the inevitable occurs? Confiscate the phone? Accost the offender? Wait and

Views Presented in Class: Balanced?

Do some instructors use their classrooms to indoctrinate students? That has been the concern of some who have gone so far as to propose legislation designed to “take politics out of the university curriculum and to protect the rights of students to get an education rather than an indoctrination.” (p. 112) Students can now document their professors’ biases and experiences in class on a website: www.noindoctrination.org.

Little has been done to document whether the lack of instructor balance in presenting viewpoints is a widespread problem, as perceived by students. The research team below decided to systematically assess this issue in the field of sociology. They looked for answers to these three questions: 1) Do sociology students perceive their instructors to be balanced in their presentation of material and in allowing criticism of their ideas? 2) Do students

that perceive their instructors as presenting a balanced view in the classroom rate their instructors and courses more favorably? 3) What is the relative influence of sociology students’ perceptions of how balanced their instructors are compared to other influences?

Researchers operationalized “balance” as “discusses other points of view” and “invites criticism of ideas.” On a five-point scale, the mean response was four or “often”. These results caused the researchers to conclude that sociology faculty at this large, public research university were “relatively balanced in their approach to teaching.” (p. 122)

Did these “balanced” teachers receive better evaluations? Yes, they did. Both those instructors who discussed viewpoints other than their own and those who invited criticism of their ideas had higher instructor and course ratings.

Data showed that “balance was not as important as other factors in influencing instructor and course evaluation.” It is one correlate of effective teaching but is not as important as other factors in influencing ratings.

Are instructors obligated to present opposing points of view when little or no evidence supports those positions? Instructors, individually and collectively in their disciplines, have debated the ethical ramifications of instructors’ presenting or withholding personal points of view or interpretations of results. In the classroom, the decision is usually an individual one.

Reference: Dixon, J. C., and McCabe, J. (2006). Competing perspectives in the classroom: The effect of sociology students’ perceptions of “balance” on evaluations. *Teaching Sociology*, 34 (July), 111-125. ♥

Preventing Cheating: Do Faculty Beliefs Make a Difference?

“We believe that student beliefs about their peers ... can influence misconduct, while faculty beliefs about student academic misconduct can influence efforts to prevent and challenge the misconduct.” (p. 1059) Said another way, the researchers (citation below) are afraid that if students think that a lot of their peers are cheating, it will increase the likelihood that they will cheat. And, if faculty believe that lots of students are cheating, they will do more to prevent it. Conversely, if faculty don’t think academic dishonesty is much of a problem in their classes, they will do less to prevent it and make it easier for students to get away with it.

This study did reaffirm that cheating among students (at this institution), as reported by students, is widespread. More than 90 percent of the more than 400 students in this sample admitted that they had cheated at least once. The researchers pointed out that data on cheating that differentiates between if and how often are

not generally reported. “Looking at the data this way leads to a different conclusion from examination of overall misconduct rates.” (p. 1078)

The activity students reported doing least often was “improperly” acquiring or distributing exams. The activity they reported doing most often involved working with another student on material that would be submitted for grading when the instructor had not authorized collaboration with others. Results here replicated another finding documented by previous research: males reported more incidents of misconduct than females.

These researchers found that for every one of the 16 behaviors of academic dishonesty, students believed that their peers were engaging in those behaviors more often than their peers reported. The researchers worried that these inaccurate beliefs empower students to cheat more since they believe that “everyone else” is doing it.

Faculty in this study “overestimated the actual frequency of misconduct.” (p. 1076) As for the actual hypotheses about faculty beliefs, they were verified. “Our results showed that faculty members who underestimate the frequency of misconduct very rarely take action to challenge students’ misconduct.” (p. 1076) Their results also verified the reverse. Faculty who overestimated the extent of cheating were more solicitous in their efforts to prevent it.

Researchers advise that both faculty and students should be provided accurate information as to the extent of academic misconduct occurring at an institution. Faculty “need to send [the] message to students through prevention and detection efforts.” (p. 1076)

Reference: Hard, S. F., Conway, J. M., and Moran, A. C. (2006). Faculty and college student beliefs about the frequency of student academic misconduct. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77 (6), 1058-1080. ♥

Large Classes: Approaches Taken in One Discipline

With some regularity in this newsletter, we summarize a research project with results directly relevant to only one discipline. In this case, it's some exploratory descriptive work that seeks to establish the state of practice with respect to large class in the field of criminal justice. We summarize some of the findings of interest below because we don't think that the way in which large courses are taught in criminal justice is all that different from how they are taught in lots of closely, and even in some not so closely, related fields. But even more important, we highlight the work because the article models an approach that could be profitably replicated across all academic disciplines. How do faculty approach large classes in your discipline? How useful is it for large-course instructors to have these benchmarks? How useful is it for disciplines to have descriptions of current practices that might profitably be used to develop standards—not for the purpose of making all practice the same, but for the purpose of establishing the basic tenets of good and best practice within a discipline.

This research team started by surveying the literature for techniques advocated for use in large classes. Then they surveyed large-course instructors to ascertain the extent to which these preferred approach-

es were being used. About 30 percent of the faculty in this sample employed traditional lecture formats exclusively. Another 50 percent enhanced lectures with multimedia presentations of material. The rest used different approaches such as Socratic dialogue. Only 25 percent of the sample reported using active learning techniques, although more than 40 percent reported using learning groups.

Even though literature on teaching large classes recommends "personalization," that is, faculty getting to know their students, nearly 66 percent of this sample reported that they did nothing to get to know the students. Interestingly, class size was not a relevant variable here. Sixty-two percent of the faculty with class sizes below 80 reported that they did nothing; 58 percent of instructors with classes larger than 150 students reported that they did nothing.

Over 90 percent of these faculty reported that they did encourage participation, although 40 percent reported that the amount of participation in their large classes was lower than it was in their smaller classes. In this faculty group, 89 percent reported that they had no discipline problems. One respondent shared a rather novel approach to managing disruptions. If a student is marginally disrupt-

tive, the instructor pulls out a yellow piece of paper and hands it to the student as a warning. If the disruption persists or becomes major, the student is handed a red piece of paper, which functions just like an ejection in soccer. If you get it, you're out of class.

Basically these researchers found that faculty who teach large classes in criminal justice did not use the techniques and practices recommended for large-class instruction. This is not surprising, given the response to the final survey question that asked if the respondent could "recommend any literature that had helped them instruct their large classes. The overwhelming majority (90%) of professors knew of no such literature." (p.118) Norms expecting that practice be informed by anything other than experience continue to be absent in higher education.

Reference: Morabito, M. S., and Bennett, R.R. (2006). Socrates in the modern classroom: How are large classes in criminal justice being taught? *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 17 (1), 103-120. ♥

CELL PHONES

FROM PAGE 4

carry on about how students show no respect? The problem with these loud and powerful responses is that most of the time they don't prevent the problem from recurring.

It seems more prudent not to make a mountain out of a molehill. That doesn't mean molehills have to be tolerated. Their offensiveness should indeed be pointed out. But when the distraction occurs, perhaps there is silence and then an attempt to regroup. "Now, where were we?" "What's the last thing you wrote in your

notes?" "Do you understand what I was trying to explain?" The disruption becomes an opportunity to review and connect with what students are (or are not) understanding. This prevents the disruption from doing even more harm when it not only distracts but results in an unpleasant exchange that threatens the climate for learning.

Reference: Campbell, S. (2006). Perceptions of mobile phones in college classrooms: Ringing, cheating, and classroom policies. *Communication Education*, 55 (3), 280-294. ♥

ASSESSING

FROM PAGE 1

notion that preparation, attendance, and participation are one and the same. I also offer concrete measures that the student can take to improve his or her participation.

When this exercise is done early in the semester, it can enhance both the amount and quality of participation. It helps to build confidence and reminds students that they have to hold themselves accountable for every part of their course grade, including participation. ♥

Active Learning: A Perspective from Cognitive Psychology

By Suzanne M. Swiderski
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In recent years, the phrase *active learning* has become commonplace across the academic disciplines of higher education. Indeed, most faculty members are familiar with definitions that go something like this: Active learning involves tasks that require students not only to do something, but also to think about what they have done. Moreover, many faculty have already incorporated into their teaching activities associated with active learning, such as interactive lectures, collaborative learning groups, and discussion-related writing tasks.

However, faculty may not be aware that, from the perspective of cognitive psychology, the meaning of active learning is slightly different. According to cognitive psychology, active learning involves the development of cognition, which is achieved by acquiring “organized knowledge structures” and “strategies for remembering, understanding, and solving problems.” (This particular definition is from a cognitive psychology text edited by Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, School*.) Additionally, active learning entails a process of interpretation, whereby new knowledge is related to prior knowledge and stored in a manner that emphasizes the elaborated meaning of these relationships.

Faculty interested in promoting this cognitively oriented understanding of active learning can do so by familiarizing

their students with such cognitive active learning strategies as activating prior knowledge, chunking, and practicing metacognitive awareness.

- **Activating Prior Knowledge** — Students need to determine what they already know about a particular principle so any preconceptions or misconceptions can be corrected before further learning occurs. For example, prior to teaching about the process of photosynthesis, a biology instructor could discuss with students their current understanding of the ways plants gain nutrition. By doing so, the instructor can correct any erroneous information so that students are not attempting to reconcile misinformation with the appropriate information the instructor will shortly present.
- **Chunking** — Students need to be able to group individual pieces of information into larger, more meaningful units, so these “chunks” of information can be remembered and retrieved in an efficient manner. A mathematics instructor, for instance, could help students learn by presenting strategies used to solve problems as groups of integrated steps, with meaningful connections between these steps, rather than as isolated tactics that could be combined in several different ways.
- **Practicing Metacognitive Awareness** — Students need information about

their own thinking processes so they can effectively plan, monitor, and evaluate their progress in learning. For example, while teaching a specific Greek epic, a classics instructor could discuss with students where in the text they experienced difficulty and how they resolved that difficulty. By doing so, the instructor encourages students to reflect on the comprehension strategies that they are already using, as well as to learn other useful strategies from their peers.

Faculty interested in promoting active learning should not attempt to incorporate all of these cognitive active learning strategies into their classroom instruction in a single period, or even during a single week, because doing so would likely prove overwhelming and exhausting to students. Rather, they might consider choosing a single strategy, teaching it to students, and then repeatedly requiring the use of it—for in- and out-of-class tasks—throughout a semester. If they provide students with instruction in the strategy and follow that instruction with opportunities for practice and feedback, they will help students make the strategy a natural and automatic part of their learning efforts.

Reference: Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., and Cocking, R. R. (Eds.) 2000. *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, school*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press. ♥

Take a Quote and Think about What We're Doing

“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.” --Derek Bok

“Education is learning a lot about how little you know.” --Proverb

“Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire.” --William Butler Yeats

“Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.” --Robert Frost

“Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.” --Soren Kierkegaard

Great quotes! These and many more appear as part of an exercise in a book titled, *50 Ways to Leave Your Lectern*. As you might suspect, the book contains a collection of activities designed to get students active and involved in learning.

In this particular activity, students sit in

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Questions that Lead to Self Understanding

Questions are one of those mainstay teaching strategies used to accomplish all kinds of learning goals: questions help an instructor gauge levels of understanding; questions can pique flagging interest; questions lead the way deeper into content and questions challenge thinking. Adult educator Patricia Cranton identifies three kinds of questions especially effective at promoting critical self-reflection and self-knowledge. The goal of these questions is to establish “an environment where people can figure things out for themselves.” Cranton credits other adult educators with phrasing the goal this way (p.138). Said another way, these are the kind of queries that open minds, change perspectives and enable learners to better understand their own and others view-points.

Content Reflection Questions “serve to raise learner awareness of assumptions and beliefs.” (p. 139) Some of these questions relate to knowledge and the way it is obtained. “What knowledge have you gained from your experience in this area?” (p. 139-140). Others relate

to “habits of the mind.” “What would you say to this if you were a union leader?” (p. 139)

Process Reflection Questions “address how a person has come to hold a certain perspective.” (p. 140) These questions help learners find the source of assumptions and beliefs. The questions may prompt learners to think of a time when they did not hold that belief so that they can work forward from that point. “Can you remember when you first started to hate working with numbers?” Sometimes process questions go after the social norm on which an assumption rests. “Has the media had an effect on what you believe about this?” And sometimes process questions take aim at moral-ethical perspectives or philosophical views. “What led you to conclude this action is unethical?”

Premise Reflection Questions “get at the very core of belief systems.” (p. 141) They raise questions about the most foundational aspects of thinking and belief. “Why is this so important to you

in the first place?” Considering these questions can be emotional and traumatic to the learner. Premise questions also get at the powerful but unquestioned ways language, social norms, and cultural expectations influence belief and behavior. “Why do you value hard work?” “Why do you care about pleasing the person you work for?”

Adult educators write about something they call transformative learning. It is learning that changes who people are. This is high stakes learning and learning that lasts. A lot of what we teach in college does not intend this effect, but four years of college should lead students to new vistas of self knowledge and understanding. Those insights can be prompted by confrontational questions that challenge beliefs and assumptions.

Reference: Cranton, P. *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults*. 2nd Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006. 🍎

TAKE A QUOTE FROM PAGE 7

a circle or U, if possible. Each one draws or is given a quote which is placed face down in front of them. The first student turns over his or her quotation, reads it aloud and offers a one-minute commentary on it. The student may agree or disagree, but in either case is encouraged to draw support for that position from personal experience, course material, or other relevant sources. While one student is speaking, the next student may turn over his or her quotation and begin formulating the commentary.

At the midpoint in a course, when students and teachers are very much immersed in course content, the exercise provides a useful way to pause, take a

breath and consider what education is really all about. Obviously, it's possible to use a more general set of quotations like ones about successful living or ones more closely tied to course goals and objectives. If the class is too large for everyone to participate, the exercise still reaps benefits when volunteers or a randomly selected group of students read and respond to quotes.

In addition to helping students to see class activities and course content as part of a larger objective, the exercise gives students practice thinking on their feet and speaking before others. Shy students can be encouraged to participate because the exercise is ungraded, and the quotes need not require a lengthy response.

The book containing this exercise includes three and half pages of possible

quotations. Most of us already have some of our own favorites. And then there's always the possibility of students bringing their favorites.

If you're worried about consulting a book that advocates leaving the lectern, the author notes, the assumption is that you'll come back. She didn't title the book *50 Ways to Forever Leave Your Lectern*.

Reference: Staley, C. *50 Ways to Leave Your Lectern: Active Learning Strategies to Engage First-Year Students*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003. 🍎