

Facilitating Active Learning through Classroom Assessment Techniques, Course Preparation Assignments and Out-of-Class Assignments

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According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), active learning 'involves students doing things and thinking about the things they are doing'. It requires students to engage actively with course materials inside and outside of the classroom. Students can become more involved in learning when they are given the chance to talk, discuss, write and apply what they are learning. To engage students in active learning, instructors must increase student participation and interest inside and outside of classrooms.

To promote active learning in an introductory Sociology course, the author undertook a teaching development project which used classroom assessment techniques (CATs, Angelo & Cross 1993) to encourage students to self-learn and to challenge them to apply concepts and new knowledge, and to articulate their views. CATs used in the course included 'application card', 'brainstorming activities', 'debate' and 'reflect-group-share'. These techniques were supplemented by course preparation assignments (CPAs, Yamane 2006) and out-of-class assignments (OCAs) which prepared students for classroom activities. CPAs were used to guide students to read prescribed readings. A typical CPA would highlight sections and concepts in the prescribed reading that students needed to understand before they came to class. In some of the CPAs, students were asked to do writing to prepare for the classroom activities and bring their written work to class. Out-of-class assignments included journal writing, participation in web-based discussions and pre-class on-line surveys. This paper will introduce how the various techniques were applied and show examples of summaries of students' works, such as how they applied deviance theories to explain juvenile shoplifting, and what they proposed in terms of engaging men and women in achieving gender equality.

Students showed enthusiasm in the CATs. A learning experience survey was conducted at the end of the semester and it showed that students found CATs more helpful than CPAs and OCAs in helping them achieve the course intended learning outcomes. All the CATs utilized in this course involved group discussions and interactions among students. Positive responses from students indicated that group work was effective in

motivating active learning in class.

The class in which the techniques were adopted had a student size of 30. Application of these techniques to larger classes will offer opportunities for comparing the relative effectiveness of these techniques in small and large classes.

References :

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