

A few teaching strategies/activities for the classroom

Questioning

Everyone asks questions in the classroom, but are those questions getting the best out of every student?

A couple of things to think of when asking questions is who do you want to think about the question, and how do you want it answered? You probably want every student to be contemplating the answer and you probably want them to have thought about their answer before they speak out loud.

Here are a couple of examples (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2008) of how you can get this to happen:

1. "Thumbs up if you agree and down if you don't, be prepared to defend your answer if I ask you. Creating new mental health "disorders" is helpful to ensure that as people develop different types of symptoms, they can be categorised and receive better help."
2. "You will have one minute to talk to the person next to you about your answer to this question and I will ask 3 people to respond. What are the three most common injuries of marathon runners and which type of health professional is likely to be the most useful to them?"

Numbering off

Group work is great for problem solving and project work in the classroom. The main problem is that each group has the same people discussing and exchanging ideas each day. To help increase accountability, have students listening to different points of view and expanding their mode of operation, have them "number off".

One easy way to do this is to have a jar by the door and each day as students walk in, they grab a number from the jar. They can put it back at the end of the class. You can change the number or size of the groups by what you put in the jar each day or leave it the same.

In a class of 30, you could have numbers one to six in the jar and end up with six groups of five people to work together on the day's topic/s. You may also be able to say; "everyone who is a number 3 will be the person who presents the information back to the class", "all number 4's will scribe today" and "number 2's can go grab an iPad for the group" (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2008).

Think pair share

(Lyman, 1981; from Fitzgerald, 2013).

When you ask a question or pose a problem, put time frames and strategies around how they will address it. This can help learners structure their problem-solving methodology and be more accountable for their ideas/knowledge. It can also help those lacking confidence as they get some quiet time to formulate their ideas then quietly share it with one other. If they are chosen to share the ideas or answers, either learner could do it.

Things to ensure (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2008 and Kagan, 2008):

1. You explain the way the activity works before posing the problem.
2. You are clear about time frames and stick to them.
3. You let them know how many people/pairs will be asked for a response.

For example, “The next part of our work today will take about 15 minutes. I want you to think about the topic yourself for at least one minute before working through it with one person you are sitting next to. At the end of the 15 minutes I will choose 3 people to explain what they did and why. To follow on from what we did yesterday, your task is to make a paper aeroplane that rises before it falls. You only have two pieces of paper so think carefully about what you will do and why before you start building.”

Group work with presentation

An oldie but a goodie. Creating communities of inquiry in the classroom is a fabulous way to have learners thinking, discussing and testing ideas, strategies and hypotheses. For a real community of inquiry to develop you need to provide a clear structure, consistent support, and pose quizzical questions, but basically stay out of the way. Sound contradictory? It isn't really.

After setting the scene, you need to move smoothly from group to group making sure they have what they need and have at least one open ended question for them each time. For example, “This looks interesting. How did you get that so smooth?”

Jigsaw puzzles or matching games

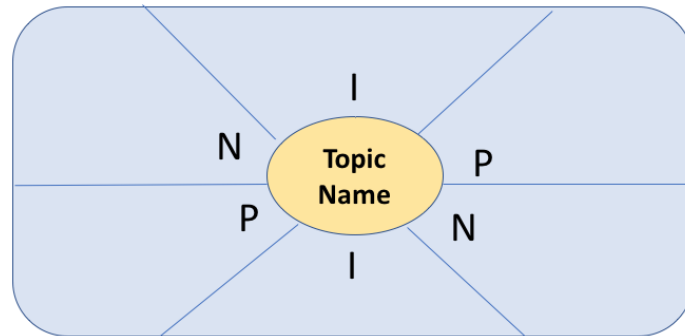
These could take more to set up than anything mentioned so far but getting people moving, thinking and talking will improve learning. Some puzzles have been created at VU using the 3D printer to make brain puzzles and bones for piecing arms and shoulders together. There are many other puzzle type activities you can do without a 3D printer too.

For example, in psychology you could have a group of theorists to divide into overarching theory (humanistic, behavioural, etc.), key concepts (conditioning, acceptance, etc), famous quotes, key strategies and birth dates. For a paper-based activity get a card for each thing (eg., one card saying humanistic, one saying Carl Rogers, one saying the birth date, etc.) so learners can arrange them in groups on a table. Learners could also create a tabled document, a (sort of) mind map, design a poster or online quiz, etc.

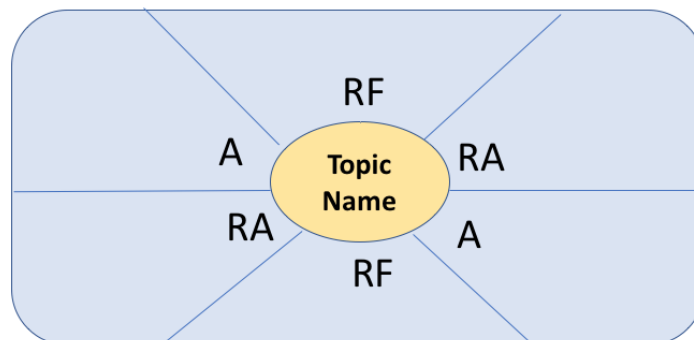
Placemat

(Bennett & Rolheiser, 2008)

The placemat activity can be used before, during or after students have learned about a topic. Using paper or digital means, get a page together with three or more angles to look at something. See the pictures below for examples. Have students work in groups and provide an idea or reason in each space at least once. When they have finished, a discussion can follow about what has been recorded but the exercise itself will spark multiple ways of looking at, or reasoning about, the topic.



I for interesting, P for positives, N for negatives.



RF for reasons for, RA for reasons against, A for alternatives.

References

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Kagan, S., (2008). *The instructional revolution*. <https://www.kaganaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Instructional-Revolution.pdf>

Bennett, B., & Rolheiser, C., (2008). *Beyond Monet: The artful science of instructional integration*. Bookation: Toronto.