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Designing Active Learning for the Face-to-Face Classroom [1]

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This blog post is the second in a series about active learning course design. The first post provided an evidence-based perspective on how moving from a lecture paradigm design to an active learning design improves student learning. This second post explores how to design active learning for the face-to-face classroom.

There are many active learning strategies available on the Internet, in education journals, and in higher education design books. In fact, the variety of ideas may lead one to feel overwhelmed in trying to pick the "right" active learning strategy.

Before you pick from a robust list of possibilities, I encourage you to first consider key design concepts. These design concepts can be organized around the questions of who, what, when, where, and why.

Who are your learners?

Consider finding out the answer to questions such as:

- **What the average age of your students?**
- **Where are they in their plans of study?**

The answers to questions like these will point you to generational learning preferences to consider as well as what prior learned knowledge, skills, and attitudes students bring to your classroom.

What knowledge, skill(s), and/or attitude(s) do you want to teach?

Additionally:

- **Are you designing a formative or a summative activity?**
- **What course objectives/outcomes does the activity support?**

Classroom activities should help students intentionally achieve one or more of the course objectives/outcomes. It's important to know if active learning will prepare students for a graded assignment (formative) or if the activity and the results are graded (summative). This delineation will help you choose the right active learning strategy to help students achieve the aligned objective/outcome.

When will active learning take place?

Asking students to actively participate after a two-hour lecture may not lead to the results you

were hoping for. Conversely, jumping right into active learning the minute class starts may not allow students time to acclimate. Planning an agenda where active learning is strategically threaded throughout the class can allow students to truly engage.

Where will active learning take place?

Active learning can take place in a large lecture hall as well as a smaller classroom. The key is intentionally choosing an active learning strategy that fits your learners, the course objectives/outcomes, and your agenda for the day.

Why use active learning strategies?

My first post in this active learning series provides a primer on the research that supports utilizing active learning strategies when designing your course. I encourage you to build your own repertoire of education literature that is specific to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes you need to design a class around. A strong class design is a well-informed class design.

Next Steps

Now that you've considered who, what, when, where, and why, you are ready to choose an active learning strategy. The University of Central Florida created a comprehensive list for faculty to reference by clicking here. I hope you find it helpful as you incorporate active learning into your face-to-face classroom.

In an upcoming post, I'll outline design considerations for active learning in an online course.

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