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Reflections on Effective Teaching Practice Modules from ACUE

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Reflection on Module 3D; Planning Effective Class Discussions

I chose to implement a preparatory quiz to get students ready to fully participate in an in-class discussion. Since this is a very large class with over 200 students and auditorium-style seating, a discussion involving the entire class is somewhat limited, but having the students work in small groups with other students seated nearby has proved to be a worthwhile strategy in learning how to integrate new information with previously learned material. I figured they were ready to tackle something a bit more challenging, so at the end of the previous lecture, I gave out a worksheet to complete before the next class, and let the students know that there would be a quiz covering this material during the next class. The worksheet was actually an extension of an active learning cycle helping the students recognize the patterns underlying the structure and organization of the musculoskeletal system (this is a class in human anatomy & physiology). Students have been working to master this complex subject for several weeks, and now that we are nearing the end of the unit, it is time to apply has been learned about individual muscles and groups of synergistic muscles at certain joints to the complex movements of many groups of muscles acting at different joints simultaneously to power everyday activities such as walking, manipulating and holding objects, carrying loads, etc.

I informed the students that they would be held accountable for completing the worksheet as well as doing well on the quiz by letting them know that the discussion would be entirely student-led with no guidance or answers from me. In previous discussions, I offered suggestions, demonstrated strategies to use for solving complex problems and in some cases, provided some answers when it became evident that no one seemed to be on the right track. I let the students know that the type of questions presented in the quiz were representative of the ones they might encounter on the next exam, and this would be an excellent way to determine how well they have grasped the material.

This technique is new to me. I have built occasional in-class exercises or unannounced pop quizzes into a lecture, but never a specific assignment tied to a major quiz in preparation for a discussion. Since the lecture is only 70 minutes long, finding the time for this strategy was rather challenging. I chose to work around this by spreading it across three lectures: explaining the assignment and establishing goals for the class (in depth learning and application of theoretical concepts to real-life scenarios and a greater appreciation for the relationship between form and function) on the first day and administering the quiz on the second day with the discussion to follow on the third day.

I teach two sections of the same class and I was disappointed that quite a few students in the first section did not complete the worksheet, and consequently did not do well on the quiz or follow-up Q & A session. All of the students are encouraged to take part in the discussion, although only those students with a passing score on the quiz are eligible to earn a form of bonus points that can be applied to the question of their choice on the next exam (each of the questions on this exam are worth the same number of points). I thought this would be a fun way to encourage participation in the future.

The second section had a much better outcome—almost all students were prepared and did well on the quiz as well as the follow-up. Overall, the students seemed satisfied with their performance, and it was easy to see that the extra work had paid off—they did have a better understanding of the subject, and I am sure that they will do in the discussion. After class, a few

students mentioned that this type of learning was more difficult than just taking notes, but they felt as if they were getting a bit more out of it, by having to think of solutions for themselves instead of just memorizing facts. As this is a team-taught class with a set syllabus, there is no way to allocate points for additional assignments this quarter, but in the future, I will be better able to plan for this technique. Despite the mixed results, I think I will be able to modify this technique for use in future classes, and if the worksheet and quiz count toward overall scores, I am sure that the completion rate will also improve. I would say that in this particular class, I had more success with the active learning cycle techniques than the preparatory quiz, but It is nice to have several options to be able to use to keep students focused and on track. My goal is to be help students get the most out of a challenging class and increase the number of students passing (this course is required for many higher division classes and advanced programs, but the fail rate is rather high) and I think techniques such as this do a lot to keep students interested and boost my own effectiveness as well.

Comments:

Susan, Your reflection for module 3D is complete. It sounds as if you had great success with the techniques in the module. You write, "After class a few students mentioned that this type of learning was more difficult than just taking notes, but they felt as if they were getting a bit more out of it...". Wonderful!

ACUE Reader, Feb 23, 2019 at 1:08pm