

## **Collaborating to Connect in College**

Student success in college is enhanced by active and collaborative learning (G. Kuh, A. Astin, Chickering & Gamson). *Active learning* occurs when students are involved both physically and mentally in educationally purposeful activities. *Collaborative learning* occurs when students do this active learning together. "Knowledge and learning are communal acts" (Parker Palmer, The Courage to Teach). Asking students to connect with others in discussions can motivate deep learning and encourage fuller understanding of differing ideas, possibilities, and opinions. And remember that a college campus can be lonely. If you use a collaborative-learning strategy, students may meet one another, go to coffee together (get off their cell phones!), and like college better!

Below are six simple strategies that have the potential for both active and collaborative learning. Embed them in your class-session design and observe student interaction in order to keep your finger on the pulse of student learning and help untangle student misunderstandings.

### **Six Simple Active and Collaborative Learning Strategies**

#### **Think, Ink, Pair, Square, Share** (Modify by eliminating steps)

- Question, issue, or problem posed by the teacher.
- Students think and write a response.
- Pairs discuss their responses.
- Two pairs (a "square") discuss their responses.
- Whole-class sharing of a few responses.

#### **Pre/Post Reflection Lines**

- Can be done in groups or individually at the beginning and end of a unit of study to show change in values as a result of study.
- Students mark (initial) and explain their position on an *Agree-Disagree Line* they have drawn on a 3 x 5 card to indicate their values regarding a statement about a debatable issue (e.g., Stem-cell research should be encouraged. Aid to Africa should be increased).
- Students compare their pre/post 3 x 5 cards done at the beginning and end of the unit of study, and write a short reflection paper on their change (or not) in attitude.

#### **Student-to-Student Interviews**

- Students seated in groups of 4.
- Each student writes a set of 4 interview questions to seek information about another student's project, report, or current event.
- Students pair up, and 1 student interviews the other for 3 minutes.
- Teacher signals after 3 minutes, and the students reverse interview/interviewee roles.
- Teacher signals after 3 minutes, and the group of 4 begins a "round robin," each student sharing information learned from the interview.

#### **Jigsaw**

- Students seated in groups of 4.
- Teacher divides new material to be learned into 4 equal parts, 1 for each group member. [Material might include: text sections, vocabulary words, people in history, P.E. warm-up exercises.]
- Each student independently masters his/her part and prepares to teach it to his/her

- group. Students teach their material to their group in Round Robin fashion.
- Accountability: Students are given an assignment which requires integration of all the parts (e.g., essay, diagram, performance).
  - Debriefing: Students discuss what helped or hindered learning, as well as other insights.
  - Caution: Each part of the material must have meaning as a “stand alone” assignment. For this reason, avoid dividing up a story, where one student has the beginning, one the middle, and one the end. In this situation, parts lose maximum meaning.

**Categorizing with Post-its (3” x 3”)**

- Teacher announces a unit of study (e.g., Linguistic Diversity in American Schools or Internet Security Issues).
- In groups of 3-5, students brainstorm 12 or more sub-concepts related to the unit of study, and record each one (briefly) on Post-it notes, one member per Post-it.
- As a group, students analyze the Post-its to develop categories, placing the Post-its on large chart paper in category groups they can explain and defend. Next, each group of students uses colored markers to draw *circles* around the categories they have developed and to write a *category name* atop each category
- Students share their charts by: posting, orally presenting, or *Carousel Sharing*.
- *Carousel Share*: One group member in each group is selected to remain at the group’s table to explain the group chart, while the rest of the class rotates at the signal (I find a student who can whistle loudly) clockwise around the room to learn about each chart. Each round lasts approximately 2 minutes, depending upon the charts' complexity.

**Send-a-Problem/Find the Solution**

- Students seated in groups of 3-5.
- Each student writes a high consensus review question (verifiable by text) on a 3 x 5 card.
- Students pair to check their review question and its answer.
- Format: Write the question on side #1, and label it *Question*.  
Write the answer on side #2, and label it *Answer*.
- Each group stacks their 3 x 5 cards, question side up, and passes the stack (“sends-a-problem”) to another group to determine answers. It is helpful if a team name is written on the top 3 x 5 card for ease of identification when cards are returned.
- Problems might be sent up to 3 times before returning them to the table of origin.
- Accountability: Students can write answers on paper and turn in.
- Clarification: Students can send a “diplomat” to the table of origin with questions.

Adapted from many resources and practitioners of active and collaborative learning

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