ACTIVE LEARNING RESOURCES

Look for **20 examples of active learning activities**, and short videos of Western faculty sharing their examples of active learning in large and small classes and online in our online course on university teaching, developed in collaboration with the Queen’s University and the University of Waterloo.

http://www.queensu.ca/teachingandlearning/modules/home.html
Active Learning Activities from the workshop

Buzz Groups

A small discussion group (typically 3 – 5 individuals) formed for a specific task such as generating ideas, solving problems, or reaching a common viewpoint on a topic within a specific period of time. Large groups are often divided into buzz groups after an initial presentation in order to cover different aspects of a topic or maximize participation. Groups may appoint a spokesperson to report the results of the discussion to the larger group if time permits. Buzz groups are a form of collective brainstorming.

Fish Bowl

Fishbowls are used for dynamic group involvement. The most common configuration is an "inner ring" (Group A), which is the discussion group, surrounded by an "outer ring" (Group B), which is the observation group. Just as people observe the fish in a fishbowl, the "outer ring" observes the "inner ring".

Group A is given an assignment, such as a discussion or exercise to perform, while Group B observes. After 10 to 30 minutes, groups exchange (Group A observes while Group B performs activity). They can either perform the same activity, a modified version, or a new activity.

The group observing will either observe the process, the content, or both depending on the desired outcome. After the activity, you can have feedback to each other, either on a group to group basis, individually, or in pairs. If you feel that the learners are not ready for public feedback, use the one-on-one or two-on-two method.

Stop-Start-Continue

The stop-start-continue technique is a means of quickly obtaining feedback from students in a non-threatening manner. It is an excellent post-assessment technique and works especially well for groups that you will encounter repeatedly (i.e. over a multi-day workshop). At the conclusion of the initial meeting with a group, you can hand-out three different colour post-it notes to each student (i.e. Red, Green & Yellow). Each colour corresponds to one of Start (Green), Stop (Red) and Continue (Yellow). Once students have the post- its, ask them to write down responses to the following questions on the appropriately coloured sheet:

What would you like me to start doing for the remainder of our meetings?
What would you like me to continue doing...
What would you like me to stop doing...

Collect the responses and review them, reporting your main findings to the group at the beginning of your next session together.
**Dotmocracy**

This is a technique for voting and recognizing levels of agreement among a group of people. For example, in a group discussion, five potential strategies to dealing with a particular problem might be suggested. One means of accessing individual opinions on each of these alternatives in a non-threatening fashion is to write all of the options on large sheets of paper, and put these sheets of paper on the wall. Students are then each given a waxed paper strip with a certain number of sticky dots, and asked to walk around the room, thinking about each of the options and putting one or more dots on the approaches they most strongly agree with. At the end of the Dotmocracy period, all participants can visually assess the opinion of the group as a whole.

**Think-Pair-Share**

Think-Pair-Share is a cooperative learning strategy that can promote and support higher-level thinking. The instructor asks students to think about a specific topic or problem individually for a short period of time. Students then pair with another colleague to discuss their thinking and, after that, share their ideas with the larger group if time permits.

**Games (i.e. Jeopardy, Who Wants to be a Millionaire, Family Fued)**

Interactive templates for many popular game shows are available for free download on the internet (http://www.murray.k12.ga.us/Default.asp?PN=Documents&DivisionID=8663&DepartmentID=8975&SubDepartmentID=0&SubDocumentID=5431&keyword=games). These games are most frequently used as ‘Review or Recap’ activities to assess whether participants have achieved the desired lesson outcomes and to review important concepts in a fun and active fashion.

**Post-It Parade**

This is wonderful ‘brainstorming’-esque technique that allows students who are generally reluctant to speak aloud an opportunity to share their opinions. In this activity, a series of words or statements all related to a central theme are taped on walls around the room (i.e. If the central theme is TEAMWORK, you might have words like group, evaluation, consensus, workload, and accountability posted). Students are then given several post-it notes (at least as many as there are words around the room) and are given 5-10 minutes to write down anything that comes to mind related to each word/statement, and stick their note on or near the relevant word. At the conclusion of this round, students are given another 5-10 minutes to walk around and peruse their colleagues’ ideas. Finally, a large group discussion ensues about the themes and ideas that emerged from this activity.
Snow-Ball Discussion

Individual students think about a question or issue posed by the instructor (E.g. In your opinion, identify three key remediation strategies for global warming.) for 1-5 minutes, generating 3 reactions/comments/answers. Students then form groups of 2 and share their responses, reducing the six individual responses they brought to the discussion and coming to a consensus about their best 3 responses together. Groups then merge again and groups of 4 are formed. From the ideas brought to the new group, the 3 best are again selected. This continues until conclusions are drawn by the large group or class as a whole.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a group creativity technique designed to generate a large number of ideas for the solution of a problem. Students are typically asked to respond verbally to a prompt by the instructor with as many ideas as possible. The ideas are often recorded on the board. There are three basic rules in brainstorming. These are intended to reduce social inhibitions among group members, stimulate idea generation, and increase overall creativity of the group.

1. Focus on quantity: This rule is a means of enhancing divergent production, aiming to facilitate problem solving through the maxim *quantity breeds quality.*
2. Withhold criticism: In brainstorming, participants should focus on extending or adding to ideas, reserving criticism for a later 'critical stage' of the process. By suspending judgment, participants will feel free to generate unusual ideas.
3. Welcome unusual ideas: To get a good and long list of ideas, unusual ideas are welcomed. They can be generated by looking from new perspectives and suspending assumptions. These new ways of thinking may provide better solutions.

Quescussion

Quescussion is a type of discussion that is conducted entirely in the form of questions. The instructor begins by asking a provocative question or statement such as: “Should potential employers use Facebook as a means of gathering information about their applicants?” and students MUST respond to this prompt by shouting out questions of their own, such as ‘What is the distinction between professional and personal information?’ As the Quescussion proceeds, participants must wait until four (this number can vary with the size of the class) other people have spoken before they can speak again. If someone makes a statement, the rest of the class is to shout "Statement." The exercise is thus self-policing. Questions can be recorded on the board and serve as a ‘map’ of students’ interests and can also inform future instruction.
‘Tell me what you’ve heard about…’

This is a form of brainstorming that works very well to open a topic or to act as a pre-assessment strategy for groups you are meeting for the first time. The instructor begins a session by asking, ‘Tell me what you’ve heard about…global warming; writing resumes; acing a job interview, etc...’ Responses are then collected on the board to identify common knowledge, misconceptions and/or concerns.

One Minute Paper/Muddiest Point

This is another very simple post-assessment technique that can be used at the end of a lesson to assess whether students have achieved the desired outcomes and to uncover any remaining difficulties or misconceptions with the content. In this exercise, students are asked to grab a scrap piece of paper and spend 1-2 minutes responding to the following types of questions (typically you would ask any ONE of these)

*What was the key message you will take with you when leaving this session?*

*What was the most useful thing you learned today? Why?*

*In your own words, briefly define (insert key concept here).*

*What concept discussed today was most challenging for you? Why?*

*What concept discussed today would you be most worried about encountering on a future test?*

They then submit their responses to the instructor who can review them after class to gauge students’ interest areas or difficulties.