Engagement Strategies for Enhancing College Teaching

By

Belinda Dunnick Karge, Ph.D.

California State University, Fullerton

Kathleen M. Phillips, Ph.D.

California State University, San Bernardino

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      American college classrooms are changing with the vast technology available. However, despite the numerous online classes, the face-to-face (described by many students as the *in-person*) model of instruction remains. Keeping up with adult students who routinely tweet, Facebook, and spend hours with technology can be a challenge for anyone, especially the college professor with content knowledge to share. Brophy and Good (1986) in their text, *Handbook on Research on Teaching*, share that active teachers elicit higher achievement gains than their colleagues by implementing instruction in a mindful, content-centered interaction between teacher and student.

      Malcom Knowles (1970) was a pioneer researcher in understanding how adults learn. He identified six characteristics of the adult learner: 1) Autonomous and self-directed; 2) Holds a foundation of experiences and knowledge; 3) Goal oriented; 4) Relevancy oriented; 5) Practical; and 6) Needing respect. He purports that adults learn best when a climate of mutual trust is created and when expectations between the student and the teacher are clearly defined.

      The Adult Learning Centre (2005) asserts that most adults enter into a new learning experience in order to create change in their lives. This could include a change in their (a) skills (b) behavior, (c) knowledge level, or (d) attitudes about things. Their research identified that the major differences between school-age children and adult learners was in the degree of motivation, the amount of previous experience, the level of engagement in the learning process, and how the learning is applied. Adults bring a wealth of background experience, knowledge, and information to the learning setting that influence each of these factors. Assessing this information and utilizing it in educational planning for adult learners is imperative if a successful learning experience is to occur.

      The traditional faculty/student relationship must be altered to facilitate effective adult learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). The faculty members' instructional practices influence the educational goals that students adopt. The choices that faculty make about issues – such as introducing and teaching course content, grading student work, grouping of students, and how students are recognized for their successes – all influence the types of goals that students adopt. When students are active in their learning they are able to develop critical thinking skills,

receive social support systems for the learning, and gain knowledge in an efficient way. Faculty must enhance traditional lecturing with carefully constructed effective teaching strategies designed to enhance skills and gain content knowledge (Feger, Woleck & Hickman, 2004).

The strategies described below have been used in highly effective college classrooms across the United States to encourage interaction and active participation. These strategies offer an effective means for designing classroom collaboration and discussion as well as an avenue for respecting experience and background knowledge of adult learners. At the same time, use of the strategies provides interesting and alluring ways to ensure content coverage.

Ticket to Exit. Spending an hour or more in a class session focused on one topic can be challenging for any student. Recalling the key details and organizing the critical information can be especially difficult. Equally challenging for the instructor is determining if the students actually grasped the important concepts. To ease this challenge, the *Ticket to Exit* is suggested. At the close of the class period, the instructor gives the students a prompt, for example, "Today I learned…..". The students write a response to the prompt and hand it to the instructor as a "ticket" to leave the room, thus the term *ticket to exit.* The tickets are not graded but merely used to gage the knowledge obtained by the students. Fisher, Brozo, Frey and Ivey (2007) purport that this process of writing at the close of a class period provides an opportunity for the students to reflect on what they have learned.

Wait Time. Research has validated the importance of allowing students time to think and process content as knowledge is obtained (Stahl, 1994). Many professors allow only one second for the student to respond; this encourages short one or two word answers and does not allow for higher order thinking. One way to enhance student reflection is *Wait Time*. The concept was first introduced in 1972, when research was conducted to determine strategies for increasing the quality of student responses (Rowe, 1986). It was concluded that instructors who waited three to seven seconds before accepting and then evaluating student responses produced higher quality of student responses, more unsolicited responses, and the length of the responses were longer.

Class discussions are critical in college courses and the discussions can greatly enhance the quality of instruction when all students are involved. Larson (1999) asserts that the finest discussions are those that provide enrichment and understanding of the disciplinary content area through the exchange of multiple viewpoints and enlist contributions of nearly every student. The *Fishbowl*, *IFAT*, *Audience Plants*, *Carousel*, and *Give One-Get One* discussion strategies all

allow for class discussions that encourage the participation of all students and provide opportunities for sharing a variety of perspectives.

Fishbowl. The *Fishbowl* discussion (Green, 2000) opens the door for many to participate in a controversial topic. The instructor asks five to eight students to sit in a circle in chairs facing each other. There is one open chair. Initially, the rest of the class stands behind the circle to observe and listen to the peer discussion. The instructor sits in the open chair and begins the discussion by asking a high-level inquiry question then steps behind the open chair. The students sitting in the circle begin talking about the topic. At any time, a student standing behind the circle of chairs can sit in the open chair to speak. As s/he sits down, the person speaking from the circle must finish his/her statement, leave his/her chair, and move behind the circle to join the observers. This opens a chair for the next observer who wants to speak. This discussion continues until all have had the opportunity to sit and join the discussion.

The *Immediate Feedback Assessment Test* (*IFAT*) (Dihoff, Brosvic, Epstein & Cook, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002) provides a richly collaborative experience by allowing students to immediately view the accuracy of their responses and participate in a collective dialogue regarding the content. The *IFAT* protocol is simple to use for both the instructor and the students. First, the instructor creates multiple choice questions relating to the content knowledge the students should have acquired. Each student independently takes the multiple-choice test in the traditional manner. Once the individual has completed the test, he or she is placed into a group. The group is given one *IFAT* answer sheet.

The *IFAT* form is similar to a Scantron form that is used with many multiple-choice tests. For each question, the students compare their answers and collectively agree on the correct choice. One student scratches off the opaque coating corresponding to the chosen answer; if the choice is correct, a star appears in the box and the group goes on to the next item. If the choice is incorrect, a blank space appears. The blank space signals the group to discuss the rationale for a better answer. In this way, students engage in meaningful discussions and develop a deeper understanding of the content. The group's final choice is always the correct answer ensuring that each student leaves the testing session with knowledge of the correct information.

Pedagogically, the *IFAT* has several advantages over traditional multiple-choice test procedures. First, traditional multiple tests are generally graded after the student leaves, thus delaying feedback for the test items. The *IFAT* is graded by the students immediately after each

answer is given. Since the feedback is corrective, the student leaves the testing situation knowing the correct answer rather wondering if s/he was right or wrong. *IFAT* provides a simple and fair way for the instructor to give partial credit. Because of this, students can still earn points even if their first choice is not accurate. Finally, students leave the testing situation already aware of their overall test score.

Epstein (2002) demonstrates that the experience of using the *IFAT* system increases the students' level of content knowledge. DeBattista, Mitterer & Gosse (2004) found that university students strongly prefer the *IFAT* to the more commonly used Scantron form, with 83 per cent saying that they would like to be able to use the *IFAT* in all of their courses. The likeability of *IFAT* was not related to student characteristics or test performance variables. Students learn more with the system and actually prefer it to more traditional multiple-choice tests.

Audience Plants. The *Audience Plant* ensures that a coordinated discussion can occur even if the topic is unknown to the majority of the students. At the end of an instruction period, the instructor tells one or two students that during the next meeting they will be asked to answer questions on the topic covered in class. The students are given the questions and possible responses. At the next class meeting, the instructor begins by asking the "*audience plants*" the questions. The students will have prepared responses that will begin the discussion and allow other students time to think and prepare their own comments. Alternatively, prior to the lesson, the instructor can quietly share a few answers with several students and tell them they will be asked the questions during the ensuing class period. Their assignment is to begin the discussion by repeating the answers prompted to them (Silberman, 1966).

Carousel is a strategy designed to have students respond to topics or prompts by physically moving in a circular fashion around the room (Guillaume, Yopp & Yopp, 2007). First introduced by Osborn (1953) the concept is to post charts around the classroom with various topics. The instructor divides students into small groups and each group is stationed at a chart. One member of each small group is assigned as the recorder with a specific color of magic marker. Each group is given three to five minutes to brainstorm anything related to the subtopic on their chart. Once the time period is over, the groups move clockwise around the room. Each group reads what the previous group wrote and then adds to the list using their designated magic marker. Groups circulate until they reach their original chart; at that time, they read all their classmates' ideas and make any final comments. At the end of the activity the charts contain

information in different colors, each color representing a group voice. Magic marker colors allow groups to identify with their responses and can respond to queries from classmates in other groups. This is a fabulous strategy to use the meeting prior to an exam.

Give One - Get One. This strategy provides a great review and encourages peer interaction and collaboration. It allows everyone to contribute ideas while at the same time providing an avenue for those with expertise on the content to feel valued. First, the instructor assigns students to partners. Then students are told to gather all of their notes and that they will make a list of facts or ideas they have learned. Each student begins by asking his/her partner to share one fact or idea regarding the topic. In return, the partner also shares one fact or idea. If neither has a new or different idea, they should brainstorm the topic to create something they had not thought of or remembered. Then the partners move to each person in the class, collecting information, until they have generated many ideas on the subject (Guillaume, Yopp & Yopp, 2007). At the conclusion of the activity, the instructor compiles a group list of ideas surrounding the content.

Although many adult learners approach the educational setting from different perspectives, adults learn best when instructors take the time and effort to utilize a variety of strategy approaches that reflect their understanding of adult learning needs. Active participation, which can take many different forms, is the cornerstone for both the style of learning and the principles of adult education. Today's university faculty members are presented with a variety of challenges in addressing the needs of adult learners. Utilizing strategies that value the characteristics of the adult learner result in longer-term recall, synthesis, problem-solving skills, and educational satisfaction than verbal instruction alone.

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