

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Creating a Culture of Learning: Using Creative Cultural Experiences to Engage Students

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

Creative cultural experiences are essentially several smaller activities and assignments that are culturally relevant and engage students in a creative way. The three examples that follow were designed to be culturally relevant and creative.

1. *Indigenous Games*

During the portion of history class in which indigenous cultures are covered, the professor moves the class outside and engages students in various activities, one of which is double ball—a game played by the Plains Indians. Specific information about the game itself can be found online, but the overall premise of the game is similar to lacrosse, except that the players use a stick to toss the double ball (two balls wrapped in some sort of hide that connects them with about six inches of space between them). The purpose of the activity is not the game itself; it is to teach students about how games we know today are similar to those played by indigenous people many years ago, helping them connect history to the present. The game is also an opportunity to help the students bond, learn about teamwork, and engage in fun competition. If a student is physically unable to play the game, they have the opportunity to work with their team in a supportive role such as helping develop game strategy or coaching. Students are all awarded points for participation, but the winning team gets one

extra credit point. The idea is to make learning fun and culturally relevant while encouraging students to be active.

2. *Creative Expression Group Work*

Students are required to read four academic articles that are assigned by the professor throughout the course and provide a group response to each one. To do so, students are randomly assigned to a different group for each article. They work together in different ways to come up with a shared response. The first two articles are written responses. Each student first works individually outside of class to write a response, and then they work with their assigned group to craft a combined response that will be shared with the class during the next class meeting. The students submit both their individual and combined responses to the professor.

The last two articles require that students work together to craft a “creative” response. As such, students work together outside of class to decide upon and prepare a creative response that can take the form of a poem, dance, skit, artwork, or any other type of creative expression students feel best conveys their shared response to the article. Students are assessed on the cohesiveness of their response and how well they work together when presenting their piece to the rest of the class.

3. *Creative Group Presentation: Midterm Review*

At the midpoint of the semester, students work together to create a presentation about topics covered in the course up to that point. The presentation is used as a type of midterm review for the rest of the class. For this assignment, students are randomly assigned to groups and are asked to select a topic from a list included in a midterm study guide provided by the professor. After the groups are formed and topics are selected, the students use the remaining class time to brainstorm ideas and outline the key points they want to cover in their presentation. During this time, the instructor visits with each group to ensure that they are moving in the right direction and that key points for the topic are being addressed. Students may choose to deliver their presentation in any format they wish—a skit, a story, role play, or any other means—but each group must produce a poster to accompany their presentation. The poster is an essential part of the process because this is what is used for the midterm review. As such, students may use the poster to outline key points or draw diagrams for their topics. Each student is responsible for at least one task on the poster and presentation. Students take turns sharing their presentations, which last approximately 15 minutes; then they engage in a final instructor-led group discussion to address any outstanding questions. Upon completion of the activity, the groups will provide a list to the instructor that outlines each person's area of responsibility. The professor also uses his time with the groups and observation of the presentations to take note of how each student participated. The students are graded on overall participation for this activity.

How to Ensure Participation in This Innovative Teaching Practice:

Having students participate in learning activities that allow them to use their natural talents and strengths helps them engage more effectively with the material. Creative and culturally relevant activities provide an opportunity for all students to identify a way of engaging in the course that is most meaningful for them. Some students enjoy the athletic aspect of the games, others enjoy the creative outlets, and some like the writing assignments. The key to this approach is variety as a way of appealing to the interests of more students. Furthermore, the professor works with groups as they are developing their presentations to ensure that they know the professor is available to provide support.

Notes From the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

“No two students are the same, and teaching is not one-size-fits all.”