

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Learning Writing and Literature Concepts Through Group Games

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

For this course, the instructor develops games related to three topics: grammar, in-text citations, and formatting a bibliography. Students are assigned to small groups or pairs for these games.

Each game includes multiple rounds, and the grammar round, for instance, involves examining one short piece of text. In each passage, there are multiple errors. The students are provided with a handout containing definitions of grammar and sentence errors and examples of such errors.

Each round consists of three stages. In stage 1, the instructor checks answers and secretly assigns points. In stage 2, the teams interact with other teams to persuade them that their answer is correct (this round takes the most time depending on the number of teams). If one team persuades another team to change to the correct answer, the persuasive team gets two points and the persuaded team gets one point. If a team persuades another to change to a wrong answer, no points are awarded to either team for that stage. Stage 3 is necessary if a team cannot be persuaded to change their answer. In stage 3, teams secretly place bets and wager points about which other teams are incorrect. All points from all stages are awarded at the end of the round, creating a complicated but fun game.

The instructor has students play a game in class whenever essay assignments are due; this schedule

enables students with last-minute questions about their essays to have an opportunity to talk with the instructor during the game. It also allows students to associate essay due dates with something fun. In total, the games are played about three times a semester.

Phones and computers are not allowed during the games.

Notes From the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

Instructors can design their own games or find game resources on the web. Games add an intrinsic motivator to learning the content and create an atmosphere that people don't necessarily associate with learning. The instructor notes that when you create an environment in which people are playing a game, it puts them in a different headspace in which they are more focused on learning in order to obtain the intrinsic motivation (e.g., points, extra credit, etc.). Additionally, the instructor uses examples that are funny or thought-provoking, noting that making something humorous encourages students to participate more often.

The instructor noticed that after playing the games, understanding typically increased. The games seem to be most effective for people who already have some skill and some foundation for addressing weaknesses they might have. The games are less successful for people who have no understanding of a concept.

The instructor provides supplementary materials and encourages struggling students to go to the writing center for additional help; he also conducts writing diagnostics and provides students with a checklist of items on which they need to work.

The instructor's job during the game is to interact with students. The instructor noted that people who have strong deficits are less likely to participate because they feel they can't offer much to the group. The instructor empowers students who might not be participating by asking them questions about the content and encouraging them to share their thoughts with the other students.