

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Dissecting Difficult Text Through Active Reading

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

For this innovative teaching practice, the instructor assigns in-class group work to help students understand difficult philosophical readings. The instructor divides the class into small groups and each group is responsible for explaining a portion of an assigned reading to the class.

The instructor first chooses a short reading on a controversial issue from the textbook and asks for a volunteer to lead the class. The class leader divides the reading based on the number of paragraphs and distributes the paragraphs among the groups.

Within each group, students further divide the assigned section among the group members. Each group member has about 15 minutes to learn the content of their assigned reading with the goal of being able to explain it to others. Next, the instructor pairs students to discuss what they read and to practice explaining the material to a classmate. The instructor allocates about five minutes for this portion of the assignment. Finally, students explain what they read to the entire class. Those not presenting are expected to take notes. The total time for this teaching practice can vary depending on the length of text and the number of students in the class.

How to Ensure Participation in This Innovative Teaching Practice:

To ensure that every student participates, the instructor collects the students' notes at the end of the activity.

Notes from the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

“This activity requires students to actively participate, not just sit back and listen. Having students participate in active reading forces them to wrestle with reading difficult text. This gives students a chance to extend their knowledge and thought process, even if just a little. Any progress is changing trajectory for a lifetime, so that is a good thing.”

The instructor also notes that this teaching practice has three benefits:

1. The practice helps reduce the fear and anxiety students may have about being in a classroom of strangers.
2. The practice ensures students talk with and get to know one another.
3. The practice helps students better learn the material.