

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Collaborative Learning Activities Packed Inside a Single Class Session

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

The instructor guides students through several structured small group activities during each class. The goal is to engage them in group work, have them collaborate with different classmates, and stay active throughout the entire class period.

The class typically starts out with a question related to life, social, political, or current issues. Questions prompt students to consider things such as the importance of love or the necessity of gun control. After the instructor introduces the topic—which can take the form of a mini-lecture, a video clip, or a song—students have 1 or 2 minutes to think about the question. Students then transition into a “speed-dating” activity in which students share their opinion with their classmates. Students start out with one classmate, share their opinion, listen to their partner’s opinion, then switch to a different partner. Typically, students change partners three times during the activity. Because this is a Spanish class based on language immersion, this activity helps students think critically, use their oral skills to share their opinion, and practice their listening skills.

After the speed-dating activity, students split into groups of three or four to engage in a written group assignment. As a group, students discuss the issue of the day, sharing their opinion and what they learned from others in the class. Then, they must write out

their answer to the question, pointing out the main aspects of the problem, their analysis, and their opinion. They then present their analysis to the class. In doing so, each student is expected to present and is not allowed to read from notes. After the presentation, the rest of the class is encouraged to ask questions. The instructor also asks questions to deepen the conversation and directs questions to people in the group who did not speak proportionately to others in the group as a way to encourage equal participation. Both of the above activities last approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

The class concludes with an individual writing assignment in which students spend 25 to 30 minutes writing a reflection about the topic. They are encouraged to use elements of the presentations, discussions, and notes to support their ideas.

How to Ensure Participation in This Innovative Teaching Practice:

The instructor walks around to each group, pays attention to every detail, and makes a point to call on each person at least once. Oral participation is mandatory.