

Tips for Creating an Active Classroom

R Pruim

6/7/2019

Tips for Creating an Active Classroom

1. Make your lectures active, too.

It is tempting to equate “active learning” with “group work”, Think about ways to make lectures more active for students. Interject questions (and wait for answers). Mix in short “your turn” exercises or “think-pair-share” questions. Use “call and response”. Ask students to guess computer commands before introducing new commands.

2. Establish clear expectations.

It may take some time at the beginning of the term to get students used to you and each other. Use this time to establish expectations. (How should students address you? May they interrupt or should they raise their hand? How do they get your attention when they are working in a group? May they work alone or must they work in a group? May groups interact with each other? Will you provide “correct” answers? How do they tell you if their group is dysfunctional? How often will groups change?)

3. Start with something easy but interesting.

Too hard is discouraging. Easy but boring doesn’t promote engagement.

4. Make the mode of response clear.

How do you want students to respond? Should they talk quietly with a partner? Write something on the board? Turn something in on paper? Add to a google doc or presentation?

5. Assign student roles.

POGIL (process oriented guided inquiry learning) emphasizes clear and differentiated roles for students working in groups (Manager, Presenter, Reflector, Recorder).

6. Focus all-class discussion.

Don’t redo everything students do in groups; focus attention on points of emphasis, places where students struggled, etc.

7. Get students talking before class starts.

Use the time as students are arriving to “warm them up”.

Tips for Creating Activities

1. Have a goal.

It is easier to design an activity if you have a clear idea what you want the activity to achieve.

One way to come up with goals is to think about things that have given your students trouble in the past. These are the places where you can have the biggest impact.

2. Have an assessment plan.

How will you tell if your students have achieved your goal? Having an assessment plan can focus your ideas for the activity. It will also give you information to tell whether your goals have been achieved.

3. Enumerate student **pre-requisites**.

Learning is about getting from point A (what the students already know/can do) to point B (what you want them to know/be able to do). Knowing the particular things you plan to build on will help you design your activity.

If you are uncertain that the pre-requisites are in place, you can build in a portion of the activity to diagnose this.

Is there anything students must do in advance to prepare?

4. **Design** the activity.

Sometimes the key idea presents itself without much effort.

Textbook examples can provide inspiration for activities.

Brainstorm with colleagues.

5. **Iterate**.

Take some time to consider how well the activity worked. What worked well? How might it be improved? What questions did the students ask while they were working? Were the instructions clear? Did anything surprise you? Are there elements (ideas, data sets, tasks, instructions, etc.) of this activity that can be recycled?

6. **Borrow** and **share**.

Collaborate with colleagues.

Find ways to make your best activities public.