Graduate Student Orientation

Amanda Stovicek, Department of English

Promoting Engagement and Understanding in the Classroom

Slide #1

Narrator: This presentation is designed to provide new graduate teaching assistants with the principles and strategies for developing lectures and discussions for their respective courses. We intend to promote deeper student engagement and understand of course material.

Slide #2

Narrator: We will discuss the differing experiences of student learners and teachers especially via classroom interaction through lectures and discussions.

Slide #3

Narrator: When we think about our experiences as students in a classroom setting. Not all of our experiences may be pleasant ones. We can probably remember particular classes where we were disinterested, bored, or even off put by certain lectures and discussions. What characterized those poor experiences? What do you remember disliking?

Lecturers that are dry, monotonous, and don't vary techniques, they can elicit little interest. If the sessions seem forced or inorganic, participation will also be forced. Many of these issues can come out of misunderstanding of learning styles, poor preparation, and tendency to slip into routine.

Now we should remember those classroom experiences that were pleasant, exciting, and memorable. These lectures that seemed to grab our interest in which our participation was fluid and organic are often the ones where preparation took place in advance where our instructor considered the varied styles of his or her students.

Slide #4

Narrator: As students, we relish those memorable discussions. We look forward to dynamic coursework. We should try to instill this same excitement in our own students. To do this, we must consider our actions as an instructor. Of course, depending on what department you are teaching in, course styles and materials will vary. Thus, we should strive to evaluate our course material before class begins and evaluate our class as much as we can in the first few weeks of the semester.

By know our material and how to approach it, we can began to structure our classwork. By getting to know our students, by testing out their styles, in both lecture and discussion settings, we can engage our students as fully as possible.

For example, in an English course, discussion in small groups would allow students to bounce ideas off of each other and formulate opinions before bringing them to the larger classroom. In larger class settings such as psychology or lecture-based science courses, instructors could facilitate question and response via tools like Poll Everywhere which utilizes texting to engage students anonymously.

Instructors should be aware of how they present themselves not just how they present material. One's appearance, demeanor, and attitude could make the difference between a boring class and an interesting one. If the instructor loves what he or she is teaching, students will be receptive to that.

We should seek to foster critical thinking in all levels at KSU. Asking questions of students or posing a problem with real world implications, can get students thinking outside of the constraint of the classroom and into situations that have potential consequences in their lives.

Don't be afraid to answer questions from your students either. Flexibility and fluidity makes a classroom environment seem natural. Questions that students pose may also lead to valuable information that the instructor may or may not have considered previously.

Considering self-assessment is also important for engagement. If we do not take the time to poll our students of their own engagement or of their interest and understanding, we cannot hope to reach all learners in our classes. Self-assessment allows us to gauge our classes, to mold how much we teach and approach to better fit the students.

Questions like, "What have you learned?" and "What confuses you still?" could be administered weekly to get students comfortable to talking with the instructor and to help the instructor reevaluate his or her teaching practices.

Slide #5

Narrator: So, when we teach, whether we are lecturing or discussing, we should think of how we are engaging our students in the course material. On this slide, we can see strategies to take to promote engagement and understanding. Giving students a handout or key discussion questions ahead of time allows them to prepare for what material that will come during the class and allow them to think about how they can contribute.

Of course, these points should be summarized at the end of the class period. Repetition promotes understanding.

Slide #6

Narrator: Now that we've discussed strategies and differences of being a teacher and a student, we must evaluate how we learn. Would you consider yourself a visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner? Perhaps you learn in another way. Take a moment to think about what types of teaching appeals to you and how you can easily absorb information.

Slide #7

Narrator: Approximately 65% of people are visual learners meaning they like pictures, charts, and graphic material. They like to see what they are learning approximately 35% of people are auditory learners. They prefer to hear what they are learning through speech, through written word, or by speaking aloud.

Approximately 5% of people are kinesthetic learners. These learners to do what they are learning. Active exercises, flip chart activities, anecdotes, and real-life analogies help.

Slide #8

Narrator: Though the three basic learning styles - visual, auditory, and kinesthetic - are the easiest ones to outline in the classroom, it is also worth noting that these styles can be further broken down and analyzed into seven perceptual styles, i.e. ways we use our senses to approach learning.

According to the Institute of Learning Styles, the seven perceptual styles are the means by which learners extract information from their surroundings through the use of their five senses. Thus, repeated exposure to course material via these perceptual pathways, will promote recall of course material and retention in long term memory.

Slide #9

Narrator: The seven perceptual or sensory styles are:

Print. These learners prefer to see the written word, to read material they are learning.

Aural or auditory. These learners prefer to listen what they are learning. Lectures work best here.

Hepatic learners prefer to touch or grasp the things they are learning. This applies more in the sciences where labs allow students to take a hands-on approach.

Interactive learners like to verbalize their studying. Discussions and small group work will benefit them.

Kinesthetic learners look specifically to whole body movement. This involves getting up from chairs, moving around the room, teaching using stations or student presentations.

Olfactory learners are students who learn through the use of smell and taste. Classrooms that are interactive or use food products may benefit these learners.

Finally, visual learners, which refers to those seeing everything via visual depictions, graphs, charts, videos, and pictures.

Knowing these seven styles and the three basic styles mentioned previously, we can work to engage all types of learners. If we recognize these styles in our students, we should attempt to appeal to these styles in some way. An easy way to see where the majority of your students fall is to poll them about their own learning styles. This poll, coupled with your own observations, will help you promote engagement and understanding.

Slide #10

Narrator: Application of these styles can be difficult without an example. We'll use World War 2 as an example here. How can we approach this topic via the seven styles?

Some examples of approaches might be:

For print learners, viewing textbooks about World War 2 or reading newspapers from the era.

For aural or auditory learners, listening to speeches, newsreels or even music from the era.

For haptic learners, holding artifacts from World War 2 while learning about key events. For example, holding onto a uniform or pin while learning about the Battle of the Bulge.

For interactive learners, group discussion about global politics in 1945 or about the morality behind the Mengele experiments, or small, medium, or large group discussions could work for these kinds of topics.

For kinesthetic learners, field trips to relevant places, getting up and moving around during the class, or even acting out key moments might help.

For olfactory learners, incorporating food from the era would highlight the senses of smell and taste.

And for visual learners, pictures such as the ones on this slide, video depictions, or even dramatizations would help them approach the material.

These are just a few examples of each style and they can be applied for other topics as well.

Slide #11

Narrator: Once we understand that our students have different learning styles, we can transition from engagement to understanding. Once you have to the tools to engage your students, you must use those tools to increase their understanding. Get your students to think critically about the information they are receiving in your class. If we want our students to think critically, we must think about our own approach.

We can approach learning via Bloom's Taxonomy.

Slide #12

Narrator: Bloom's Taxonomy is a classification of learning objectives that educators have set for students. This taxonomy is based on a publication developed after a series of conferences from 1949 to 1953. The taxonomy has been revised recently to promote creation and [didn't hear] specifically.

There are three domains within the Taxonomy: cognitive or thinking; effective or thinking; and psychomotor or doing. These domains relate to different learning situations and cognitive is the most important for knowledge development and college level work.

Slide #13

Narrator: Here we see the cognitive domain broken up into a hierarchy with the base level at the left, and the highest level of understanding at the right. Cognitive begins with remembering. Students must first recall the information they've learned in class. Students can remember specific terminology or specific facts; ways and means of dealing with these specifics such as methods, classifications, and sequences; and principles and universals in the specific fields.

For example, we can ask our students, "What were the outcomes of the Battle of the Bulge?" Once students are able to recall specifics, they can move on to understanding which is expressed through translation, interpretation, and extrapolation of course material.

For example, we can ask our students, "Compare the strategies of the Battle of the Bulge to the Battle of Midway." Once students understand material, they can apply this information across their courses. They use their knowledge to solve problems in new situations by applying facts, principles in a different way.

For example, we can move from a discussion of history to a discussion of consequences today. "What repercussions of World War 2 are directly visible in world economies today?"

Application gives way to analysis where students can take the information they've learned and ask questions about it - examination of elements, relationships, and principles.

Students can identify motives or causes and make inferences to support conclusions or hypotheses that they've drawn.

For example, we can ask our students to list three cultural principles or beliefs that are common today and explain how they are consequences of World War 2.

Once students can analyze course material, they can make judgments and draw conclusions about that information

Evaluation involves making judgments for validity and quality using evidence based on a set of criteria. This is the first step for students to move toward creating their own arguments. That is, evaluating an existing bit of information based on gathered evidence.

For example, we can ask our students, "Has World War 2 affected American culture?"

From evaluation comes synthesis or creation. This is the apex of the cognitive or thinking domain of Bloom's Taxonomy. Once students have remembered, understood, applied, analyzed, and evaluated course material, they can synthesize their own ideas based on what they've learned, combining their own knowledge to ask questions and create new hypotheses - the highest value of critical thinking.

For example, we can ask our students to defend the following hypothesis:

The outcome of World War 2 has affected American culture via the glamorization of American involvement in those outcomes and the resulting response to that glamorization.

The cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy revolves around knowledge, comprehension, and critical thinking. We can emphasize in learning, especially at the three lower levels, which are accessible for all types of courses: knowledge or remembering, comprehension or understanding, and finally, application.

Slide #14

Narrator: Once we understand the taxonomy, we can think about its application in lectures and discussions in our classrooms. For engaged lectures, we must think how our students recall and understand information in our courses. In lectures, we should provide multiple examples and presentations of our course material to appeal to the different learners. We can use emotion to encourage recall. We should incorporate discussions to promote different applications of the course material.

Slide #15

Narrator: Once students can recall and understand information, they can apply said information to real-life situations which can be used in discussions. Course material and group size should be considered for discussion feasibility. Small groups and larger discussions work well with material involving critical thinking and decision making. Instructors should reinforce participation but also make sure they guide discussions to stay on topic.

Guidelines for discussion participation should be presented before an instructor facilitates discussion. This way, students know what to expect and an instructor has something to fall back if a discussion gets out of hand.

Slide #16

Narrator: I want to leave you with a quote from Albert Einstein. He says, "I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn." This is our job as instructors. We create and facilitate situations where our students can critically think about the information we give them. We have the tools and the foresight to connect and engage and promote understanding in our students.

Thank you for listening to this presentation.

Slide #17

[No audio.]

[End of class.]