



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Creating Enthusiasm In The Classroom

At a convention I attended several years ago, a speaker tried to convey to an audience of mathematics teachers that they must be actors in their classrooms. I fell prey to that piece of advice and have not regretted it in my many years of teaching; when I tried it, I saw immediate positive results. Hence, students see many sides of me, especially when I jovially concoct all types of mathematics examples pertinent to the topic under discussion. So we talk about shopping for bargains (sale discounts), lottery tickets, salary increases, traveling by car to New York, traveling by plane with and against the wind when going on vacation, traveling by boat with and against the current on the river, and investing money to become financially independent.

This technique is deliberate. (1) Many students find mathematics boring; and if students can relate mathematics taught in the classroom with real life experiences, then there exists a great possibility that the subject matter might become more meaningful and lasting. (2) After teaching for several years, the teacher needs to create excitement in the classroom for himself/herself to combat the feelings of burn-out.

My reason, however, for writing this article is to share a new experience with readers.

Some of us teach the same courses semester after semester; and having done so for several years, we can attend classes and give lectures, with little or no preparation. Teaching should be challenging both to the students and to ourselves; when it becomes more challenging to us, the lectures become more stimulating and interesting to the students. As a result, often we need to try new methods, various teaching/learning techniques.

I decided to teach a course which I had not taught for several years; this meant that I would be forced out of the complacency which comes with teaching the same courses all the time. But what I discovered was that the students were not getting the same "high" as I anticipated. They participated, but not satisfactorily. So I decided to try something new—new to my style of teaching. At the end of a class session, I announced what would be covered during the next class period. I

divided this section of the text among the students and asked each one to read the entire section and prepare a presentation to be made to the class.

At the next class session, after answering questions about the day's activities, I sat with the students while they gave presentations. Each presentation was critiqued by me and/or the other students in a very positive manner, paying attention to omissions of important items. I filled in those areas for which there were no students to report (two students were absent).

Some students tended to read directly from the text, while others were more thorough in their preparation and delivery. At the end of the students' presentations, I gave a quick overall summary and some advice as to how they could better prepare their assignments. Homework assignments were then made based on topics discussed in class.

At the next class session everyone was present, and I repeated the technique, assigning each student an area of study to report on in class. The students came much better prepared; they used the chalkboard, illustrated problems, drew graphs, and made excellent presentations. [Whereas I might have given a C to a first attempt, the second attempt would have received an A minus.] The students appeared confident in their presentations and were very convincing in their arguments. Some of them literally took on the "air" of a professor at the board.

The presentations were valuable and enjoyable teaching successes. I began to award a maximum of ten points for the presentations, and there was a marked increase in enthusiasm among the students. They got to know each other better, and the "stronger" helped the "weaker" whenever they had to work on problems in class.

Following are some students' opinions of this methodology:

Class presentations are good educational tools. You are forced to learn and understand the material you must present.



I believe that as a student it is sometimes easier to translate and transfer information to other students. Therefore, I gained from having fellow students present different topics in mathematics to me.

When you are assigned to do problems on your own and explain them to the class, it tests you to see whether you understand or if you are capable of doing the problems. You feel more obligated and will try to do your best. Also you can benefit from it;

because as you explain it, students and teacher can point out to you aspects of the problem you might not be able to see or understand. I think you develop a feeling of self-confidence.

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Peer Tutors

A common dilemma facing both two- and four-year institutions is publicizing the existence of tutoring services on campus while increasing the legitimacy of peer tutors for the general student population. As Tutor Coordinator and Student Support Services Counselor, I have recently explored some innovative methods to meet both needs for campus tutoring services. One of the most effective methods is the utilization of peer tutors as facilitators for study skills seminars under the sponsorship of Student Support Services.

Initially, tutors helped with organizing materials and publicizing the seminars through the use of posters and memos to students and faculty. They would also help with the organization of group activities for the seminars and evaluation process itself.

This past fall semester, several of the tutors expressed an interest in presenting at the seminars, in addition to their other responsibilities. One of the tutors had already demonstrated presentation expertise by sharing information about the Tutoring Lab with prospective students on visitation days.

I applauded the tutors' initiative: presentations would be opportunities to present themselves as authorities and role models to the general student population, and would be opportunities to better organize the increasing numbers of students attending study skills seminars.

I met with three of the tutors a week before the seminar to compile a "script" for the presentations. We wanted to be consistent not only with the study

skills information presented, but with procedures for structuring group activities. Peer tutors were invited to provide input, so that planning the seminars could be a democratic process.

Final copies of all materials were provided for each tutor. Each was to be responsible for a small group (four to eight people), depending on the total number of students attending the seminar. [In the past, when large numbers of students—25 to 45—attended, it was difficult (if not impossible) to carry out group activities. With tutors dividing the large group into smaller groups of four to eight people, then going into separate classrooms, group activities were much better organized and executed.]

The result of this plan was that more students became familiar with the work of the tutors, and the tutors were viewed both as role models and as group facilitators. In addition, seminar activities became the small group experiences that we had sought to provide initially.

Both the peer tutors and the Tutoring Center have earned a well-deserved legitimacy in the eyes of the general student population.

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