



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Teaching Learning Project—Fun for Student and Educator!

Integration of writing skills, critical thinking, conceptual learning, and concurrent theory and practice are of paramount concern across our campuses. As a college professor, I have witnessed a steady decline in the ability of my students to think critically, write expressively, and learn conceptually. This is a concern shared by our curriculum theorists, as well as by the researchers who suggest that writing is a critical component in all disciplines.

Of equal importance is keeping our sanity as professors and not inundating ourselves with mountains of paperwork. When we have classes of over 30 students each, multiple choice exams are especially attractive.

But we wanted to encourage more writing. Therefore, we developed a teaching/learning project that required more writing, but that limited writing assignments to one page each!

The teaching/learning project model presented here is for nursing students in a senior medical/surgical course, but it can be adapted to any discipline.

Criteria for Teaching/Learning Project

1. Content Accuracy (30%)

It is imperative that the information the student is disseminating to clients or professionals be accurate. The content should be relevant to the subject matter of the course. For example, in the senior medical/surgical course, the student can pick self-breast exam, testicular exam, colostomy care, or a specific medication related to the course content for his/her writing assignment.

2. Content Clarity and Appropriateness for Client Reading Level (20%)

The student must design the project for a specific audience. If the student is preparing a teaching/learning project for a client, terminology should be in lay terms. If the project is designed for others in the field, professional terminology is more appropriate.

3. Appearance (15%)

Included in this category is neatness, spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. If students in any discipline want to be seen as professionals, they must be able to communicate with their clients and other

professionals. Also included is the one-page limit. While initially this may seem like an easy task for students, they soon discover it is very difficult to effectively communicate in a one-page format.

4. Creativity (10%)

I encourage students to be creative and "do their thing." Students have designed pamphlets and board games, and they have demonstrated tremendous artistic ability. Several of my students have sent their projects to professional journals for publication.

5. Evaluation of Teaching (15%)

Students should understand that because they have been taught does not mean that they have learned! They must, therefore, know how to evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching. On a separate sheet of paper they are to include:

- Teacher goal statement (i.e., to teach a client to do a self-breast examination)
- Resource materials used (i.e., AV material, printed handouts, models, pamphlets)
- Techniques utilized in teaching (i.e., demonstration/return demonstration, lecture, discussion, role-playing, question-answer period)
- Evaluation of teaching (i.e., client outcomes, specific and written in measurable terms)

6. Bibliography (10%)

Students must learn to seek information from a variety of sources. They are to include, on a separate sheet of paper, a bibliography of no less than three sources which they have consulted (from the project textbooks or professional journals). Bibliographies should follow an approved reference style.

The teaching/learning project fosters creativity and puts fun into learning. It also allows instructors to be themselves, as well!

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Essay Tests II

Because we wanted to enhance students' potential for success in writing across the curriculum, we designed an outline that described how to write essay tests (see *Innovation Abstracts*, Vol. IX, No. 25). Students struggling with the writing experience convinced us that they should be more involved in selecting content about which they were required to write.

While the students were able to define, describe, and give examples from text and lecture material, the overwhelming evidence was that students have difficulty integrating, synthesizing, or developing unique ideas about the concepts. As the result of in-depth interviews with students and developmental education faculty in English and speech, it was determined that students have difficulty expressing themselves without "ownership" of the material. **STUDENTS WRITE AND SPEAK BETTER WHEN THEY WRITE AND SPEAK ABOUT SOMETHING THEY REALLY KNOW.**

Thus, a variety of approaches to student test-taking has been initiated, with the express purpose of giving students more control over the material. The use and relative success of each method appear to be dependent upon several factors:

1. the relative writing ability as determined from a writing sample, collected at the beginning of the quarter;
2. the relative complexity of the concepts; and
3. the synergy of the class members' interaction.

All questions are distributed to the students at least a week before the test. Depending upon the content, the questions may be distributed at the beginning of the learning unit as "study guides." The methods of essay testing which appear to provide ownership include:

1. students selecting questions at test time from a pre-selected list,
2. students selecting questions before the testing date from a pre-selected list of questions,
3. individual students generating their own questions,
4. groups generating their own questions,
5. some combination of #3 and #4,
6. students weighing value of questions/answers (each student decides how much of his/her

test grade he/she wants particular questions to affect).

With each of these methods, I have adopted a variety of "open note" testing procedures. Again, the approach depends upon writing ability, complexity of concepts, and synergy of the class. These include:

1. a 3x5 card for all questions,
2. a 3x5 card for each question,
3. a one-page note sheet for all (selected) questions.

The notes that students bring with them to the test further enhance their sense of control, and the simple process of reducing content to notes appears to help most students write better.

Different combinations are worth a try, and (perish the thought) students might even be asked to select the method(s) they feel helps them learn best.

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