



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Get Students Moving

Most instructors have moved away from the “sage on the stage” teaching style in favor of the “guide on the side” approach. It is rare today for instructors to lecture for an entire class period. For example, I always seek new ways to engage students during my classes. While I do lecture in every class, I intersperse lectures with group discussions, PowerPoint and Prezi presentations, and other activities. My goal of presenting course content in various ways is to help students engage more with each other and the course material.

Throughout the semester, I incorporate different strategies so students can learn and teach the literature we study. Some of the best ways for students to learn is through class discussions and debates. During such activities, students learn from their classmates’ viewpoints.

Literature classes at Hudson County Community College meet once per week for just under three hours. Keeping students engaged for that length of time is challenging; therefore, I try to move from one activity to the next every 15 minutes.

In my two World Literature survey courses, I follow a general format for each class session. I begin class with an open-book quiz, then I use PowerPoint to present the author and historical context of the text under consideration. Afterwards, students work in teams to dissect various aspects of the text and share their findings with the class. To conclude the class, I facilitate a class discussion about the text.

Start Moving

Afternoon classes can be nap inducing. So, to prevent students from nodding off in class, I have them stand up and engage with the text by speaking and moving. To encourage movement, I have adopted a classroom kinesthetic exercise called “Four Corners.” A kinesthetic classroom exercise is one in which students carry out physical activities, rather than passively listening to lectures or watching demonstrations. As the name of the exercise implies, each corner in the room represents an answer choice. The instructor poses a question to the class and each student moves to one corner of the room based on his or her response to the question.

Once the purpose of the strategy is explained to the class, the instructor poses a thought-provoking question, provides time for students to think about and reflect on their answers, and instructs them to move to a corner that reflects their answers. Students discuss and justify their selected responses with other students standing in the same corner. Following corner discussions, students are invited to share with the entire class

why they are in their selected corner. Often, students hear evidence from their peers that convinces them to change their thinking, and therefore change corners.

This exercise requires students to form and defend opinions and to be open to changing their view points if another classmate is sufficiently persuasive. With the “Four Corners” exercise, students engage in teamwork, persuasive speaking, and active listening. Not only do students learn from each other, but they have also persuaded me to change my mind a few times!

The Assignment

I ask students to read the first 70 pages of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. Students then identify the three strands of rhetorical argument in the text developed by Aristotle: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos arguments appeal to the reader based on the writer’s experience, ethics, and credibility. Pathos arguments appeal to the reader’s emotions and needs such as compassion, fear, self-esteem, pity, and anger. Logos arguments appeal to the reader’s logic through the writer’s use of evidence, facts, and statistics. Olaudah Equiano uses all three Aristotle’s arguments in his narrative. Below are two example passages from the narrative that I read to students so that they can determine the passages’ rhetorical arguments:

- Example 1. “People generally think those memoirs only worthy to be read or remembered which abound in great or striking events, those, in short, which in a high degree excite either admiration or pity; all others they consign to contempt and oblivion. It is therefore, I confess, not a little hazardous in a private and obscure individual, and a stranger too, thus to solicit the indulgent attention of the public; especially when I own I offer here the history of neither a saint, a hero, nor a tyrant” (Equiano 31).
- Example 2. “But alas! Ere long it was my fate to be thus attacked, and to be carried off, when none of the grown people were nigh” (Equiano 47).

For this activity, all students gather in the center of the classroom while I read a passage from the text. Each student must decide if the passage is an ethos, pathos, or logos argument. Students consider which argument they believe best represents the passage and move to the appropriate corner. Once in the corner of their choice, students confer with each other to formulate why they believe the passage is an ethos, pathos, or logos argument. Then one representative from each corner

group defends why the passage exemplifies their argument. Students can move from one corner to another if they are persuaded by their classmates' explanations.

Conclusion

When students get up and move around during a kinesthetic classroom exercise, they not only stimulate their muscles, but they also stimulate their brains. The exercise described above encourages students to think more deeply about a text, form and defend opinions, and express themselves clearly to their peers. At times, students become so passionate with defending their ideas that debates arise. I enjoy seeing my students vehemently defend their positions. So, I don't discourage these debates, as long as they remain civil.

There are limitless variations to this kinesthetic exercise and I envision its use in a variety of classes other than a literature class. In a literature class, however, all opinions are viable as long as students can defend them. This exercise is most effective when there is no "correct" answer. Science and math instructors can use kinesthetic classroom activities when there is more than one approach to an answer. "Four Corners" is an effective kinesthetic exercise in any class where diverse opinions are viable and welcomed.

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Works Cited

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Vincent Carretta. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.