



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## "TEACHING IN CHUNKS": PROMOTING INTEGRATION OF CONCEPTS

My students frequently find it difficult to transfer information presented in the classroom to practice in the field. When I use the lecture method to deliver information, students' passive role makes them less alert, reduces their comprehension, and decreases the chances that they can make future applications. Students are most attentive when they are in a setting which is stimulating, changing, novel, or motivating. It is for this purpose that I recently began using a technique called "teaching in chunks."

Teaching in chunks has been promoted as a means of breaking up a class period into manageable, and more meaningful time-blocks of activities. This technique may be used to gauge the number of topics that can be covered in a given time period and still keep students' attention. By breaking an hour into three to four "chunks" and presenting one or two concepts per chunk, the instructor can be reasonably sure that he or she is progressing at a good pace. To keep students' attention and promote learning, students must be involved and provide feedback.

I applied the "teaching in chunks" technique during a 2 1/2 hour lecture, to 17 nursing students, about how to care for individuals with musculoskeletal disorders. I provided information chunks in approximately 10-to-20-minute segments. The students then had 2-to-5-minutes to organize their notes, collaborate with classmates, and/or research major points in their texts. I provided these written guidelines which served as ground rules:

- stay in room
- use quiet voices
- relocate in room if necessary
- share experiences
- discuss clinical application
- research in text
- discuss questions
- highlight main points.

During my trial of the "chunking" technique, I assessed my students' prior and subsequent knowledge through a matrix-type tool. Students recalled more content and understood more of the primary concepts than had former students responding to my traditional lecture format. Positive comments included: "I had an opportunity to compare my notes with my classmates'," "I felt less rushed," and "Providing information in shorter segments made it easier to understand and remember." Students also reported that they felt the technique helped them remember and study the content in a more organized fashion, that concepts presented in this style were easily compared and interrelated. However, one student said that she would have preferred previous knowledge of the content that was to be covered in each of the blocks; another felt that a less structured environment during the minutes allocated for review would have been helpful.

While the responses to my trial of teaching in chunks were mixed, I plan to continue to experiment with this technique and refine it for future lectures.

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## LESSONS ON SERVICE LEARNING

Mentioning *service learning* to faculty typically draws this confused and burdened response, "What is service learning and why do I have to do it?" As the service learning coordinator for my college, I hear these words and instinctively gear up for battle. I immediately prepare to attack on the grounds that service learning is not *just* community service and draw my pedagogical sword to defend to the death the importance of learning by doing. I stand, ready to fight for service learning as the "be all to end all" method for teaching—not to mention the only way to total educational fulfillment.

Although I have lost many battles, I have continued on about why one should do service learning, how it could make both your life and teaching career more rewarding...blah, blah, blah.

It is obvious now why faculty buy-in remained low. I was professing, not teaching. I realized this when an unexpected ally—a math instructor—came to my rescue. After discovering that math instructors are among the hardest to reach when it comes to service learning, her comment was received as a great gift.

"It's not that I am opposed to the concepts of service learning, I just need someone to *teach me how* to make it work in my classroom."

Amid the fury of the debate that instructors have been engaged in for years about whether or not service learning is a valid teaching tool, perhaps we have forgotten to employ its basic tenants within our own faculty communities. By giving faculty concrete methods, not abstract concepts, for service learning, they are able to participate in the process of incorporating service learning into their classrooms.

It occurred to me that the key to reaching more faculty members might be to offer instructional, rather than informational venues on service learning. Therefore, I designed a series of three "hands-on" workshops.

### #1 Explaining Service Learning

This workshop allows faculty to explore service learning as a new or different teaching method for their courses. Faculty are asked to brainstorm service learning project ideas that would fit their course content. Then, they are asked to exchange ideas and work together on constructing different ways to implement service learning into their courses.

### #2 Doing Service Learning

This workshop assists faculty in designing a syllabus that integrates the service learning option. It also instructs faculty about how to utilize the service learn-

ing coordinator, the service learning website, and other resources provided by the college and the community.

### #3 Expanding Service Learning

This follow-up workshop provides opportunities to troubleshoot problems; learn about new ideas for expanding existing projects; or initiate a service learning project for themselves/colleagues.

Faculty participation and understanding have increased, and "peace time" has had its benefits. However, students will be the greatest beneficiaries and, ultimately, will teach us by their service learning experiences.

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