



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *Motivation and Activation=Ownership and Success*

As a developmental English and reading instructor, I have been using collaborative learning strategies and interactive teaching techniques, as well as varying my teaching activities, to accommodate multiple learning styles. At one time, I had the idea that industry's strategy of goal-setting would be a good addition to my repertoire of teaching techniques. However, after evaluating my teaching goals, I determined that this additional strategy was only *one part* of what was needed to make a difference—industry's practice of team-directed workforce might be another. I decided to try to duplicate this strategy in a classroom setting. I gave serious thought to motivation and activation, and came up with a plan to transfer some ownership of the class from the teacher to the students. So, I redesigned my syllabus to include only the class description, desired outcomes, list of textbooks, and possible assessment methods. Then I began the experiment.

On the first day of class, I divided the students into groups (that could change over the semester), and the groups chose temporary leaders. Then each student interviewed another student in his group and introduced that student to the class. Next, the students listed five things that they would like to accomplish in the class, and the group leaders recorded these goals on a flip chart. The lists were posted in the classroom. We discussed the goals and prioritized them in order of importance, and then turned to the syllabus. We discussed the course description and what it took to be successful in this class and others, we looked at syllabi from past classes, and then we discussed the parts of the syllabus that were missing.

Construction on new sections of the syllabus began with the next class meeting. Working in groups, the students (1) selected the assessment methods (e.g., quizzes and writing assignments) they wished to use for the writing portion of the class and the reading assignments (including a group's teaching one skill to the class) for the reading portion; and (2) wrote policies, such as for attendance, late work, group privileges (a group could divorce a member, or a member could petition to join another group), extra credit, and grading scales. (3) Then, each group elected one of its members to serve on an all-student council that would

be responsible for enforcing policies and arbitrating disputes. (Eventually, the council was called upon to settle several disputes and two requests for exceptions to the rules.)

To encourage group unity further, I gave stickers to students who were present and on time to class, and averaged the sticker points of group members just before the tests. The group with the highest average had points added to their next test scores. And students played "Word Challenge," a game in which they used vocabulary words in conversations outside the classroom and reported the results to the class. The class approved or disapproved the use of each word. If usage was approved, the group could record the words in the group's column. Words were totaled eventually, and the winning group received a special prize.

Grades were my province, and I delivered most of the instruction. However, the groups were responsible for delivering some lessons to the class, tutoring their members, and holding a book discussion hour each week.

This experiment in ownership succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. The class had an 87% retention rate, and only one student needed to repeat. This experience created a student support group that should serve its members well throughout their college careers. Beyond academics and study skills, however, these students acquired important intangibles—e.g., life skills, such as punctuality, attendance, participation, productivity, and team playing. I plan to extend this experiment to a freshman English composition class and add to the students' ownership by giving them some choice of textbooks.

Students in this experiment proved that owning the design, content standards, and discipline of a class really works! With this ownership came the determination to succeed and, ultimately, came their success.

Linda Caywood-Farrell, *Instructor, English*

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## *Chindogu, or Whatchamacallit*

While looking for creative and challenging writing projects, I came across a fascinating book which contained the answer to my dilemma. *Chindogu: 100 Almost Completely Useless Japanese Inventions*, by Kenji Kawakami (translated and additional text by Dan Papia), is a collection of tongue-in-cheek inventions (actually made and photographed) with clever descriptions. Some of the more memorable items in this book include: a shirt with a stenciled graph on the back so the wearer can accurately describe the location of that annoying itch; slippers for cats which are, in reality, dust cloths to get at those difficult-to-reach dusting places; and a miniature umbrella that fits over a camera for taking pictures on rainy days. The book provided a good laugh and inspiration. Why not have my writing students create a Chindogu or, the more Americanized version, Whatchamacallit?

Armed with Kenji Kawakami's book and the ten tenets of what makes a Chindogu, I threw the gauntlet to my students in my basic writing classes: create an almost totally useless product, describe it, make it, draw it, and design an advertising scheme to market it. I was a bit skeptical about how well my students would accept this creative challenge—a mistake on my part!

The students worked in teams and produced some stunning Whatchamacallits in only two class sessions. One team produced the "Shower Talk Curtain," which has a velcro flap sewn into the curtain, resulting in easier, more modest bathroom conversations. Another team created the "Lifto Heel," an extended heel for a woman's shoe that can be retracted with a key for those lunchtime walks. Still another came up with the miniaturized textbook, complete with magnifying glass, suitable for students who get back problems from overweighted backpacks. While most of the products fit the description of almost totally useless inventions, there were a few that were much too practical and marketable; as a result, they did not qualify for Whatchamacallit status.

The thinking, writing, and fun activities of this project made it a success! And, it convinced me that all students can enjoy and profit by a good creative challenge.

**Rick Stepp-Bolling**, *Instructor, English*

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## NISOD's International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence

May 23-26, 1999  
Austin, Texas  
Austin Convention Center

### *Keynote Speakers*

Monday, May 24

"Intersection: Lofty Vision and Hard Realities"  
James Tschechtelin, President, Baltimore City  
Community College

Tuesday, May 25

"Strategic Thinking for Embracing Diversity"  
Juliet Garcia, President  
The University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas  
Southmost College

### *Program Strands*

- Teaching and Learning
- Leadership Development
- Career Development
- Teamship Development

### *Special Emphasis - 1999*

In further support of the American Association of Community Colleges' 1999 special attention to remedial education as a national imperative, this year's program review committee gave special consideration to presentations describing and demonstrating successful remedial/developmental education instructional strategies, programs, and initiatives.

### *Best Practices*

NISOD continues its tradition of showcasing community colleges' best practices. Sessions describing and/or demonstrating best practices in instruction, initiatives, programming, and support will be identified accordingly in the conference program.

**Suanne D. Roueche**, *Editor*

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