



Engaging Your Students with Mini-lectures, Prediscussion Posts, and Interactive Starter Activities

SPEAKERS

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Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. How do you get your students to engage with the content so they better retain it? How do you get your students to engage in discussion so that everyone is talking and everyone feels empowered to use their voice? The concept of student engagement is broad, but today, we're going to talk about how to incorporate min-lectures, the importance of a prediscussion post, and how you can use drawing, a multimedia starter, or social activity to engage students with the content. To start, Christy Price explains the concept of mini-lectures and how to engage students through the use of them.

Christy Price 00:53

Today, we're going to talk about effective mini-lectures, how to engage students through the use of mini-lectures. And I want to begin by saying this was very heavy on my mind and sense that as I travel and speak, and even on my own campus, I realize that the majority of us are still, although we are experimenting a lot with more engaging active learning methods, we are still going to have to lecture to serve to a certain extent. And the point of all of this is if we are going to lecture, how can we do that well and in the most effective way to achieve outcomes for students, or to assist students in achieving outcomes? So I want to start today with a somewhat humorous quote from a student on an official evaluation of one of their instructors. The student says, "I failed a quiz because I didn't realize he was teaching. I thought he was just talking." So I think one of our main issues, of course, is lessening attention span, student disinterest. So part of this will be some 10 tips on how to do the effective mini-lecture such that students get the most out of that lecture time. So one of my first points here comes from Sousa's *How the Brain Learns*, the idea that, as you see in your notes, the brain is a novelty seeker. So our first most important thing is that we need to be using teaching activities that involve our learners. So the more we can change things up and change our methods, the more we will engage our students. My next point has to do with a quote from Sousa's *How the Brain Learns* - this idea that there's a big limitation in terms of lecture only, that, in my own research, I read repeatedly on my surveys of students, not that they had an issue with lecture, but that they had an issue with lecture only. So I think we need to be careful about changing things up, but also when we lecture to be effective,

more effective. So first point, the effect of mini-lecture has to be mini. And when I say mini, I would say there's some debate, particularly if we're doing video capture. Now we'll hear that many lectures should be no more than seven minutes. And I think in some cases, that's a stretch. So if we're many lecturing in class, I typically say somewhere between five and 15, hopefully no more than 10 depending on the level of learners and the kinds of content and if it's something that maintains attention, perhaps a little bit more. The next thing you'll see in your notes is another humorous quote from a student who simply says, "Can you write in big letters because I want to take a picture of the board." So it's sort of like the game has changed a bit. And students are avoiding taking notes and they're just taking photos of content. So I do want to address another big issue that I think is somewhat controversial, because a lot of us are really attached to the idea of old school note-taking the Cornell Method and obviously there are some effective methods and there are some pros, obviously for taking notes. But what you'll see in your notes along with the presentation, is this idea that lecture and note-taking together is now referred to by cognitive psychologists as switch tasking. So if you look in the cognitive psychology literature right now, there's a big backlash against the what they call the myth of multitasking. And as Sousa says, the brain cannot carry out two cognitive processes simultaneously. So what we're glorifying as I'm a good multitasker is actually switch tasking. So this really, really hit me hard and just sort of transformed my teaching and I think it's been one of the things that has helped me most and that's to realize that, oh, the traditional note-taking that we do is actually overloading the auditory verbal aspect of our processing. So if you follow along on the notes, you'll see on the dual coding handout, how visual input is processed, and words verbal, and auditory are processed as well. And if our students are in this situation where they're having to listen, and they're having to write, they're having a look at a slide. We're overloading those processes. So my next recommendation would be that we do things a little differently, and that we don't in my classes, we no longer take traditional open hand notes on blank sheets of paper. We do what I call guided processing. So if you're following along, my second tip, is to use what I refer to as guided practice to minimize the note taking process in order to enhance memory processing. So once again, students would seem to be overwhelmed. They're listening, they're trying to write at the same time, they're trying to look at the board, so guided practice, once again, if you're looking at Sousa's How the Brain Learns on memory processing, you'll see for whatever reason, this is very apparent in the cognitive psychology literature, that if a question is posed for whatever reason, that enhances our ability to process something greatly, so retention is greatly enhanced by the posing of a question. So instead of even traditional, I know some people are printing out their PowerPoints that are just outline format. This is actually a question format. But basically, if I'm doing a five minute lecture or a 10 minute lecture, we're looking for what are the big three to five, possibly 10? If you're doing a 15 minute lecture, what are the big main points? What are the big outcomes, and you pose those questions in advance to students either on the learning management system or you're handing them out to students, and that guided practice, in my own experience has greatly enhanced student achievement of learning outcomes, success on assessments, and so forth.

Tierney King 07:23

Just as you can use mini-lectures to foster student engagement. Kamil Hamoui explains how he uses a prediscussion posts to ignite interest and engagement prior to a class discussion. The prediscussion posts consist of a theoretical question and an experiential question - so students get to apply their own experiences to the discussion.

Kamil Hamoui 07:44

The discussions are a big part of my classes. It's not just a little addendum, a little supplementary thing if you're finished with a lecture. Okay, let's do a little bit of discussion now. No, it's an integral part of the class. It's fully integrated into the class. So for each of my lessons that I'm teaching, for example, for Introduction to Psychology, each of those lessons and I cover in a term typically has a discussion associated with it, and for the discussion I require students to do some work prior to the class discussion outside of class. Then they come to class. We have our class discussion. I'll talk about that together in person. You could also do this in a remote modality if you have a synchronous remote class, but you have a class discussion component when you're meeting with the students. And then afterwards, students engage in some reflection after the discussion on their own independently. So there are three parts to it. So the first part is what I call the prediscussion post. So I present for students the issue, the question to be discussed. I give them an overview of it. I give them some content to view. It might be a lecture, it might be reading an online article, it might be watching an online video. So they learn about the issue on their own. And then they have a set of questions to answer in the prediscussion post. Now, this is something they do before class the day before the class discussion. Well, they have a period of days where they can complete it prior to the class where we're going to engage in the discussion together. Typically, I have two questions for them to address. One question is experiential. So I asked them to think about their own experiences with the issue or their own observations related to the issue. So for example, take the issue of social media use and adolescence. So this is one of the topics I use for my discussion. How much social media should an adolescent be allowed to use, a young adolescent, let's say 12 to 14? That's one question. It's a short question. So you are making a judgement about what you think is good or bad in that regard? And the second question is, what do you think the impact of social media use is on development? So socioemotional development? Is it impactful? Is it not impactful? Is it positive or negative? So typically, I have two questions. One more is a more theoretical question and one is more experiential, where they get to apply their own experiences. So for this topic, I would first have a question asking students to kind of reflect back to think back when they were young, adolescent, and what social media they used. Now, that goes back a long time, you know, because you might have some older students, you could ask them, just to reflect upon what they've observed with adolescents in that age range and their social media use. And then the second question, has them apply some theoretical concepts. So here's where they have to first have done some reading, watch the lectures, done some research of authoritative online sources, and they take some of that contact some of that information, some of those ideas, and they apply them in their argument and their position statement about what they think the impact is of social media use on socioemotional development. So that's the prediscussion post. Now for that theoretical question I was talking about, I require students to provide an in-text citation. So wherever they're using ideas from a source, I first asked them to quote the ideas, to paraphrase them, to put the ideas in their own words, that's an important skill for students to develop. And then to provide a citation to the source the name of the article, the author, and if it's online a URL, so make that a requirement for that post. Now, an important thing to consider is, your students might not do this, unless you make it worth their time. So it's very important to incentivize student work with points towards their grade. So you need to make it worth something substantial towards their course grade.

Tierney King 12:04

So we've gone through different elements to increase student engagement from mini-lectures to prediscussion post. But now, Jeremy Caplan explains how you can integrate drawing, a multimedia starter, or social activity to engage students with something that is interesting and interactive right from the start of class.

Jeremy Caplan 12:23

The next way for students to interact actively with an online exercise or activity is by drawing. So there's a lot of research that shows that when we draw things, they're integrated into our minds and our memory in creative and strong ways. So this could be a concept map, that could be asking them to create a quick concept map, connecting three or four concepts that you've talked about in the class, or connecting some ideas that were discussed by a guest speaker recently, or connecting recent events in the real world to a topic you're covering in the class, it could also be an opportunity for them to draw in a different way. So you can ask them to draw out a visual version of a concept like truth, or like entrepreneurship, and tell them to put it on a piece of paper. And a key instruction is that there are no wrong answers. And in some cases, you may even want to say you're not going to be collecting something, so that students can feel free to engage with that in a creative way. Now, you may want to check on their work. And so you may want to ask for some volunteers, or encourage them to take a little picture and submit that image. But that's really up to you and your teaching style. The next activity you can engage students with is multimedia starter, so you can play a quick video, quick piece of audio, or even show them a picture dramatic picture. And what you're asking them to do is interact with that in some way. So either provide a caption for it, provide a six-word response to it, or a one-word response to it or write a sentence about their reaction to it. So they're doing something interactive, and you're taking advantage of the fact that you're in a digital medium in an online class. And it can be really exciting to see a powerful video or a piece of audio or picture that the students haven't seen before and particularly useful if it's connected to the topic you're teaching about. And finally, you can engage them with a social activity of some sort, meaning they're in breakout rooms, and they're working with one colleague or two fellow students or even three, to do an activity that you give them that's clearly constrained, clearly defined. So for example, it might be come up with a quote together from one of the past sessions, or one of the readings or something that we've been talking about in school in class that has meaning to you. Or it could be asking them to share a question that they have come up with a thick question, an interesting meaty, important question that the course has raised in their minds. And together, they can discuss that and come back with that question and paste it in the chat or paste it in a shared document that you have or share it in whatever way works best for you and your teaching style. They could also be asked to share an underrated concept, or an interesting concept that they think deserves more attention in the subject matter that you're teaching. So those are all ways to create a social activity with the students in break out rooms. If you don't want to use breakout rooms or you can't use breakout rooms, you can have students do that individually and then share their answers with other students either by email or in whatever way works for you and your teaching format. So those are some ways of engaging students right from the start of class with interesting and interactive activities.

Tierney King 15:19

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