

〈研究ノート〉

Active Learning In Action!

(One example of designing and implementing
a seminar project using active learning)

Robert McGuire: Hokkaido Musashi Women's
Junior College Department of English

With Invaluable Help From:

K. Amo, Y. Ishibashi, M. Onodera, R. Kasai,
F. Kikuchi, S. Takakura, N. Nakamura, Y. Naruse,
S. Hanamoto, M. Fujita, H. Funato, N. Matamura

Introduction

Active learning is defined as “a method of learning in which students are actively or experientially involved in the learning process and where there are different levels of active learning, depending on student involvement. (Bonwell & Eison 1991).” Active learning is also very closely related to Bloom's taxonomy of learning in that it strives for the students to be engaged in learning at higher levels such as analyzing information, evaluating their own decisions during the learning process, and creating products using the information they have obtained during the learning process.

Having been educated using these concepts and also using active

learning extensively in my own teaching, I believe that active learning is an extremely useful tool for us as educators. The policy of teaching using only lectures creates students who are passive, bored, and disengaged from their learning. This is especially true with the current generation of students who have very short attention spans and are easily distracted due to (over) use of the Internet and a heavy reliance on social media.

The project described in this paper: A survey on humor and a presentation of the survey results, was carried out by students in my second year seminar class during weeks two through five of the first semester. This paper is divided into three sections: A description of the process of creating the survey questionnaire, conducting the survey and making the presentation, and finally a look at the results of the project.

The Process

During the first week of class students were given the Western Humor and Culture Phrases and Questions handout (see appendix 1) as an introduction to some of the ideas and language that would be used during the class. This paper provides background vocabulary and phrases for discussing kinds of humor and expressing likes or dislikes and why. Ideas from this handout, as well as concepts from the previous week were used during the construction and analysis of the survey.

At the start of the second class the students were divided into three groups of four students each and given the survey paper and instructions (see appendix 2). The survey was divided into three sections (Social, Likes and Dislikes, and Funny Media) and there were one or two questions provided as examples in each section. The students were then given the task of creating more questions for each section using the provided

questions as models. After each group was finished making their questions, they were checked for clarity and language issues and to make sure they fit in with the overall theme of each section of the survey.

It is important to note that during the process of creating the new questions for each section of the questionnaire the students were engaged in analysis of the questions provided as well as making decisions dealing with their own questions with regards to them being appropriate for the particular section of the questionnaire, being applicable to students and non-students alike, and other related factors. These are all higher-level functions according to Bloom's taxonomy. This is in addition to them utilizing a foreign language, in this case English, to communicate, and practicing the basic mechanics of English such as grammar, vocabulary meaning, and spelling while constructing the items for their survey.

Once the questions were written and corrected it was time for the students to use them to conduct their surveys. During class time, the students interviewed their classmates from the other groups and recorded their answers, being careful to avoid duplication of survey data by not interviewing the same people as their other group members. Once this portion of the data collection was completed, the students were assigned the task of interviewing five more people each outside of the class. Students could interview friends, family members, non-seminar classmates, people at their part-time jobs, etc. They had one week to complete this task.

During week three of the class the students brought back the responses to their surveys that they had obtained from people outside of their class. They then combined these responses with the answers they

got from their classmates during week two to make a complete data set for each survey question. The final data sets were created by tallying up the answers to each question, then grouping them by similar response and finally calculating the percentage of survey participants who gave each response. The data was then checked for accuracy by the teacher.

During week four of the class the students took their survey questions and the data they had compiled the previous week and used them to create an oral presentation. The presentation consisted of an introduction; in which the students introduced themselves and what they had done, the body of the presentation; where they discussed their survey questions and the answers they received. They also discussed any answers that were surprising or differed from what they expected in this section. In the conclusion the students wrapped up their presentation and told the audience what they had learned from doing it. Each student was expected to make at least one comment in this section. Once the presentation was written it was checked for any problems with grammar or mechanics. The students were then told to divide the presentation evenly so that each group member would present an equal amount. They were then allowed to practice the presentation for the following week's class.

Week five of the class saw the students getting together in their groups and giving presentations on their surveys and results. The presentations were non-memorized due to the amount and density of material each student needed to present. However, the students were required to practice their presentations in their groups in order to ensure that the presentation flowed smoothly and that any problems with pronunciation etc. could be taken care of prior to the actual presentation.

The groups were then called on in turn to give their presentations to the class. Each presentation lasted about five minutes. After each group had finished, the students were given comments on the physical aspects of their presentation: I.E. their voices, pronunciation, eye contact, and clarity and the informational aspects of their presentation: I.E the order and completeness of the information and the relevance of their survey questions.

The students were also given grades on their projects for the actual written survey and their oral presentations. This was done to ensure that the students who were good at writing or devising questions but not speaking, or vice-versa, could receive an adequate grade for the project.

Analysis of The Results

Overall, students were able to complete this project with guidance from the teacher. There were many initial problems with understanding how to make their own survey questions, especially for the Friends section in part one, the Social section of the survey. Some groups made general questions such as “What kind of humor do your friends use?” While other made more person-specific questions such as “Who is the funniest person in this class?” The former is closer to the intent of the survey as it can be used both inside and outside of class while the latter is too specific to be used outside of class. Note: The latter survey item was changed for the group’s final survey.

The second major drawback to doing this project over a three-week period was that some students were absent for one of the classes. This was especially bad when one student was gone on the day that the groups were supposed to take their individual member’s survey data and

combine it for their presentation. As a result, this group had an incomplete data set for their presentation and the student who was absent the week before had only a short time to review her part of the presentation when she returned the following week. Group members being missing or not doing their portion of a project are pitfalls of doing multi-week projects in any situation. The best solution is that group members keep in contact with each other on a regular basis using SNS and can find a way to work around any problems if an absence occurs.

On the positive side students could employ critical thinking skills when analyzing the survey questions and creating their own. They could also analyze the results and organize them into a presentation once they were shown how to do so.

The students came into their own during the preparation of their presentations and the actual presentations themselves. The presentations were well organized and the students spent a lot of time making sure they could do the actual presentations well. This shows they placed a lot of value on making a good final product for this project.

Also, it shows that most of them are more comfortable doing group-oriented oral presentations than written work. In the future I will emphasize that the survey is just as important as the presentation and they should be thought of as two equal parts of the project. Despite the fact that these two items were given separate grades, it seems that the survey was simply thought of as one part of the process leading up to a presentation and not as an equal part of a project.

Despite the above pitfalls and problems this project was a success and will be used, with improvements, as part of my seminar class in the upcoming academic year.

In Conclusion

The preceding survey project is an example of how to incorporate active learning into a class with themed content, in this case the study of humor and culture. The description of the process shows how students can improve their language skills by using English to read and then create survey questions, ask the questions and record the answers, and finally, to create an oral presentation based on their survey results.

In addition to the language learning, students used higher level thinking for analyzing the survey and making decisions about their own survey items. As well as how to group the survey results appropriately.

This shows that active learning can be used to create meaningful, multi-faceted projects that will help students learn on a variety of levels and keep them engaged in their learning.

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Appendix 1

Western Humor and Culture Phrases and Questions

Name_____

Number_____

Some helpful phrases for talking about humor

Kinds of Humor

Visual-Something that looks funny

Physical/slapstick- A funny action

Situational-Something that is funny because of where it happens

Verbal-Jokes that are spoken.

Black -Jokes about death or other “dark” topics.

Blue/Dirty jokes/Rude jokes-Jokes with bad language or jokes about sex or bodily functions.

Un-PC-Jokes about other races, people with disabilities, etc.

Bad-Jokes that aren't funny.

Levels of Humor

hilarious

very funny

funny

pretty funny

not funny (at all)

dumb/stupid/terrible

Your opinion

I think this is funny because_____.

I don't think this is funny because_____.

I like/don't like visual, physical, situational, verbal, ETC humor.

My favorite/least favorite part/joke was_____.

Asking for other people's opinion

What do you think (about it)?

What part did you like/not like? Why?

What kind of humor do you like? For example?

Why do you think this is funny/not funny?

Appendix 2

Seminar Humor Survey

Name_____

Number_____

Directions: Read the questions for each of the sections on the survey. Then, make at least two new questions for each section in your group. Third, interview the people in your interview group and write down their answers. You will also need to interview five people outside of class to complete your survey.

Social

1. I like to make jokes
 - a. With friends.
 - b. In class.
 - c. With my family.
 - d. At work.

2. I make jokes
 - a. When I am with people I know.
 - b. Any time.
 - c. When I have stress.
 - d. When my friends are sad or depressed (to cheer them up).

3. When is it NOT ok to make jokes?

4. Friends

5. Family

Likes/dislikes

1. I like _____ jokes. (See the list from our first lecture.)
2. I don't like _____ jokes (See the list from our first lecture.)

(your two questions about likes/dislikes for humor)

Funny Media

1. I like funny (comics, TV shows, movies, YouTube videos...) Write down three.
2. Favorite (Why?)
3. Least favorite (why?)

(Your two funny media questions)