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4-2020

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Recommended Citation
Abbott, Stephen, Stephen, "Abbott: ACUE Online Course in Effective Teaching Practices-Cohort A"
(2020). Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy.

Planning an Effective Class Session

For this module, I will be trying the breaking down a complex topic into mini-lessons. We will deal with the high-level concept of building a pricing strategy.

There are 3 components to this strategy and taking them one at a time will hopefully give the students a meaningful grasp on each. In the past when I bounce around between the three, I have seen a level of confusion in student responses. I want the students to be able to execute the building of a pricing strategy from start to finish using the full cadre of strategy components.

This is a 110 minute class so after my initial comments we dove into about 3 20-minute sessions each on the pricing components. I used about a 5 minute review/transition between the components and about a 30 minute class exercise at the end to actually build a pricing model for a fictitious business.

I was pleasantly surprised on 2 fronts. First, my prep was much more structured as I revamped it to compartmentalize the three concepts versus my basic random wandering, which did get to everything but not in this compartmentalized way. The other front was student engagement. I felt like the student engagement and feedback/questions drove deeper into the specifics of each component and showed me much better that they were getting the finer points. The class exercise was quite a robust interaction which had not been this way before.

 I think maybe I want to try doing the final exercise in steps as well. Not sure if there is a precedence relations ship in any step that requires having exposed all 3 components before taking on the actual pricing model build. I'll have to play that out a bit before trying it on students.

Facilitating Discussions

I decided that since I was only getting 30% to 40% of the students engaging in discussions, I decided to have a brief session explaining the role of discussions in the class. I also put together a short grading rubric that I shared with the class.

What I wanted to do was to see was if I directly addressed the issue of lack of participation to the class would the non-participating students step up without a direct one-on-one conversation about the perceived lack of effort concerning discussions. I felt having a generic discussion would not be confrontational nor pick on any one in particular.

Sharing the rubric seemed to be much more effective than the general statements about why I have participation as part of my grading. The theoretical nature of the general discussion did not elicit much response from the students. The examples of proper or "good" participation did get a fair amount of student reaction.

The biggest thing that I got from the students during the talking about the rubric was the issue of those 3 or 4 students who monopolize discussions making it difficult for the less gregarious or deeper thinking student to get a chance.

I am now thinking that with more students wanting to participate that controlling the discussion is key to this sticking as we go forward. I have always had that small group of students each term who blurt out responses immediately when a discussion question is raised. I must limit those few students to a ration per class and let the less forward students have a chance.

Very enlightening for me. I will add to my rubric that we all need to be aware of being dominant or just too assertive in addressing discussion questions.

Effective Lectures

The technique I want to try is to create more active breaks and try to acknowledge the 15-minute rule more specifically. I teach 110-minute classes and this technique I would think would help in creating more segmented events to facilitate learning.

With the 110-minute class it is important to both aid the student in any number of takeaways and to maintain focus. I normally must present anywhere from 6 to 8 significant concepts in one class session so focusing on one is not an option; requires chunking. So I think trying more formal or planned stops and starts might be better than a 110-minute dialog.

I see the difficulties in putting this together for a class session in that there will be decisions made as to allocation of time for each concept presentation. Any given day will likely not be best served with a 1/6th time breakdown. The prep will have to include the synchronization of concepts to flow with both timing in mind as well as some allocation for active breaks. The danger will be that the overall class session might have a required sequence of concepts as they potentially are building on one another. I must make sure that the concepts needed for the last session module are all out before needed by other module sessions.

I will have to be much more cognizant of time as I might have a significant engagement by the class in an early concept could preclude getting through the entire planned session. This would be great in getting students responding but I'll have to make sure I transition without the perception of cutting them off.

I will hope that these active breaks will make more of the materials memorable by having the students do something with each concept and not just moving on to the next. The active breaks style that I think will be effective in my field will be real world examples. In nearly all the concepts we discuss there are obvious real-world examples in the current event business media that I think this will be effective. I will put this in place in the marketing expense discussion that is scheduled for week 6 this term.

Active Learning Techniques

I have been mentoring a small student team who are preparing to compete at an intercollegiate business plan competition. I know this is a bit of a different situation than a classroom environment, but I wanted to try out the sharing the aim & rationale as well as the think-pair-share.

I felt that the team was become a bit spread in that they each had section assignments, but the finished product needed to come together with a consistent feel to it. I thought that as we approached each section with a think-pair-share type of collaboration that all team members would at least have to noodle all of the sections (even the ones that they were not responsible for) and contribute thoughts as to the importance of various types of content for all sections.

From my view the most important outcome came from the sharing of the rationale. I was very surprised that the students commented that knowing the "why" for the couple of hours we spent doing this exercise made them try harder and be more introspective than if I had just said to do it. They also felt that being given the opportunity to "think" individually gave them time to evaluate more of their personal experiences and learnings from courses they had taken on the various sub-sections of a business plan. Even though a section might not have been theirs to develop content for, each did have something to contribute to all of them. The challenge became that for each section-lead person, they had to decide if the content contribution fit into their design of the section. With this much idea flow going on it became a matter of controlling the volume.

It was clear that the students saw that the wealth of content was a great benefit of the exercise. They all agreed that they would have omitted important details about the sections if we had not had the think-share-pair conversations.

I look forward to trying this in a full classroom setting. I think I will try this with groups of 3. I think for some of the management classes need a bit broader small group thinking before the general class sharing. I hope a 3-person group will better be able to share the "why" of their thinking which is the basis for decision making and getting buy-in for opinions.