

Having Fun While Enhancing Student Engagement: Creative Approaches in Online Learning

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Abstract

This article explores various creative approaches to integrate into online counselor education classrooms. Creative approaches to learning help encourage students to be involved in classroom discussions or activities; while enhancing their critical thinking skills, professional development, and inclusivity within the classroom. This article explores the intention behind integrating creative approaches into online learning and offers several resources that instructors can use in their online classrooms.

Keywords: Creative Online Learning, Counselor Education, Creative Resources

Introduction

Distant learning counselor education programs and online coursework have become increasingly prevalent in recent years, but it is not without its challenges. Online learning can often feel disconnected and disengaging for students (Rinkevich, 2011; Shepard & Brew, 2013). Teaching requires the instructor to adapt to the needs of the students (i.e., adapting to learning styles, facilitating growth and development, etc.) while remaining engaged (Shepard & Brew, 2013; Wasik et al., 2019). In addition to implementing different learning styles, instructors also need to find creative ways to engage students with each other outside typical communication tools, such as discussion boards. One of the biggest hurdles instructors face is keeping students engaged and connected. Previous research has shown that online learning can feel isolating and disengaging for students (Wasik et al., 2019). Additionally, instructors teaching online courses with many students must be able to cater to various learning styles to ensure optimal growth and development (Snow et al., 2018; Wasik et al., 2019).

Creative learning includes innovative, novel, or new creations (Gibson, 2010; Gladding, 2008; McGhee et al., 2019). Creative approaches to online learning include a multi-componential term embodying critical thinking, creative-relevant, problem-solving, task motivation, and the surrounding environment (Robinson et al., 2018). This approach helps students learn in a creative environment and model creative engagement in their application, of course, learning to their careers (Aleinikov, 2013). Current literature demonstrates how creative individuals produce higher quality work when intrinsically motivated instead of extrinsic rewards (Gibson, 2010). In one study, counseling professionals found that creativity helps in their work with clients and to further advances the profession (McGhee et al., 2019). Creativity is also a predictor of academic success (Rinkevich, 2011). Further, creativity leads to higher engagement, deeper understanding, and greater learning (Gibson, 2010). By engaging in creative approaches to teaching online courses, one can promote inclusive practices and enhance student engagement and learning.

Significance of Creative Pedagogy in the Classroom

Creative learning involves engaging in innovative, novel, or different approaches to learning and engaging (Gibson, 2010). Creative teaching within counselor education can be implemented within different pedagogies and can overlap with teaching approaches. Integration of creativity and feminist pedagogy gives us the space to promote critical thinking while creating a dialogue aimed at the exploration of diverse experiences (Hayden & Crocket, 2020). Researchers Shepard and Brew (2013) note that creativity in counselor education, specifically in practicum courses, can facilitate personal growth and professional development. Further, creativity is connected to academic success, student engagement, and overall growth (Rinkevich, 2011; Gibson, 2010). Lin (2011, p. 151) defines creative pedagogy as a “practice that enhances creativity through a) creative learning, b) teaching for creativity, and c) creative teaching.” Further, McGhee and colleagues (2019) underscores that creative learning is student-led rather than instructor-enforced.

Activities

The authors identify several icebreaker and other activities to be used in a virtual classroom to support student learning and facilitate creative learning.

Music. A simple way to welcome students to the classroom is by playing music as they arrive. You may open your virtual classroom a few minutes before class time normally begins. Select a song or a few songs to play as students join the room. You may also encourage students to request songs that they enjoy or that have significant meaning.

The Map. Before the term begins, post a link to a custom Google map. Provide instructions for students on how they may create a pin. Prompt students to “pin” where they currently live or all of the places they have lived. Students are able to add descriptions of their pins or post pictures or videos. Invite students to share about the locations they pinned and their connection to these locations. This activity may also be adapted to places they hope to go.

The Name Game. Invite students to begin the class by sharing their names. They may choose to share their full name or one part of their name. Have students share the story of their names. This may include cultural connections to their name, who named them or who they are named for, the meaning of their name, etc.

Interactive Classroom Activities

Interactive Scavenger Hunts. There are many different approaches to engaging students in scavenger hunts in a virtual classroom. The authors identified one for the purpose of this paper. This first approach to the scavenger can be created through the use of Google Forms. Using Google Forms, create a page that invites students to identify their team and a team name. When setting up the Google Form, customize the “Confirmation Message” and post it to the next form. This may be done under the settings page. You may incorporate videos, case studies, have students complete recordings add quiz questions, etc., under prompts that you create for the scavenger hunt. You may also monitor the progress of each group in real time.

Virtual Reality. There is a plethora of resources available on the internet for exploration, and among them is the *New York Times' 360 VR playlist*. This resource can be utilized to assign students a particular issue or topic for them to explore. Students can view the video using the 360 feature, and discussion prompts related to the topic can be provided. By reviewing these prompts in small and large groups, class discussions can be furthered. Additionally, using VR goggles can provide a unique and immersive experience for students to delve into a client's presenting concern or the topic being addressed.

Games. The last activity highlighted is the use of games in the classroom. Resources, including Pictionary, Jeopardy, and Kahoot, are fun and interactive tools to use in the classroom to keep students engaged. In order to use Pictionary in the virtual classroom, tap into the whiteboard on the video conferencing platform you use. Following the standard rules for Pictionary, use the whiteboard to draw out prompts that connect with your course content. For example, when using this as a tool to prompt the discussion of boundaries in a Legal and Ethical Foundations class, students may be given cues to draw out of boundary-related ethical issues, such as “boundary crossing,” “dual relationships,” “slippery slope,” etc.

Additional games to utilize in the virtual classroom include Jeopardy and Kahoot. Both are quiz-style games that encourage student participation. Jeopardy is formatted as a gameshow, similar to the televised version, where students have the opportunity to earn points based on the

difficulty of the question. Students may work in teams or independently, depending on the size of the class. Kahoot is a platform for creating interactive quizzes on. Students may engage in a game-style quiz based on the questions you create or from a databank of questions preformulated on the website. This platform includes music and a scoring system to engage students further. These activities are all meant to create a fun and engaging way to start conversations with students throughout the course.

Impact of Creative Pedagogy

When students are actively engaged in the learning process, they are more likely to be motivated, attentive, and invested in their own learning and academic success (Fredricks et al., 2004). This increased engagement leads to a more positive learning experience, making the process of learning easier for students. Higher levels of engagement are positively correlated with higher achievement levels (Rinkevich, 2011; Gibson, 2010; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000). Engaged students are more likely to participate in classroom activities, complete tasks, and take ownership of their learning, resulting in improved academic performance and achievement (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000).

Creative pedagogy also enhances meaningful learning. Students are more likely to understand and retain information when they are actively involved in their own learning through creative activities, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and hands-on experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Creative pedagogy helps with cognitive development. Experiential learning utilizing virtual reality (VR) modalities, for example, has been found to engage multiple senses and improve mind-body connections in the learning process (Sacco-Bene et al., 2022). This multi-sensory engagement increases different brain structures' activation, leading to enhanced cognitive and emotional engagement (Sacco-Bene et al., 2022). This can lead to improved cognitive development, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Dewey, 1938).

Integrating cultural competence and safety within activities

Educators must also pay attention to integrating cultural competence within creative pedagogy to promote inclusivity. Educators can create an inclusive learning environment by considering students' lived experiences, including their race/ethnic cultures, religious experiences, health, economic experiences, sociopolitical experiences, and access to resources (McMahon, 2019). This approach recognizes and values the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences, which can foster a sense of belonging and promote student engagement (Hurtado et al., 2012). Research has shown that integrating cultural competence and safety within activities can contribute to increased student engagement and learning outcomes. For example, when students see their own cultures and experiences reflected in the curriculum and instructional materials, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in learning (Gay, 2010). This can lead to a deeper understanding of the material and increased retention of knowledge (Sleeter & Grant, 2017).

Conclusion

While online learning has become increasingly popular, it can often feel disconnected and disengaging for students. One of the biggest challenges faced by instructors is keeping students engaged and connected. By using creative approaches to engage students, instructors are

able to promote inclusive practices in the classroom, enhance student engagement and learning, and offer a new perspective to course content. Creative techniques offer counselor educators the space to promote critical thinking skills while creating a dialogue to further professional development and student engagement.

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