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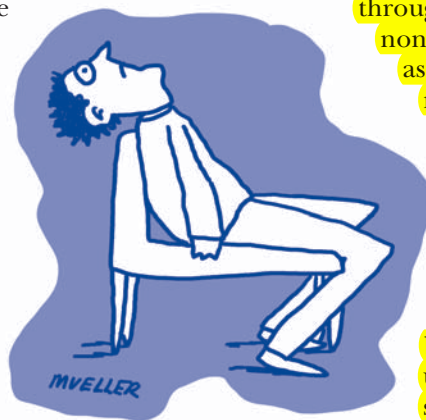
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Awake, Accountable, and Engaged

Lisa J. Lucas
West Chester University

As a new college professor, one of the things that surprised me most was the lack of student engagement and accountability in the classroom. Striving to be a professor that utilized a lecture format sparingly, I structured my class sessions to encourage participation and to be highly interactive, collaborative, and student-centered. Mini-lectures were designed to foster discourse. Since I am preparing many of my students to be educators, I feel responsible to model “best practice” instructional strategies and procedures.

My belief has always been never to work harder than my students, but I found myself not living up to that principle. Students' classroom participation was minimal, and question/answer “wait time” had become extreme. Silence was the norm, and the same volunteers would eventually contribute only when they could no longer bear the stillness. Clearly, a new strategy was required.



I recalled two techniques for increasing student accountability that I had found very effective when implementing the Collins Writing Program in the K-12 classroom two decades ago. (The Collins Writing Program is used in K-12 classrooms across the country with tremendous success.)

As a former classroom teacher and Curriculum and Instruction Director, I have implemented and supervised many programs throughout the years, but none with such success as Collins Writing. In my twenty years of experience using Collins, I observed that once teachers are trained in Collins techniques, they often become “lifetime users.” I realized the same research-based strategies and techniques I had used two decades ago could be just as effective in the college classroom.

Herewith are two teaching strategies I have used to engage students in the classroom and hold them accountable for their own learning by systematically gauging their comprehension of presented material.

Strategy 1: Using “Intentional Closure” to Help Students Determine and Retain Primary Information

During classroom discussions, students frequently have asked what information they would be tested on. I realized many students had become accustomed to receiving a study guide and were conditioned to rely on the instructor to provide them with a synopsis of essential coursework. I purposely did not provide them with a study guide; my belief is the student should be responsible for determining the most relevant information. Yet I witnessed many students struggling to prioritize what was essential material. A strategy was needed to promote student accountability and to help students synthesize the most important information.

One technique for helping students to clarify the most relevant lecture material relies on intentional closure of the class session. I ask students to compose two questions about the day’s lesson at the end of each class. Students present their questions at the beginning of the following class to initiate discussion and confirm the previous lecture’s essential information.

Composing the questions compels students to review and summarize what was provided during class. It is also an effective closure activity, with all students focused on reviewing the day’s information rather than simply packing their bags and chatting.

This technique has been identified by Marzano as one of nine instructional strategies most likely to improve student achievement. Marzano (2001) states that students should learn to eliminate unnecessary information, substitute some information, keep important information, write/rewrite and analyze information, and put some information into their own words.

As a result of this activity, I found that students began taking

diligent notes since they would use them to formulate their questions at the end of each class period. As students compose their questions, I circulate around the classroom, scan the questions quickly and provide a check or minus for completing the assignment. Note that I am *not* collecting students’ questions; I’ve learned to be selective regarding papers I take home to grade. A check or minus can be given quickly and is one way that I can objectively grant a grade for class participation.

Before dismissing class, I ask a few students to read their ques-



tions. Hopefully, their responses give other students an explicit indicator of the essential information presented during class. I then select a few of the oral questions and write them in my plan book. The students quickly learn that I will begin the next class meeting by asking one or two of these questions and that they will be expected to formulate a brief written response.

Indeed, when the next class meets, I write one of the questions students came up with in the previous meeting on the board and ask students to write a response. I again circulate through the classroom while they write, scanning their papers for misconceptions about the prior material. Sometimes I collect all students’

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October

Editor's Note:

In some sense reviews dominate this issue. After seven years spent exploring intriguing and useful implications of a fractal model of teaching and learning, **Ed Nuhfer** pauses to review the fundamentals and chart important growth in his own thinking. I weigh in with a review of the latest issue of *New Directions in Teaching in Learning*, which is itself a review of the important themes the publication has explored in the last twenty years. Though we constantly receive the advice that we should live in the present, be present in the moment, looking back has value we can't go forward without. As T.S. Eliot declared in his 1919 essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," a poet must come to terms with the past, with tradition, in order to have his work live in his own time. Surely that's true about our thinking about teaching and learning. It may be trendy to denigrate the idea of the sage at the moment, but the world still needs wisdom and most teachers humbly hope to foster it. Small groups may be all the rage, but we will always gather to hear the learned speak even if they dare not call it lecture.

But will we always gather to learn? I hope so, but often stirring many of today's sleepy students seems the first challenge. **Lisa Lucas** offers her own tried and tested method for keeping her students awake, accountable, and engaged. Her advice struck a sympathetic chord and so I've followed up her piece by reprinting an article from the University of Minnesota—Duluth that explores and expands on the same theme, the challenge of having students come to class "primed, prepared, and ready."

Does posting one's lecture notes help or hinder students' engagement? **Marilla Svinicki** explores this question in her AD REM . . . column concluding this issue.

But before we get to the end, the boys from Kentucky—**Charlie Sweet, Hal Blythe, and Viga Chandra**—offer another thought-provoking essay. Those familiar with the work of philosophers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson won't find these ideas new, but their perspective on applying them to college teaching is.

— James Rhem

papers; however, I'm more apt to "roll the dice" when determining which student papers to collect and grade. This may be based on the seating arrangement or other student grouping.

I rarely grade every collected paper but make sure that by the end of the semester, I have collected an equal amount from each student. No one knows whose paper will be collected during a class session, since it's always random, and I can usually grade these papers in about fifteen minutes.

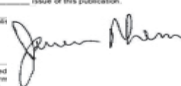
Strategy 2: Promoting Student Engagement and Participation Through Writing Responses

When students come to class, I want them to be mentally engaged as well as physically present. I expect everyone to be an active participant.

Often, however, when I asked a question, the same three to five hands were raised while the remainder of the class sat idle (most likely giving thanks that they were spared from answering the question). In this scenario, it was impossible to determine who had prepared for class or completed required reading and who was having difficulty synthesizing the material.

Now, to encourage active participation, and in lieu of asking questions to individual students, all students must provide a written response to a posed, content-based question.

When using this technique, I often stop class midway and ask a question. Based on the number of hands up, I will often say, "Why don't you *all* just respond in writing—you have five minutes." I always give a definitive time limit and expected quota of lines when using this technique. This provides students with well-needed practice in putting their thoughts into words. Having the ability to formulate written responses that are succinct and to the point is a required skill in virtually all professions.

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The questions that I ask are purposeful, have a definite answer, and can span the full range of Bloom's Taxonomy. Each question constitutes a brief quiz but one that requires that students formulate an answer clearly, succinctly, and correctly in a limited amount of time. This does not mean that the answer should be a verbatim response from the text or class notes. The best questions help students make their own meaning by translating concepts into their own words.

Evaluation of student responses varies, depending upon the importance of the questions and the time available. I tend to keep evaluations simple so that I can skim each paper looking for appropriate responses. I prefer a point system because it is quick and easy to use. Students who previously relied on their classmates to field my questions are now alert and engaged.



Listed below are five of my most effective questions:

1. Give a five-to-ten-line summary of last night's reading. Include two or three main ideas.
2. What were three of the most important points from yesterday's discussion?
3. If you were summarizing today's discussion for a friend who was absent, what two ideas do you think are the most essential?
4. Define in your own words the term _____.
5. Tell me three things wrong with this statement: _____.

I have found that frequent use of this technique makes students more comfortable and skilled in explaining their thinking, generates better writing, and, most important, promotes learning, retention, and participation.