

Active Learning in Online Classrooms: 3 Tips in 5 Minutes – Talking Points

L. M. Freer

March 18, 2016-

Introduction (Slide 1)

- Digital constructivism
 - Student learning and engagement demonstrated through using carefully-chosen technologies (often participatory technologies) to Make Stuff. Curiosity, cross-platform skills
 - Instructor models desired outcomes in their own experimentation with technological tools
- Scalability/interoperability
 - Online pedagogy needs a flexible core—scales to class size, tech limits, subject matter as needed, but begins with a few common strategies any instructor can have in their back pocket
 - Starts with choosing tools to enable as many students to meet your learning outcomes as well as possible. Free/Easy/Fast/High Quality: we strive to meet all of these, but often have to compromise on (more than) one element
 - Faculty can and should start where they're comfortable! Several of these strategies have a Step A, and then a Step B. Mix-and-match.

Students Are Knowledge Producers (Slide 2)

- Assign projects in which students make and share digital artifacts. Recommended for all courses (works in all time zones)
- FIT example: digital mural project (see photo).
- Challenge Q: How to reflect this level of engagement in an online course?
- Already trending this way in the online classroom given the way it reorients instructor-peer and peer-peer relationships, but need to nurture this kind of learn-pair-share structure by choosing good apps for student projects
- Low Threshold Applications
 - 6 key qualities: low cost, easy to learn/use, not too intimidating, observable positive consequences, reliability, and creates an environment for long-term change
 - FIT Mural.ly project was visual in orientation, collage-y, students could decide how to organize info, easy to use from home or in computer lab, could integrate stuff from commonly used web sources like YouTube, had built-in collaboration tools—for me, an LTA
- You can extend this idea of artifact creation by including experiential assignments in an online course!

- Develop assignments that use photography or video (phone as learning device), have students conduct interviews, observe nature, visit places wherever they are, then bring that experience back to group
- Examples: FIT Vietnam project, Jenny's NYU project: students in two different countries analyzing street art.

Small Group Learning Has Social Benefits (Slide 3)

- We all know that small group learning can build trust and community if done well, true online/offline.
- Consider the benefits of scaling up the idea of “group work” and having students work together in teams or cohorts for the bulk of the course, or the entire course.
 - Cohort model is also a secondary level of social support, key to retaining busy students with many responsibilities, can also help those who need to catch up academically.
- Task management/workflow management tools
 - Originally designed for the workplace, can be repurposed by students to manage their own learning
 - Example: Slack, combines multiple chat streams, calendar, and interactive file-sharing in a single app (also can be used on web)
 - Resource: blog post in which one professor describes how he's using it right now
 - Mobile learning reaches students where they're at, can be accomplished with a variety of technologies, such as Gchat, group texting, document sharing, Skype, other real-time tools
- Encourage students to collaborate thru use of add'l technologies
- You don't need to play hall monitor—model your expectations for small group interaction (civility, honesty, kindness) through your approach to your students
- Make rules for communication explicit if you think there's need, but also trust your students to choose tools that make the most sense for their own use.
- Also: don't feel tied to the LMS! If we want to inculcate the value of lifelong learning, we have to demonstrate that learning can happen in all elements of our students' lives!

Good Discussions Build Cognitive Presence (Slide 4)

- The building block of any high-quality online course is the discussion board or forum, so I want to devote some time to that tool specifically.
- **Cognitive presence:** the extent to which students and instructor are together able to create shared meaning and understanding within the online course.
- Steps to creating cognitive presence:
 - Begin with questions: state of puzzlement.
 - Information exchange
 - Connection of ideas

- Concepts (idea clusters) are created
 - Test solutions for viability
 - Great discussion board posts have 3 parts, often in response to a Q or to a student's A to a Q (peer response):
 - State your response
 - State why you think what you do
 - State what you wish you knew, or what the next question would logically be
 - Encourages students to respond, reflect critically, and grow the conversation.
 - Already having great discussions? You can up the ante further by integrating multimedia in 3 ways:
 - Introducing video clips, images, or audio clips as artifacts for students to respond to
 - Asking students to respond to a question by posting a piece of multimedia and explaining how they think that video, image, or audio clip serves as an answer
- Encouraging the use of audio and video as a means of responding, asking students to create in text, sound, or video as feels most natural to them, in response to a prompt.

References (Slide 5)

Two of these are books I really like, two are blog posts about recent experiments that left me feeling inspired.

Keep The Conversation Going (Slide 6)

Here's all my contact info!