

Staff Development Centre  
Otago Polytechnic

TEACHING METHODS: EXAMPLES

Brainstorm

- a freeflowing sharing of ideas on a particular topic. Contributions are not judged or discussed during this time as this would halt the flow and inhibit some participants. The idea is to accept everything as it is offered, and to sort ideas out later.

Card Sort

- the students work in groups, usually of three or four, to sort out cards provided by the teacher. Each card has one item written on it. This method can be used as a quick way of sorting out which terms, or aspects of a topic, students already know, with students placing the cards into "know" or "don't know" piles. It can also be used to get students to decide what sequence of steps would make most sense for a particular task (with one step written on each card). Another use is to sort aspects of a topic into a hierarchy (like a taxonomy of terms), or into some kind of grouping that makes sense to the students. This is a kinesthetic, action method and provides an alternative to the usual pen-and-paper exercise.

Donut (Doughnut)

- the teacher places the chairs into an inner and outer circle, with the chairs of one circle facing those of the other. The resulting double circle looks like a doughnut. Students sit in pairs, facing each other, and carry out the first task, e.g. comparing notes from an earlier exercise or answering a question. The outer students then move one chair to the right and the new pairs work on the next task. This continues until all parts of the task are complete. This co-operative learning method means that students have the chance to work with a variety of people. It provides a different format to the usual small group discussion.

Goldfish Bowl

- so called because students cluster round in a circle to observe a central activity, such as a role play, performed by two or three students. The teacher can "stop the action" to allow students to comment on what is happening or to swap places and participate in the centre of the goldfish bowl. Students in the centre can also call for "time out" to ask the advice of those observing, or to ask for a replacement.

Jigsaw

- this is a co-operative learning method. Students divide into small groups and assign themselves an identifier, e.g. #1, #2 or #3. Students then leave their original groups to team up with others of the same number, i.e. all the #1s together, #2s

together and so on. They then work in these teams to carry out a task, with a different task assigned to each number-group. When this is completed, students return to their original groups to report on their particular task. Each student will be bringing a different piece of information which will "jigsaw" together to make a whole. This method can be used, for example, to divide up an information-gathering task so that smaller pieces are allocated to each of the number-groups.

### Journalling

- a form of reflective learning. Students write in a journal, perhaps daily, weekly or at specified points during a course. They are usually asked to record their impressions of an experience (what happened, how they felt about it, what understanding they have now gained, what changes they might make). Sometimes the teacher asks students to follow a structured format, other times it is left to the student to decide what, and how, they record in their journal. It is a good idea to leave spaces blank (perhaps each facing page, or every tenth page) so that further comments can be recorded when the student looks back over their past entries. Groundrules need to be established so students and teachers are aware of "who owns the material", whether students are expected to read or copy portions for sharing in class. It is a good idea to have a written "code of ethics" relating to journalling.

### Laboratory or Workshop

- a learning/teaching session with a practical focus where students work in a "hands on" way to discover information or learn and practise new skills in a safe environment. This format requires the teacher to prepare resources, set up the laboratory or workshop, perhaps demonstrate the activity, and act as a resource for the learners as they carry out the task or practise the skill.

### Lecture

- a formal presentation of a topic, usually to a larger audience, with the lecturer talking about the topic and the students listening and taking notes. It is traditionally a teacher-centred method where the lecturer takes a more active role than the student. With more awareness now of the kinds of activities needed for effective learning, lecturers are devising ways of increasing student participation during lectures. The lecture is one method of teaching larger groups.

### Mindmapping

- similar to brainstorming, but presented in a graphic way. The teacher writes the topic for discussion in the centre of the whiteboard or sheet of newsprint. As words or ideas are offered by students, the teacher writes these around the board, joining them by lines to the central topic so that the end result looks something like a spiders web. Students can then consider how some of the ideas link together. This works well as the start to a new topic, giving the teacher a way to estimate students'

existing knowledge on the topic. It is also a useful way of planning an essay. It can be translated to an action method by placing pieces of newsprint on the floor, joining them by tape. The teacher puts a heading on each one and asks students to wander round adding ideas, using marker pens provided with each piece of newsprint. This method offers a little more structure and is useful for kinesthetic learners. It can be used as a starter for a topic, as a summary of a session, or as a link with previous sessions.

### Practical Demonstration

- the teacher shows students how to perform an unfamiliar task. Students are usually taught the underlying principles e.g. related to safety, physics, physiology, chemistry, so that they will understand how to carry out the task effectively, especially if there is more than one way to achieve it. This produces sounder learning, rather than remembering steps "by rote".

### Pyramid

- a co-operative activity where students work in a succession of groupings to carry out tasks arranged by the teacher. In the first phase, students work individually on a task. They then combine in pairs to compare results from the first task, before going on to jointly tackle the second task. Pairs are then combined into fours, with a new task added. It is called a pyramid because the continued combining of groups represents an inverted pyramid.

### Role Plays

- in this method people take on an assigned role and act out a situation. It can be used, for example, in learning communication skills, where one student might be an employee and another a customer. The teacher needs to be clear about the role and how much flexibility the students have within these roles. Students should have sufficient opportunity to reflect on what they have learned. Most importantly, the teacher must set in place a clear de-roling process. Care needs to be taken with role plays as some students may become upset by feelings generated by the role.

### Small Group Discussion

- the class is split into groups, usually of four or five, to discuss an issue or question. Some teachers like to set specific roles for group members, e.g. leader, recorder and reporter. Some adult students prefer to sort these aspects out in a less structured way. It is important to vary the method of "reporting back" to the whole group. Hearing the views of several small groups can become laborious. Variations are to ask each group for just one interesting thing that came up in their discussion, or to answer only one of the questions set, or simply to add any different comments from those offered by the previous group. A whole group discussion should only be added if it would contribute significantly to students' learning.

### Structured Controversy

- in this method students work in double pairs to discuss a values statement decided by the teacher. One pair decides all the reasons "for" the statement, the other pair decides all the reasons "against". Each pair listens carefully to the other. The teacher can then ask the group to reach a consensus position on the statement. This method has a clear advantage over the traditional debate, as students will listen attentively to each other rather than trying to demolish the opposing argument. By asking the group to reach a consensus position, students are encouraged to shift from their "for" or "against" position.

### Teaching Pairs

- another co-operative learning method where students work in pairs to help each other learn. This can be used for a variety of purposes, e.g. comparing notes from a piece of set reading, checking out answers to a test, teaching each other separate parts of the one topic, or gaining feedback on an essay in draft form before it is completed for submission. Many students appreciate a chance to try out their ideas before voicing them to the whole class, or before submitting them to the teacher for formal assessment.

### Walk and Talk

- students split into pairs and go for a walk for an allotted time, so they can discuss a topic, consider a question or complete a task requiring reflection. The "walk" aids kinesthetic learners and provides an alternative venue to the classroom.

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