Active Learning: “Creative Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners” April 4, 2012

There is a big push towards active learning techniques. Often, as I stated in another reflection, that often these techniques seem to be “edu-tainment”. However, as I get introduced to more ideas, I can see that it can be described equally as well as “engaged learning”. I think the whole idea of active learning is to have your class be responsive, digesting the material, and really enjoying the process of learning. When you think of engaged learning you can still have lecture, but you have to switch it up with stories, with questions, with activities, with pneumonic devices, with movement, etc, to keep the students’ engagement.

The workshop by Michele Deck was great. She highlighted basic characteristics present in different generations: How these generations view their outlook, work ethic, authority, Leadership, relationships and perspectives. It was useful to see it so succinctly compared and contrasted on one page. However, we focused a lot on Generation X and Y’ers, since these are the majority of our students. The general idea that stuck out to me most was that you can do an activity that tangentially relates to the topic you want to discuss, that sometimes the connection might not even be apparent until it is explained to you, and that can be a very effective way to “shake your mind” into making a connection. At first the activity might seem to just be fun or to make relationships in the classroom, however, when she makes the connective statement can make a dramatic impact.

Some of the favorite activities or concepts discussed were the idea of being flexible. This was illustrated as being constructively flexible. Let your students, “choose which cup they want to drink their milk from” not “let your students choose whether to drink milk or not.” The idea of time management: Take a small dessert paper plate and separate it into 8 pie slices with everyday activities: eating, sleeping, job, family care, cleaning, exercising, watching tv, making sure you leave one slice open. Have them put smarties, representing time, on each slice. Then have them “go to school, and needing to rearrange 4 hours of time a day for school” and make a physical connection to how sacrifices need to be made, etc. Or have the students be shaken out of doing things that they “always” do or just do “by habit” – doing rhymes: say “poke poke poke” but then ask what do they call the white part of the egg? Or tell them to focus on listening, but then ask them to list physical characteristics – illustrating ideas of when you focus on one thing you may miss something else. Or using two halves of a square to match up – for example doing this to match mathematical rules to each other – one thing that I struggle with when teaching radical and exponential rules, since it is so second nature to me. Or telling stories, set in a regular experience, highlighting what you want them to remember (like the story she used to demonstrate the CPR protocol), basically to help as a pneumonic device. Also, emphasizing if the student makes it (like the anatomy on a white tshirt) it is more pertinent to them personally.

I appreciated the different take on active learning with the emphasis that everyday experiences, items, etc can make a profound effect, almost like a prop to your teaching. Of course, Michele also gave great techniques to involve the students with movement and engagement, but it got me thinking in a way I hadn’t thought about before. I am excited to sit down and give some vitality to some of my lectures on some of my topics.