

Starter for 10 or playing at psychology?

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Abstract

According to Lusted (1986:3) pedagogy is ‘...the transformation of consciousness that takes place in three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce’. Surely, that is what we, as educators, are aiming for? Raymie McKerrow (1989, p. 91) states that critical rhetoric serves to ‘de-mystify and connect’ individuals with knowledge through a subjective and engaged discourse. Vivian Burr (1998, p.4) suggests that it is through interaction we construct knowledge. It is in this spirit that I offer the idea of sharing activities that have engaged students with psychology and the psychological way of thinking, either as ‘starters’ or extension activities. Diverse student populations, classroom limitations and institutional constraints notwithstanding, I believe we have much to present to each other and we may find ideas for activities that suit our pedagogies and allow for the co-construction of knowledge with students through experience.

Fontes and Peirce (2000, p. 179) state ‘students learn best through direct experience’. According to Kohonen (1992), experiential learning has diverse origins, being derived from John Dewey’s progressive philosophy of education, Lewin’s social psychology, Piaget’s model of developmental psychology, Kelley’s cognitive theory of education, and the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers in the field of humanistic psychology. The first suggestion I have is for an activity I have used with 16–19 year olds and also with adults who are studying an AS in psychology. It gives them the actual experience of having a false memory rather than a simulation or asking them to empathise. It is based upon the work of Deese, Roediger and McDermott (Deese, 1959; Roediger & McDermott, 1995). Students are presented with the following words, all of which are related to the non-presented critical word sleep: bed, rest, awake, tired, dream, wake, snooze, blanket, doze, slumber, snore, nap, peace, yawn, drowsy. This can be easily done as a Powerpoint slide. Emphasise to the students that this will be an easy test, ‘Look I’ll even read these out while you remember them.’ Remove the slide and give the students 60 seconds to write down the words that they recall. About 30 seconds in give prompts

such as, ‘When you hit that wall and you don’t think you can remember any more, just push through and keep writing.’ Within a class, it is statistically probable that some of the students will have ‘remembered’ the word that was not presented on the list: sleep. They find it quite shocking that this occurs, that they cannot trust their own memories.

The next activity is based on what McDade (2005, p. 10) terms the dare to students to ‘...identify and challenge assumptions about their own situation or beliefs.’ Again, I have used it with adults and 16–19-year-olds studying AS psychology. It is great as a starter for stereotypes and what experience brings to our perceptions or judgments. I take in two teddies; one is larger than the other and has a blue ribbon round its neck. The other is slightly smaller and has a pink ribbon. I ask the students to name the teddies. This works best if you ask them not to use paired names such as Fish ’n Chips, Salt ’n Pepper or Topsy ’n Turvy. Invariably they suggest male names for the larger teddy and female ones for the smaller teddy. It is then time to ask them why.

Souza (2004, p. 4) states that knowledge construction is ‘inexplicably linked to the participants involved in meaning making.’ This activity encourages students to explore

the making of meaning in front of their eyes. Prior to the activity, you should identify a confederate and agree that whatever sentence you read out first, they will say that it is their sentence. Tell your class that you have picked up some vibrations in the collective conscious and that these will help you to read their minds. Give out slips of paper to your class and ask them to write a nonsense sentence. Provide envelopes and request that they put the papers into the envelopes and then seal them. Collect the sealed envelopes in, keeping the confederate's envelope at the very bottom. Hold the first envelope against your forehead, with appropriate gestures and mutterings of thought transfer and unconscious vibrations. Say any nonsense sentence you like and the confederate will say that that is their sentence. Open the envelope to 'check' you got the wording correct – this lets you look at the

next sentence – which you pretend to be 'getting' through the next unopened envelope. In this way, you will be able to work through the remaining envelopes. Eventually the students should catch on and will be amazed that the paradigm of mind reading made them ignore what was going on in front of their face and this activity should also engender a healthy skepticism in everything else you do and say!

In the emergent development of psychological pedagogy Ennis (1990) has identified mixed strategies in pedagogy as the optimum way to enhance student involvement with psychological concepts in a way that moves beyond rote learning. I would be interested to hear of other activities that colleagues use to facilitate this.

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