Making Large Classes Feel Small: Engaging Teaching Strategies for Large Classes

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Additional Information & Resources

Low-Stakes, Low-Tech Strategies (NOT an exhaustive list!)

- **Think/pair/share:** Students first think about a question independently, then discuss their ideas with a partner before sharing with the larger group. This structure increases participation while reducing the anxiety associated with speaking in front of the entire class.
- **Minute papers:** Students spend one or two minutes writing a brief response to a prompt such as "What was the most important thing you learned today?" or "What remains unclear?" Minute papers promote reflection and provide instructors with immediate feedback on student understanding.
- **Informal small group work:** Students work in temporary groups of two to four classmates to solve problems, discuss concepts, or analyze scenarios. These brief collaborative activities increase engagement and allow students to learn from one another.
- **Concept mapping**: Students create visual diagrams showing relationships among ideas, terms, or processes. Concept maps help learners organize information and develop a deeper understanding of complex topics.
- **Whip-Around/Pass the Mic:** Students quickly contribute short responses one after another, often around or down a row, section, or virtual room. Ask a question with many possible short answers (e.g., *"Name one major cause of the French Revolution"*), pick a row, and have each student say their answer in sequence until the row finishes. This strategy encourages broad participation while keeping individual contributions low risk
- **Write/Pass:** The Write/Pass activity engages students by having them write a response to a prompt and then pass it to a classmate, who builds on, questions, or responds to the original idea. In large classes, this strategy promotes active participation, exposes students to diverse perspectives, and encourages collaborative thinking without requiring whole-class discussion.
- **Four Corners:** Students choose a position, opinion, or answer represented by different areas of the room and discuss their reasoning with others in the same area. The activity promotes movement, discussion, and perspective-taking.
- **Fishbowl Discussion:** A small group discusses a topic while the rest of the class observes, listens, and prepares questions or comments. One optional add-on: Leave one chair in the inner circle empty. Anyone from the audience can walk down, sit in the empty chair to make a point, and then return to their regular seat so someone else can step in. This format creates the feel of a seminar discussion even in a large class.
- **Row Race:** Students work collaboratively within rows or sections to generate answers, examples, or solutions as quickly as possible. Give the student on the far aisle seat of each row a sheet of paper with a prompt (e.g., *"List as many examples of X as you can"*). They write one item, pass it down the row to the next person, and the row that passes it completely to the other side first wins. The friendly competition adds energy while encouraging participation from many students.

Deliberate Practice and Retrieval Practice Strategies

- **Reading quizzes & pre-class assignments**: Short quizzes or activities completed before class encourage students to engage with course material in advance. This preparation allows class time to be used for deeper discussion and application
- **Weekly practice exams:** Low-stakes practice tests help students retrieve information, identify knowledge gaps, and prepare for higher-stakes assessments. Frequent retrieval practice improves long-term retention and learning.

- **Class notes summaries**: Students summarize key concepts from a class session, week, or unit in their own words. This activity strengthens organization, metacognition, and retention of important ideas. It also provides a valuable opportunity for formative assessment!

Collaborative Strategies

- **Team-based learning (TBL):** Students work in permanent teams to complete structured activities that emphasize preparation, application, and peer learning. TBL promotes accountability and helps build a strong classroom learning community.
- **Gamification:** Game-like elements such as points, badges, competitions, or challenges are incorporated into learning activities. Gamification can increase motivation, participation, and enjoyment while reinforcing course concepts.
- **Polling:** Students respond to questions using polling software or response systems during class. Polls provide immediate feedback, encourage participation, and help instructors gauge student understanding in real time.
- **Peer instruction:** Students first answer a conceptual question individually, then discuss their reasoning with classmates before answering again. This process promotes deeper thinking, clarification of misconceptions, and collaborative learning.

No-Cost/Low-Cost Tech Tools

- Wayground (**formerly Quizziz):** A game-based learning platform that allows instructors to create quizzes, polls, and interactive review activities. Students can participate live or asynchronously, making it useful for engagement and retrieval practice.
- Pear Deck: An interactive presentation tool that allows instructors to embed questions, drawing activities, and checks for understanding directly into slides. It helps keep students actively engaged during presentations.
- Edpuzzle: A video-learning platform that allows instructors to embed questions, notes, and feedback into videos. Edpuzzle encourages active viewing and provides data on student participation and comprehension.
- iClicker: A student response system that enables polling, quizzes, and attendance tracking during class. It is commonly used to facilitate participation and peer-instruction activities in large courses. ** UNT has an iClicker subscription for this academic year, but future subscription status is unknown.
- Mentimeter: An interactive presentation tool that supports polls, word clouds, quizzes, rankings, and Q&A activities. It offers a simple way to gather input and increase interaction in face-to-face or virtual settings.
- Socrative: A classroom assessment platform that allows instructors to create quizzes, exit tickets, and formative assessments. Results are available immediately, making it easy to monitor understanding and adjust instruction as needed.
- Padlet: Padlet is an interactive digital collaboration tool that allows participants to share ideas, resources, questions, and media on a virtual board in real time. It promotes engagement by creating a visual, low-barrier space for brainstorming, discussion, reflection, and peer interaction in both in-person and online learning environments.

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