Practical suggestions for seminar-based activities

These suggestions for seminar-based activities came out of my search for a creative pedagogy: a playful mining of my reading about learning style theories as a kind of etymological treasure hunt for the 'creative' part of creative writing. These suggestions are not intended to be applied in their entirety, rather, you can take an aspect of the syllabus and use one of the suggestions below to structure it.

Assessment and critique

1. Vary the kinds of assessment given. Build in informal positive rewards as well as formal assessment. Avoid sole use of grade-focused assessment. Use a variety of assessment strategies, some of which won't use grades. Avoid limited impersonal assessment feedback. Repeat assessment on the same skills, to encourage continued application. Use some assessments which test for deep understanding and critical thinking.
2. Vary the kinds of criticism given. Ask students about the kinds of criticism they respond to best.

Brain awareness

3. Apply colour, images, music and movement to tasks which require one to process words or come up with structure and order.
4. Ask students to organise a self-reflexive essay on what they have learnt during a term, using either Ned Herrmann's 'whole brain model' (Herrmann 1989 and Coffield et al 2004: 77 - 84) or Bernice McCarthy's 4MAT system (1990) as inspiration.
5. Build an awareness of the brain into your teaching (Buzan 1983, Caine and Caine 2008, Coffield et al 2004: pp 77 - 84 and Jensen 2008) or use reading material about the brain (for instance Pinker 1999).
6. Create a comparison of Ned Herrmann (Herrmann 1989 and Coffield et al 2004: 77 - 84) and Bernice McCarthy's (1990) approaches and a list of their influences with a group of students.
7. Learn to draw mind maps using the work of Tony Buzan (2002).
8. Ask students to present to the group on how Caine and Caine (Caine et al 2008) or Jensen (2008) enabled them to learn more about a particular topic.
9. Use Caine and Caine's '12 Principles' (Caine et al 2008) or Jensen's '10 Principles' (Jensen 2008) and ask students to relate them to subject-specific tasks, such as a discussion of the

different meanings of creativity or writing a five minute screenplay.

10. Using all the senses, plus regular movement, will help to connect both sides of the brain. (Even if these prove to be partly metaphorical!)

Context

11. Allow students to facilitate group discussions or chair a debate on a particular dilemma.
12. Avoid 'in text' questions on photocopies, as they return the focus to learning for the sake of the test or assessment. Get them to find the book.
13. Discuss outside interests which inform our study. For instance, a visit to an art gallery could be informed by an outside interest in photography.
14. Encourage students to be proactive learners, to set goals, to decide what's important to them, to use mediation and conflict-resolution, empathy and multiple viewpoints. Talk about time management and the importance of regular breaks and exercise.
15. Give some examples which make connections between the concepts.
16. Look at the patterns and relationships between things.
17. Provide a wider context, whatever you teach.
18. Provide information on competitions or, if appropriate, allow for competitive activities within the group. In a particular task, introduce some competitive elements and some cooperative elements.

Group / solo work

19. Over the term, provide a mix of group work, discussion and individual work. Allow students to practice group work and provide a framework for it based on solving a problem by incorporating skills and knowledge from all group members.
20. Let students explain the material to others in order to learn it.
21. Use group work and social networks to encourage learning. Encourage the joining of groups of like-minded individuals. Use activities where empathy, understanding, cooperating, communication, or negotiation is important conflicts. Set up a conflict or debate for students to resolve using the concept under discussion. Use pair based interview activities.
22. Use peer-lead explanations and group work to help extroverted students. For introverted students, build in reflection time and the chance to contextualize work according to relevancy

and a wider conceptual framework.

23. Within one task, use both group discussion and more individual reflective activities.

24. Provide structure but build in opportunities for self-directed learning and goal setting.

Innovation

25. Ask students to act as 'consultants' and to come into a business, education, media-led or political environment (which can be 'played' by the rest of the group) and propose a solution to a problem posed by the teacher.

26. Ask students to deliberately come up with the wackiest ideas they can for i) a new business ii) a new way of organizing education iii) a system to replace money.

27. Ask students to design a policy, taking in the opinions of experts, related to the use of public money to fund artworks in public places.

28. Pose a series of questions relating to the topic at hand and ask students to take on the role of inventors OR small business leaders and to come up with a solution or invention which solves the problem.

Learning personality (Using the MBTI as an example)

29. Read about the MBTI first (Briggs Myers 2000). Discuss with the group whether people have different ‘learning personalities’. Consider the different aspects of an individual learner's personality and how that impacts on study.

30. For 'feeling' students, promote tightly structured (rather than open) group work, and give ground rules.

31. Help 'thinking 'students by encouraging them to apply analysis and logic.

32. Use different kinds of deadline. 'Judgers' plan and are able to apply self-discipline. They like deadlines. Because 'perceiving' students are always looking for relational material and may delay the start of creative projects, Brightman suggests breaking a project into “a series of sub-assignments and providing deadlines for each sub-assignment” (Brightman date unknown). Consider giving a series of short deadlines and longer deadlines.

33. Make some instructions step-by-step and detailed and others more flexible. Structure some work tightly and allow for some self-directed independent study.

34. Use facts, detail, step-by-step instruction to help 'sensing' students.

35. Use the relationships between ideas, patterns in concepts and they way the interact to help 'intuitive' students. Use concept mapping. Encourage the use of all of the senses.

Linkages

36. Link concepts to prior knowledge and to the 'bigger picture.' Find out more about field dependence and field independence (Witkin 1962, Coffield et al 2004: 36 - 40 and Hammond et al 2003: 20).

37. Link to other courses, topics or texts. Encourage students to see where they might use the material again. Establish a strong link between different modules and parts of the same module.

38. Within the specific task, spend time on the connections between topics or ideas and between those ideas and the students' social context.

Perception

39. Allow students to illustrate a concept diagrammatically or using symbols and colours. Incorporate the concept of building and design, or of taking things apart. Encourage students to daydream and to visualize. Use colour, pictures, presentations and film clips. Encourage students to watch movies and play with machines. Draw on all of the senses. Set up tasks as puzzles. Use mazes, maps and charts.

40. Ask students to discuss the thinking processes they went through to reach a conclusion or to complete the task.

41. Ask students to discuss with a partner how important deadlines and structure are to work at university-level and whether they should be set externally or by the student.

42. Ask students to list situations which require precision, problems which need a carefully considered answer and those which require a quick 'impulsive' decision.

43. Ask students to list the advantages / disadvantages of 1) making a quick decision / holding back from making a decision in different situations, and of 2) 'jumping in' or 'holding back' from opportunities.

44. Ask students to write about a situation from several view points.

45. Describe the benefits of empathy in relation to careers or writing or textual analysis.

46. Discuss constraint and whether it is productive or creative.

47. Discuss David Kolb’s ideas. (Kolb 1984, Dalton and Smith 2005: 7 - 9 and Coffield et al

2004: 60 - 70)

48. Discuss the existence of universal values and whether they always hold true.

49. Discuss the ideas of i) social acceptability ii) thinking outside the box iii) structure and framework.

50. Discuss the invention or creation of any object or work of art or text relevant to the topic of the seminar OR discuss the life of any important figure within the subject area OR discuss the rise to fame of any successful entrepreneur. Ask students to record how making mistakes was of benefit in the situation discussed. Go through specific mistakes step-by-step.

51. Discuss trial and error in relation to evolutionary theory. Discuss the history of apprenticeship. Do writers (or other artists) serve apprenticeships? Discuss the importance of both trial and error and apprenticeship in the students' own learning. Relate to 'instant access' pop culture. Build in activities which employ trial and error.

52. Discuss when it is better to use a methodical, sequential approach and when is it best to use a multiple answer, connective approach.

53. During each session include some moving around. Structure group work so that body language and the way we communicate is considered. Encourage students to try physical or hands-on activities. For instance, going for a walk during / after a study session. Include texture as well as the sense of touch, bodily sensations and spatial awareness in the session.

54. Encourage an understanding of ways of understanding. For instance, use Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (1993) to understand creative processes.

55. Encourage students to sing, hum, listen to, play and respond to music. Use sound, melody and rhythm to communicate concepts. Ask musical students to play an instrument for the class or ask students to try listening to music while they work and to report back.

56. Focus on text, words (spoken and written), on reading and writing and narrative. Incorporate memory tests, facts and dates.

57. Introduce the idea of cognitive processing style - use the work of Guilford and Kagan (Coffield et al 2004: pp 36 - 40), for instance - when approaching any seminar-based task. Discuss when it is appropriate to use one creative style or another other. Aim to enable students to use a thinking style to which they don't automatically defer in appropriate situations as well as

the one they do.

58. Pose dilemmas and problem-solving challenges. Set up creative experiments. Give students the chance to work out a problem for themselves, applying reasoning and logic. Talk about statistics and patterns, and relationships between concepts. Set tasks which involve categories or classification.

59. Practicing proof-reading skills or break a proof-reading task down into smaller chunks.

60. Require students stimulate all the senses when learning. (For example, listen to music, visit a gallery, write in a kitchen.)

61. Set a test where making a quick decision and speed are the key components.

62. Set activities during which students have to be outside. Encourage interaction with local surroundings or geological features, animals, the environment or the weather. Include the study of nature or the use of a natural environment to aid learning. Ask students to consider the environment and conservation when approaching a task.

63. Set up hypotheses and provide students with situations or concepts to 'test.'

64. Students make a list of possible solutions to a dilemma posed by the teacher. After each one students write 'on the other hand' and record a possible alternative. They continue to write 'on the other hand' until the page is full, and then compare with a partner.

65. According to Jonassen et al, students need to move from a “dualist” stage to a “multiple” stage, by having “concrete experiences” which involve several “paradoxical points of view” (Jonassen et al 2004: 78 - 90). Work on creative activities that test these stages.

66. Use a creative project which presents several possibilities for execution in terms or form and content. Give a constraint (time or the form of presentation) which requires i) two or three choices ii) those choices to lead a decision based on one option. Analyse the results by discussing the problems or successes which occurred during the construction of the task. When did students need to use divergent thinking and when did they use convergent thinking? (Hammond et al 2003: 18 - 23)

67. Use analytical, verbal and logical tasks as well as visual, non-verbal and more open idea-generating tasks.

68. Use pictures, diagrams, highlighting and annotation techniques.

69. Use reading and writing tasks and ask students to write or speak summaries of these tasks.

70. Use step-by-step approaches and big picture approaches. Use 'world-oriented' activities and 'individual-oriented' activities (Pask 1976). Involve relevancy too. For example: What's the function of literature in the world? / How do I get my short story published? / How do I write an effective short story?

71. Use some of Edward De Bono's (1992) ideas for multiple idea-generation.

72. Use the '100 uses for a paperclip' activity suggested by Tony Buzan in a chapter on Creative Intelligence (Buzan 2000). The aim is to record as many uses as possible.

73. Discuss which tasks / jobs / methods of analysis require one to come up with lots of answers and which require one to make a decision based on one answer.

74. Within your area of expertise, are there any examples of i) a figure who was rejected by the establishment for being 'too' innovative or ii) an outdated policy which was followed to the detriment of those involved or iii) a figure who was rejected for being 'too' conventional or iv) an established policy which was shown to work well when applied to a new situation?

75. Within your area of expertise, are there any examples of a problem where innovative thinkers went back to the source of the problem to find the answer?

Reflection

76. Allow students time to reflect on their work alone. Allow students to set individual goals and use some tasks where students design their own framework and timescale. Allow them to dwell on the pursuit of self and one's own interests and inward reflection on feelings and dreams, instincts and hunches. Encourage students to set up a working space at home.

77. Allow students to ponder dilemmas related to a concept before it is discussed but also to clarify their understanding afterwards through both individual reflection and question and answer.

78. Discuss the term 'reflexivity' and the importance of self-evaluation and awareness. Discuss critical feedback and why it is useful.

79. Encourage students to integrate new knowledge and skills with prior learning and discuss how particular behaviours may change in the light of new ways of thinking.

80. Encourage students to review material, to ask self-reflexive questions and write summaries, or draw Mind Maps (Buzan 2002) of classes.

81. Include goal setting, self-directed learning, continuing self-reflexivity and self-evaluation.

82. Some self-help or popular psychology books will contain useful suggestions, many of which are applicable in study skills sessions. If explicitly referencing these ideas, encourage students to look more deeply and more critically at the issues involved, by providing additional references or conflicting ideas.

83. Self-help or popular psychology books also provide one with an opportunity to talk about, variously, genre, marketing, the retail industry, meanings of expertise, preferred learning styles, time management or the public perception of psychology.

Relevancy

84. Allow students to work out how a concept might be relevant to their own lives

85. Be aware that the learner may be learning for learning's sake. Don't ignore this aspect for the sake of relevancy. Do both. (Blackmore 1996)

86. Contextualise the work according to relevancy and wider social application.

87. Discuss careers, professionalism and what motivates students to learn. In particular think about transferable skills.

88. Discuss specific reasons for learning and the expectations placed on (or perceived by) the student. Build in career advice where appropriate.

89. Discuss the importance of voluntary work to society and on an individual basis.

90. Give examples of how the concept works in practice. On some occasions, allow students to discover a relationship or rule for themselves. On others, tell them the rule first and ask them to apply it.

91. Highlight the idea that learning for its own sake is a positive thing

92. Let students do something creative with material in order to learn it

93. Place emphasis on meaning or context or relevancy, at different points.

94. Relate work to students' life experiences using anecdotes, case studies and role play.

Social

95. Ask students to pick the best possible solution to a dilemma from a range of creative

solutions, each of which has problems attached. Relate this to 'real life' examples, if possible, from the creative industries.

96. Focus some examples on relationships and emotions and make others more objective. Explore the objective correlative.

97. Give examples that relate to social situations and explain a concept objectively.

98. Present students with various dilemmas related to the topic in hand and ask them to weigh up, without coming up with an answer, the pros and cons of each possible approach.

99. Use hands-on 'real-world' examples / experiences.

100. Use pair work, group work, peer reviews and peer education to allow students to build a social network.

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[1] I’ve written about this elsewhere. See for instance Tondeur 09 and 12.

[2] The MBTI is included in Sternberg's work on learning styles, for instance: Sternberg and Zhang 2006 p 148. See also: Bargar and Hoover 1984 pp 56-63. The MBTI website gives a background to this approach. See: http://www.myersbriggs.org/ Click on 'my MBTI personality type' / 'MBTI basics' for an explanation.

[3]Articles by Richard Felder can be found via Dr Felder's home page on North Carolina State University's website: www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/RMF.html and http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Learning_Styles.html

[4]You can find my blog post ‘How to think outside your lesson plan’ at http://www.louisetondeur.co.uk/how-to-think-outside-your-lesson-plan/

[6]See Gregorc 1979 and section 3.1 in Coffield et al 2004. See also: Jonassen and Grabowski 1993.

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