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Brainstorming activity in class: How will you do it?

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I. INTRODUCTION

I am an educator in a local university keen on exploring different types of teaching methods, including collaborative activity in class. I have explored several approaches of collaborative activity and here, I would like to reflect on my experience. First and foremost, as usual, I will prepare for a lecture that takes about 30 to 45 minutes depending on the topic. For most of my class, I like to integrate my teaching with interactive or collaborative activity such as a brainstorming activity. The aim of the brainstorming activity is to explore the student's current level of understanding of certain topic and also an opportunity to explore their creativity and ideas. In order to facilitate a more effective brainstorming activity, before the class, I also provide the students with some reading exercises or learning questions. This will help the students prepare themselves with some prior knowledge before coming to the class. I have discovered that, such brainstorming activity encourages the students to do prior learning and will helps to facilitate a more effective and collaborative class discussion.

II. TYPES OF BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITIES

One of the traditional methods of brainstorming activities is by directly asking the students questions during class time. In this process, I normally give a chance for any students to volunteer by scanning around the students in the classroom. Most of the time, normally, the active ones were the one who normally volunteers. I realize that by doing this process, I only manage to get a couple of ideas from the whole lot of students. Sometimes, I do call up names to ask for their opinion but this does not gives everyone the opportunity to say their thoughts and ideas.

In one of my class, I have also used sticky post-it brainstorming method. I find that this activity is useful when the class size is big (more than 50 students). The students tend to come up with different ideas and then my job is to pull them together into several categories, wherever possible. Most of the time, the students were able to identify the important points. But I also found that, their ideas tend to be a bit narrow, if no learning questions or reading homework were given before the brainstorming activity. The issue with this activity is that, we need a lot of post-it and also the students are not able to keep a permanent record of what has been written in their post-it. Nevertheless, I find that this particular method is still quite effective as it encourages the students to think in-depth about a certain topic and it also gives every single student a chance to voice out their opinion.

Another brainstorming tool that I have utilized is using an e-learning tool called Padlet. Padlet is available freely online. The incorporation of an e-learning tool such as Padlet encourages student's interaction among their peers and myself, as their lecturer. One of the benefits of such tool encourages the quieter students to gives out their opinion or ideas. This is because in most of the case, when question were asked verbally, only one or two of the usual students will volunteer to answer the questions. To make the discussion more effective, I find that encouraging them to talk among themselves in smaller groups of 3 to 4 students able them to discuss and then jot down variety of ideas together. Some time is given for the students to think about their ideas, normally about five to ten minutes, depending on the question. One of the handy features of Padlet is that, at the end of the session, I am able to organize their answers and saved

them as pdf copy or image version to be shared to the whole class. The outcome of their brainstorming session can be projected onto the screen and discussed further.

Apart from that, I also like to conduct brainstorming activity at the very end of the class, asking the students general questions regarding what they have learnt so far. In order to use e-learning tool such as Padlet, however, a good Wi-Fi connection and computers is required throughout the session. However, unstable internet connections may not be much of a trouble because nowadays, most of the university students have mobile phone. Padlet is accessible via mobile phones as well. However, as a back-up plan, when utilizing any e-learning tools, I suggest to prepare some sticky post-it, just in case there is problem with the Wi-Fi connection during the session.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, student's interaction is very important; I always encourage the students to conduct brainstorming in class, which will help improve their communication and collaborative skills among their peers and the lecturer. Furthermore, in the past decade, the advancement of Information Technology (IT) is taking place very rapidly. In-line with this, I do believe that educators should take advantage of the various tools to stimulate their traditional classroom teaching. In conclusion, I found that the incorporation of brainstorming activity during class encourages the students to express and crafts their thoughts and ideas more effectively and this can be achieved with the help of various learning tools such as post-it or e-learning tool such as Padlet.

Declaration of Interest

The author declares no competing interests.

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