

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Increasing Accountability Through Popsicle Pairs

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

The instructor uses a practice called “Popsicle pairs” to increase student engagement during lectures, quizzes, and the final class project. Each class has their own set of Popsicle pairs, which the instructor creates using large Popsicle sticks placed in a cup with two student names written on the end of each stick.

On the first class day, students complete a survey with their name, major, study habits, goals for the course, and an interesting personal fact. After class, the instructor posts all survey responses to the course website. Students review their peers’ responses and select potential candidates for their Popsicle stick pairings. During the next class meeting, the instructor randomly chooses students to select their pairing. Once a pair is finalized, the instructor records the pair on a large Popsicle stick.

The instructor uses Popsicle pairings throughout the course to increase student accountability and community. During lectures, the instructor randomly selects a Popsicle pair every 10 to 15 minutes to answer review questions. The selected pair discusses the question, using their collective notes and resources, before answering. Quizzes are also collaborative as pairs work together to complete them; both members receive the same grade on the assessment. The collaboration aspect of the practice keeps students accountable to one another as an unprepared member puts their team at a disadvantage.

The final group project is called “Popsicle Pairs Squared.” The instructor randomly selects two Popsicle pairs to make teams of four. For their final project, groups create a business selling fictional products. In the first half of the final project, each group outlines their business plan for incoming supplies, product transformations, outbound logistics, services, and communications. In the second half of the project, teams use Weebly.com to create websites for their businesses. Each website includes a home page, product information page, blog page, contact page, and leadership page with team member pictures and biographies. The instructor provides rubrics with specific project requirements and team member expectations. After the conclusion of the project, students anonymously evaluate their team members according to a provided rubric. The instructor uses these peer evaluations as factors in each student’s final project grade.