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# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Collaboration is the key to innovation.

Dr. Patricia Stewart-Hopkins

## ACTIVE & COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Thank you, Dr. Stewart-Hopkins, for your willingness to share and collaborate!



## Active & Collaborative Learning

Active and collaborative teaching strategies engage students in the process of learning through activities and/or discussions in class. Students learn by interacting with content in multiple ways rather than a single delivery method like passively listening to a lecture. Active and collaborative learning activities engage students in higher-order thinking processes like application, analysis, evaluation, and creation. This evidence-based practice builds deep concept knowledge, improves recall, and results in higher grades. In addition, active and collaborative learning facilitates the development of skills that will benefit students across the curriculum and into the workplace. Students show gains in interpersonal communication skills, critical thinking skills, decision-making, real-world problem solving, and creativity. As students become accustomed to taking more control of their learning experiences, they become more motivated to prepare for class. In an active and collaborative environment, students are encouraged to share their ideas, defend their conclusions, listen to different views, investigate, learn in context, and build on other people's ideas.



## How have you designed lesson plans that engage students in active and collaborative learning?

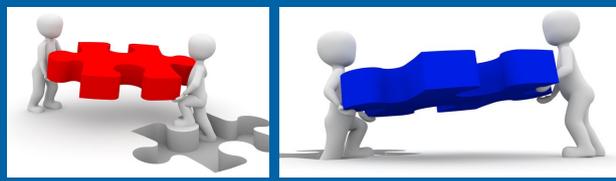
One of the most advantageous strategies I am employing is a shared lesson plan document. (A sample lesson plan is linked at the end of this article). Using this tool has created consistency, routine, and predictability that is aligned to trauma-informed education. The shared lesson plan outlines the topics, associated learning objectives, identifies key concepts or terms, and provides instruction for the active and/or collaborative learning activities. It includes tools that are used in class to support their engagement. Each important concept is paired with an active and/or collaborative learning activity. I make this lesson plan available prior to our class meeting time and invite them to print the pdf or access the same document in our class Google Docs. In an effort to foster accountability for participation, and check for content comprehension, I ask that they email or submit hard copies of the completed engagement activity documents the day of class.

Another strategy that has been well received by students is the liberty they have to select their preferred roles and type of engagement. Group member roles are designated to establish a division of labor and structure during collaborative activities, but the roles of members are not assigned by me. Students who are more comfortable writing about their ideas are not forced to share aloud. If students are more comfortable sharing during the out loud discussions, they are invited to include their written ideas in an abbreviated fashion on the lesson plan engagement documents. The variety of roles and engagement opportunities included during active and/or collaborative learning activities are inclusive of multiple styles of learning. Another opportunity for student choice is in the student selected focus in lecture or discussion. I present students with several options to choose from, and then I deliver material in that area before the wrap up 3,2,1 activity. These opportunities to choose paired with the consistency, predictability, and routine offered by the lesson plan create a sense of psychological safety.

## How have your students responded to this pedagogical strategy?

Once I worked out the kinks, based on student feedback and my own errors, I asked them what they liked about the new strategies for learning. This is a compilation of some comments which were echoed by all who offered feedback.

"Your teaching is more from a realistic standpoint, you back it up with the book or articles but also with real-world examples. I like that. That style makes it easier to understand. You check in, and talk with us, not at us. All the different activities make it impossible to be bored or check out. You are teaching to all the different learning styles. I'm taking what we do in this class and using it at work. I feel more prepared for what is going to happen in class. I have fewer questions because I have an idea of what to expect, and how things will go."



## How have active learning opportunities impacted student performance in your course?

Students are better prepared to relate and apply what we are covering in their field experience, and at times to their lives. This is evident in their class discussion and their writing assignments. Internship supervisors have been impressed with the progress of students in areas that are covered by these active and collaborative activities. For those of you seeking outcomes data, quiz scores are high.

## What did you learn that might be helpful to others who want to implement a similar strategy?

I sometimes overestimate the tech savvy of my students. Having said that, I have learned the importance of reviewing what I create for these collaborative learning activities to determine where I can make it easier for students to navigate them. For example, inserting links into the instructions for any needed articles, Google Meet, or Google Docs. When students have to go back and forth within Bb to access these tools, they sometimes feel overwhelmed or run into problems that their peers or myself need to troubleshoot. After completing the lesson plan, I think about the tech skill of the student who is at the greatest deficit. Reflecting on student difficulties in navigating prior activities allows me to adapt the instructions and tools' accessibility to reduce troubleshooting needs. This increases the time spent engaging with material while reducing the likelihood that anyone will be left out of the collaborative activities.

\*Many of the active and collaborative activities in my lesson plan are adaptations from the K. Patricia Cross Academy website <https://kpcrossacademy.org/>. Tammy Yoho has also been another valuable resource for feedback on the design and delivery of these active/collaborative learning activities.

**VIEW A SAMPLE**

CLICK  
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**LESSON PLAN**

**BY DR. STEWART-HOPKINS**

