

Activators & Summarizers

October 5

2012

Sample strategies to use at the beginning of the lesson to prepare students for the content that follows and at the end of the lesson to help students process what they have learned.

Presented by
Jim Effinger

ACTIVATOR

Estimation Line-Up

From Spencer Kagen, Cooperative Learning

Students make a best guess estimate about a concept or topic to be studied.

- Students make the best guess estimate and write it on a scrap of paper.
- Students line-up in sequential order of their estimate.
- Pair students by A. folding the line so the high estimate is paired with the low estimate.

OR

B. divide the line in half and slide the line so the high estimate is paired with a middle estimate.

- Partners share their estimates and discuss strategies they used to determine their estimate.
- Students need to fully understand the strategy their partner used.
- Back at their desks, students share the strategies students used.

ACTIVATOR

I Know, I Think I Know, I Want to Know (Not a KWL, but similar)

An activator that can be used prior to the study of new material, a discussion, a reading, or a field trip / guest presentation.

The activator can be used with the whole class or in smaller groups of student working on chart paper.

- The topic is identified.
- Student tell what they - KNOW about the topic
THINK they know about the topic
WANT to know about the topic.
- A recorder writes the student's statements on the board or chart paper.
- It is important to emphasize getting many ideas on the paper rather than discussing the ideas as they are generated.
- Debates and discussion may occur after all comments are posted.
- It is fun to save the chart paper and show it to the class at the conclusion of the unit. Students like to look back to what they knew and thought they knew when compared to what they know at the end of the unit of study.
- This is also a good activator that will help the teacher tailor the unit to student misconceptions and interests.

ACTIVATOR

Word Splash

A word splash is a collection of words or concepts from a written passage, a chapter in a textbook, or an article the students are about to read. The words are randomly spread out and placed at angles on a visual for students to read. The student's task is to make predictive statements about how each of the terms relates to the main focus of the reading.

- Show student's the Word Splash.
- Students brainstorm and generate complete statements which predict the relationship between the terms and the topic to be read.
- Students then read the text (article, chapter, etc.) and check the accuracy of their predictive statements.

Students can also create a Summarizer by reading a passage, chapter, etc. and writing a Word Splash of the important key terms and ideas.

Example : Fruit Bats

Summarizer

10 • 2

The structure of this summarizer was developed by Mary Budd Rowe (also famous for her work with “wait time”).

The idea behind this summarizer is that the teacher allows students time to process information and concepts made during a large group presentation.

The teacher presents for 10 minutes then stops and asks the students to review, ask questions to each other, share notes, or clarify concepts with each other for 2 minutes. The time frame can of course vary but teachers need to remember stop and allow student time to summarize.

I put a large sign in the back of the room so I see it and remember to stop frequently. The sign simply says 10 • 2 . Usually sometime in the middle of the semester a student asks “What does that sign mean.” When I tell them, the student comments are in the order of “Yea, I like when you let us talk about the material in the middle of class.”

The research shows that groups that followed the 10 • 2 pattern performed better than control groups on more complex test items, had a greater long term retention of material and had more positive attitudes toward the subject and instructional method. The quality of student questions and in-class notes also improved.

Some suggestions for students during the 2 minutes:

- Pair share with a partner and tell the most important thing to remember.
- Compare notes and fill add another important piece to your notes.
- Discuss what the most difficult thing is to understand about the concept.
- Develop questions you wished the teacher would have addressed.

Summarizer

A B C Summarizer

We use this summarizer at the end of the first day of our summer workshops. It is always a fun way to end the day and get feedback from the participants about what they have learned.

Each participant (student) draws a letter of the alphabet from the container. They must then say a sentence that begins with a word that begins with the letter that they have drawn. In our case, we ask the participants to say a sentence about what they have learned about “Inquiry teaching” on the first day. We get some really good sentences about the topic and are always impressed by what the participants have learned. Some are funny but most reflect what we hoped was the important ideas presented that first day.

If there are more than 26 participant (students), just put some blank pieces of paper in the container. Those who draw a blank are asked to help a student near them create a sentence for their letter.

If there are less than 26 students, have some student draw two letters.

We usually say it is alright to use “ex” for the X letter.

Usually one of the instructors keeps the Z letter in their pocket and claims they took the Z, then says “Zee you tomorrow, it was a good class today”. But feel free to have students struggle with X and Z.

As a more complex summarizer, a group of students could create an alphabet book (A is for...) to summarize the end of a chapter or unit.

Bring in a children’s alphabet book as an example.

Summarizer Inside Outside Circle

This summarizer is excellent for quickly reviewing factual information and recall or comprehension questions. It is also the most time consuming during preparation if you are preparing the questions.

Students can prepare the questions but the teacher should screen them and also suggest quality questions as examples.

Write questions about the subject (concept) that was taught on note cards. I find the best way is to use a folded card with the question on the front of the card and the answer on the inside of the card.

- Each student gets a card and students form a large circle in the room.
- Students letter off A-B-A-B (or 1-2-1-2)
- All the A students take two steps forward, turn and face a B student. You now have two circles of students. (An inside and outside circle)
- A students ask their questions to the B students. If the B student can not answer the A student gives them the answer. Repeat with the B students asking their question to the A students.
- **IMPORTANT** Have students exchange their question with their partner.
- After a few moments ask the outside circle to move in a clockwise direction and walk past 2 students on the inside circle. Stop at the 3rd person and ask them the new question.
- Repeat this process with students reviewing as many questions as they can in the given time for your summary.

A few hints:

Try to write the questions so students have the same amount of time to answer the questions. One or two questions that have long answers slows the group down.

Think of answers the students may give that are correct but just not the same words you would use. Put these alternative answers on the cards.

Summarizer Synectics

Originally from Sidney Parnes and Alex Osborn.

The word Synectics, literally means “brining together diverse elements.”

Students review the topic they have studied by comparing that topic to some other randomly selected familiar object.

The teacher can select an object or have students name a few everyday objects.

Then the teacher poses the question:

“What are all the ways _____ (the concept studied in class) is like a _____?” (everyday object)

One of my favorites is from Leo Ley, a teacher I worked with for many years. Yes, I borrowed it from him and it has worked well as a summarizer in my biology class.

“How is photosynthesis like a washing machine?”

Expect a few silly answers but also expect some profound comments from students that reflect some real thinking and understanding by the students. Students may need some basic training in this process if you have never done synectics before. In this case, you may first want to have students brainstorm as much as possible about the familiar object. Another possibility is to compare two familiar objects. “How are fifth graders like a lawnmower?” (Both are loud and noisy. Both sometimes get pushed around by older people. Both work hard.)

Variations: Use several pictures of familiar items and have a group of students compare the concept topic to all the pictures.

Write four familiar words on the board, and the concept topic in the middle of the words. Have students compare the concept topic to all the familiar words.

It is a principle of creative thinking that the most interesting and less obvious ideas and connections tend to come later in brainstorming. Take your time and let the ideas flow.