Instructor/Student Perception of Effective Use of Class Time

Judy C. Lambert, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI 54963

Sharon Asman
Oshkosh Area School District
Oshkosh, WI 54901

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Abstract

This study investigated the following: 1) What are college students' perceptions of in-class activities or the way face-to-face class contact time is used? 2) Do students' perceptions of the above differ based on amount of teaching experience they have had? Examined were the value or helpfulness of specific class activities in terms of helping students understand concepts and course material and whether the activities were perceived as enjoyable, motivating, and a good model for future classroom use. Findings indicate that students clearly remembered the class activities and perceived them as a valuable use of class time. Certain activities were consistently rated higher than others. The amount of teaching experience of the students had little effect on their perceptions.

Student Perception of Effective Use of Class Time

As more and more content in college courses is being offered on line and face-to-face class time substantially reduced, how the actual class time is used becomes vitally important. Is it being used in the most effective manner? Who is the best judge of this? Do instructors and students see eye to eye?

Research specifically on the differences in college students' and instructor perceptions of the use of class time could not be found. Nevertheless, much has been studied regarding teacher quality and students' perceptions of teacher quality. Teachers have misconceptions of what students consider to be good teaching (Miley & Gonsalves, 2003). The differences in teacher belief and student perception regarding the quality of a course represent a balance between teaching conceptions or knowledge, and teaching action or presentation (McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, & Fairbank-Roch, 2006).

Teaching quality perceptions vary due to students' conceptions of learning and the teacher's beliefs about teaching (Kember & Wong, 2000). Similarly interest in the content, anticipated grades, satisfaction with the time and place, and instructor gender impact student perceptions (Heckert, Latier, Ringwald, & Silvey, 2006).

Student ratings can be one of the most influential measures of teaching effectiveness (Chen & Hoshower, 2003). Therefore, student participation and input are vital. The most beneficial and appealing outcome of student ratings is an improvement in teaching (Chen and Hoshower, 2003). However, Kember, Leung, and Kwan (2002) found there is no indication that student input necessarily improves the quality of teaching.

Method

Subjects. Participants were 27 adults enrolled in an accelerated early childhood cohort program at a mid-sized mid-western university. All were employed full time in early childhood care positions and taking 5 to 6 college courses each semester. This accelerated program would allow them to receive their undergraduate degree in elementary education in a very short time period. Cohort participants were extremely motivated, yet very stressed as they juggled full time work, a continuously heavy course load and family obligations.

Procedure

Data was collected in a content area reading class that was adapted for this specific cohort group. The course was scheduled during a seven week term, meeting for only five evenings. There was much less face-to-face contact time than a regular course and an extensive on-line component was involved. From the five face-to-face class meetings, twelve specific in-class activities were identified. At the third class session students rated the first six activities. At the last session, activities 7 through 12 were rated. Activities were rated regarding their value or helpfulness in terms of helping understand concepts and course material. Participants also indicated whether they felt the activities were enjoyable, motivating, and a good model for future classroom use. The instructor also rated the activities. Figure 1 indicates how each activity was rated on seven questions using a four point scale. Figure 2 provides a brief description of the 12 activities. In addition, a short focus group discussion was held to collect qualitative data regarding students' perceptions of the use of class time.

Figure 1: Ratings Example

Activity # 1 Taffy & Diane (Reading is an Active Process)				
	Very Clearly	**Clearly**	**Vaguely**	**Not At All**
Remember this activity:	4	3	2	1
This activity:	**Very Strong**	**High**	**Limited**	**Low**
Helped My Understanding	4	3	2	1
Was Enjoyable	4	3	2	1
Was Motivating	4	3	2	1
Was a Good Model for Future Classroom Use	4	3	2	1
Was a Good Use of Class Time	4	3	2	1
	Expanded	**Retained As Is**	**Shortened**	**Deleted**
This activity should be:	4	3	2	1

Figure 2: Description of Activities

#1. Taffy and Diane—A passage that students read together, stopping to make predictions. It demonstrates that reading is a very active process and cannot be engaged in in a passive manner.
#2. 5 Rooms-A memory strategy that has students mentally walk through five rooms in a house that they are very familiar with as a way of remembering a long list of words or terms.
#3/ Graphic Representation—A strategy that has students make and explain a detailed drawing to demonstrate their understanding of content material.
#4/ List/Group/Label—Small groups of students are asked to brainstorm a list of terms they associate with a given concept. They group their terms and provide a label for each group. Other students try to guess the original concept.
#5. Word Splash—Students are shown a chart containing words from a content passage and the passage's title. They are asked to predict relationships about the words to the title and are challenged to come up with a correct relationship that no one else uses.
#6. Cloze—A content area passage is provided with words deleted. Students make predictions about what words they think are correct in the blanks.
#7. Magic Squares--A puzzle that has students do a matching exercise on content material, but use a math square where the numbers add up horizontally and vertically to form the same number.
#8. Word Guess—Students provide a meaning or sound clue to help classmates guess content vocabulary words.
#9. Guided Reading Procedure—Students read a piece of text and as a group list all the facts they can remember on the board. They then reread to add missing facts or correct wrong information.
#10. Word Predict—Students are given subheadings for material they will be reading about. They are to list twenty words that they think will be used in their content passages.
#11. Talking Drawing—Students are given a title for a piece of content material. They then make a detailed drawing of their predictions. After reading the material, they revise their drawings.

#12. Alphaboxes—Students are given an alphabet chart. As review of a unit, they are to list as many terms from their notes as possible for each of the letters of the alphabet.

Results

Activities Data. Table 1 contains the results for all students for the first six activities. Table 2 contains the results for the last six activities for all the students. Data was also analyzed separately for students with 5 or less years of teaching experience compared to those with six or more years of experience. This data is not presented as there was little difference from what was found without separating the data.

Table 1: Averages for all Students for Activities 1-6

Activity Number	**Act. 1**	**Act. 2**	**Act. 3**	**Act. 4**	**Act. 5**	**Act. 6**
Activity Name	***Taffy & Diane***	***5 Rooms***	***Graphic Repre.***	***List/Group/Label***	***Word Splash***	***Cloze***
I remember this activity	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.6
It helped my understanding of content	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.5
It was enjoyable	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.8	3.5
It was motivating	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.5	3.5
It was a good model for my teaching	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.4
It was a good use of class time	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.4
This activity should be . . .	3.0	3.0	2.8	3.1	3.1	3.2
AVERAGE	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.4

N=25

Table 2: Averages for all Students Activities 7-12, Plus Averages for Questions

Activity Number	**Act. 7**	**Act. 8**	**Act. 9**	**Act. 10**	**Act. 11**	**Act. 12**	
Activity Name	***Magic Squares***	***Word Guess***	***GRP***	***Word Predict***	***Talking Drawing***	***Alpha-boxes***	AVE. 1-12
I remember this activity	3.4	3.1	3.3	2.1	3.5	3.9	3.3
It helped my understanding of content	3.0	3.1	3.1	2.6	3.3	3.6	3.2
It was enjoyable	3.0	3.2	3.0	2.6	3.2	3.3	3.2
It was motivating	3.0	3.2	3.0	2.6	3.2	3.0	3.1
It was a good model for my teaching	3.0	3.2	3.0	2.6	3.3	3.5	3.2
It was a good use of class time	3.1	3.2	3.0	2.6	3.2	3.4	3.2
This activity should be. . .	2.9	3.1	3.0	2.9	2.9	3.1	3.0
AVERAGE	3.1	3.2	3.1	2.6	3.2	3.4	

N=23

Discussion

Students clearly remembered the activities, with all except one activity rating between 3.1 and 3.9 with an average of 3.3. (4 indicating that they remembered it very clearly; 3 clearly, 2 vaguely, and 1 not at all) **Alphaboxes** was the most remembered activity at 3.9 and **Word Predict** the least remembered at 2.1. **Word Predict** was also the activity receiving the lowest of all ratings with an average of 2.6 on all six questions asked.

Two activities, **Word Splash** and **Alphaboxes,** consistently received the highest responses as determined by the averages of the seven questions with 3.5 for **Word Splash** and 3.4 for **Alphaboxes**. All activities were viewed positively with averages of 3.1 to 3.5 except for **Word Predict** again receiving the lowest average of 2.6. **Word Splash** and **Alphaboxes** seem

to be the standout activities, with **Word Splash** rated as the most enjoyable, 3.8, most motivating, 3.5, best model for teaching 3.5 along with **Alphaboxes** and tying with **List/Group/Label** and **Cloze** at 3.4 for being a good use of class time. Besides rating highest in being remembered, **Alphaboxes** also rated highest in helping understand content, 3.6, and tied with **Word Splash** as a good model for teaching and good use of class time. It is not surprising that **Word Predict**, obtained the lowest rating on all seven of the questions.

All activities rated between 2.6 and 3.4 on being a good use of class time. The lowest being **Word Predict** and the highest being **List/Group/Label**, **Word Splash**, **Cloze**, and **Alphaboxes** at 3.4.

The instructor rated all of the activities very highly, which is to be expected. If they were not felt to have been good activities they would not have been included in the course. The instructor did indicate that some of the activities should be modified by being either shortened or expanded. It is interesting to note that the lowest rated activity by the instructor was **Word Predict**. This was in agreement with the students. The instructor rated the activities after they had been presented in class. It is possible that the instructor picked up when presenting the activity that students were not responding as positively as usual. This could lead one to conclude that although surveying students about the activities provides interesting information, it is information that the instructor probably already intuitively picks up on. It should be noted that, although the primary investigator of this study was the course instructor, all data collection and focus group discussions were conducted by an independent research assistant.

The self-reporting of teaching experience may be a factor that contributed to the finding that previous teaching experience made little difference. The individuals were all in childcare

situations; some definitely did involve teaching while others did not. So, in essence, years of work experience or perhaps age was the factor being studied rather than teaching experience. Madsen and Cassidy (2005) did find that "expert or experienced teachers are more critical in their ratings of classroom teaching than are preservice teachers" (p. 227).

Focus Group Data. Positive comments included that "class time flies," and "no minute is wasted." In general students felt they were engaged and that the content of the course material was interesting and meaningful. They felt that explanations given in class helped them to clarify and remember ideas. "Activities done in class gave a way to remember the information in a clear way." "Class makes a difference in understanding the material, because I can see the strategies in action instead of just reading about them." A value of the face-to-face sessions was that questions could be immediately answered. Negative comments included the extremely fast pace of the class, having difficulty keeping up and always feeling one step behind. Other negatives included things unrelated to the use of class time such as too much work, redundancy in assignments and too much material. This is consistent with Adams (2005) who found that students believe that effort should significantly influence grades more so than did faculty members and that faculty and students differ in their views of the number of hours it takes to define superior effort.

In conclusion, this study did provide the instructor with strong support for continuing the use of the activities studied and indicate which ones should perhaps be modified or perhaps eliminated. It also provided support for the involvement of students in determining certain aspects of the course. From the overall response of the students and from the focus group discussion, it was apparent that the students responded very positively to being asked to provide

feedback. They were extremely interested in the research process and pleased to be asked to give their opinions about class activities. It is possible that they felt more involved in the course as a result of this participation.

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