

Documentary Project as an Active Learning Strategy in a Developmental Psychology Course

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Abstract : Recent studies in active-learning focus on how student experience varies based on the content (e.g. STEM versus Humanities) and the medium (e.g. in-class exercises versus off-campus activities) of experiential learning. However, little is known whether the variation in classroom time and space within the same active learning context affects student experience. This study manipulated the use of classroom time for the active learning component of a developmental psychology course that is offered at a four-year university in the South-West Region of United States. The course uses a blended model: traditional and active learning. In the traditional learning component of the course, students do weekly readings, listen to lectures, and take midterms. In the active learning component, students make a documentary on a developmental topic as a final project. Students used the classroom time and space for the documentary in two ways: regular classroom time slots that were dedicated to the making of the documentary outside without the supervision of the professor (Classroom-time Outside) and lectures that offered basic instructions about how to make a documentary (Documentary Lectures). The study used the public teaching evaluations that are administered by the Office of Registrar's. A total of two hundred and seven student evaluations were available across six semesters. Because the Office of Registrar's presented the data separately without personal identifiers, One-Way ANOVA with four groups (Traditional, Experiential-Heavy: 19% Classroom-time Outside, 12% for Documentary Lectures, Experiential-Moderate: 5-7% for Classroom-time Outside, 16-19% for Documentary Lectures, Experiential Light: 4-7% for Classroom-time Outside, 7% for Documentary Lectures) was conducted on five key features (Organization, Quality, Assignments Contribution, Intellectual Curiosity, Teaching Effectiveness). Each measure used a five-point reverse-coded scale (1-Outstanding, 5-Poor). For all experiential conditions, the documentary counted towards 30% of the final grade. Organization ('The instructors preparation for class was'), Quality ('Overall, I would rate the quality of this course as') and Assignment Contribution ('The contribution of the graded work that made to the learning experience was') did not yield any significant differences across four course types ($F(3, 202)=1.72, p > .05$, $F(3, 200)=.32, p > .05$, $F(3, 203)=.43, p > .05$, respectively). Intellectual Curiosity ('The instructor's ability to stimulate intellectual curiosity was') yielded a marginal effect ($F(3, 201)=2.61, p = .053$). Tukey's HSD ($p < .05$) indicated that the Experiential-Heavy ($M = 1.94, SD = .82$) condition was significantly different than all other three conditions ($M = 1.57, 1.51, 1.58; SD = .68, .66, .77$, respectively) showing that heavily active class-time did not elicit intellectual curiosity as much as others. Finally, Teaching Effectiveness ('Overall, I feel that the instructor's effectiveness as a teacher was') was significant ($F(3, 198)=3.32, p < .05$). Tukey's HSD ($p < .05$) showed that students found the courses with moderate ($M=1.49, SD=.62$) to light ($M=1.52, SD=.70$) active class-time more effective than heavily active class-time ($M=1.93, SD=.69$). Overall, the findings of this study suggest that within the same active learning context, the time and the space dedicated to active learning results in different outcomes in intellectual curiosity and teaching effectiveness.

Keywords : active learning, learning outcomes, student experience, learning context

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