ASPIRE
STRATEGY

Mount Wachusett
Community College

Learn
Collaborative
Group
Building
Create
Strengthen
Grow
Ambition
ASPIRE
Success

active learning
STRATEGIES

Melissa Fama, Ph.D.
Vice President of Academic Affairs
mfama@mwcc.mass.edu
978-630-9288

Joe Stiso
Associate Vice President for Institutional
Advancement / Title III Project Director
jstiso@mwcc.mass.edu
978-630-9113

Michelle Paranto, Ed.D.
Assistant Dean of Curriculum and Instruction
mparanto@mwcc.mass.edu
978-630-9487

mwcc.edu

ACTIVE LEARNING
strategies

classroom
DISCUSSION

Collaborative Group Work: Collaborative group work brings students together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Students are grouped intentionally with each student held accountable for contributing to the group work. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers. Literacy groups are a form of collaborative group work focused on reading, analyzing and understanding texts.

Writing to Learn: Writing to learn is a strategy that helps students develop their ideas, their critical thinking abilities and their writing skills. Writing to learn enables students to experiment with written language and increase their fluency and mastery of writing conventions. Writing to learn can also be used as formative assessment and as a way to scaffold to mid- and high-stakes writing assignments. Writing to learn can help students problem solve in any subject area and serves as a strategy for students to show their thinking and understanding of a topic.

Questioning: Questioning challenges students and faculty to use good questions as a way to open conversations and further intellectual inquiry. Learning to ask good questions is crucial to thinking critically and creatively. Effective questioning (by faculty and by students) deepens classroom conversations and the level of discourse students apply to their work. Faculty can use this strategy to create opportunities for students to investigate and analyze their thinking, the thinking of their peers and the texts that they read.

Scaffolding: Scaffolding enables students to construct new knowledge by building on what they already know and are able to do. Faculty use scaffolding to help students connect their prior knowledge and experience with new information. Scaffolding also helps students think about texts by asking them to draw on their subjective experience to make connections to what they are reading. Faculty use scaffolding to guide students as they learn how to read, think critically and develop their academic voice.

Classroom Discussion: Classroom discussion creates the space for students to articulate their thinking, strengthen their voice and take more ownership of their learning. Classroom discussion takes place in pairs, in collaborative group work and as a whole class. As students become accustomed to talking in class, faculty serve as facilitators and scaffold students to higher levels of discourse.

What is Classroom Discussion?

Classroom discussion creates the space for students to articulate their thinking, strengthen their voice and take more ownership of their learning.

Classroom discussion takes place in pairs, in collaborative group work and as a whole class. As students become accustomed to talking in class, faculty serve as facilitators and scaffold students to higher levels of discourse.

Why Implement Classroom Discussion As A Learning Strategy?
Classroom Discussion will actively engage all students, promote both speaking and listening skills, support collaboration and critical and creative thinking, help students develop confidence, articulate their ideas and develop a voice, and encourage students to share information and ideas with one another.

What Do Students Do During Classroom Discussion?
Develop a confident voice and become comfortable speaking in the classroom, learn to be active listeners and reflective speakers, engage in meaningful conversations across the curriculum, build strong student-student and student-teacher relationships, and acquire the ability to use content-specific vocabulary in discussion.

What Do Teachers Do To Implement Classroom Discussion?
Keep classroom discussion focused and on topic, establish clear and explicit rules and expectations for classroom discussion, listen and respond to what they hear as classroom discussion is taking place, use protocols and instructional strategies that support effective classroom discussion, and emphasize that all voices, opinions and ideas must be respected and valued.

SCAFFOLDING

collaborative GROUP WORK

What is Scaffolding?

Scaffolding enables students to construct new knowledge by building on what they already know and are able to do. Faculty use scaffolding to help students connect their prior knowledge and experience with new information. Scaffolding also helps students think about texts by asking them to draw on their subjective experience to make connections to what they are reading.

Faculty use scaffolding to guide students as they learn how to read, think critically and develop their academic voice.

Why Implement Scaffolding As A Learning Strategy?

Scaffolding will support students before, during and after learning new content or skills, help students engage with course materials and content, enable students to reach higher-order thinking, and make ideas and concepts relevant by putting them in context.

What Do Students Do During Scaffolding?

Better understand what they are reading and learning, make connections between their prior knowledge and experience and new content and skills, build confidence as they access more challenging material, develop creative and critical thinking and metacognition skills, and become skilled and purposeful readers and writers.

What Do Teachers Do To Implement Scaffolding?

Implement scaffolding as a way to support students with diverse needs and abilities as they acquire new knowledge and information, use protocols and strategies (questioning, writing to learn, graphic organizers, etc.) to help students connect their prior knowledge and experience with new content and skills, use scaffolding to put ideas and concepts into context and assist students with reading challenging texts, teach students how to scaffold learning for themselves by explicitly discussing scaffolding as they are using it in the classroom, embed scaffolding in class sessions and use it consistently to support student learning.

What is Collaborative Group Work?

Collaborative group work brings students together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Students are grouped intentionally with each student held accountable for contributing to the group work. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers. Literacy groups are a form of collaborative group work focused on reading, analyzing and understanding texts.

Why Implement Collaborative Group Work As A Learning Strategy?

Collaborative Group Work will allow students to practice using language and vocabulary specific to content areas, provide dedicated time for students to share and listen to new ideas, help students process information and get feedback, allow for both teacher-student and student-student interaction to occur, and position the teacher as an active facilitator and students as active learners.

What Do Students Do During Collaborative Group Work?

Work together to develop critical and creative thinking, social, interpersonal and communication skills, take responsibility for completing their share of work within the group, take risks, challenge themselves, and realize that making mistakes is part of the learning process, learn from each other, develop a commitment to their own learning and the learning of others, clarify their thinking and understand content in a more rich, critical and connected way.

What Do Teachers Do To Implement Collaborative Group Work?

Establish collaborative group work as a strategy for students to learn and work with others, facilitate the process of defining rules and expectations for groups, scaffold from individual work to work in pairs to small group work, listen and observe as groups work together, redirect students if necessary, challenge students if needed, vary group configurations, length of time in groups and group activities, hold students accountable for their work in groups, and make each group responsible for creating a product that reflects their learning.

WRITING to learn

What is Writing to Learn?

Writing to learn is a strategy that helps students develop their ideas, their critical thinking abilities and their writing skills. Writing to learn enables students to experiment with written language and increase their fluency and mastery of writing conventions. Writing to learn can also be used as formative assessment and as a way to scaffold to mid- and high-stakes writing assignments. Writing to learn can help students problem solve in any subject area and serves as a strategy for students to show their thinking and understanding of a topic.

Why Implement Writing to Learn As A Learning Strategy?

Writing to Learn will help students to think, reflect on content, construct their ideas, develop expressive language skills and fluency, process information, integrate new knowledge, engage with course content and lead to the improvement of higher-order thinking and high-stakes writing.

What Do Students Do During Writing to Learn?

Write in a thoughtful manner, focus more on content and less on spelling and grammar, learn to use a variety of writing-to-learn activities and protocols to improve their writing practice, scaffold to mid- and high-stakes writing assignments, and develop critical thinking, reflection and self-assessment skills.

What Do Teachers Do To Implement Writing to Learn?

Use writing to learn to engage students in the subject area, use writing to learn as a scaffold to mid- and high-stakes writing assignments, emphasize the importance of writing to learn as integral to strengthening the ability of students to write, embed writing to learn in class assignments and activities, utilize writing to learn as a way for students to show their thinking on paper, and use writing to learn as a formative assessment tool.

What is Questioning?

Questioning challenges students and faculty to use good questions as a way to open conversations and further intellectual inquiry. Learning to ask good questions is crucial to thinking critically and creatively. Effective questioning (by faculty and by students) deepens classroom conversations and the level of discourse students apply to their work. Faculty can use this strategy to create opportunities for students to investigate and analyze their thinking, the thinking of their peers and the texts that they read.

Why Implement Questioning As A Learning Strategy?

Questioning will help students put their thinking into words, provide a way for students to engage with content and each other, empower students to think critically, improve listening and speaking skills, and promote student-to-student and teacher-to-student interaction.

What Do Students Do During Questioning?

Listen to each other's questions and participate in answering them, engage in questioning at various levels of increasing difficulty, make connections to prior knowledge and experience, work collaboratively to develop higher-level questions, become active and reflective listeners and speakers, and construct new knowledge from asking and answering questions.

What Do Teachers Do To Implement Questioning?

Keep questioning focused and on topic, use wait time (3-5 seconds) and pacing to encourage all students to engage, ask questions of varying difficulty, encourage student-to-student questioning as well as student-to-teacher questioning, and use questioning as formative assessment to gauge where students are in their learning.