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What to do when active learning backfires

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SCIL 2020
We love active learning!
But... we have failed a LOT

We’re here today to teach you effective recovery strategies for active learning pitfalls
Fail 1:
Too many questions during self-guided activities

- It’s possible to spend an enormous amount on time answering student questions about a guided activity
- Students might not complete the activity because of this excessive instruction
- This defeats the entire purpose of a self-guided activity! Gah!
Solution

- Let students use each other as a resource before they come to you
- Pair or group them so they can brainstorm and troubleshoot with each other first
- This leads to better overall comprehension of the activity
Fail 2: Bias instruction gone wrong

- Opinion vs bias
- Frame the discussion around scholarly research
- Choose examples carefully
Solution

- Validate all opinions & stress that we are all human
- Use yourself as an example
- Don’t forget to explain context
- Examples should quickly illustrate, build off each other & be backed by online tools
Fail 3: Students love choosing sensitive topics for student-led activities

- The drawback to student-led activities is the lack of control on your end
- For the mind map activity I teach, students often choose sensitive or obscure topics
- This derails from the main point of the activity
Solution

- Politely reject topics that could derail the activity
  - Use your judgment: many controversial topics are completely fine, but we should make sure that activities are inclusive
- Ask students to define their topic for the class before starting the activity
- Have a back-up plan just in case!
Fail 4: Activities that require prior knowledge from students

- Be careful building an activity that depends on students having specific knowledge (even if that knowledge is basic)

- Media Map Activity
Solution

▪ Carefully consider what prior knowledge is needed
▪ Budget extra time to go over concept
▪ When designing an activity consider type of class. Stand-alone, one-shot classes make it difficult to use activities that require prior knowledge
Questions?

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