

String of Activities: An Example

“Developing a Plan for Future Learning”

The following is an example of a particularly effective “String of Activities” that Dee Fink used in a graduate course on “Preparing for College-Level Teaching.”

One major learning goal for that course was for students to learn how to keep on learning about college teaching after the course was over. This “String of Activities” was a major learning activity for that learning goal.

Here is what students did in this “String of Activities:

- **Week 4:** As the first activity, I asked students to find 5-10 SOURCES of information about ideas on college teaching, e.g., websites, bibliographies, etc. They did this out-of-class, brought their list of sources to the next class, and shared what they had found with other students in their small group.
 - We then compiled all their different sources, and distributed the full set back to everyone.
- **Week 6:** Then I asked them to take some of these sources and identify 5-10 TOPICS about college teaching that went beyond what we were going to study in the course.
 - Again, they brought what they found to class, shared it with others in their groups, and we compiled all the different ideas everyone found and distributed full list to everyone.
- **Week 8:** Then everyone was asked to review this list of ideas, and SELECT 4 TOPICS that they considered the most important for them to learn about college teaching in the next 1-3 years. Write a short essay on why they thought these 4 were the most important for them.
- **Week 10:** Then, out of the list of topics on their own short-list, everyone was asked to SELECT 1 TOPIC AND LEARN ABOUT IT NOW, i.e., in the next three weeks. To do that, they might read about it, interview a professor who knew about it, try it in their own teaching, or whatever. Then: write a short report on: *What they did to learn* about the idea, and *what they learned* about the idea.
 - After they did this, I pointed out that they had just proven to themselves that they could learn about college teaching, on their own, without me. How did they know that? They had just down it!
- **Week 13:** Then, take the remaining 3 topics on their short list, and identify *how* they would learn about those topics. Write a short report about the 3 topics, why they had selected those, and how they planned to learn about them.

- At this point, they had a PLAN FOR FUTURE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING. They had (a) identified a set of topics they wanted to learn about, and (b) had identified how they would learn about those topics – the two requirements for being self-directing learners.
- **Week 15** (last week of the course): Insert this short report as their “Plan for Future Learning” into their teaching portfolio and into their learning portfolio for this course.

Each step in this String of Activities prepared students for the next step. And the whole set of activities resulted in a major product that was valuable to the students themselves.

Most of these activities were done out-of-class, although some in-class time was spent allowing students to share what they had done or found.

My belief is that there is a high likelihood that these students will actually do this future learning, because (a) they themselves had identified *what* they thought was important for them to learn, (b) they had identified *how* they could learn about those topics, and (c) they now had *confidence* that they could learn about these topics on their own.