Inquiry and Engagement in an interactive classroom

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Warning!

In this talk, I have included three short activities for you and people around you.
First of three activities: Ice breaker.

Introduce yourself to someone sitting near you. Include

- your name,
- your institution & department, and
- the last object you put into a trash can.

(30 seconds)
(Time’s up.)

Thank you!!!
In 2017, my family (with 3–6 people at home) put 10 trashcans at the curb.
Second of three activities:

⭐ Turn back to that someone sitting near you.

💡 Suggest two–three ways you might have avoided that last piece of trash. (That is, avoided adding to a landfill).

(1 minute)
(Time’s up.)

Thank you again!!!
Your responses probably fell into one of these six categories:

1. R___f___s___ the trash in the first place
2. R___pl___c___ with a trash-free alternative
3. R___ ___s___ durable objects vs. disposable objects
4. R___d___c___ the amount of things you use
5. R___c___cl___ instead of tossing in the landfill bin
6. R___t organic items

*credit*: The Zero Waste Home
1. R__f__s__: Avoid the trash in the first place
2. R___pl___c___: Change to a trash-free alternative
3. R__ ___s__ durable objects, such as water bottles, bags, spoons, cloth napkins, ‘xeryp’ containers, etc.
4. **R**educe the amount of things you use
5. **R___c___cl__** instead of tossing in the landfill bin
6. R__t organic items
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As my daughter once told her friends,

“My mom has a PhD and a compost pile!”
credit: The Zero Waste Home

Bea Johnson’s 2015 trash
So . . .

. . .what does “talking trash”
tell us about teaching math?
Talking to strangers is uncomfortable for a lot of people.

Talking to friends makes it easy to get off-track.

The room set-up is bad for effective conversation & follow-up.

We come to a talk (or a class) to hear from an "expert", not from the random person sitting next to us.
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So make the rules specific and explicit:

  timing, roles, and scope of discussion.
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*Answer 1, for the instructor:*

So carefully craft questions that people can solve themselves, *with some difficulty*, together.
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*Answer 2, for the student:*

But what we want, and what help us learn best, are two different things.
What helps us learn best? *Interactive Engagement*
What helps us learn best? Interactive engagement has three components for students:

1. struggle with the problem themselves;
2. talk to other students about their approaches;
and then
3. get immediate feedback.

Interactive Engagement includes good, reasonable struggle.

We prefer the solutions we come up with ourselves, not the ones other people give us. So introduce “desirable difficulties”:

1. Refuse the trash in the first place.
   
   vs.

1. Refuse the trash in the first place.
It is better to guess a wrong answer (and get feedback) than to make no attempt. When learners commit errors and are given feedback, the errors are not learned.

Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel (2014)
What does it mean to say *Interactive Engagement* “works better”? 

*Next page:*

Organic Chem II student grades on a “review” test covering Organic Chem I material.

Gray/green bars: lecture,

Blue bars: Inquiry/discovery method
Organic Chemistry 2 Pre-Quiz at a Large Public University

Organic 2 Pre-quiz Results (Lecture vs. POGIL Organic 1)

“College works when it provides a thick environment of constant feedback, driven by the establishment and maintenance of social relationships.”

Chambliss and Takacs, 2014.
My first (accidental) IBL class:

I was jealous of the Geology Department, so I took my students to a coffee house.
My first worksheets were masterpieces in pencil.
I started using occasional worksheets in calculus classes, too.
And then Max came along . . .
1. The graph above has three local maxima and two local minima. Circle these five points.

2. Then fill in the blanks in the following sentence: If \( f \) is a function whose domain is the interval \([a, b]\), then local minima and local maxima happen either
   (a) at the \( \underline{\text{}} \) of the interval, or
   (b) at places where the derivative is equal to \( \underline{\text{}} \), or
   (c) at places where the derivative does not \( \underline{\text{}} \).

3. [True or False?] If \( f''(c) = 0 \) for some value \( x = c \), then \( f \) has a local maximum or minimum at \( x = c \).

4. Suppose the volume of a box is given by \( V(h) = 180h - 39h^2 + 2h^3 \), where the height \( h \) of the box ranges from 0 to \( \frac{15}{2} \).
...that I’ve posted on my web pages, for the curious
Even more worksheets for IBL math classes:
Third of three activities:

★ Turn your desks into “V”s and do questions 1–3 of the worksheet I’m about to hand out.

★ After you get started, I’ll designate a “Chalk Czar”.

(≈ 5 minutes)

What you “know” is that the word derivative means slope, and we write it with a prime: \( f'(x) \).
(Time’s up.)

Thank you again!!!
Implementing IBL

Developing questions
Assigning groups
Structuring the group work
What you do while they’re working
Giving feedback
How to develop questions? Two wide-spread approaches to IBL:

- (Modified) Moore Method
- POGIL
  Process-Oriented, Guided Inquiry Learning
Example of a Moore-Methodesque approach, in Abstract Algebra
Definition. For any element $g$ in a group $G$ with identity $e$, we say that $|g|$, the order of $g$, is the smallest positive integer $n$ so that $g^n = e$. If such an integer does not exist, we say $|g| = \infty$.

For each of the statements 1–5 below, either prove the statement or find a counter-example.

1. If $G$ contains an element of order 4, then all elements except the identity have order 4.
2. If $G$ contains an element of order 4, then $G$ contains an element of order 1.

3. If $G$ contains an element of order 4, then $G$ contains an element of order 2.

4. If $G$ contains an element of order 4, then $G$ contains an element of order 3.

5. If $G$ contains an element of order 4, then that is the only element in $G$ with order 4.
Example of a POGIL--esque approach, in Calculus I
The graph above has three local maxima and two local minima. Circle these five points.
Then fill in the blanks in the following sentence: If $f$ is a function whose domain is the interval $[a, b]$, then local minima and local maxima happen either (a) at the \underline{critical} points of the interval, or (b) at places where the derivative is equal to \underline{critical}, or (c) at places where the derivative does not \underline{critical}.

Values of $x$ that satisfy (b) or (c) above are called \textit{critical points} of $f$.

* \textit{Hint:} Unscramble the letters “d e i n n o p s t”.
How to assign groups?

- with charts
- writing symbols on worksheets
- using questionnaires
- let the students decide

(3–4 people per group seems to work well)
Structure the discussion

• Which problems to work on?
• What roles do students have within groups? (Chalk Czar!)
• When and how do they stop working?
What the instructor does . . .

- nudge students to answer each other’s questions
  “What does your group think?”
  “Sam wants to know if $x = 2$. Do you all agree?”
  “Does everyone in your group have the same answer?”
- assign “ambassadors” from one group to another
- encourage students to take risks
  “Put it up on the board! If it’s a mistake, it’s a good mistake and everyone will learn from it.”
Feedback and discussion

- Look at the students, not at the board.
- Ask students who didn’t put the answer up to explain it.
- Promote risk-taking and learning from “good” mistakes
- Promote “growth” mind-set and effort
Conclusion;

Something witty.

(talking trash? an IBL mind is a terrible thing to waste?)
Thank you.
References


Annalisa Crannell’s classroom materials: [http://www.fandm.edu/annalisa-crannell/](http://www.fandm.edu/annalisa-crannell/)


Grantham, Robinson, and Chapman, “‘That truly meant a lot to me’: A qualitative examination of meaningful faculty-student interactions, *College Teaching* **63**:3, 125–132.


