

# **Show and Tell for College Students: A Theoretically Driven Approach to Enhancing Learning**

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Creating an invested interest in academic work among college students can be challenging in some cases. This is especially true in classes such as Foundations of Parks and Recreation where instructors face the challenge of introducing a wide variety of complex and often abstract concepts in a manner that seems practical and interesting to students.

## **Constructivist Strategies to Teaching**

A critical factor in an educator's ability to maximize the experience and understanding of students is the willingness to look beyond the didactic approach to teaching toward alternative strategies that facilitate understanding and commitment. One alternative to the traditional didactic approach involves the use of constructivist teaching strategies (Piaget, 1970, 1977). Individuals being educated under the constructivist paradigm are provided with interactive experiences that help them achieve an understanding of worldly processes. This understanding is gained through cognitive adaptation, or the interaction between organism and environment (Miller, 1993). Students achieve adaptation by becoming scientists. They are given opportunities to experiment with subject matter and draw their own conclusions. Likewise, the role of the instructor shifts from provider of information to facilitator of experiences. The targeted outcome shifts from production of responses to the ability to apply worldly processes to a variety of scenarios. Learning becomes multidimensional and is based in student-driven activities. Furthermore, these activities involve multiple approaches to gaining understanding.

Although a relatively new movement in education, the effectiveness of constructivist teaching has been demonstrated when applied to mathematics and science-based material (e.g., Lord, 1997; Schifter, 1996) as well as writing development (Fosnot, 1989), the arts (Gardner 1985), social and moral development (Edwards, 1986; Furth, 1980), and environmental education (Klein & Merritt, 1994).

### *Show and Tell*

For many children, show and tell was a grade school activity that allowed them an opportunity to share an object or experience with their classmates that was personally meaningful. These items tend to be so meaningful that many adults can recall some of the objects they took to school as children. When college students are given the oppor-

tunity to participate in “show and tell,” they are immediately removed from the routine of the typical college classroom and are on alert for an interesting experience. At first, students tend to be suspicious, but childhood enthusiasm is soon aroused and students are awoken from the daily routine college classrooms.

### *Implementation*

When asking students to participate in show and tell, the instructor should consider several factors. First, explain to students that items brought for show and tell should be a symbol or artifact of their personal leisure lifestyle. Items can be associated with any sport, hobby, interest, or activity that the student participates in as a leisure experience. A second consideration is the importance of the instructor sharing his or her own personal “show and tell”. By sharing something personal, the instructor can reduce barriers that inhibit a quality relationship with students. In addition, modeling the behavior for students can help reduce any anxieties or doubts they have about speaking in front of the class and sharing personal items (Bandura, 1977). It may also be wise for the instructor to share multiple items to illustrate the diverse possibilities related to leisure. For example, a favorite book, a pair of running shoes, and a garden hoe could be shared with the class. Instructors should also be sure to model the manner in which they would like the item to be presented. In most cases, students should be required to explain the items personal relevance, as well as how it relates to the concept of leisure.

### *Theoretical Considerations*

Show and tell lends well to constructivist theory because it is simply another avenue for creating an opportunity to understand new information. Whether this information is used as material for experimentation, as kindling for intellectual discussion, or as a metaphor will depend on the content and focus of the lesson. In any of these scenarios, the instructor acts as a facilitator who encourages students to explore questions related to the lesson’s area of focus. Below are three potential applications of show and tell in a parks and recreation curriculum.

*In a foundations class.* Introductory level parks and recreation courses are an environment in which activities such as show and tell can be most fruitful. In addition to serving as an ice breaking activity, show and tell provides the raw material for experimentation and exploration of concepts. The activities shared are essentially a sample of society’s leisure behaviors. Based on this fact, a variety of basic concepts can be explored. For example, the class could be asked to present their show and tell items over a period of a few class periods. Records would be kept of each student’s presentation (e.g., what was the item and how did it relate to leisure? Once all students had presented, the instructor could introduce the concept that leisure activities can be categorized in a variety of ways. Students could then be asked to work in small groups to develop a classification system for the activities presented during show and tell. Students could then present their classification systems to one another. The instructor could then present

students with the organizational structure of the department. For example, the department may be divided into areas such as commercial recreation, municipal parks and recreation, natural resources, and therapeutic recreation. Students might then be asked to compare and contrast their classification system with the departmental organization, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of either system, and classify the show and tell activities under the various departmental categories. By participating in this process, students are able to gain a better understanding of the parks and recreation industry and the various specialty areas that exist. As these areas are covered in more detail at various times throughout the course, the instructor could refer students back to this activity and the resulting classifications as a means of creating personal and practical meaning of course content.

*In a research class.* Another potential application of show and tell within the constructivist framework is to use the activity as a source of generating research questions. This activity typically works best if conducted after students have been presented with basic research principles. For example, four weeks into a research class, students could be assigned separate days to present their show and tell items. After each student presents, the class could be asked questions such as: “what research questions could be asked about this item?”, “what kind of research do you think went into the development of this equipment?”, or “How could we find out if Joey’s hobby would be popular among other college students?”. Such an activity is specifically designed to assist students in realizing the connection between course content and applying this content to the daily leisure activities of society.

*In a diversity/special populations class.* One of the most interesting consequences of using show and tell in parks and recreation courses is the extremely diverse array of interests that is commonly revealed among the class members. This tendency lends well to demonstrating to students the individuality that exists in our society. It also can be used to metaphorically demonstrate how human beings become less judgmental of others as relationships develop, common interests are discovered, and the humanness of a person is realized.

## Conclusion

The basic assumptions of constructivism promote the use of multiple learning strategies; therefore, instructors should consider show and tell as a piece of the larger teaching puzzle. While the described activities can be helpful in creating learning experiences, the ultimate resource is the theory that guides their use. It is highly recommended that those who attempt to use this material carry their efforts a bit further and work to develop additional teaching strategies that can increase the student’s opportunities for improving overall knowledge.

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