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Creating Critical Thinkers: Problem Based Learning and Audio Commentary

In this session, presenters will offer original research on two distinct strategies for improving students' critical thinking skills and self-directed learning across disciplines. The primary objective of the session is to inform participants of the ways in which problem-based learning and audio instructor commentary on writing and projects enhance learning and inquiry.

Presenter one:

Problem-based learning is a teaching model which motivates students, encourages cognitive development, and promotes both collaborative learning and critical thinking. Rhem (1998, p.1) asserts that "PBL [orients] students toward meaning making over fact collecting." With that in mind, this presenter will refer to original research on students' perceptions of the approach and discuss the use of PBL in the classroom and the benefits and challenges involved. The literature is clear that when PBL is compared to lecture, cognitive skills vital to students' success, but not necessarily addressed in content-based course objectives, are learned. The very nature of PBL provides students exposure to activities that promote not only problem-solving but also self-directed learning, critical thinking, self-efficacy, self and peer evaluation, and lifelong learning (Dunlap, 2005). Therefore, PBL serves as a valid platform to provoke inquiry and promote learning. Participants will be invited to share their ideas about how PBL can be adapted to their disciplines.

Presenter two:

Instructors across disciplines struggle to find ways to help students improve critical thinking and writing skills. Audio commentary is a method of digitized feedback whereby instructors record formative comments on student writing or projects. More than handwritten commentary, this method offers increased opportunities to teach critical thinking and encourage metacognitive development (Sommers, 2002). Relying on original research conducted in developmental and college level classes where both handwritten and audio feedback were offered, this presenter will argue that digitized feedback enhances student learning (Sipple & Sommers, 2005; Sipple, 2006, 2007). Furthermore, interviews with ten professors who have used the audio method suggest how it also encourages them to model advanced critical thinking skills for students. Participants will hear a brief sample of audio commentary, see statistical evidence suggesting increased learning outcomes related to the use of the method, and hear practitioners' ideas regarding the ways the audio commentary allows for real teaching in the midst of feedback. In addition, participants will discuss ways to incorporate the method into their classes, regardless of discipline.