Academic Rigor: *Becoming an Active Learner*

**Purpose:** To identify the value of being an active learner and paying close attention to feedback.

**Supplies:** A dollar bill folded into a very small square; one volunteer (A)

**Directions:**

1. (To students) *Do you remember how you loved learning as a child and how good you were at it? Today we’re going to play a game to see if we can rediscover some of that lost love and the natural learning process we can still use today to maximize our learning.* (To Volunteer A): *I’m going to ask you to go out of the room for a few minutes while we set up a learning game for you to play.*
2. (To the class after A has left the room) *I’d like someone to hide this folded dollar bill somewhere in the room. It’s important that everyone knows where the dollar is, so watch carefully where it’s being hidden. When A returns, I’ll tell her that the goal is to learn where the dollar is hidden. Notice how this situation is similar to coming into a new course. No matter the discipline of the course, your job as a student is to figure out some choices that enhance learning and those that diminish learning. To do that, watch and listen for everything that A does or says. See what she does that works to learn where the dollar is and what she does that doesn’t work.*

*There are two parts to this activity. First, we’ll just let A look for the dollar without any help. If she asks you a question, don’t answer in any way. Second, after a couple of minutes, I’ll fold my arms across my chest like this. That will be your signal to start giving A some feedback. Do you remember the kids’ game called “Hot and Cold”? As A gets closer to the dollar bill, we’ll all start to hum…”Hmmmm…….” If she gets closer to the dollar, we’ll hum louder. If A stops or turns away from the dollar, we’ll immediately stop humming. Watch very carefully what A does both before and after we give her feedback by humming. Write down everything she says or does. Remember, you’re trying to figure out what behaviors help people learn something.*

1. (To A after returning to the room) *We’ve hidden a dollar bill somewhere in this room. Your goal is to learn where it is as fast as possible. Please verbalize what you are thinking so we can understand how you learn where the dollar is. When you find the dollar, it’s yours to keep. Any questions?* [No matter what the volunteer says, merely repeat these same directions. After a while, the volunteer will get the point and will start looking.]
2. [As the volunteer is looking for the dollar, you want to do two things: (1) Ask the volunteer to think out loud- explain what she is doing to learn where the dollar is. (2) Keep comparing what the volunteer is doing to what happens to many students in college. For example, if the volunteer gets frustrated because she is getting no answers to her questions, ask, “Have you ever had a teacher who didn’t seem to give you helpful feedback? What did you do?” If the volunteer just stands and does nothing, ask, “Have you ever gotten stuck in a course and found it hard to do anything? Did doing *nothing* ever help you learn? What did it help you learn?” If the volunteer says, “I quit. I just can’t find it,” ask, “Have you ever felt like quitting a difficult course?”] The possibilities of the volunteer’s actions and comments are many.
3. [After a couple of minutes of A’s searching, fold your arms to let the class members know it’s time for them to give feedback to the volunteer by humming. Keep asking the volunteer to think out loud: “How are you now going about trying to learn where the dollar is?” Also keep relating the present events to the students’ experience in college: “Is it possible that you’ve had an instructor who was giving you great information and feedback about how to learn a subject, but you just didn’t realize what he was doing?”]
4. [After the volunteer has found the dollar and the class is excited, then comes the class discussion. Lead students in answering the following questions: *What did you learn about learning? What actions help students learn?* Examples: ask Creator mindset questions, collect relevant information, organize information into empowering answers, evaluate your present answers, heed feedback, and revise your answers when incorrect. *What actions hinder learning? What thoughts help people learn? What thoughts hinder learning? What emotions help people learn? What emotions hinder learning? What beliefs help people learn? What beliefs hinder learning? Are there any changes you could make to become a better learner? What is the life lesson here for you?*

Students enjoy this activity, and it never fails to generate great conversation about learning and about life. Keep the goal as discovering how people learn and assist your students in laying a helpful foundation for their academics moving forward.

*On Course Facilitator’s Manual*  by Skip Downing, 8th edition.