20 4S - Application Exercise: Alternatives To Multiple Choice
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Full Title - 4S (Significant, Same, Specific, Simultaneous) Application Exercise –Alternatives to Multiple Choice

The 4S (significant, same, specific simultaneous) model helps to ensure that educators design TBL application exercises which will facilitate engaging whole-class discussions. The type of application exercise most associated with TBL is the A.B,C,D Multiple Choice model, which is outlined in x [Link to Stephanie].

Other application exercises that align with the 4S model include:

- X Marks the Spot
- Gallery task
- Make the Grade

X Marks the Spot

This is where an image is projected onto a wall and teams simultaneously place a marker on the image to indicate a decision they have been tasked with making (specific choice).

I used this approach with a group of 15 Consumer Psychology students (year 3 Business Psychology) in a class on persuasive design. A webpage from a shopping website was projected on to the wall. The application exercise required students to apply their learning about cognition and persuasion to pinpoint (with a Post-It note) the area on the webpage that they felt was most problematic in terms of persuading consumers to purchase a product (i.e. teams all had the same, significant practice-related task). This required them to use their learning from their pre-readings, other units from the module, and their reasoning skills to make a specific decision together.

Gallery Task

A Gallery task activity in TBL involves students creating a "low fidelity" poster with the focus being on demonstrating a solution rather than on high fidelity presentation. To align with the 4S model (same, significant, simultaneous, specific), teams will simultaneously reveal their posters which provide their solution (specific) to the same meaningful (significant) task.

In a module on Positive Psychology (Year 4, Business Psychology), I asked teams of students to apply their learning to outline a one-day training course in the area of "building resilience". Limited to six hours of training, they had to make decisions on what was critical (and not so critical) to include (specific). Teams made posters representing their agreed schedules on flipchart paper which they subsequently taped simultaneously to the wall for all to see.

Make the Grade

In a "Make the Grade" application exercise, teams of students encounter the same, "significant", authentic work-related scenario (in written or video form) and their task is to allocate a specific grade or score which they simultaneously reveal to the rest of the class.

I used this during a synchronous online class within the Higher Diploma in Leadership (an online course with classes of 35 students). The focus of the unit was problem-solving skills for leaders. Teams were provided with a short, written scenario. The scenario provided an overview of how a leader approached solving a complex problem. Teams were tasked with judging the leader's problem-solving skills and, as a team, converge on a rating out of 5. 5 was "excellent" and 1 was "very poor". This was a precursor to a lovely whole class discussion of team choices.

Implementing the Strategies

1. Introduction – share a handout with the description of the task (having it uploaded to the VLE is ideal for online learners). Include printouts of images if required. Explain the task and provide details of how much time is allocated for the team to discuss and decide.

2. Team Task – teams have the opportunity to discuss and debate. If working in an online setting, make sure to enable students to share their screens within their breakout rooms.

3. Simultaneous reporting – when the time has elapsed, request one member from each team to indicate their decision. For an "X Marks the Spot" exercise, a Post-It note is attached to the relevant spot on the projection. For the Gallery Task, sheets of flipchart paper are taped to the same wall at the same time. In Make the Grade students can indicate their scores on a physical or shared virtual whiteboard.

4. Facilitated Class Discussion – The discussion involves teasing out the reasoning and rationale behind teams' decisions and creations; comparing, contrasting and challenging. At the end of the discussion summarise the key learning points. Having all team choices visible to all in the class at the same time helps this discussion to flourish.

Your Observations/Reflections

There are many possible uses of the "X Marks the Spot" exercise. Images of maps, machines, anatomy, designs, plans could be used, depending on the subject and the learning outcome targeted.

4S Gallery task may be particularly useful for TBL-based modules within disciplines where the production of sketches, maps, processes and low fidelity prototypes are the norm. The Gallery task can also work well in an online environment (or within larger class sizes) with tools such as Moodleboard, Jamboard or LAMS. With these tools, teams (on laptops or desktop computers) work on a shared document online (instead of flipchart paper).

The "Make the Grade" exercise can also work well with a video scenario (as opposed to written). Teams might view a professional interacting with a client/co-worker, for example.

Recommended Resources

Jim Sibley from the University of British Colombia has a website devoted to learning how to roll out TBL. His page on Application Exercises is accessible at 4S Team Application Tasks | Learn TBL.

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning for Higher Education Hub features a number of resources developed on using Technology for TBL – See 81.-Facilitating-TBL-Tools-to-Succeed-Application-Exercises. pdf (https://hub.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/81.-Facilitating-TBL-Tools-to-Succeed-Application-Exercises.pdf) for more on using technology during the application exercise phase.