Active Learning

Active Learning Definitions and Toolkit of Online Resources

Prepared for the UNMC College of Medicine Curriculum Leadership

by Peggy Moore, MSEd, E-Learning Instructional Designer

January 10, 2016

Definition 1: MOST USED IN RESEARCH

Bonwell & Elison define active learning as ‘anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing’ (1991, p. 2). In other words, for learning to be active, learners not only need to do something but also need to reflect on what they are doing. Active learning is learner-centered “Involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing.” The authors emphasize that students must engage in activities that involve reading, writing, discussing, or problem solving.


Definition 2:

Active Learning offers an alternative to the traditional lecture and note-taking model. Prince define “Active Learning is generally defined as any instructional method that engages learners in the learning process”. This has become an umbrella term used to describe both an overall pedagogy and specific strategies for teaching and learning in the classroom or lecture hall. There are two underlying goals for Active Learning. First, the goal is to shift the focus from the teacher to the learner. The second goal is to promote higher-order cognitive tasks through active engagement with course content.


Definition 3:

University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

Active learning is a process whereby students engage in activities, such as reading, writing, discussion, or problem solving that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content. Cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and the use of case methods and simulations are some approaches that promote active learning.

Retrieved on 1/8/16 from http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tsal_ University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching
Definition 4:
Florida International University COM
At FIU HW COM, we want to make our students responsible for their own learning. Why? Because physicians must become life-long learners—individuals that pursue knowledge and understanding autonomously in seeking excellence in patient care. To that end, we must make every effort to provide classroom learning experiences that actively engage and involve our students in critical thinking and relevant, meaningful interaction with their peers.


Definition 5:
Active learning helps promote critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.\(^8\)\(^{11}\)\(^{-19}\) Characteristics of active learning include student involvement through more than just listening, emphasis on developing cognitive skills, student engagement in activities such as reading, writing and discussion, and a greater emphasis on exploration of a student’s own attitudes and values.\(^{19}\) Active learning means students will take greater responsibility for their own learning and become more involved in the educational process. Active learning methods help students move away from being “spoon-fed” facts and figures to developing concepts, understanding principles and applying knowledge in clinical work.\(^{20}\)\(^{-21}\) These methods leave students with a greater level of knowledge and better learning skills.\(^{16}\)


---

Cone of Learning adapted from Edgar Dale (1946)