

Active Learning

http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/active_learning/overview.htm

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Overview

Active learning is a general term for teaching and learning strategies that engage and involve students in the learning process. Research has shown that not everyone learns in the same way. Some of us are visual learners that need to see to understand; while others need to hear or verbalize information. Others are hands-on, kinesthetic learners. Some learners prefer to work alone, while some like to teach each other in small groups. Some need time to quietly reflect, while others need to move and be active. Teachers know that they need to use a variety of activities to meet the learning styles of their students.

Active Learning Is Needed

At-risk students often struggle to learn in a traditional classroom. Classrooms where learning activities are varied give these students the opportunity to excel. Students become involved in their learning rather than disinterested. Involved learners enjoy school and become lifelong learners. Numerous research studies have shown the value of active learning, particularly in improving the achievement level of the lowest-performing students and minorities (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1992; Kagan, 1994; Slavin, 1983).

What Is Active Learning?

There are a variety of active learning teaching strategies: cooperative learning, learning styles theory, multiple intelligences theory, and project-based learning. Cooperative learning is a structured experience in which students work together to achieve a common goal. The basic elements of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction (Kagan, 1994).

There are numerous learning style theories, including: Dunn & Dunn, Kolb's experiential learning, and Gardner's multiple intelligences. The most commonly used learning theory in K-12 is Dr. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Dr. Gardner began his work in 1970 at Harvard University with Project Zero. Through this project he identified eight intelligences: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, musical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. Everyone has the ability to use each of the intelligences, but there is usually one that is the strongest. This becomes our preferred learning style. Gardner continues his research and there is the possibility that he may identify new intelligences (1983, 1999). Others have expanded on Gardner's work (Armstrong, 1994; Campbell, 1994; & Haggerty, 1995) and developed practical applications for the classroom.

Project-based learning usually extends over a number of class periods. Students design their own process for acquiring the knowledge necessary to complete the project. Hallmarks of these learning activities are student-centered, interdisciplinary, address real-world problems, and incorporate technology. Students also learn workplace skills such as effective decision-making, leadership, and interpersonal skills.

Expected Benefits

Active learning in the classroom allows students to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers become facilitators rather than repositories of knowledge. Active learning has many benefits:

- * Allows each learner to be recognized and rewarded for special strengths;
- * Provides opportunities for learners to adapt their studies to their interests and learning preferences;
- * Reduces the chances of boredom by offering a variety of activities; and
- * Provides a teaching/learning methodology that works.

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