Active Learning: Producing Enthusiasm in the Classroom
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“We learn by example and by direct experience because there are real limits to the adequacy of verbal instruction.”
-Malcolm Gladwell

In today’s society, for current and future teachers, an active learning approach to teaching is essential for students’ success in the classroom. Learning that contains student-based inquiry versus teacher-based inquiry allows the students to develop their own understanding of the content with little facilitation from the teacher. Unfortunately, active learning in many classrooms has always consisted of the teacher directing the learning, which inhibits each student’s growth and potential.

Active learning refers to a method of learning where active student participation is encouraged through project-based exercises. Research studies indicate that teachers typically dominate classroom conversation, consuming nearly 70% of classroom time (Northeastern Illinois University). This happens even though other research studies have shown that student learning correlates with the quality and quantity of student involvement (Cooper and Prescott, 1989). Instead of students listening to lecture over large amounts of time, active learning:

- develops student’s own inquiry and heightens interest in the material which tends to improve their motivation
- engages students with other peers

The practice of active learning techniques in the classroom is critical because of the remarkable impact on the student’s learning.

Active learning is a helpful method to use in the classroom for a variety of different reasons. One reason is students benefit from experiencing the material first-hand. Research has shown when active learning is compared with traditional teaching methods (regardless of the subject matter) students learn more material, store the information longer, and are more likely to attain higher grades (Get SET). Higher grades lead to student satisfaction, which tends to give students more determination to learn. Studies have shown active learning should be used more in the classroom. After two weeks of instruction students can recall more information from what they learned through active learning than they do through passive learning (Anderson, n.d.). As seen in the graphic below, “The Learning Pyramid,” the highest percentage of remembrance is produced from what students say and do, which is a mere definition of active learning.

Benjamin Franklin put it flawlessly as he said, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” Not only do we, as teachers, want students to remember what we are teaching them, but most prominently we want them to learn the material. We want them to be able to take lessons that are taught and apply them to
everyday life. Through active learning, involving students in classroom discussions, and hands on experiments, they are not only remembering, but also learning.

There are numerous ways that active learning can be incorporated into the classroom. Simply modifying a basic lecture in different ways, such as: inserting brief demonstrations, having short ungraded writing exercises, and as well as class or group discussions. Having discussions throughout the class period is one of the most collective strategies of including active learning within the class (Eison, 1991). “Think-pair-share” is an incredible technique used for discussion among classmates (Mikaela, 2011). Students take time to think about the material, turn to their neighbor to discuss what they thought and then share their results with the rest of the class. This method is a great way for shy students to build up the courage and raise their hand because they have gained new confidence from discussing it with another classmate, thus making it easier to participate. Brainstorming also involves the entire class. You can start by introducing a problem, theme or topic and then ask the students for their thoughts. The class could then brainstorm and discuss which ideas fit the material the best. This gets each student thinking even if they don’t all share their thoughts.

Other excellent ways to include active learning into classrooms is through group work, various forms of writing activities, and even educational games (Davis, n.d.). Group work is a productive way to give every student the chance to speak and share their ideas. A convenient way to include this in lessons would be to give each group their own topic. Have them read the material, answer questions and find information in which later they can share and teach to the rest of the class.

Students’ success in the classroom is dependent upon the amount of active learning they are involved with. Educational classrooms should be moving their courses beyond lecture and into learning spaces that allow for this to happen. Therefore, educating our future teachers is critical so they can, in return, help students to display academic growth and achievement.

References