Active Learning in Higher Education

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What does active learning mean to you?

- What does it look like?
- What is the tutor doing?
- What are the students doing?
Some definitions

• Active learning ... a wide range of activities that share the common element of involving students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

• The process of having students engage in some activity that forces them to reflect upon ideas and how they are using those ideas. Requiring students to regularly assess their own degree of understanding and skill at handling concepts or problems in a particular discipline. The attainment of knowledge by participating or contributing. The process of keeping students mentally, and often physically, active in their learning through activities that involve them in gathering information, thinking, and problem solving (Michael, 2006, citing Collins and O’Brien, 2003).
Some more definitions

• An instance in which the lecturer stops talking and all students engage with content by tackling a common task or problem (White et al., 2016).

• Classes where students interacted with content, with each other and with instructors in order to attain domain specific learning outcomes and generic skills, such as persuasive argument (communication) and critical thinking (White et al., 2016).
Why should we consider active learning approaches in our classrooms?
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• Evidence that students’ concentration during lectures declines over time. Bligh (2000) suggests lectures should be no longer than 20-30 minutes without a break.

• Active, collaborative learning can lead to enhanced student engagement/deeper learning (Gibbs 2010)

• Increased interaction between staff and students enhances learning and student satisfaction (Gibbs, 2010)
Why should we consider active learning approaches in our classrooms?

- Gives the learner feedback on their incomplete understandings and encourage them fix this, for example by helping each other.
- Gives the teacher feedback on which learners understand, and who needs help.
- Develop thinking skills such as analysis, problem solving, and evaluation.
- Help learners to use their learning in realistic and useful ways, and see its importance and relevance.
- Is more fun! (Petty, G at http://geoffpetty.com/for-teachers/active-learning/)
What makes lectures more active?

Breaking the lecture into smaller sections of 10-12 minutes, with opportunities for student interaction in between sections.

Delivering longer sections of the lecture (15-20 minutes) with an activity such as a case study or problem between sections.
Flipped classroom
What makes classrooms more active?

- Starter tasks (settling tasks, quizzes)
- Demonstrations of techniques, application of knowledge
- Group work/solving problems
  - Correct the error
  - Support/critique a statement
  - Select a response to address a question/dilemma

- Group learning activities:
  - Case studies
  - Debates
  - Unfinished handouts

- Exit notes (also useful for feedback)
• What are the challenges that you might encounter when implementing a more active approach in your classroom?
• Try to help each other find solutions
Some underpinning principles

• Some content refined and presented to students upfront (pre-class)
• The number of classes reduced to allow students time to engage

• Include behaviours or tasks involving all students that:
  • require thinking that is directed towards the attainment of learning outcomes, developing skills or attitudes
  • provide an outcome for the student – an answer to a question, a concept map, or a technique or process for problem-solving
  • progressively become more complex and similar to real-life graduate scenarios and challenges

• Classes supported by online activities possibly including periodic assessment or self-assessment (post-class).

(adapted from White et al. 2016).
References

Thank you

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